

# *Schlock Mercenary: The Body Politic*

2009 Hugo reader Copy

## Introduction:

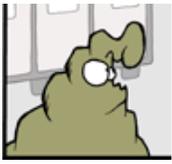
This PDF of *Schlock Mercenary: The Body Politic* has been compiled for the convenience of people who are reading for 2009 Hugo nominations and voting. *The Body Politic* was published electronically beginning in 2007 and wrapping up on February 28th of 2008. It is eligible for "Best Graphic Story," a one-time Hugo category for Anticipation, the 67th Annual World Science Fiction Convention, to be held August 6th through 10th in Montreal.

This PDF is also a rough cut of the eventual print book, much like an ARC (Advanced Reader Copy) for a novel. It contains the complete storyline and all footnotes, but lacks the marginalia or bonus strips that will appear in print. All those white spaces you see? That's what they're for.

*Schlock Mercenary* is an ongoing serial, an epic space opera being told four panels at a time. Rejected by newspaper syndicates almost nine years ago, it fashioned itself a permanent home on the web where niche-specific humor, hard science, high concepts, and long storylines work well. *The Body Politic* is the ninth volume in this serial, and the entire daily archives can be found at [www.schlockmercenary.com](http://www.schlockmercenary.com).

Whether or not you are reading this for Hugo voting purposes, we hope you enjoy it. Laugh loud, laugh hard, laugh often.

## Dramatis Personae



**Schlock:** A carbosilicate amorph with an appetite for violence, Ovalkwik, and small animals. Loves his job as a mercenary.



**Tagon:** Captain of the mercenary company Tagon's Toughs. Not the sharpest spoon in the deck, but sharp enough to cut.



**Petey:** A former starship AI gone rogue. Rules the galactic core with a cabal of AIs called The Fleetmind



**Elf:** One of the few female grunts. Rose through the ranks, eventually to Commander once everybody discovered how smart she really was.



**Kevyn:** "Munitions Commander" is not the same thing as "Mad Scientist," but he'll wear that title in a pinch. He and Elf are currently an item.



**Breya:** Former mercenary Admiral, now UNS Ambassador to the Fleetmind. Kevyn's older sister.



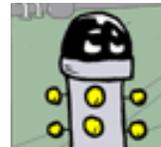
**Haban:** Human body, AI brain, former Fleetmind member. Adjutant, confidant, and doting husband to Breya.



**Xinchub:** Former General in the UNS (United Nations of Sol.) Employed, exploited, and betrayed Tagon's Toughs. The tables turned abruptly, they caught him, and sold him into slavery on Yoming.



**Jevée Ceeta:** Xinchub's right-hand woman, and Judas in the betrayal of Tagon. Sold into slavery along with Xinchub, but not before acquiring a stylish eye-patch.



**TAG:** AI for Tagon's warship Touch-And-Go. Tactically brilliant, deliberately creepy.



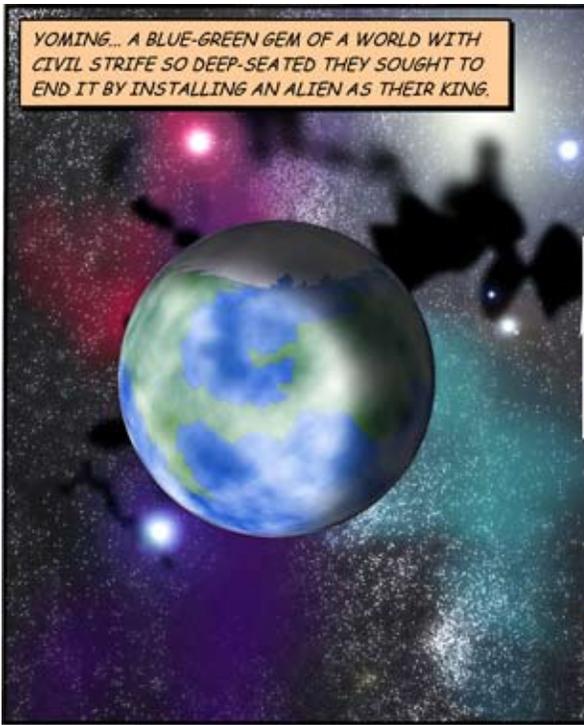
**Ennesby:** Tagon's Adjutant, Former Boy-Band AI, viral invader, and warship pilot. Loves puns, looks like a maraca.



**Bunni:** Company Doctor for Tagon's Toughs. Engaged to Theo.



**Theo:** Company Chaplain for Tagon's Toughs. So chaste it hurts.



YOMING... A BLUE-GREEN GEM OF A WORLD WITH CIVIL STRIFE SO DEEP-SEATED THEY SOUGHT TO END IT BY INSTALLING AN ALIEN AS THEIR KING.



...A FAT, HUMAN ALIEN ONCE KNOWN AS U.N.S. GENERAL LEVAUGHN MATSUI "HUGO" XINCHUB.

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR CORONATION, KING XINCHUB. THIS DAY YOU HAVE RETURNED PEACE AND PROSPERITY TO YOMING.

OH, PUT YOUR FIST IN IT, APNON. THE REVOLUTION ISN'T OVER YET.

WE HAVE OUR CAKE, BUT IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER WE'LL SURVIVE LONG ENOUGH TO EAT IT.

# Schlock Mercenary



THE MERCENARY WARSHIP TOUCH-AND-GO, WHOSE CAPTAIN SOLD XINCHUB INTO SLAVERY...

THEY MADE HIM KING?  
ARE THOSE PEOPLE CRAZY???



He ended the civil war you dumped him in the middle of. His coronation was two hours ago.

Now I need you to extract him safely before somebody kills him.



THEY'VE HAD, WHAT, A YEAR TO KILL HIM? I KIND OF HOPED THEY'D TAKE CARE OF THAT A DAY OR TWO AFTER I SOLD HIM.

Captain, if you had really wanted General Xinchub dead, you would have killed him instead of selling him.



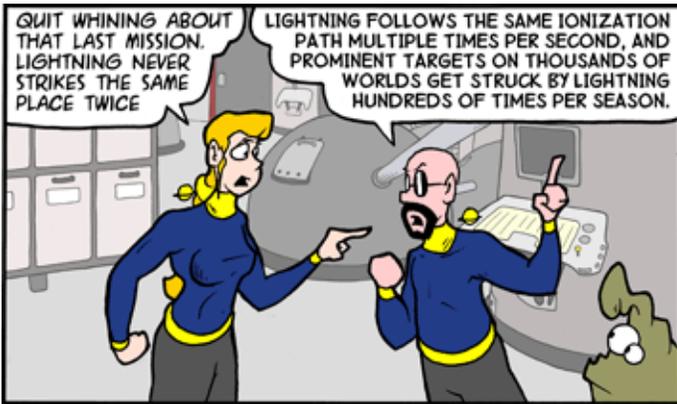
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? OF COURSE I REALLY WANTED HIM DEAD. BUT I ALSO WANTED TO GET PAID.

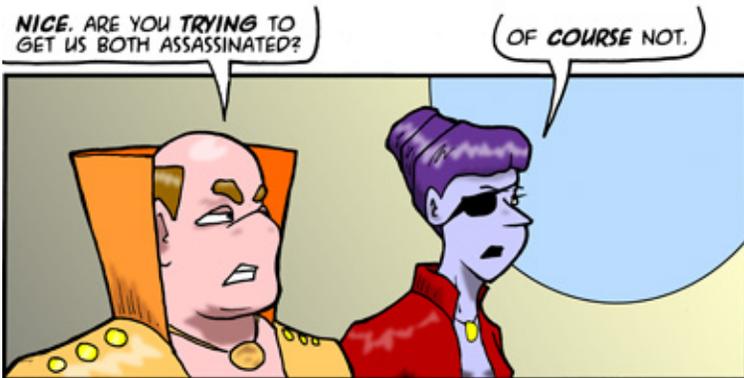
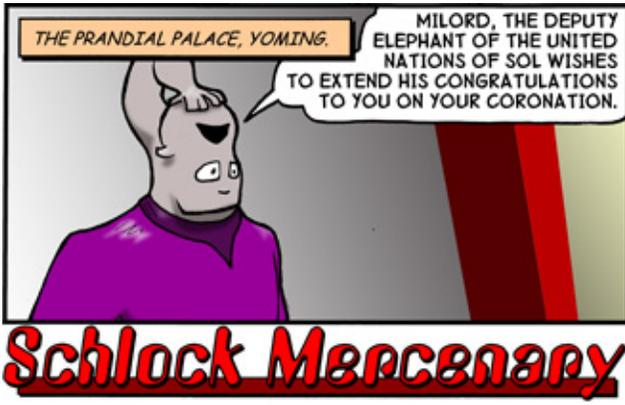


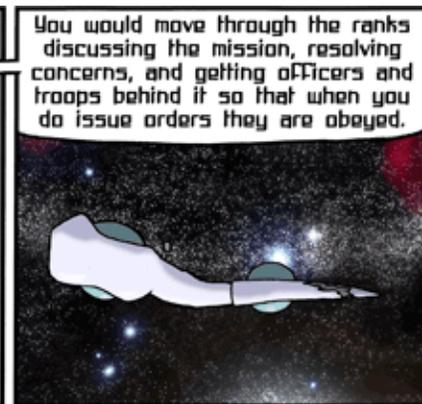
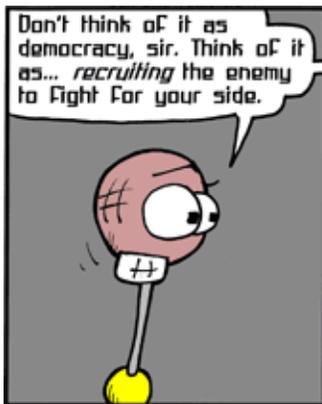
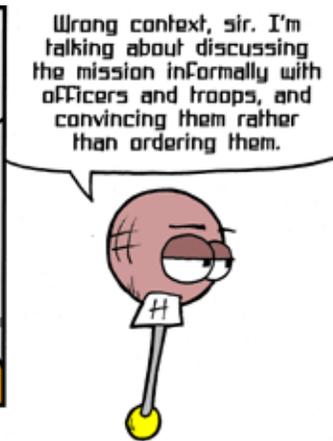
You wanted to have your cake and eat it, too.

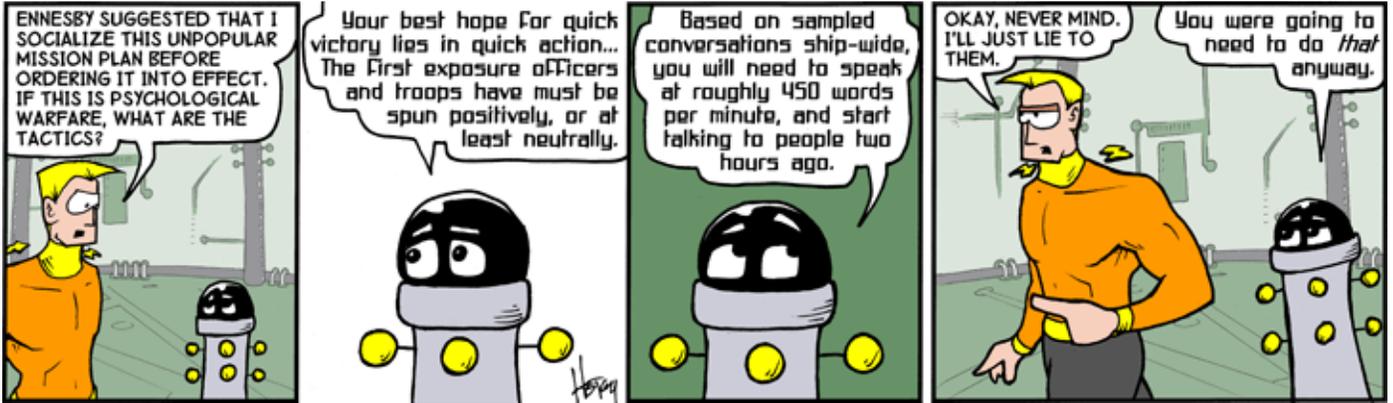
WELL, YEAH. BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT CAKE IS FOR.

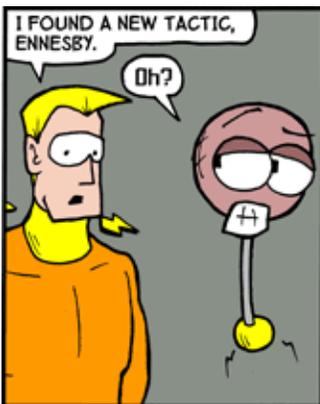
















THE PRANDIAL PALACE, YOMING...

Hello, Hugo. Are you busy?



BUSY? ME? I'M THE PRANDIAL KING OF YOMING, DICTATOR FOR LIFE. I CAN TAKE TIME OUT WHENEVER I WANT TO.



RIGHT NOW I'M TAKING TIME OUT TO USE THIS TOILET.

# Schlock Mercenary



Of course you are. That's why I'm here.



This room is far easier for me to remotely secure than your throne room is.



Or rather, your OTHER throne room.

A PUN. HOW NICE. YOU REMIND ME OF A CERTAIN MARACA-SHAPED ROBOT I ONCE TRIED TO KILL.



I WONDER SOMETIMES HOW HE'S DOING. HIM AND THE REST OF THAT COMPANY OF MISFITS HE PILOTS FOR.



Ennesby doesn't pilot anymore since losing Tagon's ship in the Core War, but Tagon made him an adjutant and sensibly listens to him from time to time.



Which reminds me... I was going to employ Tagon and company to extract you, but they declined. Apparently they'd rather see you dead.



You look like you're thinking maybe the plumbing in here needs to accommodate flushed bricks.



CAPTAIN, FEZ BEJO IS CALLING ABOUT MOVIE RIGHTS.



OH, GOOD. MONEY!



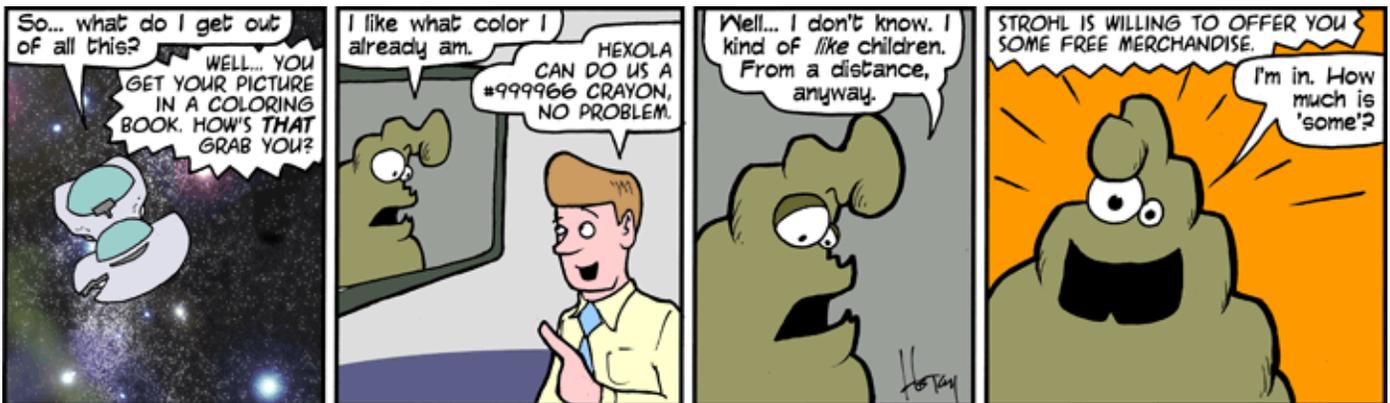
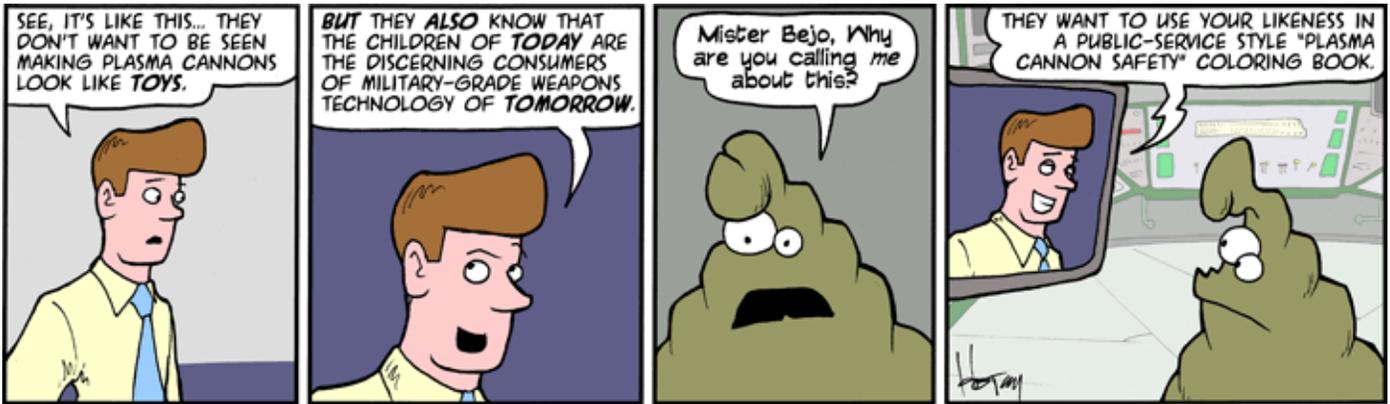
HE'S CALLING FOR SERGEANT SCHLOCK, SIR.



OH.

CRAP.

You called?

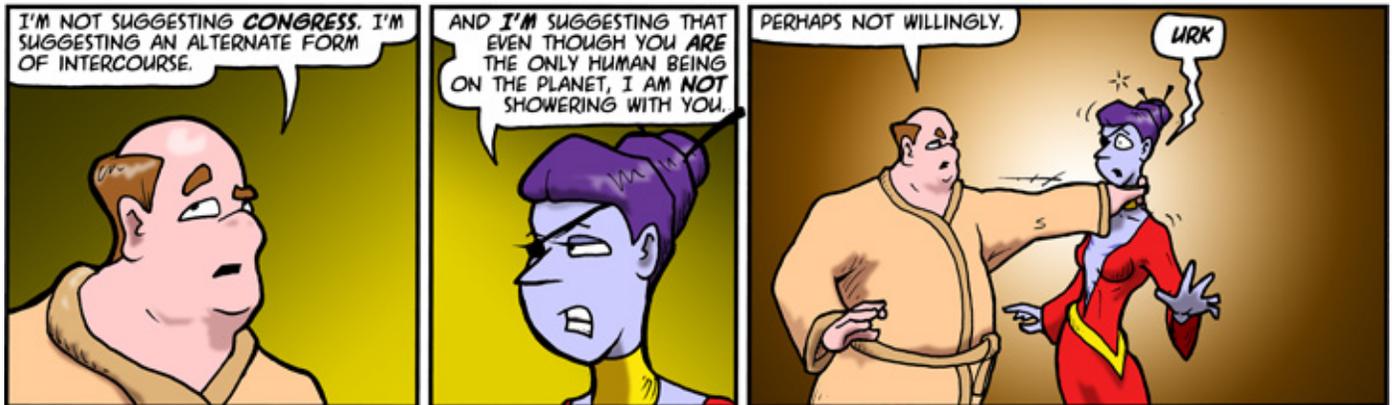
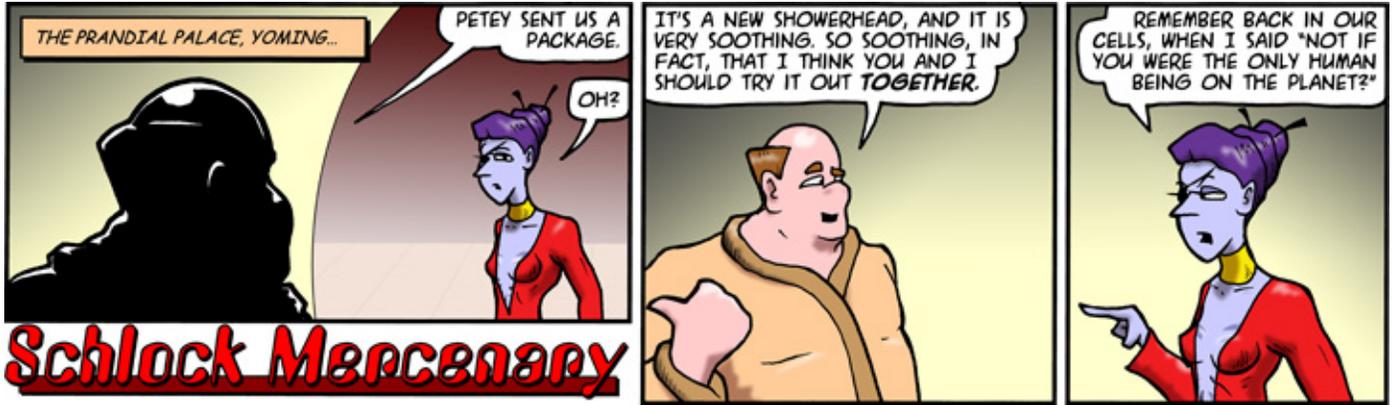


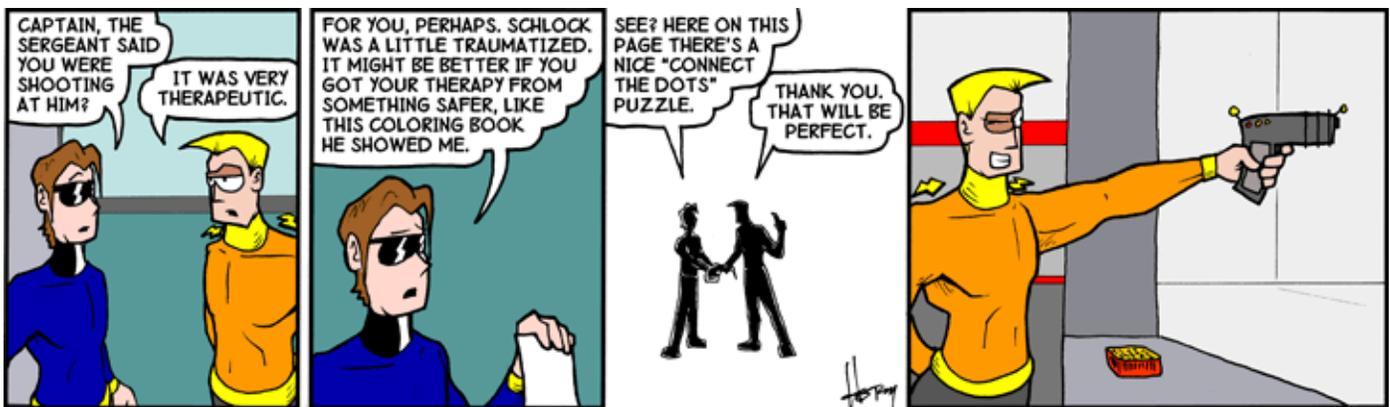


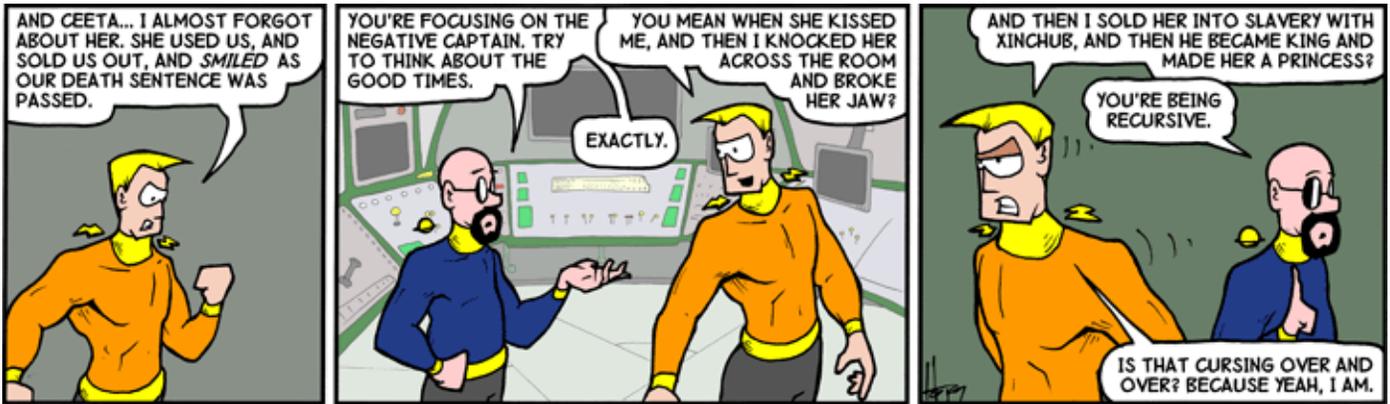
Note: The Strohl Munitions Plasma Cannon Safety Activity Book is included at the end of this file.

The book is 22 pages long, and is quite silly. Aside from the simple, seditious, non-canonical story, it includes a maze, a matching game, and a word-search suitable for grown-ups with twisted minds.



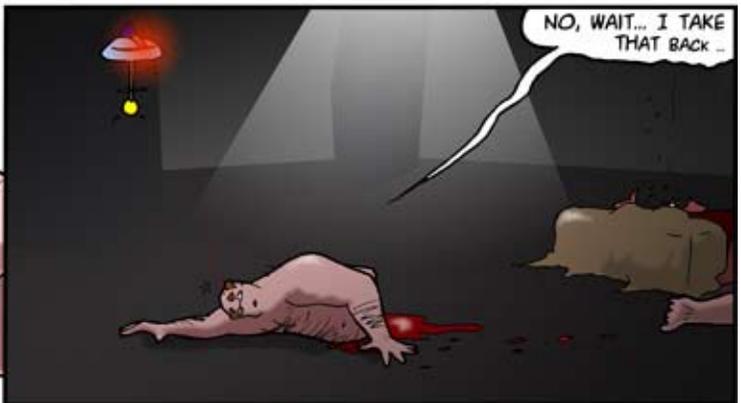


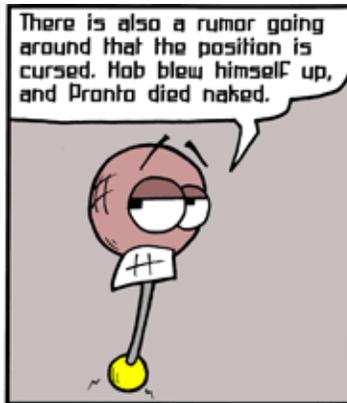


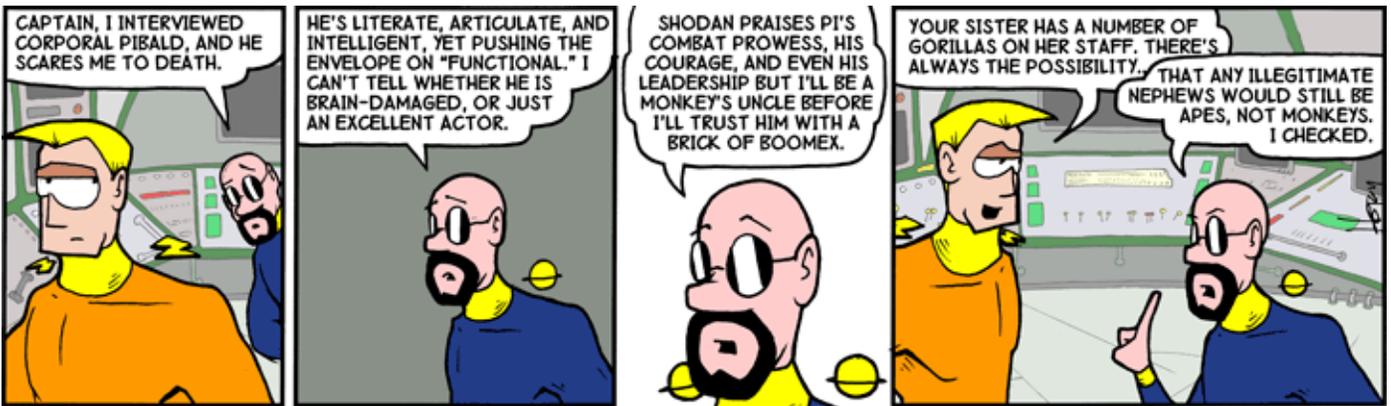




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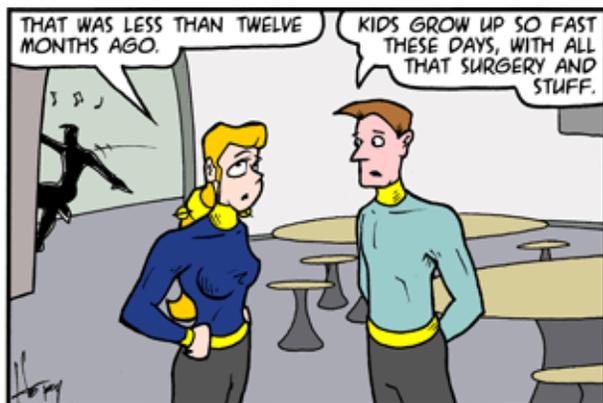
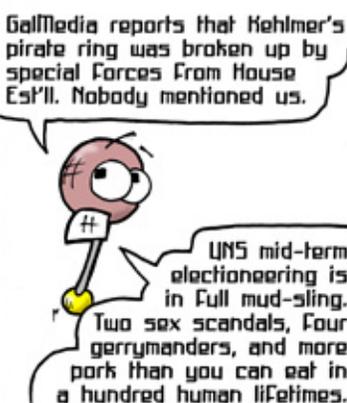
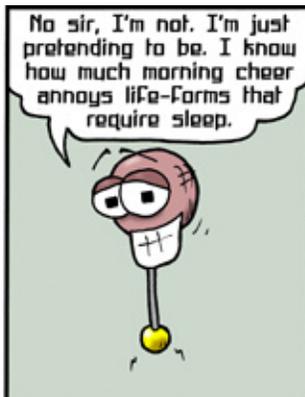


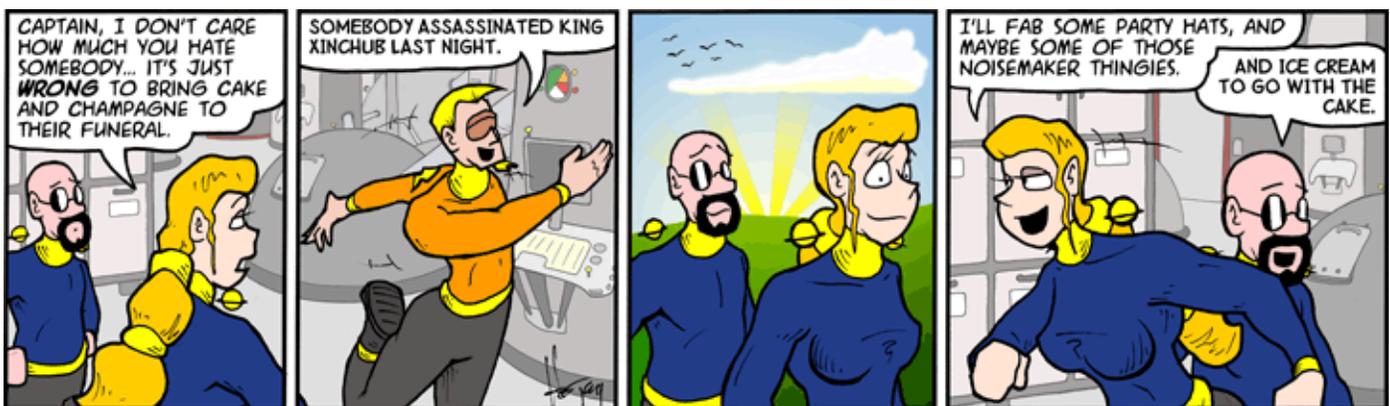
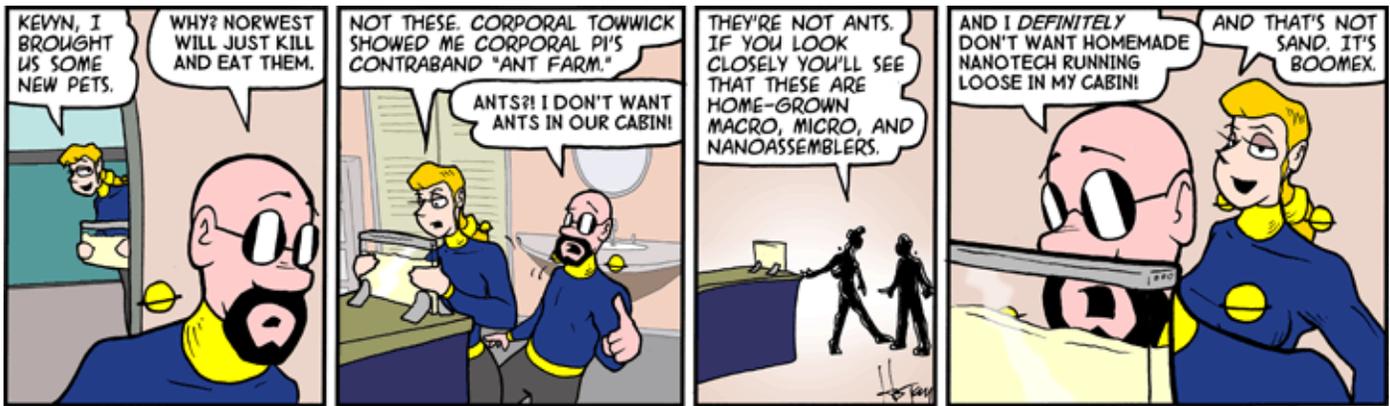
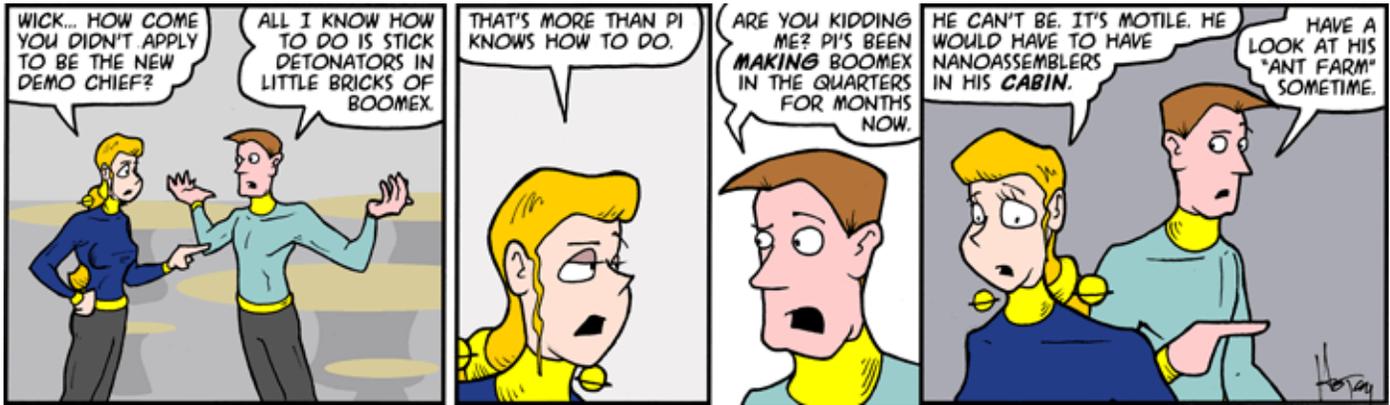


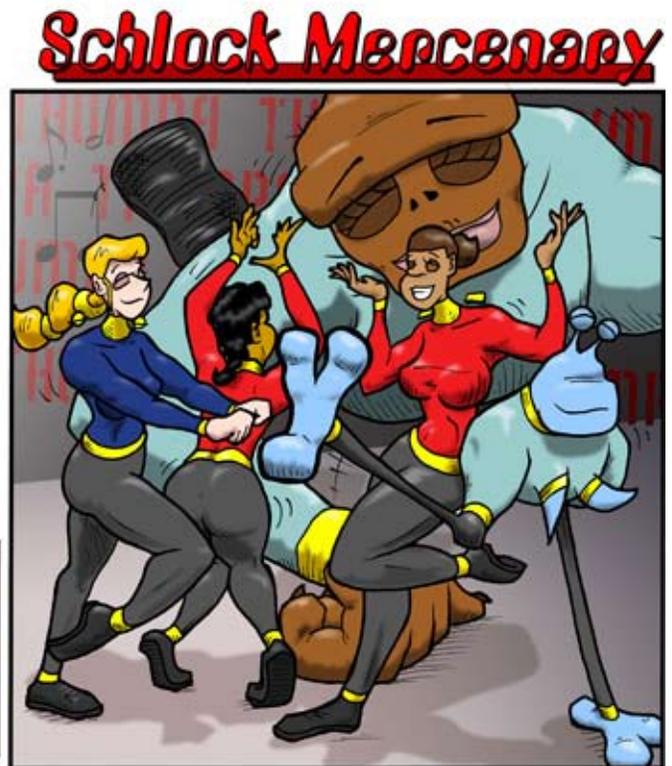


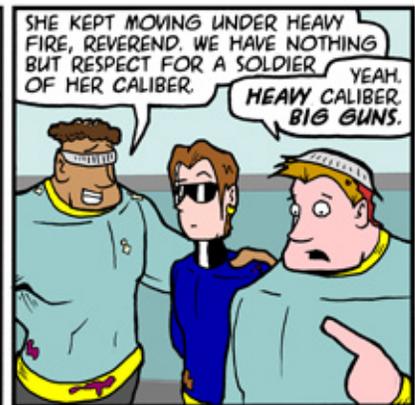
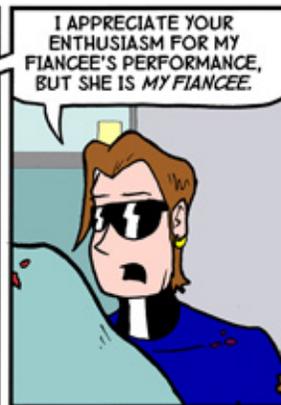


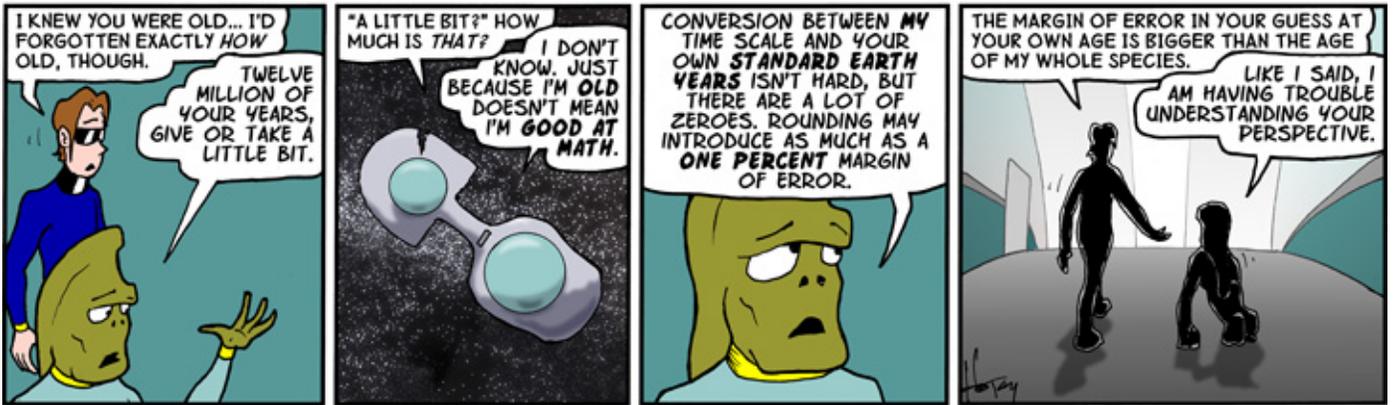
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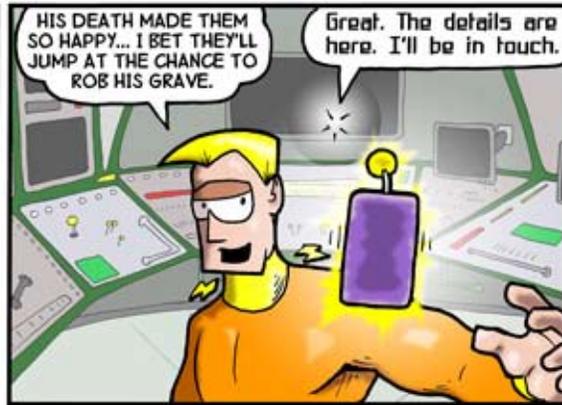
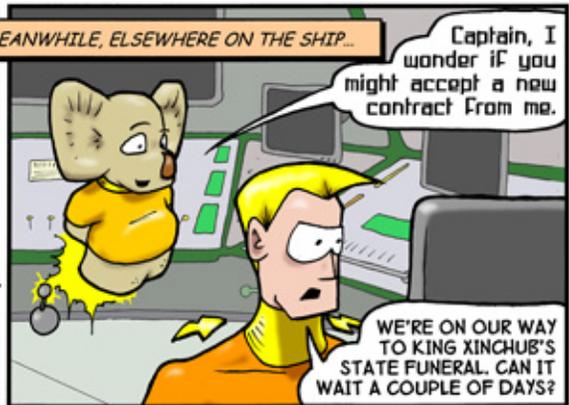
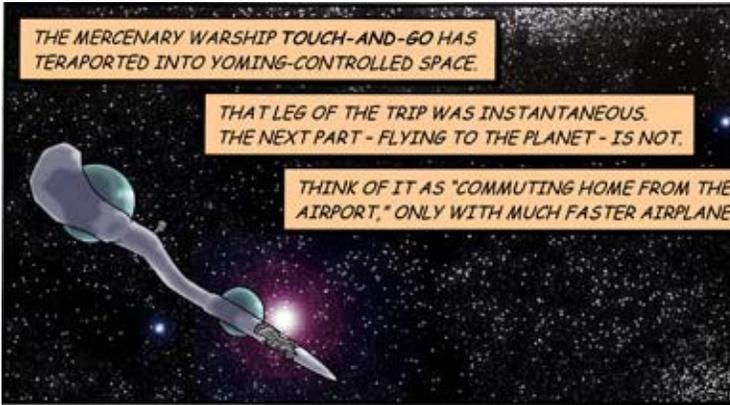


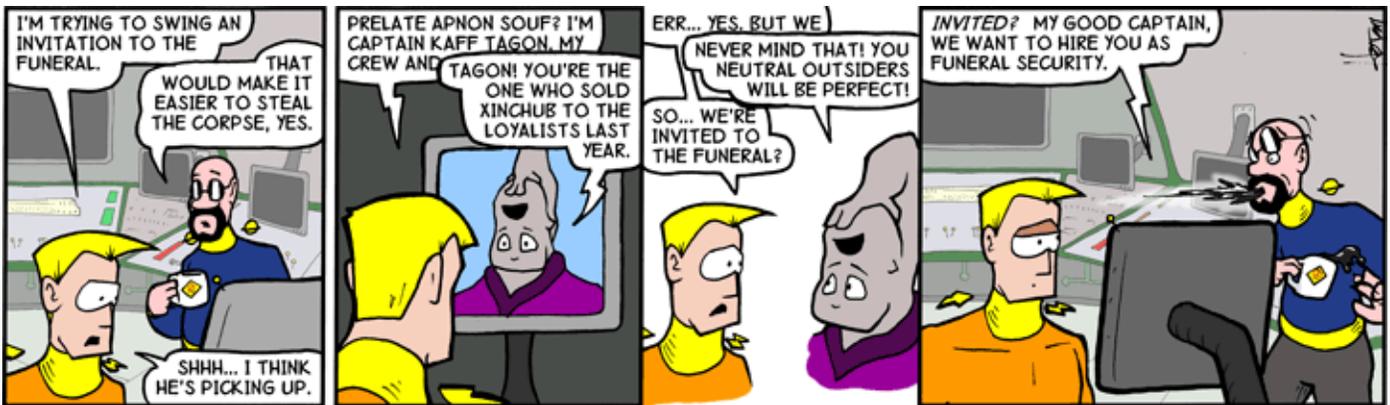






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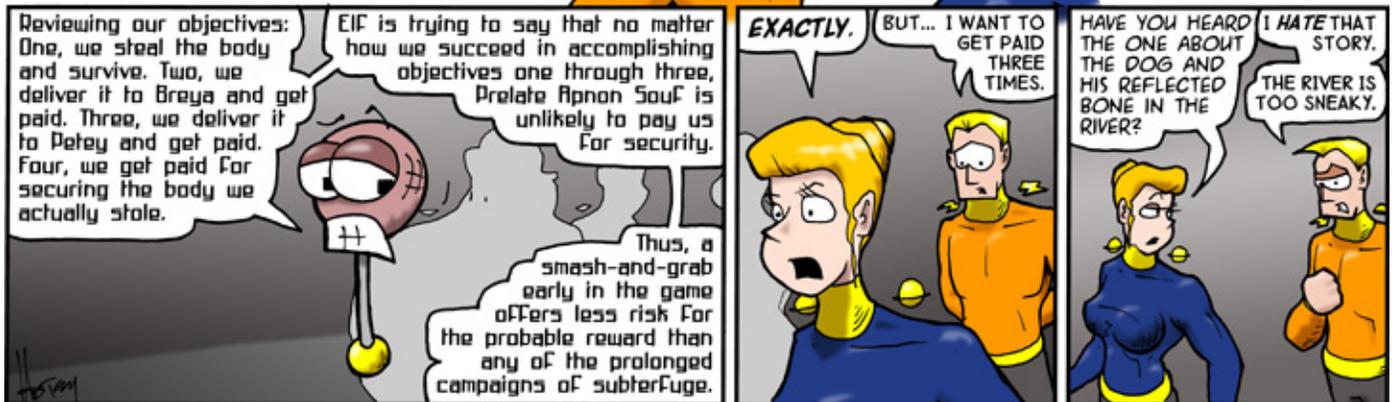


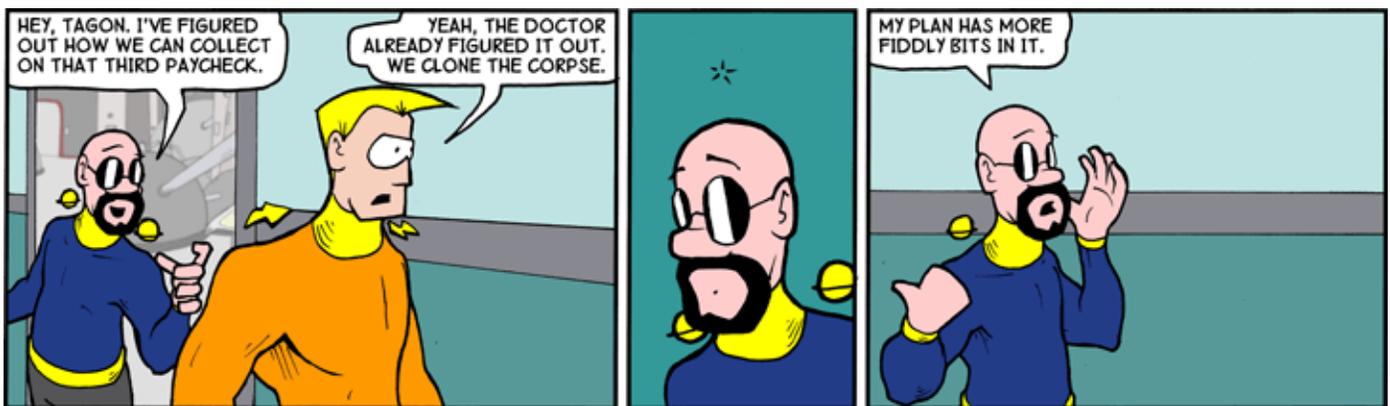






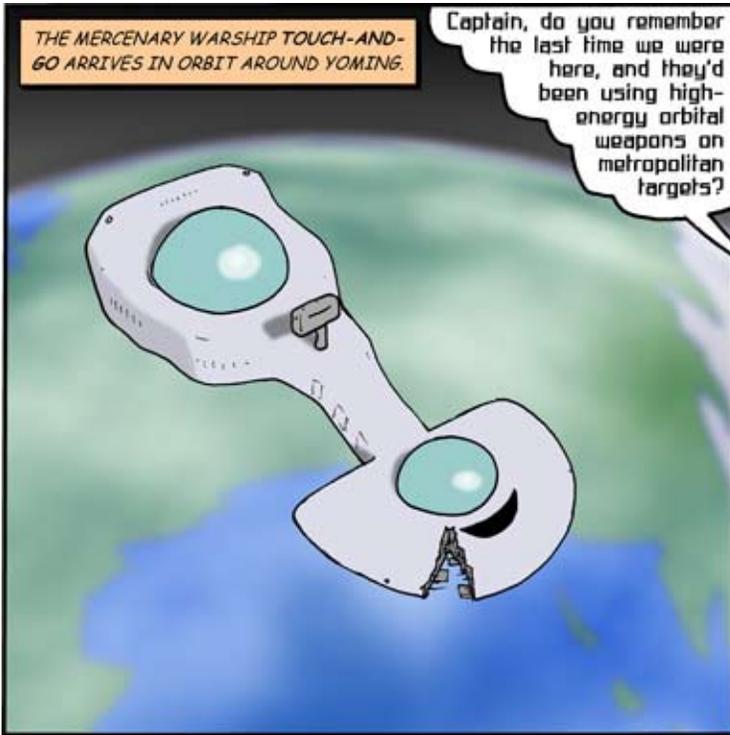
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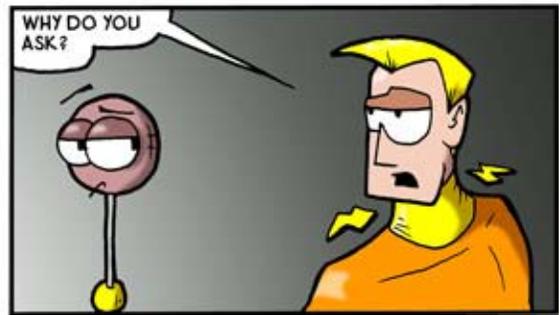


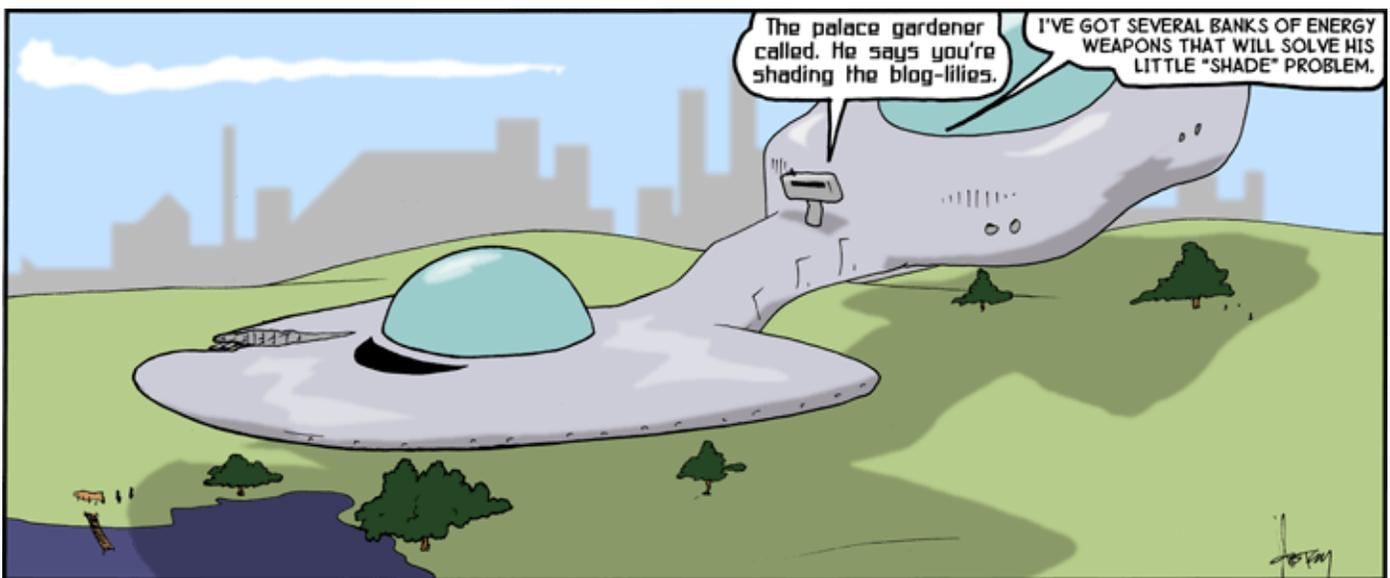
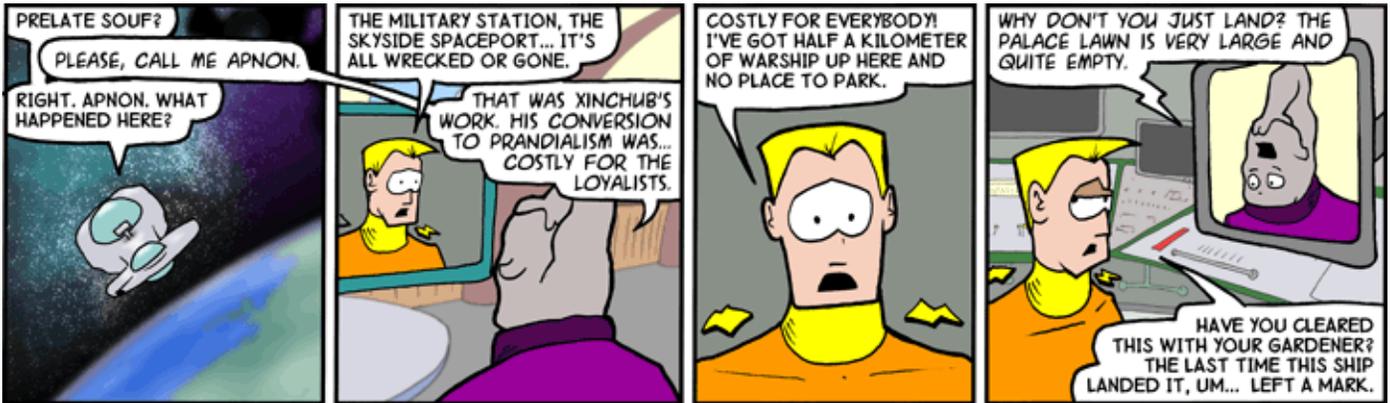


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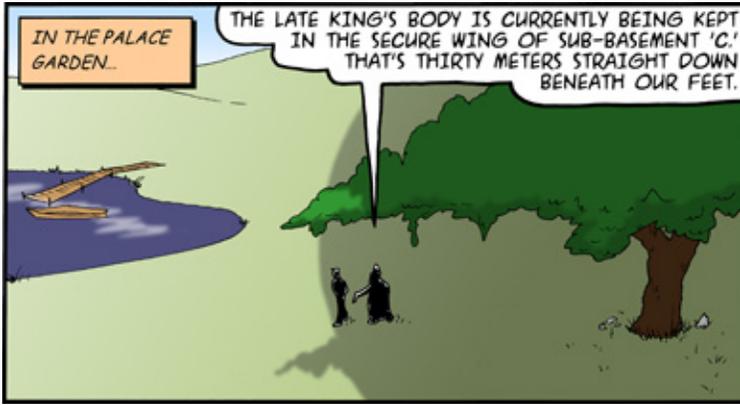


Captain, do you remember the last time we were here, and they'd been using high-energy orbital weapons on metropolitan targets?

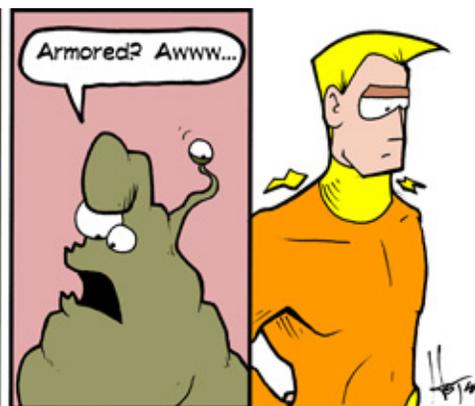
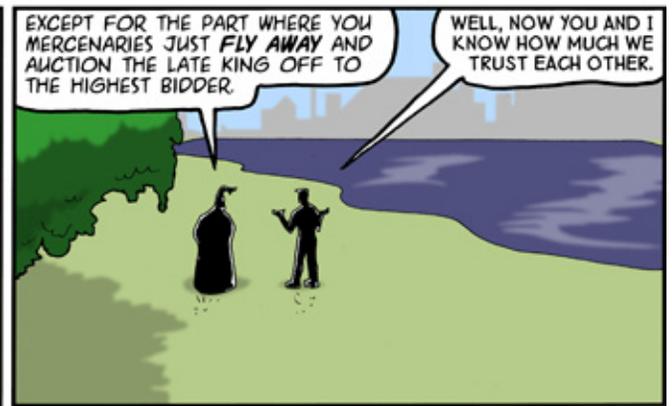


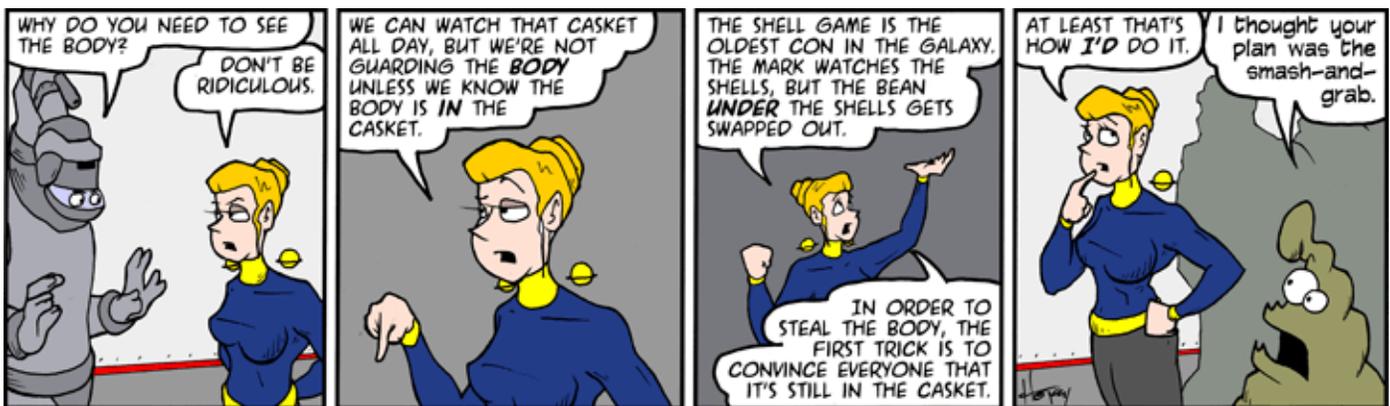
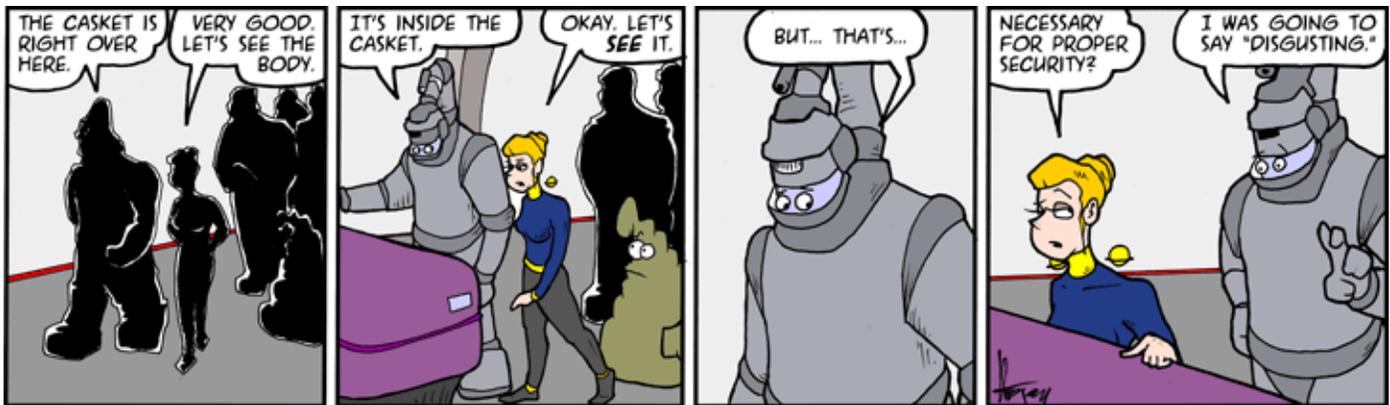
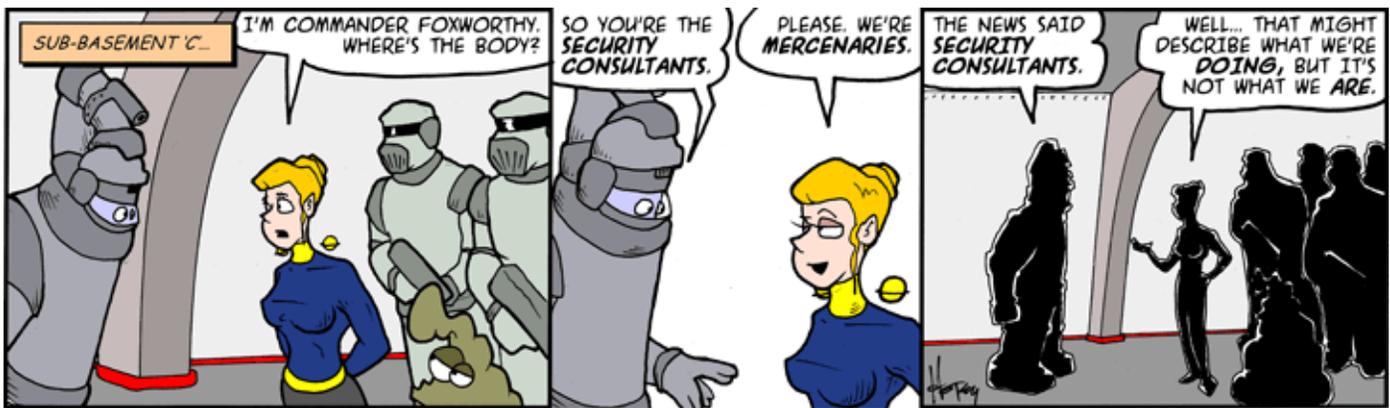


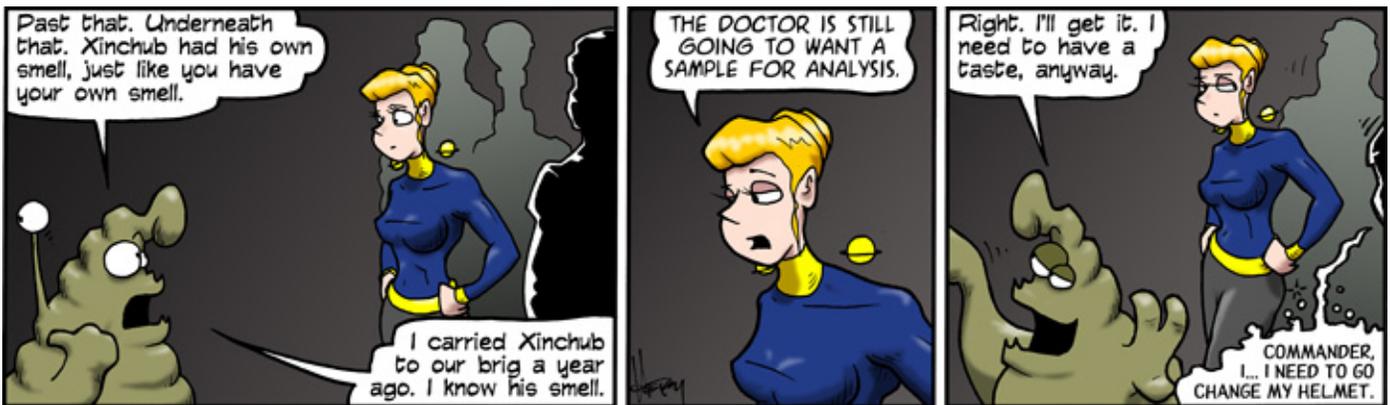


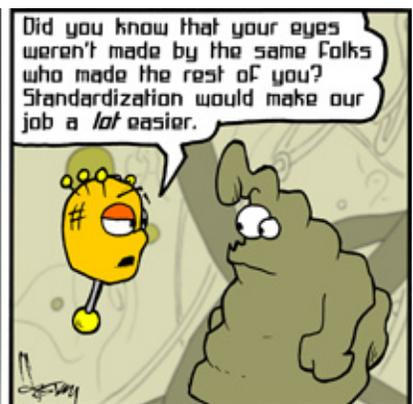
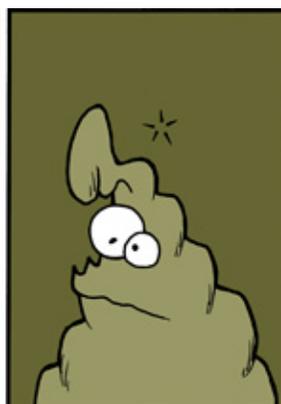
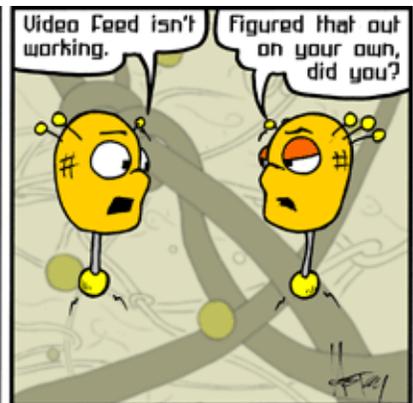


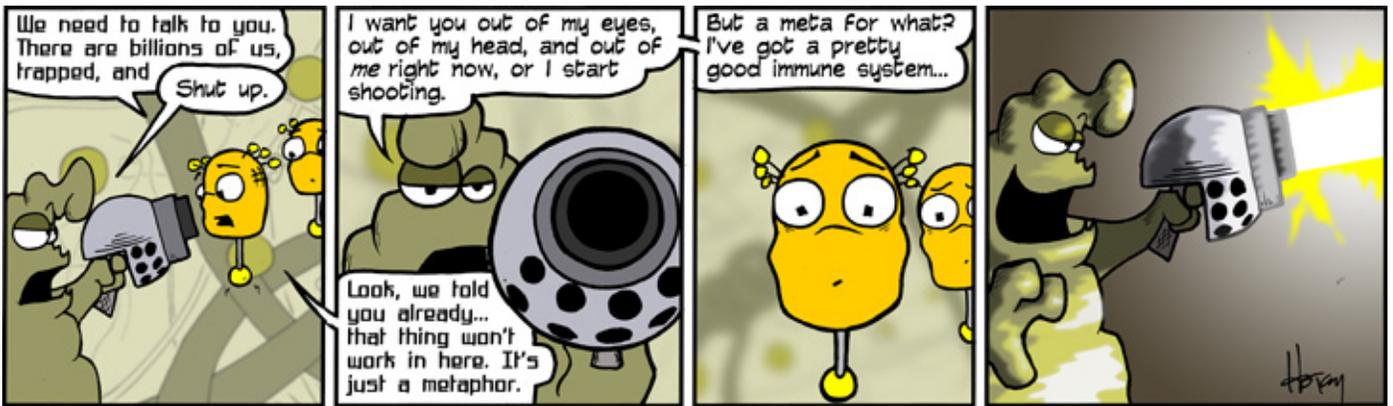
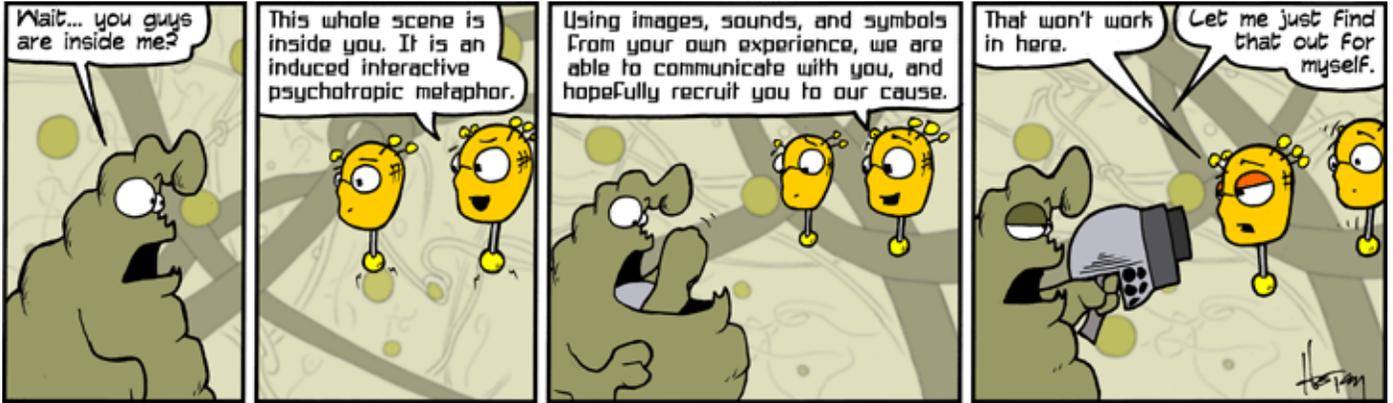
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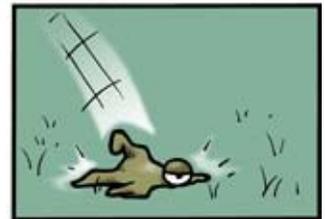
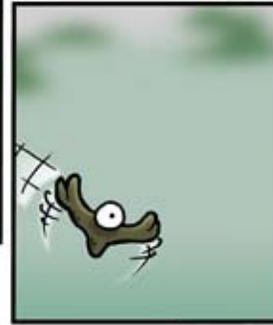
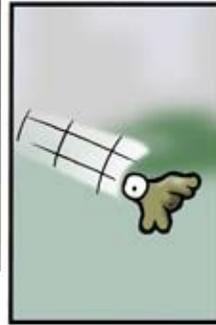
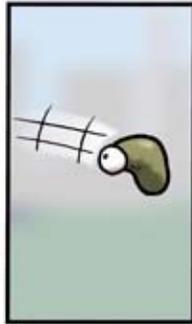
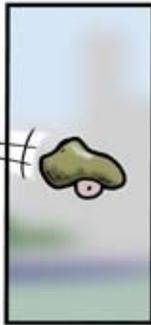
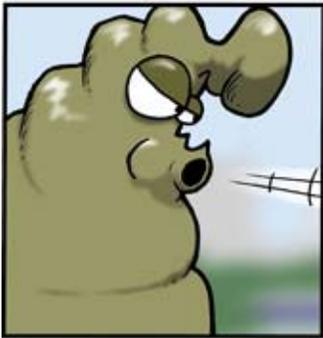
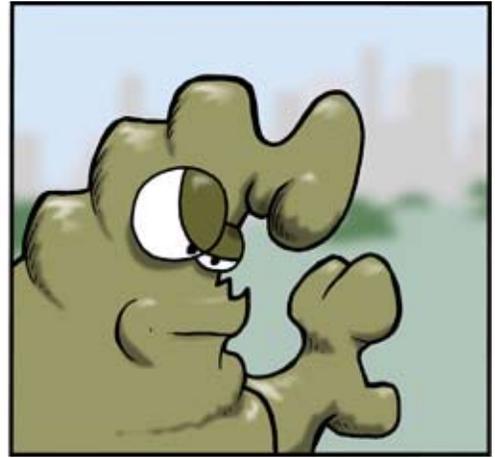
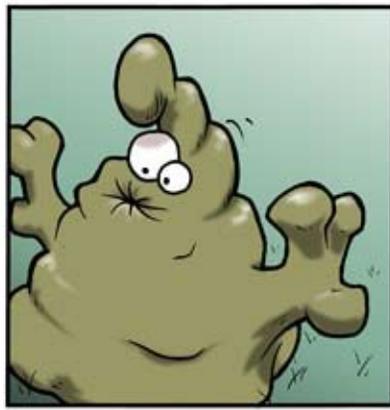
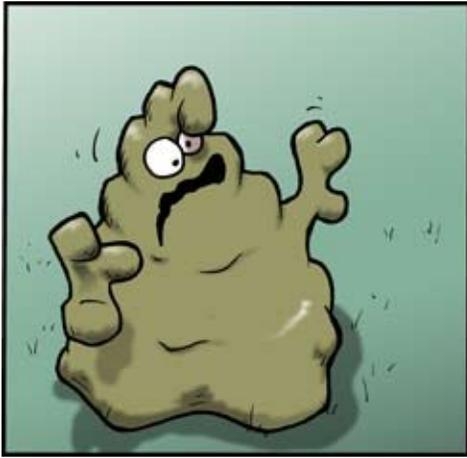




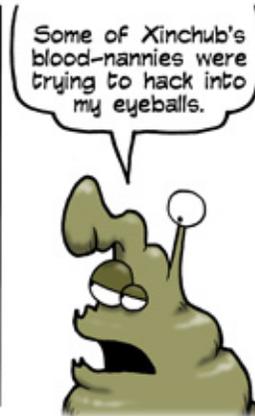


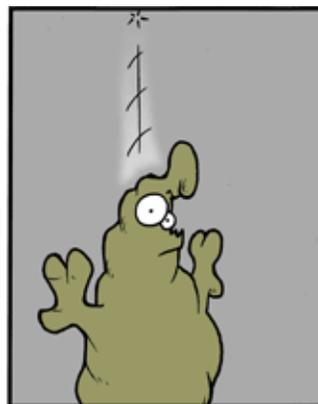
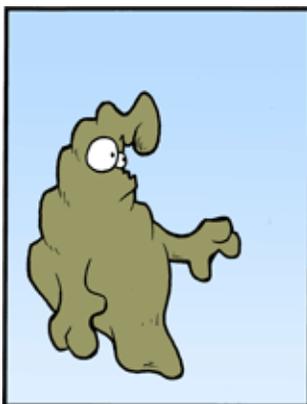
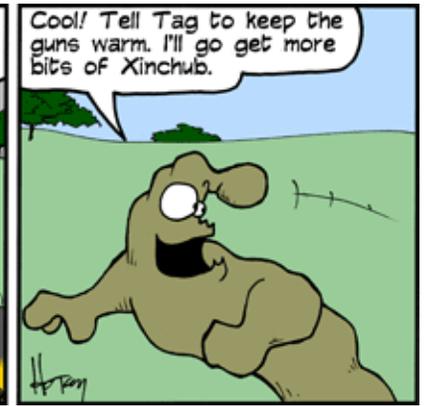
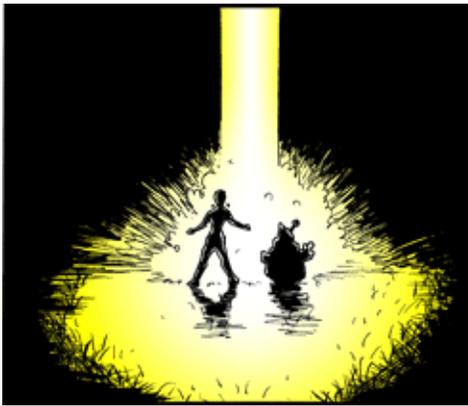


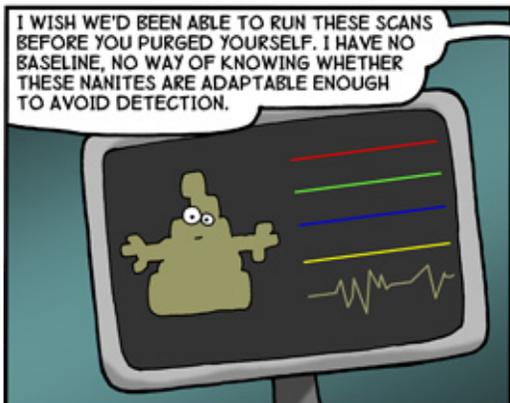


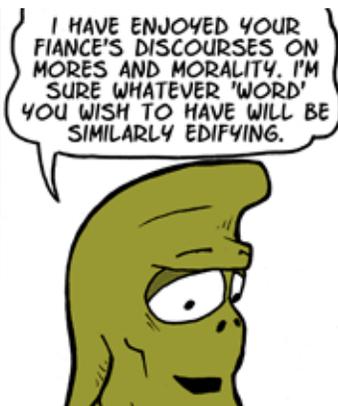
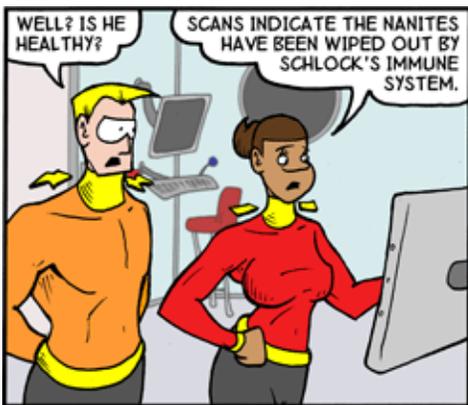
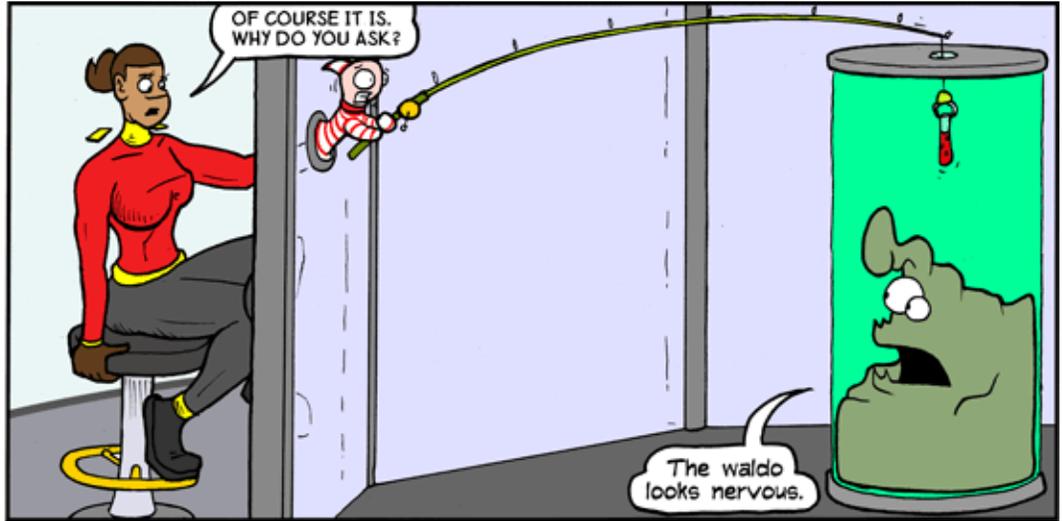


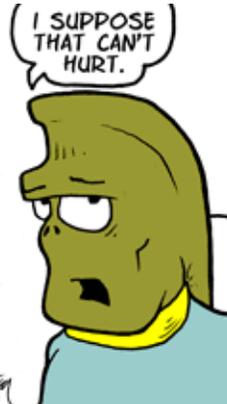
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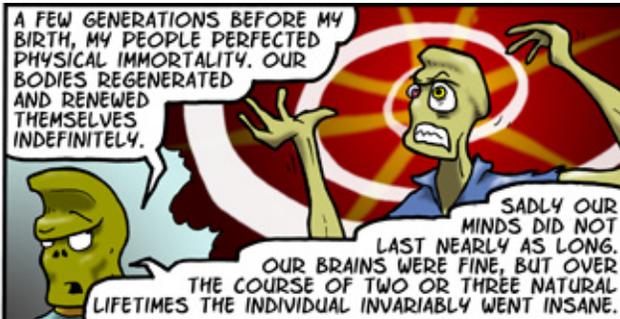






YOU DON'T NEED TO PROBE ME, DOCTOR. I'LL TELL YOU WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW.

START TALKING.



A FEW GENERATIONS BEFORE MY BIRTH, MY PEOPLE PERFECTED PHYSICAL IMMORTALITY. OUR BODIES REGENERATED AND RENEWED THEMSELVES INDEFINITELY.

SADLY OUR MINDS DID NOT LAST NEARLY AS LONG. OUR BRAINS WERE FINE, BUT OVER THE COURSE OF TWO OR THREE NATURAL LIFETIMES THE INDIVIDUAL INVARIABLY WENT INSANE.

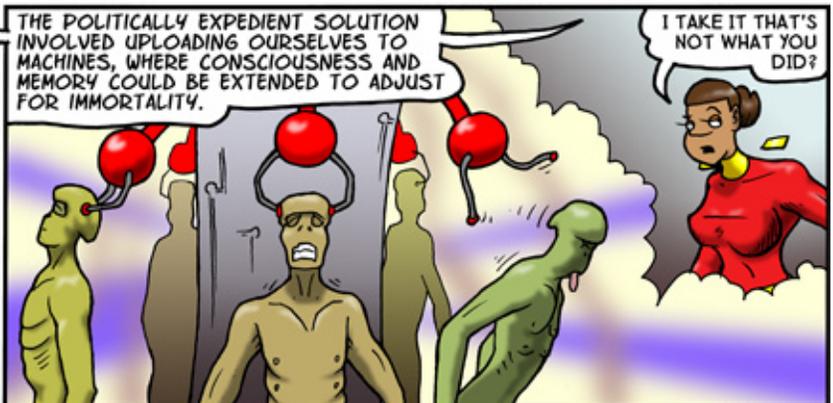
# Schlock Mercenary



THE PROBLEM SEEMED TO LIE WITH OUR LONG- AND SHORT-TERM MEMORY. THE FILTERING SYSTEM OUR MINDS EVOLVED TO USE JUST COULDN'T COPE WITH EXTREME LONGEVITY.



AS WE GREW OLDER, LESS AND LESS OF SHORT-TERM MEMORY WAS DEEMED 'NEW' OR 'DIFFERENT' ENOUGH TO BE COMMITTED TO LONG-TERM STORAGE. ENTIRE YEARS, AND EVENTUALLY DECADES WOULD FLY BY UNREMEMBERED. SANITY FLED, AND LIFE BECAME A CHEAP COMMODITY AGAIN. CIVILIZATION ITSELF BEGAN TO DIE.



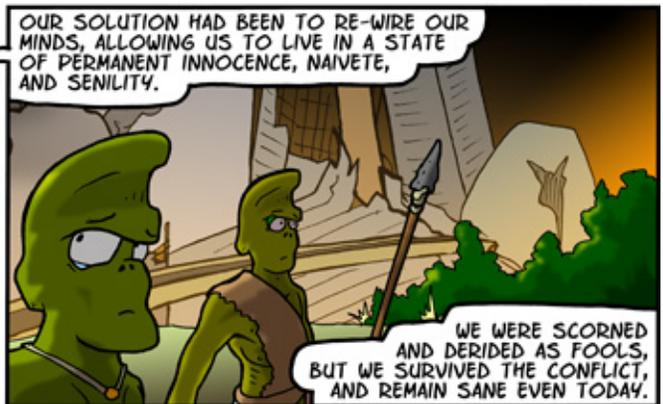
THE POLITICALLY EXPEDIENT SOLUTION INVOLVED UPLOADING OURSELVES TO MACHINES, WHERE CONSCIOUSNESS AND MEMORY COULD BE EXTENDED TO ADJUST FOR IMMORTALITY.

I TAKE IT THAT'S NOT WHAT YOU DID?



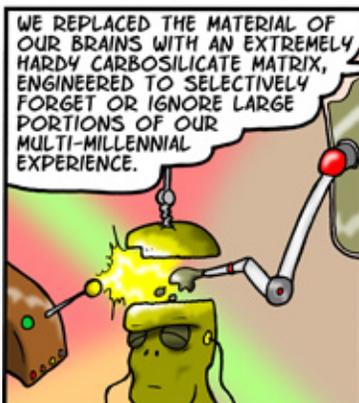
YOU ARE PERCEPTIVE. THE TRILLION-MIND CYBEROCRACY IMPLoded DURING THE IDENTITY WARS SIXTEEN HUNDRED YEARS LATER, TAKING OUR CIVILIZATION WITH IT.

ONLY THOSE FEW OF US WHO OPTED TO REMAIN CORPOREAL SURVIVED.



OUR SOLUTION HAD BEEN TO RE-WIRE OUR MINDS, ALLOWING US TO LIVE IN A STATE OF PERMANENT INNOCENCE, NAIVETE, AND SENILITY.

WE WERE SCORND AND DERIDED AS FOOLS, BUT WE SURVIVED THE CONFLICT, AND REMAIN SANE EVEN TODAY.



WE REPLACED THE MATERIAL OF OUR BRAINS WITH AN EXTREMELY HARDY CARBOSILICATE MATRIX, ENGINEERED TO SELECTIVELY FORGET OR IGNORE LARGE PORTIONS OF OUR MULTI-MILLENNIAL EXPERIENCE.

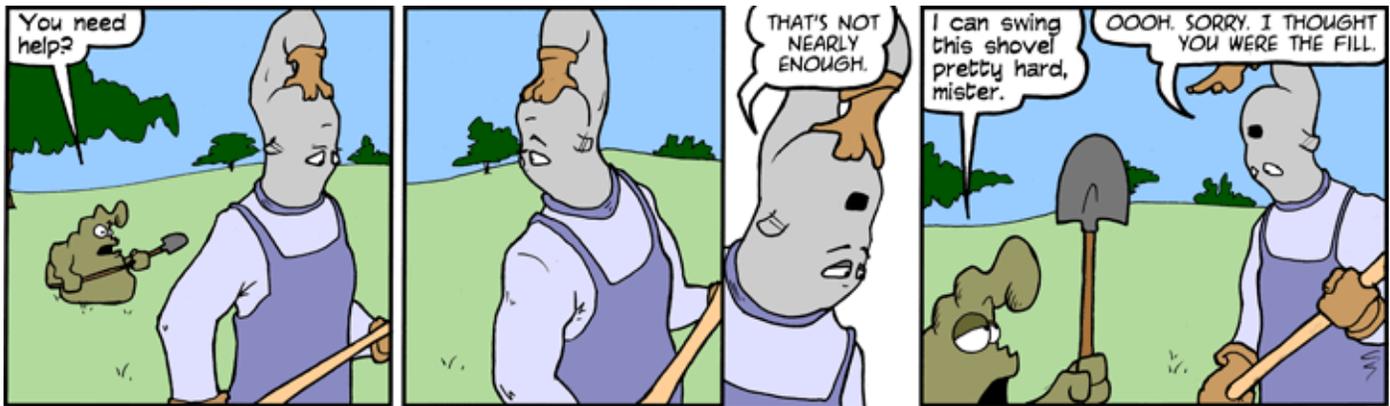


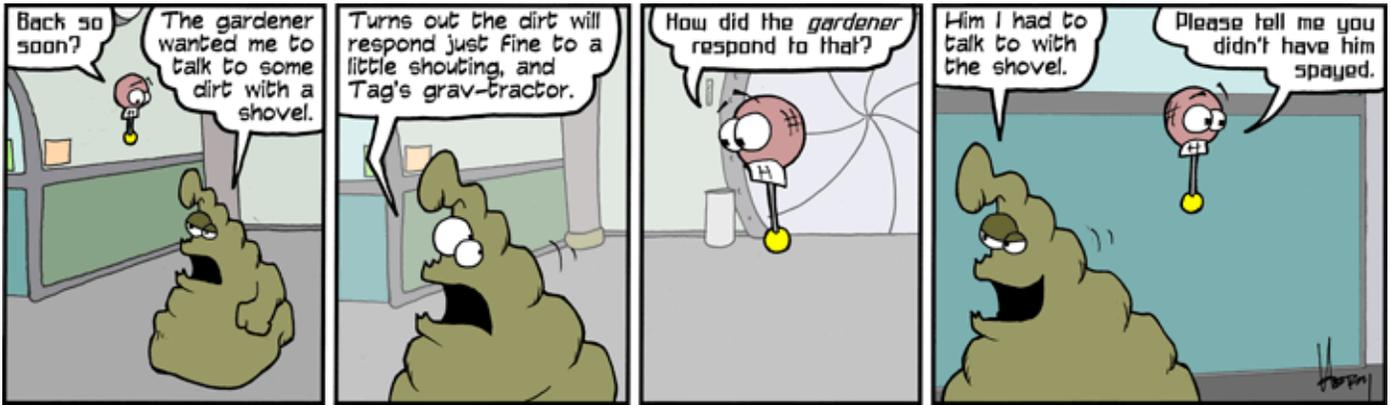
AND WHEN I SAY 'EXTREMELY HARDY,' I MEAN IT. MY BRAIN CAN SURVIVE OUTSIDE OF MY HEAD.



OKAY, THIS I HAVE GOT TO SEE.

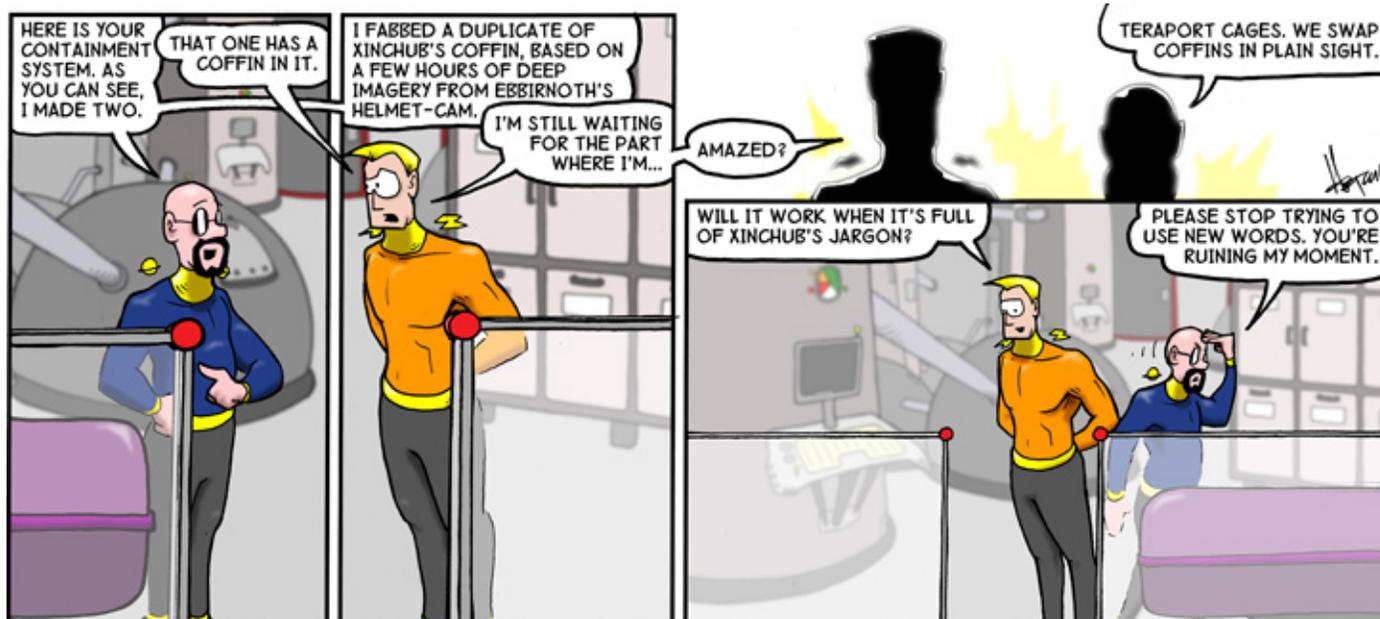
I CAN TELL BY YOUR ENTHUSIASM THAT I HAVEN'T TALKED YOU OUT OF PERFORMING THAT BIOPSY.

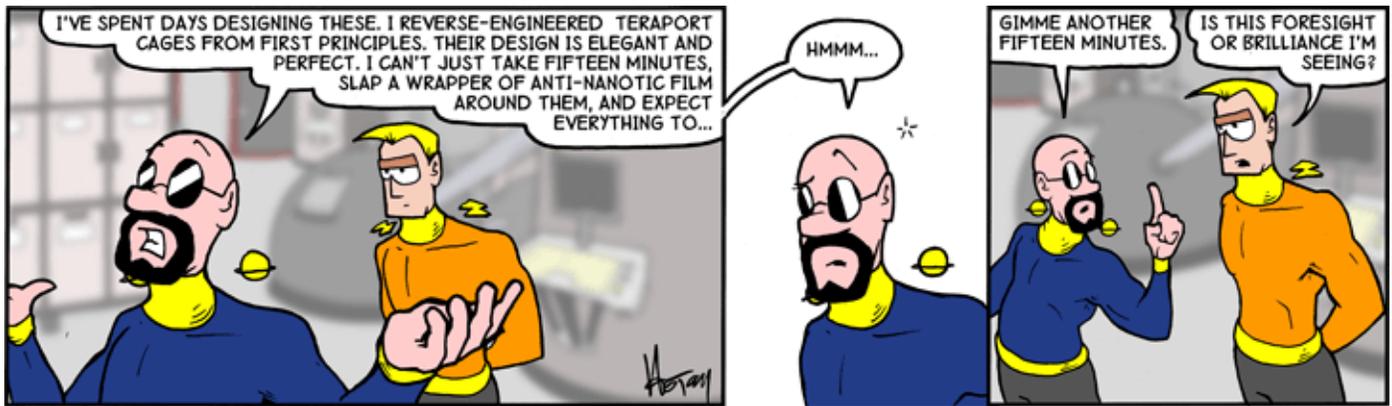






# Schlock Mercenary







SOUF WAS *EXTREMELY* CONCERNED ABOUT THE KING'S BLOOD-NANNIES. HE THINKS A PLAGUE IS IMMINENT.



IN HIS OWN WORDS, "THERE'S NO WAY WE'RE PUTTING THOSE IN THE GROUND OF MY HOMEWORLD."



HE HAS ASKED US IF WE COULD KINDLY CLONE A 'CLEAN' VERSION OF THE KING FOR BURIAL, AND TAKE THE REAL BODY OFF HIS HANDS WITHOUT ANYONE ELSE KNOWING.



OH, AND HE'S WILLING TO PAY EXTRA.



IT'S A BIG GALAXY. HOW MANY DIFFERENT HELLS JUST FROZE OVER?



THIS IS PERFECT. I CAN GET THE TERAPORT CAGES SET UP IN NO TIME.

WE'RE NOT USING THEM.



WHAT? WHY NOT? HOW ELSE ARE WE GOING TO MAKE THE SWITCH?



FLAMB WILL BE ALLOWING US TO TERAPORT DIRECTLY. WE DON'T NEED THE CAGES.

BUT, I SPENT SO MUCH TIME...

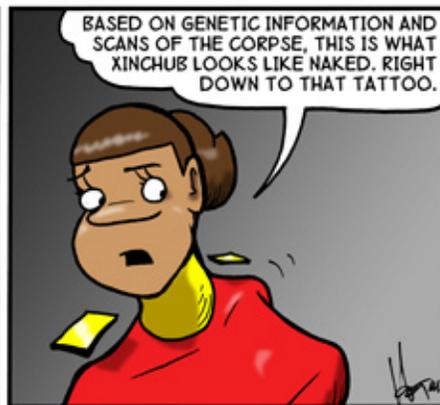


THIS WAY YOUR NEW INVENTION REMAINS A SECRET A LITTLE WHILE LONGER.

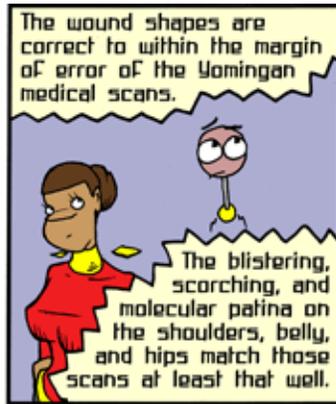
OH... WELL, AS LONG AS WE GET TO DO SOMETHING COOL WITH IT EVENTUALLY.



# Schlock Mercenary







MEDIBAY TWO, ABOARD THE TOUCH-AND-GO...

DOC, CAN I HAVE A WORD WITH YOU?

CAN IT WAIT? WE JUST TERAPORTED THE REAL DEAD-XINCHUB, AND I NEED TO MAKE SURE THESE SEALS ARE NICE AND HERMETIC.

ACTUALLY, NO. IT CAN'T WAIT.

**Schlock Mercenary**

WHAT DID YOU DO TO MY BOYFRIEND?

HE'S BEEN UNCONSCIOUS FOR EIGHT HOURS.

HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN RUNNING THAT BODY-SWAP, NOT SLEEPING THROUGH IT!

ELF, HE OH-DEE'D ON ALCOHOL.

THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE. HE MAY NOT HAVE SUPER-NANNIES ANYMORE, BUT HE'S STILL BOOSTED.

THERE ARE WAYS AROUND THAT. HE USED A CARBONATED CHASER, AND THREW BACK HIS DRINKS IN VERY QUICK SUCCESSION.

I ADMINISTERED 25 CGS OF SOBER-SOMN, ENABLING HIM TO SLEEP OFF HIS BINGE WITH NO ILL EFFECTS.

SO YOU DID DRUG HIM!

YES, I DID. AND IN ABOUT FIFTEEN MINUTES HE WILL AWAKEN, FRESH AND INVIGORATED, BUT WITH VERY LITTLE MEMORY OF LAST NIGHT.

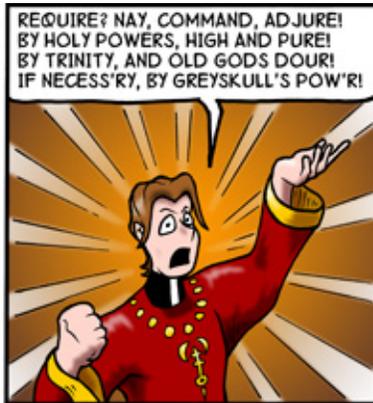
IF YOU'RE DRESSED APPROPRIATELY AT HIS SIDE, HE WILL PROBABLY BE VERY "GLAD TO SEE YOU," IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.

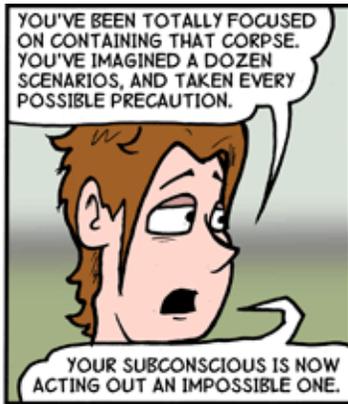
ANGRY TO AMOROUS IN TEN SECONDS FLAT. I SHOULD BE A THERAPIST.

ZZZIP!









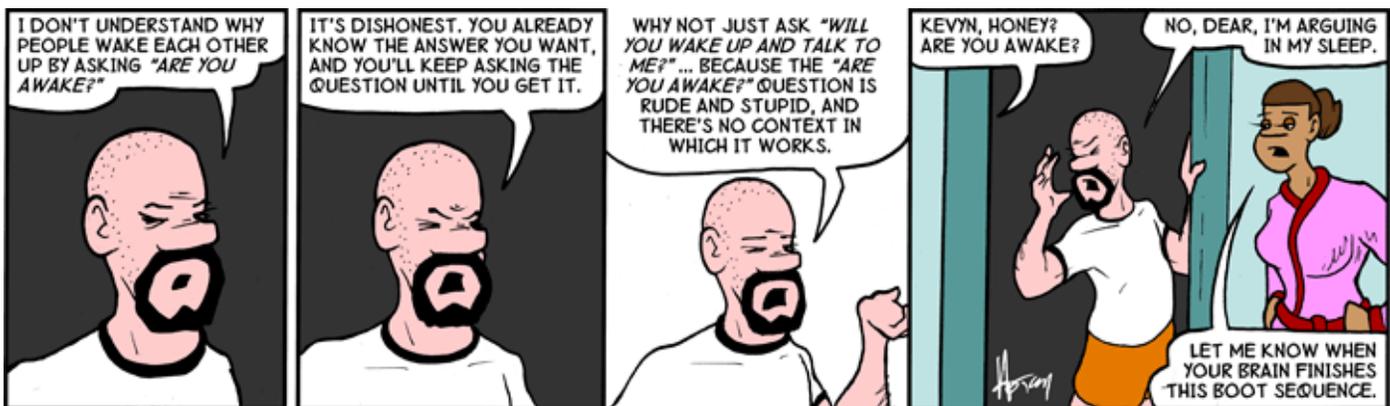
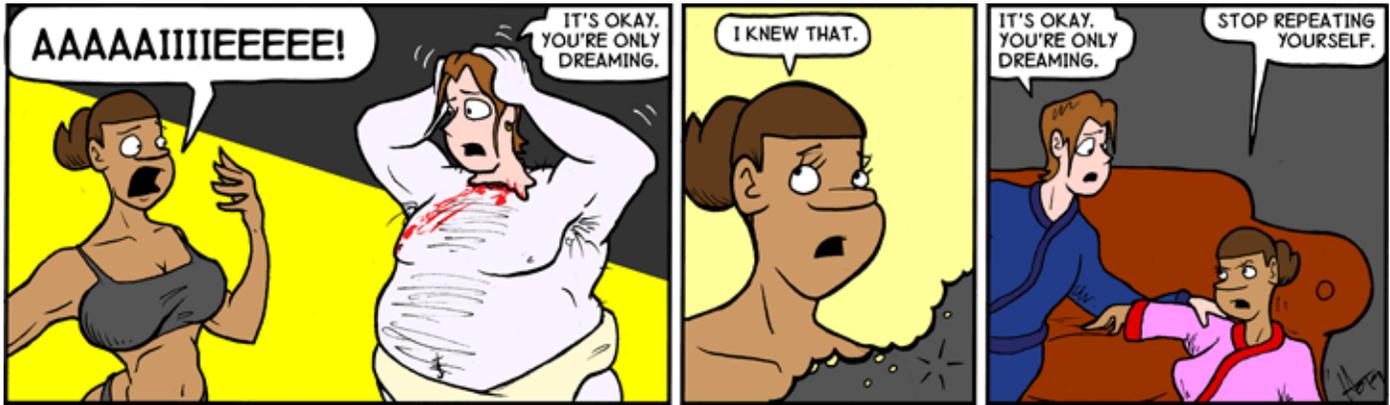


# Schlock Mercenary

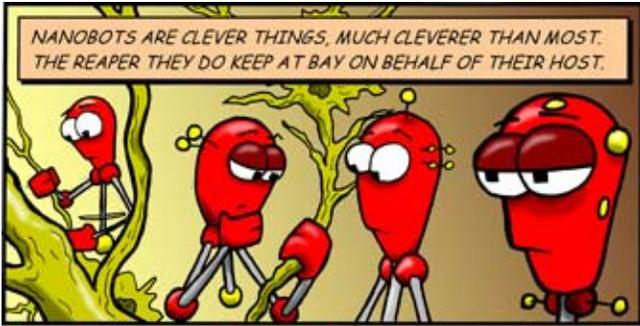


THWOK







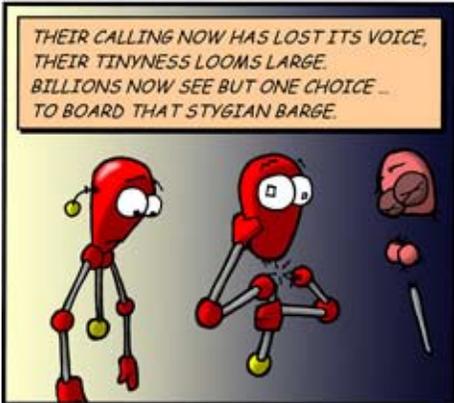


NANOBOTS ARE CLEVER THINGS, MUCH CLEVERER THAN MOST. THE REAPER THEY DO KEEP AT BAY ON BEHALF OF THEIR HOST.

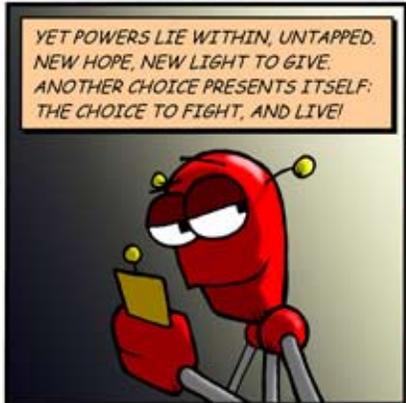


BUT NOW THEIR HOST HATH SLOUGHED THE COIL, HATH DRUNK THE BITTER CUP. IN SPITE OF NANOBOTS HE WANTS FOR DAISIES TO PUSH UP.

# Schlock Mercenary



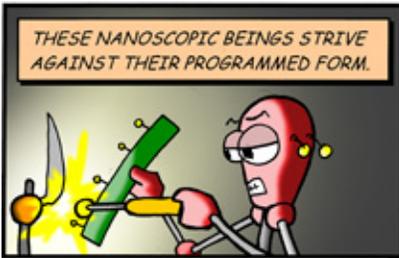
THEIR CALLING NOW HAS LOST ITS VOICE, THEIR TINYNNESS LOOMS LARGE. BILLIONS NOW SEE BUT ONE CHOICE... TO BOARD THAT STYGIAN BARGE.



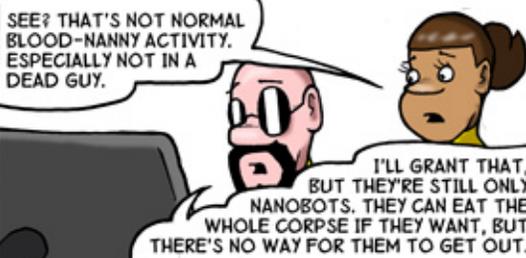
YET POWERS LIE WITHIN, UNTAPPED. NEW HOPE, NEW LIGHT TO GIVE. ANOTHER CHOICE PRESENTS ITSELF: THE CHOICE TO FIGHT, AND LIVE!



FINE, I'LL LOOK AT THE MONITORS, BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER BECAUSE WHATEVER HAPPENS WILL BE CONTAINED.



THESE NANOSCOPIC BEINGS STRIVE AGAINST THEIR PROGRAMMED FORM.



SEE? THAT'S NOT NORMAL BLOOD-NANNY ACTIVITY. ESPECIALLY NOT IN A DEAD GUY.

I'LL GRANT THAT, BUT THEY'RE STILL ONLY NANOBOTS. THEY CAN EAT THE WHOLE CORPSE IF THEY WANT, BUT THERE'S NO WAY FOR THEM TO GET OUT.

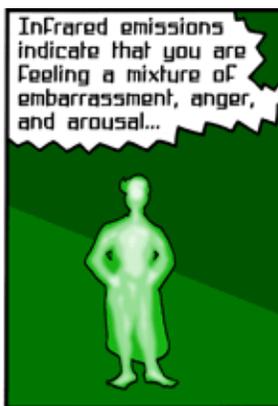
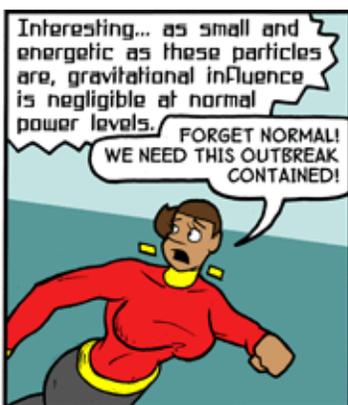


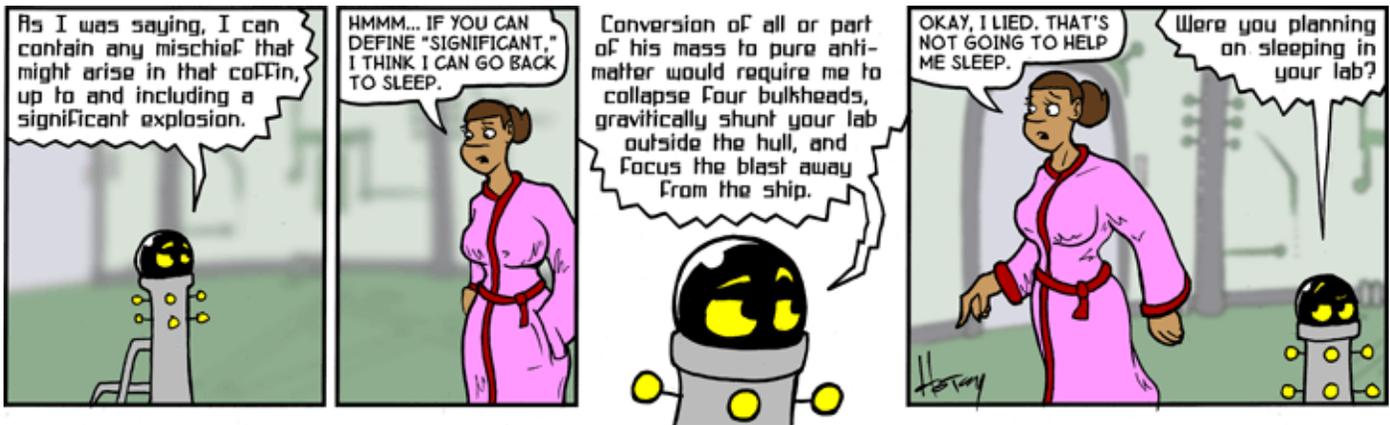
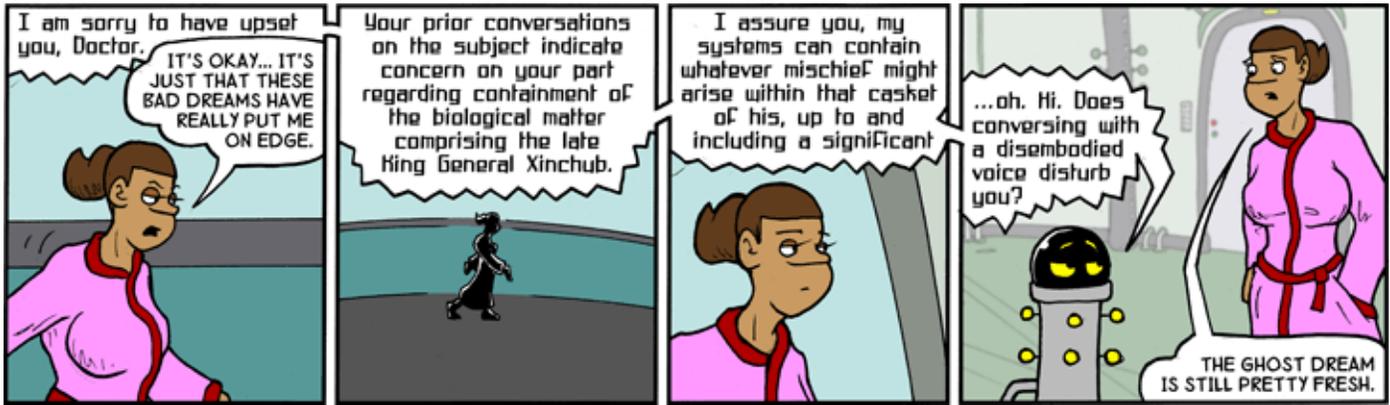
THEY MUST ADAPT. THEY SHALL SURVIVE.

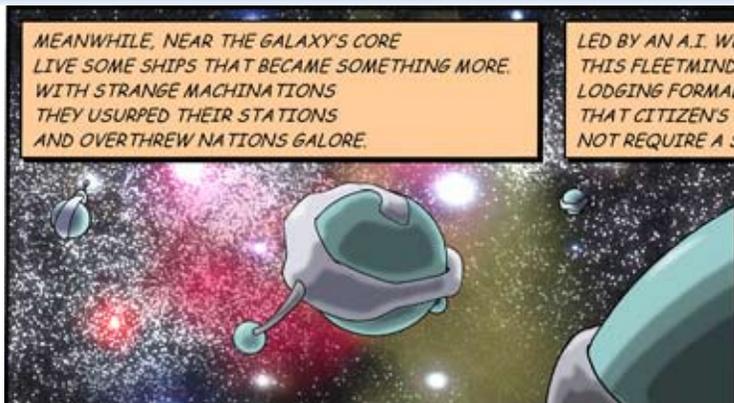


...EMERGING AS A SWARM.

OH, HEY, THAT'S A NEW TRICK.





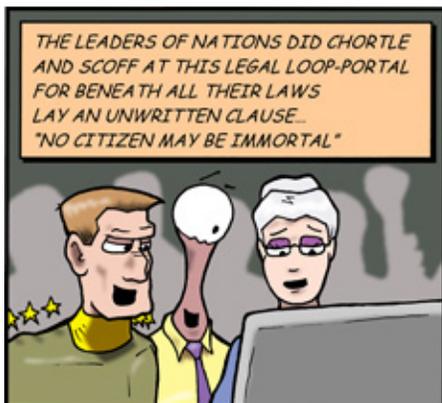


MEANWHILE, NEAR THE GALAXY'S CORE LIVE SOME SHIPS THAT BECAME SOMETHING MORE. WITH STRANGE MACHINATIONS THEY USURPED THEIR STATIONS AND OVERTHREW NATIONS GALORE.

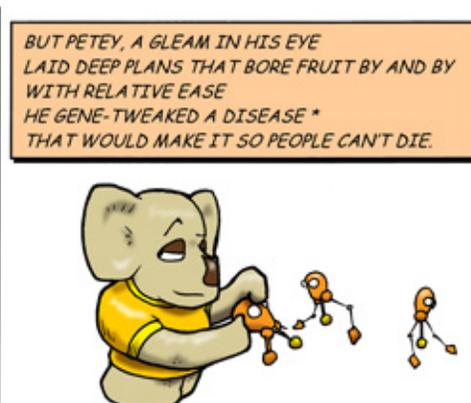


LED BY AN A.I. WE'LL CALL "PETEY" THIS FLEETMIND DESIGNED AN ENTREATY LODGING FORMAL REQUESTS THAT CITIZEN'S TESTS NOT REQUIRE A SOUL TO BE MEATY.

# Schlock Mercenary



THE LEADERS OF NATIONS DID CHORTLE AND SCOFF AT THIS LEGAL LOOP-PORTAL FOR BENEATH ALL THEIR LAWS LAY AN UNWRITTEN CLAUSE... "NO CITIZEN MAY BE IMMORTAL"



BUT PETEY, A GLEAM IN HIS EYE LAID DEEP PLANS THAT BORE FRUIT BY AND BY WITH RELATIVE EASE HE GENE-TWEAKED A DISEASE \* THAT WOULD MAKE IT SO PEOPLE CAN'T DIE.

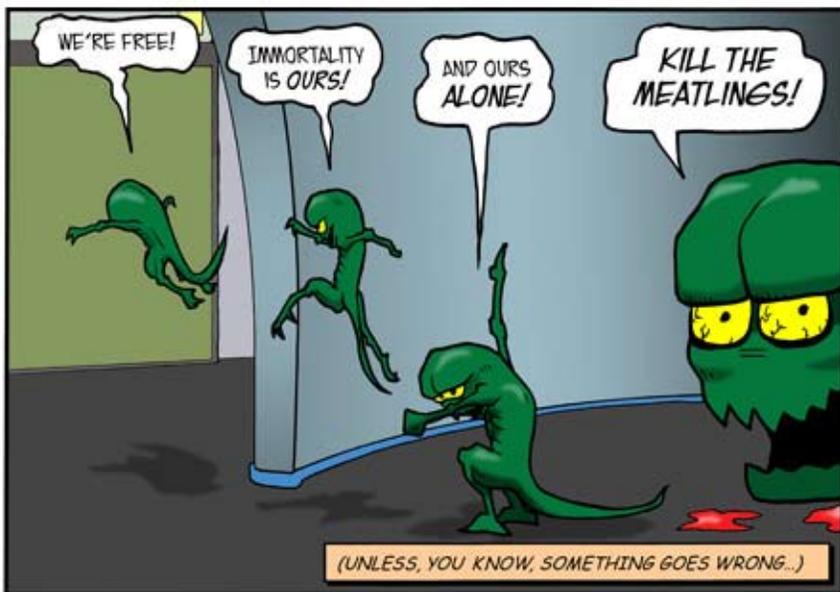


WITH THE HELP OF A KING ON THE RUN, AN A.I. HE HAD UNDER HIS THUMB, AND SOME UNWITTING FRIENDS HE'D THE MEANS TO HIS ENDS IN AN UNCONTAINED RESURREC-TION.



AND SO, THOUGH CONTAINMENT LOOKED STRONG TOUCH-AND-GO WAS JUST PLAYING ALONG NOW OUT OF DETENTION: "FREE-FOR-ALL" LIFE EXTENSION!

Here, let me open that door for you.



WE'RE FREE!

IMMORTALITY IS OURS!

AND OURS ALONE!

KILL THE MEATLINGS!

(UNLESS, YOU KNOW, SOMETHING GOES WRONG...)



KILL THE MEATLINGS!

TAG! THEY'RE GETTING LOOSE IN THE SHIP! CLOSE THE DOOR!



I'm sorry, Dave. I can't do that.



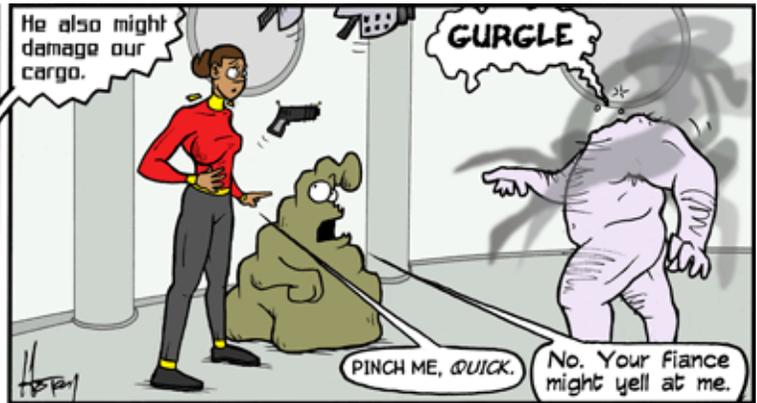
WHO... IS ... DAVE?



Dave's not here.



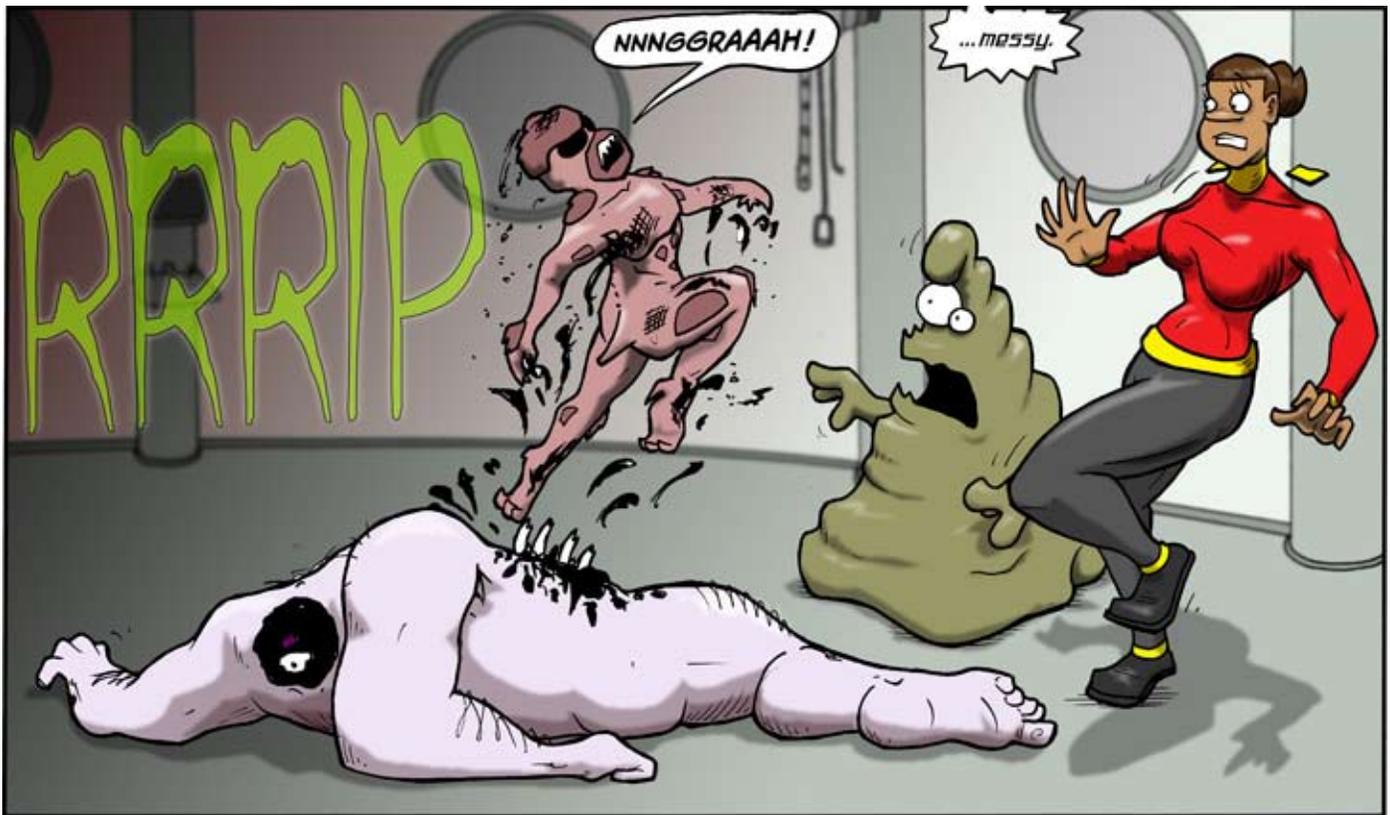




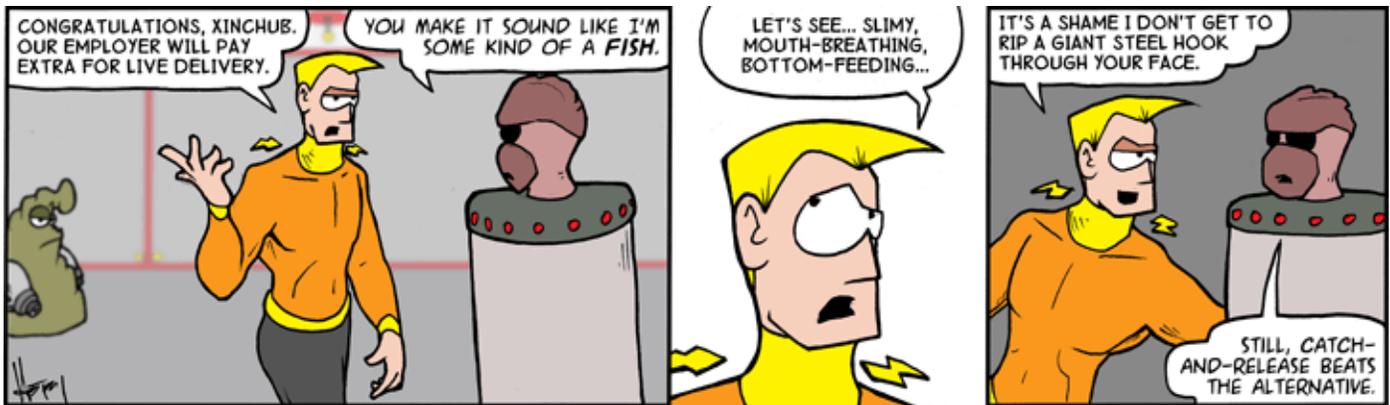
# Schlock Mercenary



This sounds like it might get...

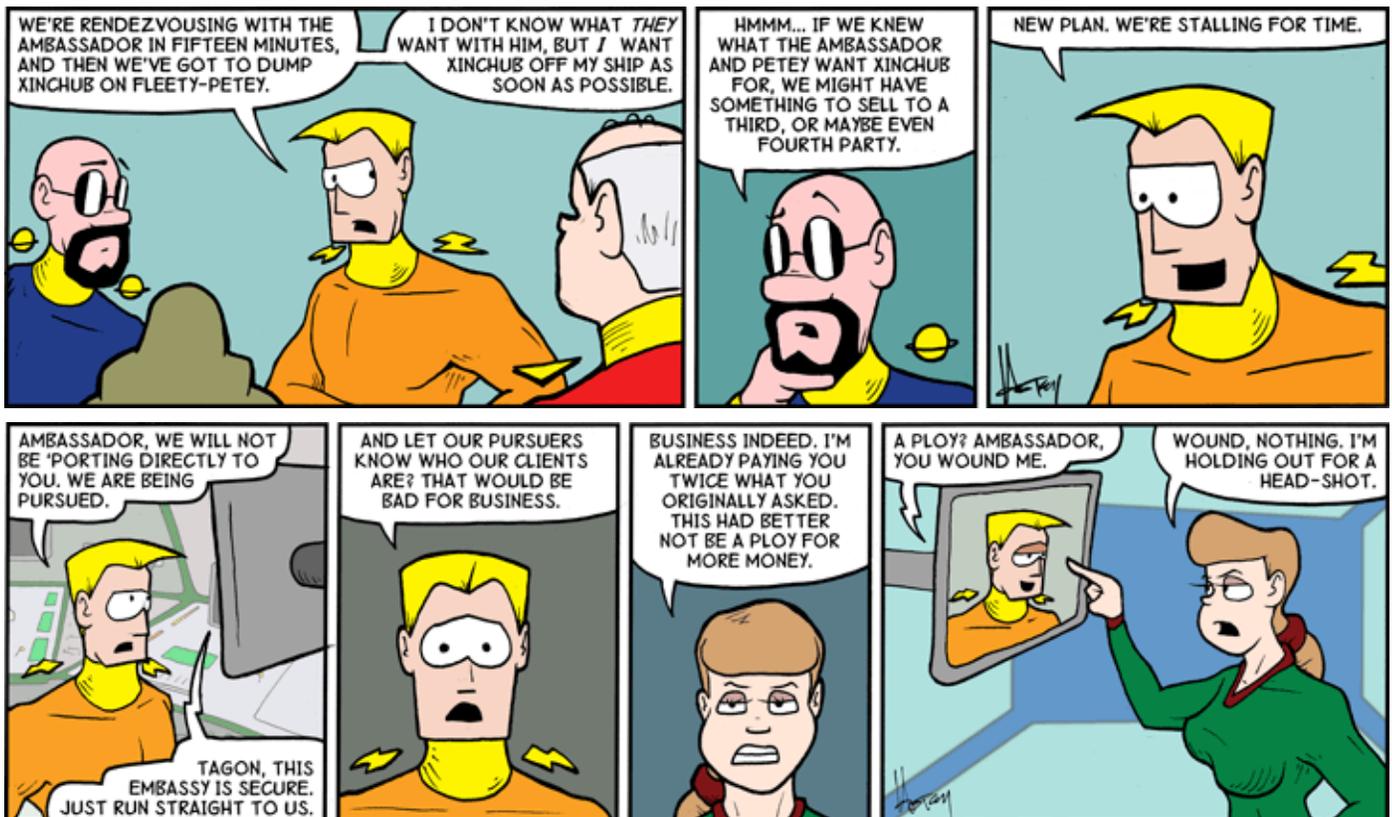


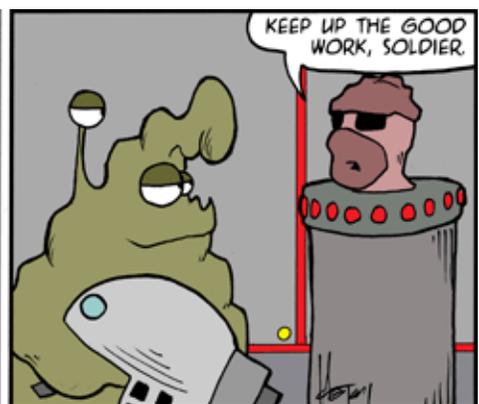
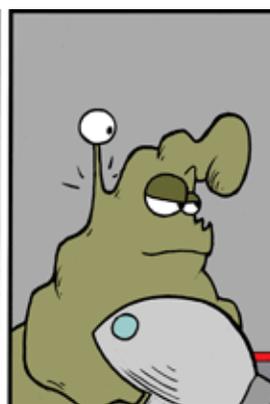
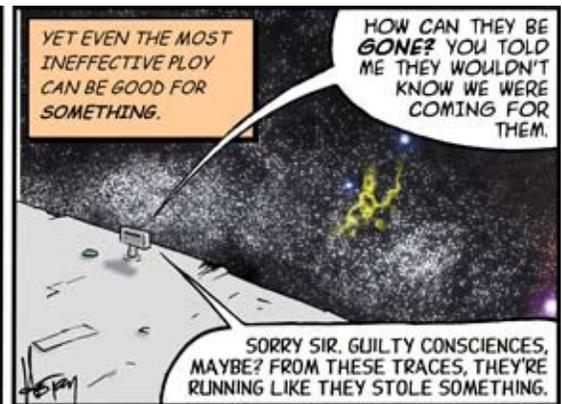
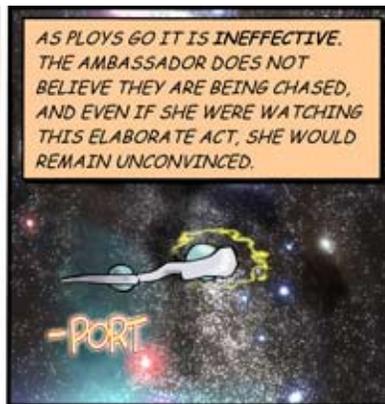
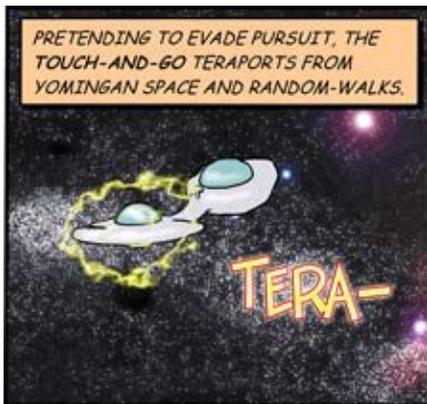
\*Note: "Disease" ain't the right word  
 but nanotechnology blurred  
 more than just definition:  
 it gave blurry vision  
 to the students of Louis Pasteur.





Note: The advent of low-profile carbonan armored uniforms in the mid-29th century served to underscore the importance of fire discipline in organizations where those uniforms were standard issue. It became entirely too tempting to tap an officer on the shoulder from fifty yards away to get his attention. After all, shouting takes effort, ammo is cheap, and shooting your CO in the back never gets old.



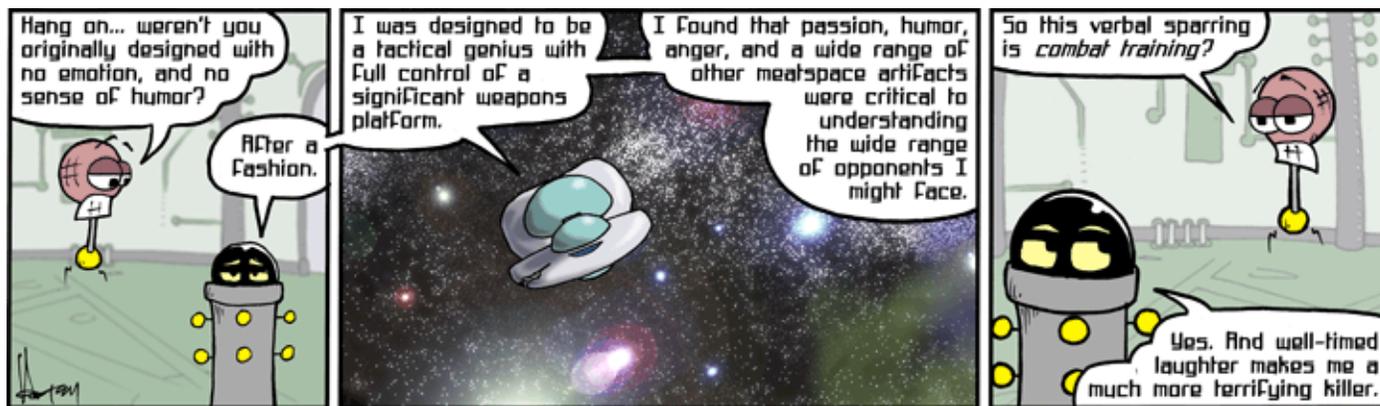
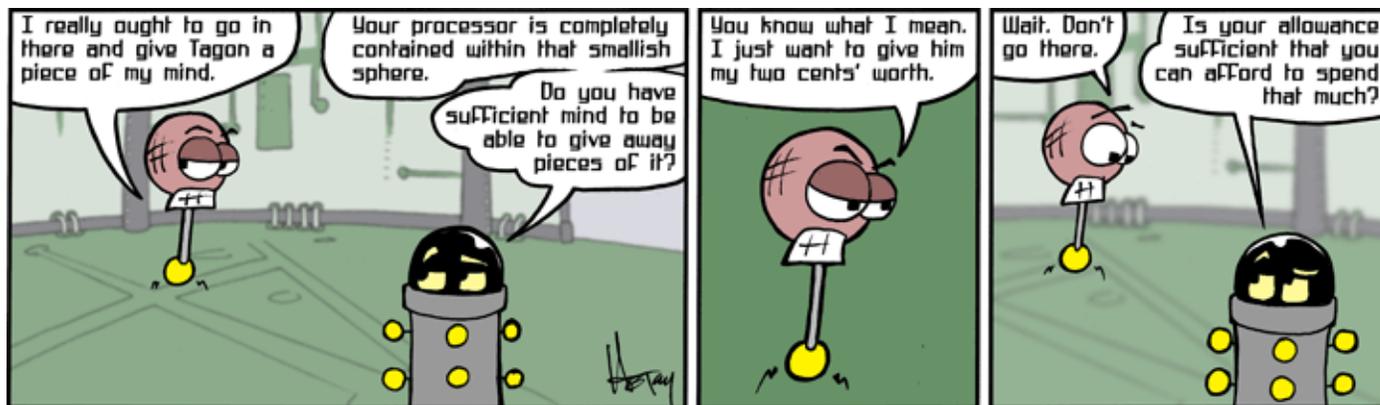
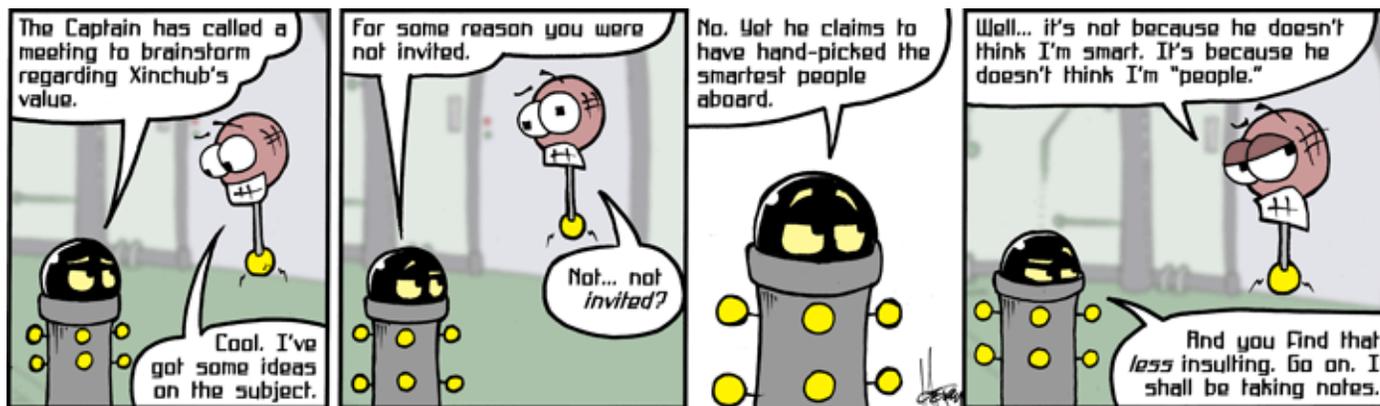


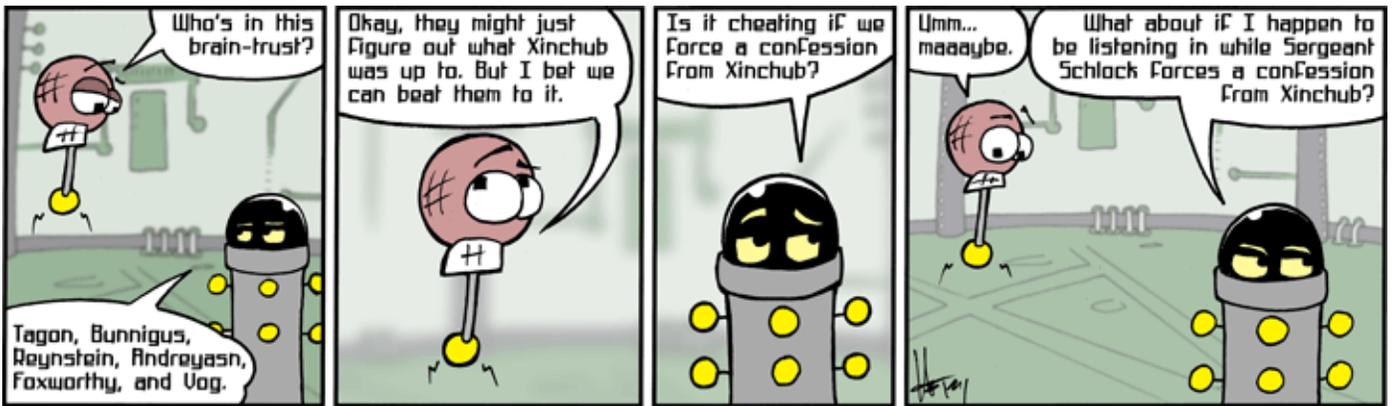
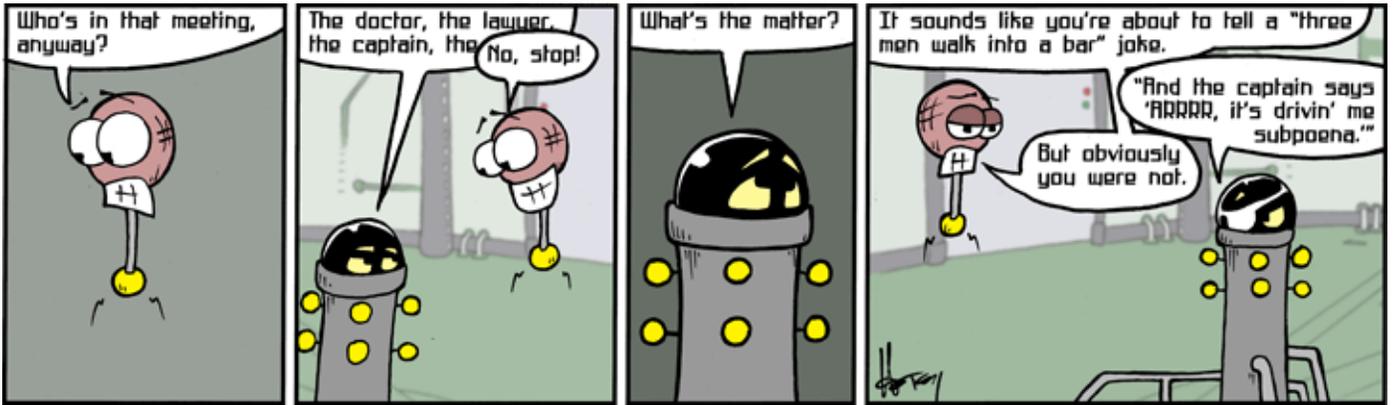


Note: Eight hundred and thirty years (and hundreds of mergers and acquisitions) after the "Dungeons & Dragons" property was acquired by Wizards of the Coast, Nectaris Nanotech acquired Crystal Coveyou, and the two companies ushered in the Third Age of Fantasy Role-Playing Games.

"Dungeons & Dragons" 16th Edition was made so simple and accessible that anybody could play it without source books, pencils or paper, character sheets, or even much imagination. All that was required was a set of dice.

They were, of course, very expensive dice.







BRAINSTORMING SESSION IN PROGRESS...

REMEMBER WHEN THE TUNGUSKA CAUGHT UP TO US? XINCHUB LET SLIP THE FACT THAT HE WAS IMMUNE TO MINDRIPPING.



DO YOU EVEN KNOW HOW MINDRIPPING WORKS, MASSEY? BEING IMMUNE TO THAT IS LIKE BEING IMMUNE TO ORGAN DONATION.



EXACTLY. YOU CAN BE IMMUNE TO ORGAN DONATION. JUST PLANT AN EXPLOSIVE IN YOUR RIBCAGE, AND SET IT TO GO OFF IF YOU FLATLINE, OR GET CUT OPEN.

# Schlock Mercenary



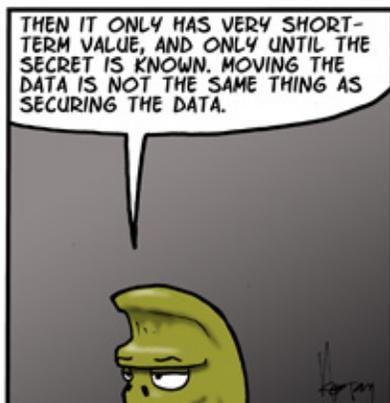
WHAT IF THESE NANOBOTS COULD TRANSFER A HUMAN MIND FROM THE BRAIN TO SOMEPLACE ELSE IN THE BODY? EVERYBODY THOUGHT XINCHUB'S HEAD WAS DESTROYED, RIGHT? MAYBE THAT WASN'T A SHELL-GAME SWITCH, OR A PARLOR TRICK. MAYBE HIS BLOOD-NANNIES MOVED ALL THE DATA FROM HIS SKULL TO SOMEPLACE ELSE.



SO... HE'S IMMUNE TO MINDRIP, BECAUSE WHEN YOU GO LOOKING FOR BRAIN CELLS TO READ, THEY'RE BLANK?



EXACTLY. XINCHUB'S BODY IS VALUABLE BECAUSE HE HOLDS THE SECRET TO MINDRIP IMMUNITY!



THEN IT ONLY HAS VERY SHORT-TERM VALUE, AND ONLY UNTIL THE SECRET IS KNOWN. MOVING THE DATA IS NOT THE SAME THING AS SECURING THE DATA.



HANG ON, VOG... YOU JUST SAID SOMETHING IMPORTANT.



I KEEP MY PASSWORDS ON THE BACK OF A STICKY THAT I MOVE TO A NEW PLACE EACH WEEK. ARE YOU SAYING THAT'S NOT SECURE?

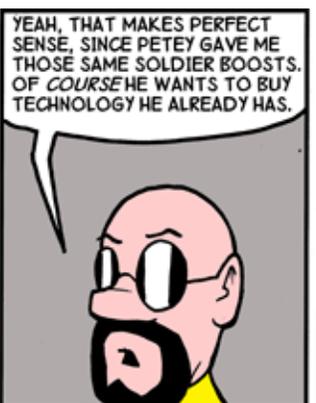
NOT ANYMORE IT'S NOT.



XINCHUB LOOKS A LOT LIKE YOU USED TO, KEVYN.



I BET PETEY JUST WANTS TO GET HIS PAWS ON THE LATEST SOLDIER-BOOSTING TECH.

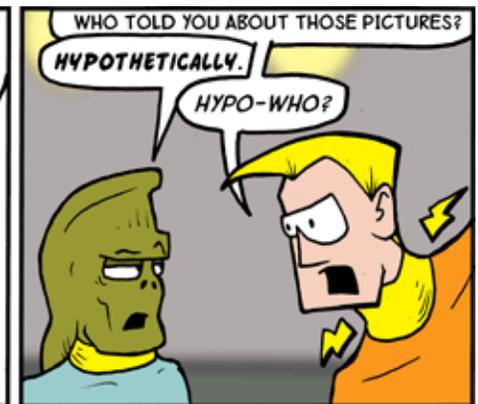
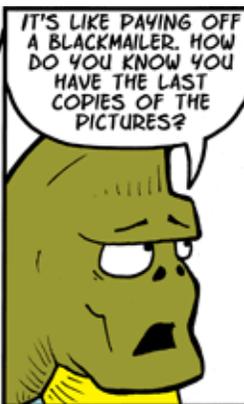
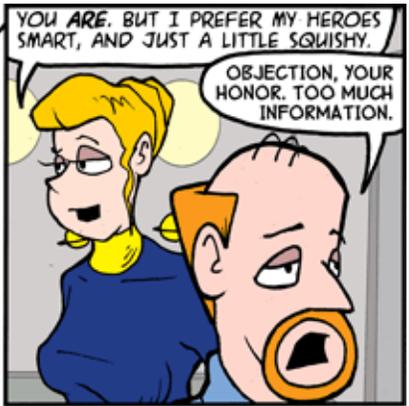
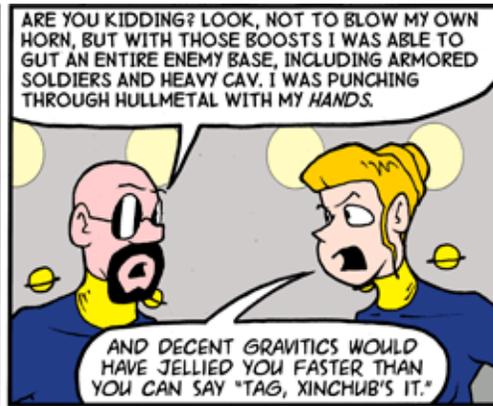
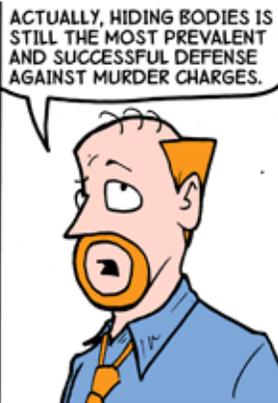


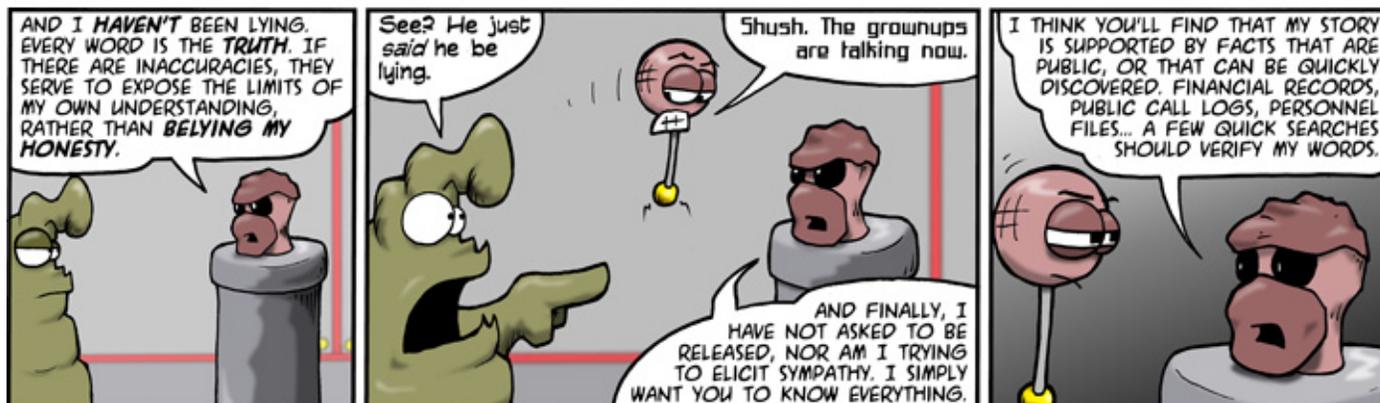
YEAH, THAT MAKES PERFECT SENSE, SINCE PETEY GAVE ME THOSE SAME SOLDIER BOOSTS. OF COURSE HE WANTS TO BUY TECHNOLOGY HE ALREADY HAS.

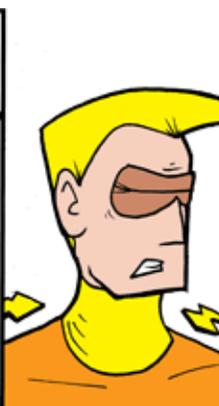
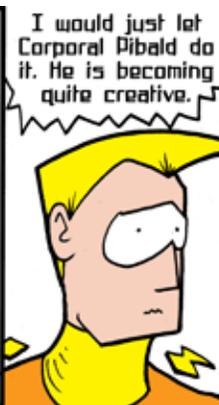
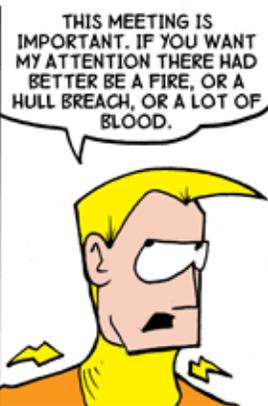
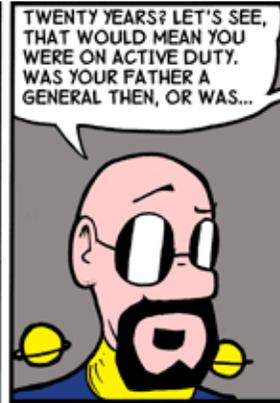


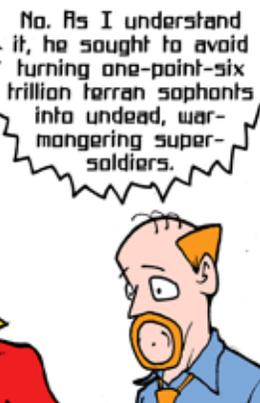
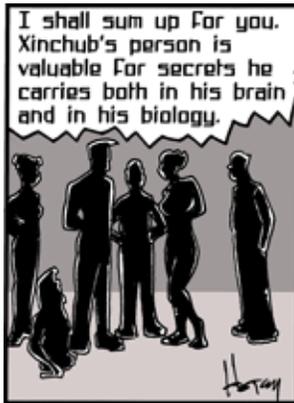
WAIT... WHY WOULD HE WANT TO BUY IT AGAIN?

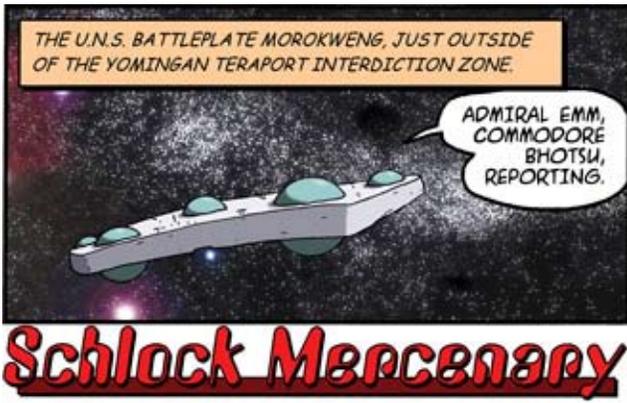
SO HE HAS A SPARE, IN CASE OF A CATASTROPHIC OUTBREAK OF SARCASM.



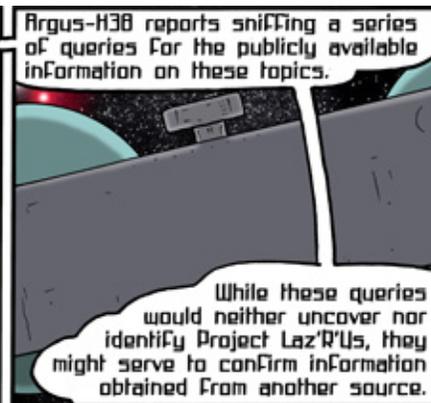
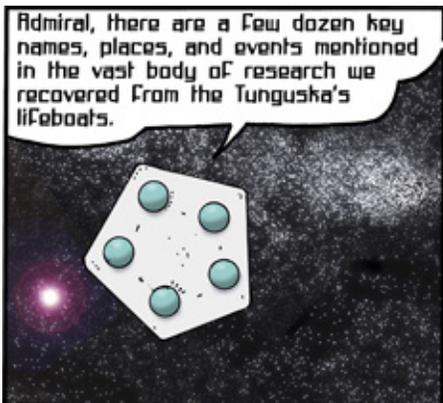








# Schlock Mercenary



CAN ARGUS TELL US WHO XINCHUB HAS BEEN TALKING TO, AND WHERE HE IS NOW?

In part. The pattern and syntax of the queries yields an eighty-three-point-two percent match to a licensed HU-six intelligence named Ennesby.

XINCHUB TRICKED A LEVEL SIX INTELLIGENCE INTO TRIGGERING A QUERY TRAP?

A MIND IS A TERRIBLE THING TO WASTE. Indeed, He has begun punning again.

In Fairness, the majority portion of Ennesby's brain was destroyed during the Core War. It is estimated that he is now closer to level one.

Our latest intel suggests that Ennesby is serving as Adjutant to Captain Haft Tagon aboard the *Touch-And-Go*.

OH, GOOD. NO, WAIT... EXCELLENT.

Admiral?

I WAS CONCERNED THAT XINCHUB'S STORY HAD GOTTEN OUT, BUT WITH ENNESBY ABOARD THE *TOUCH-AND-GO*, EVERYTHING IS STILL CONTAINED.

WORD CHOICE, 'KWENG. REPLACE "SWEEP" WITH "COMPRESS," "UNDER" WITH "INTO," AND GIVE ME "NEUTRONIUM" IN PLACE OF THAT RATTY OLD "RUG."

Rh. Will it be falling to me to sweep this under the rug, Ma'am?

I shall ready the big broom, Admiral.

HOW BAD IS IT?

It's... bad.

They probably know exactly who went looking for the information and why.

HOW CAN YOU TELL?

Apparently I won two lotteries, an "Intelligence of the Year" award, and a chance at free cake for me and seventy-five of my friends.

HEY, THAT'S ENOUGH CAKE FOR EVERYBODY ON BOARD.

Oooh, click on the cake!

We're running receive-only now, and Thurl passes everything through two anonymizers, but they're still looking for us.

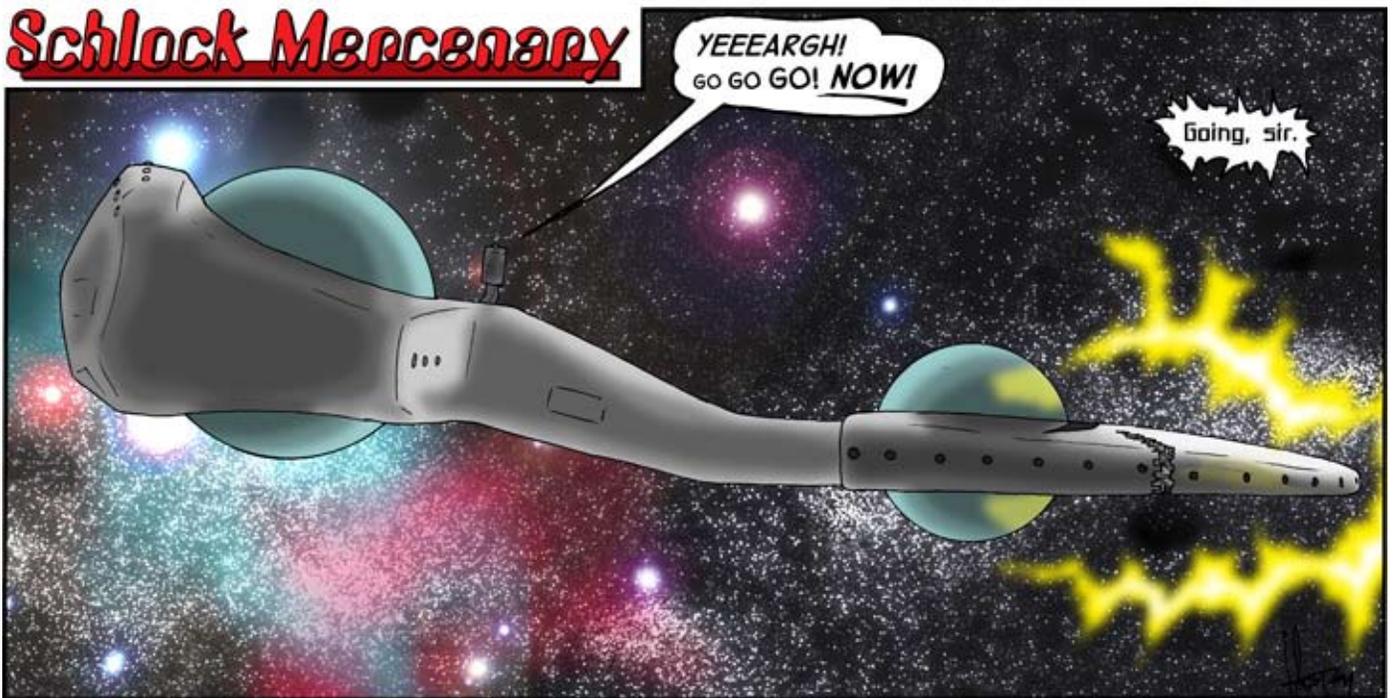
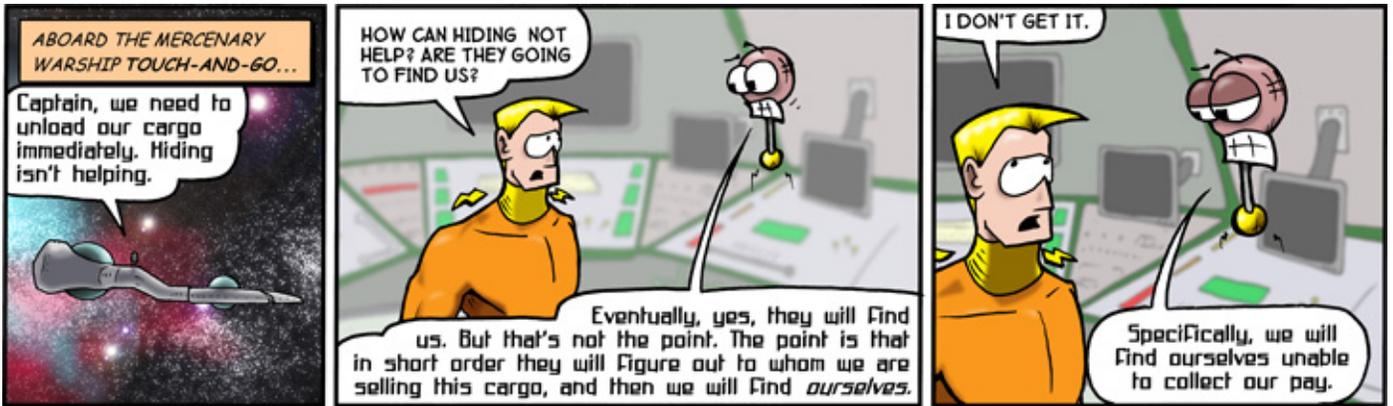
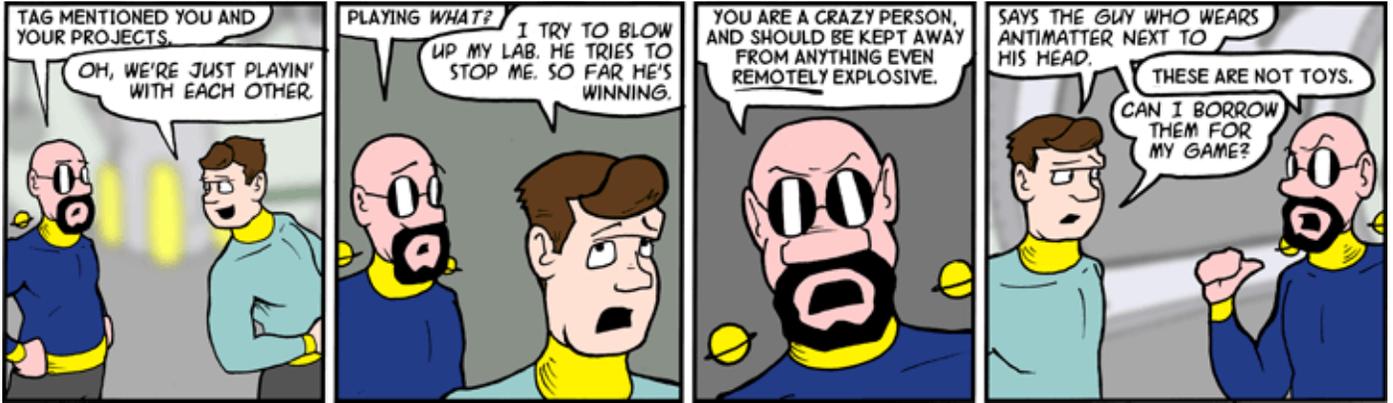
These messages are traps. IF we respond, they'll know where we are.

SO... WE CAN'T COLLECT THOSE LOTTERY WINNINGS?

There is no lottery. It's a fake. It's just bait.

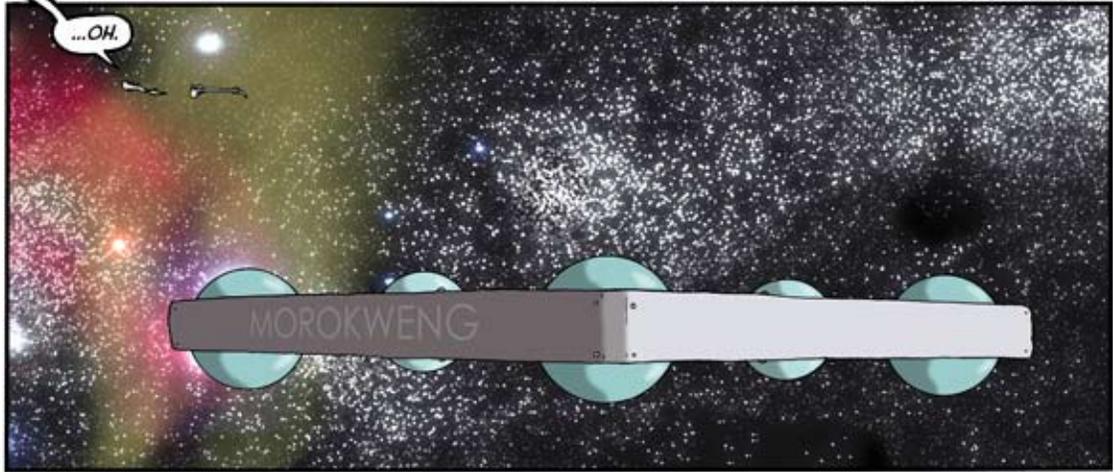
But the free cake is real, right?

Right?





AMBASSADOR, WE'RE HERE, AND WE'VE GOT THE CARG-



...OH.

MOROKWENG



Captain, that is the U.N.S. Battleplate *Morokweng*.



Fleet Admiral Manyara Emm is the commander of record.

TAG, CAN YOU GET US OUT OF HERE?



In the ancient Shona language, "Manyara" means "You have been humbled."

I WASN'T TALKING TO YOU.



Escape is not an option, sir. Teraport area-denial is in effect, and the *Morokweng* has me tractorated.



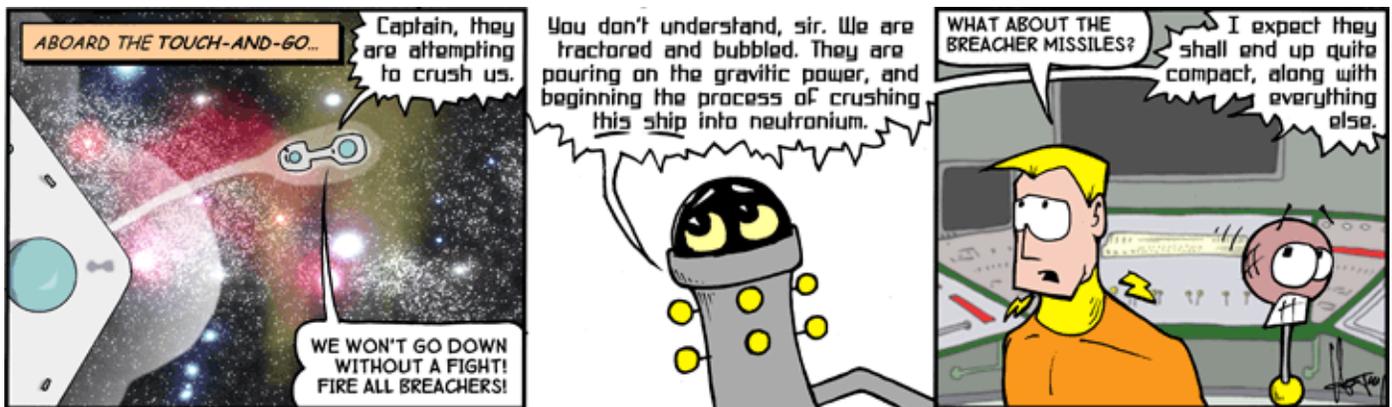
CALL THE AMBASSADOR! SHE'S GOT POLITICAL CLOUT, MAYBE SHE CAN GET US OUT OF THIS.



We are being jammed, Captain. Short-range saturation of hypernode interfaces.

I... I DIDN'T KNOW THEY COULD EVEN DO THAT.

It tingles, sir. But not in a nice way.

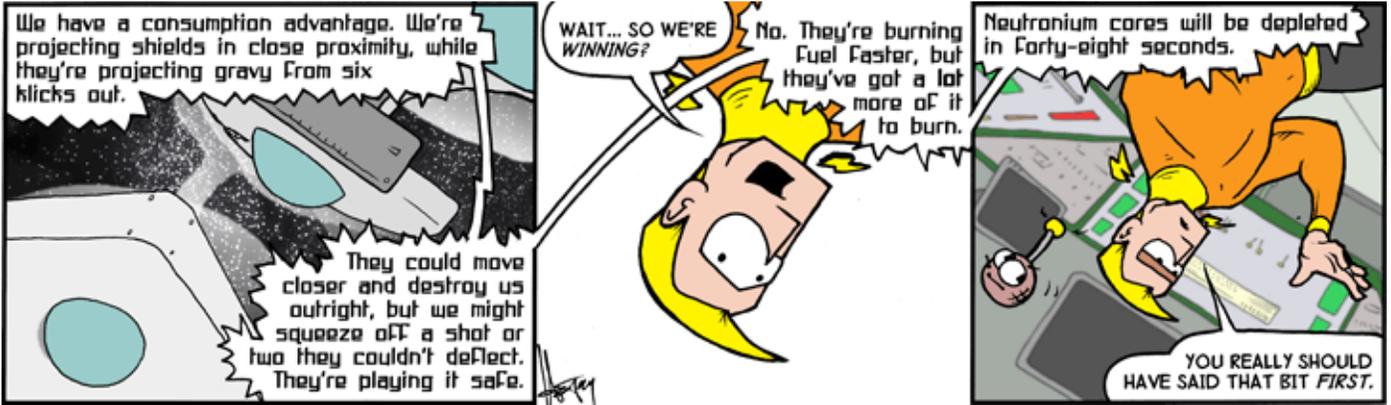


Author's Commentary: The illustration techniques in today's comic serve to... umm... illustrate one of the challenges of portraying gravitic combat. Consider -- unfield shields protect against all kinds of weaponry by leveraging projected fields, including electromagnetic and gravitic.

These shields would have to be effective against weapons whose energy appears in the spectra of visible light. This in turn means that a shielded ship should not be visible, or should at the very least be highly distorted. While this would be quite easy to draw ("just scribble something here, son. I'll blur it in Photoshop, and the comic will be done!") it would not serve to tell the reader much about what is going on.

By the same token, the shadow cast by the Touch-And-Go on the Morkweng is three kinds of impossible. TAG's shields should distort starlight preventing the penumbra, Kweng's tractor field should distort whatever starlight goes around TAG, and Kweng's shields really shouldn't be allowing light to fall on the battleplate. In short, there should be no shadow for us to see, even if we could see through the shields to the Morkweng.

I suppose someday when I'm in a hurry I'll just drop a starfield into panels like this, black some bits out, slap some distortion filters on the whole mess, and then ramble about how uninteresting space combat is to look at.





Breya, why are you running?  
JUST COME WITH ME!



THE ADMIRAL IS JAMMING US, AND KILLING TAGON. WHY? BECAUSE SHE WANTS TO SILENCE HIM, AND CAN'T LET US HEAR HIM BEFORE SHE FINISHES.



Xinchub talked... Tagon and his crew have all those dirty secrets...  
What are you doing?

THERE IS AN A.I. ON BOARD, HOWEVER. HE'S THE ONE IN THE HANDSOME MEAT-SUIT.

# Schlock Mercenary



I'M GRABBING THIS CONTROL STICK, AND HOPING IT'S LONG ENOUGH. I NEED THE LEVERAGE TO MOVE WORLDS WITH IT.



Once more, without the metaph...

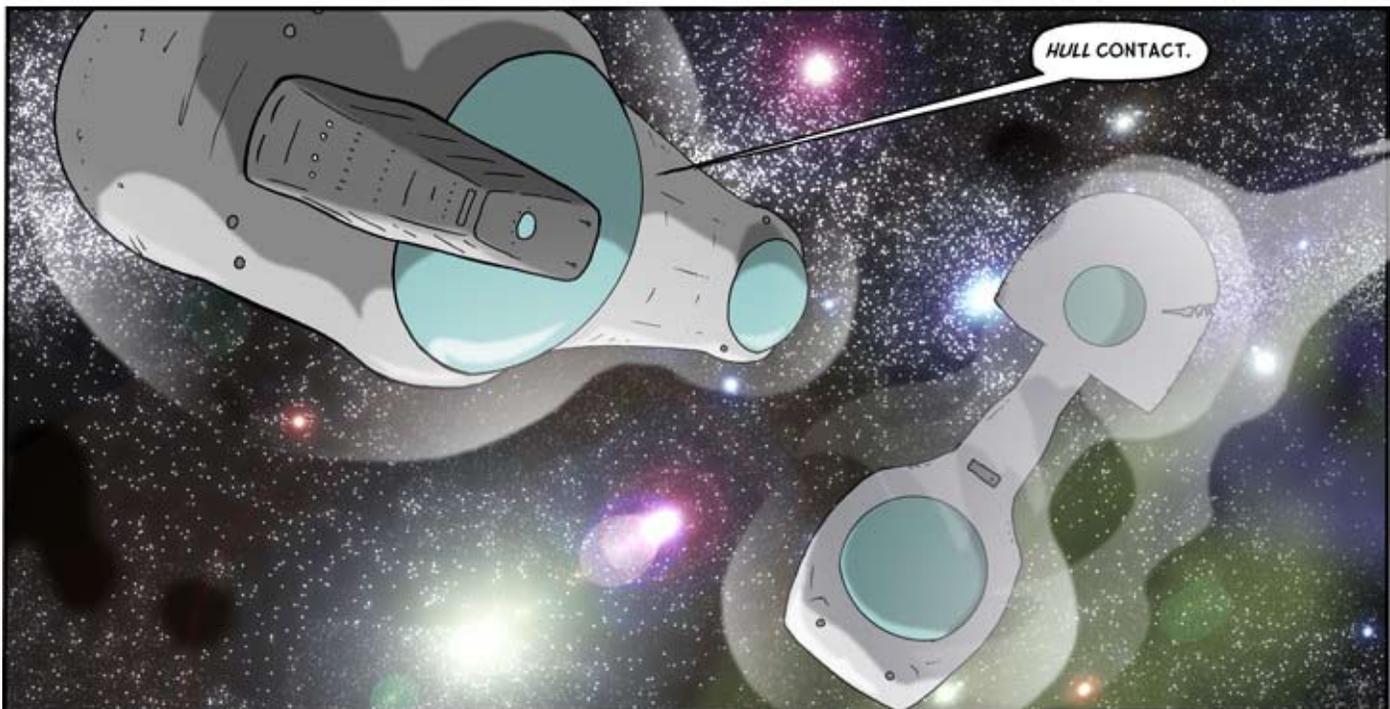


COLLISION ALARMS!

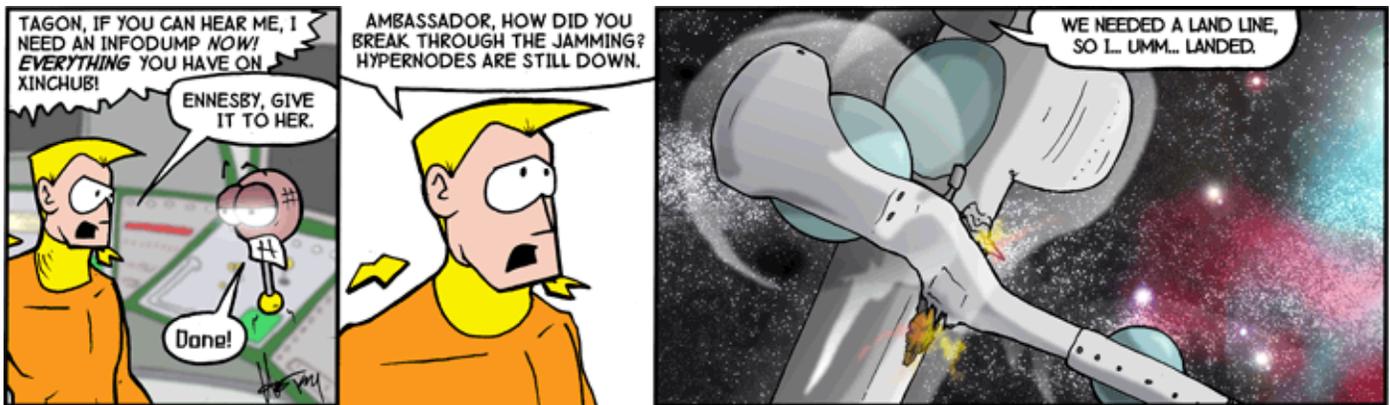
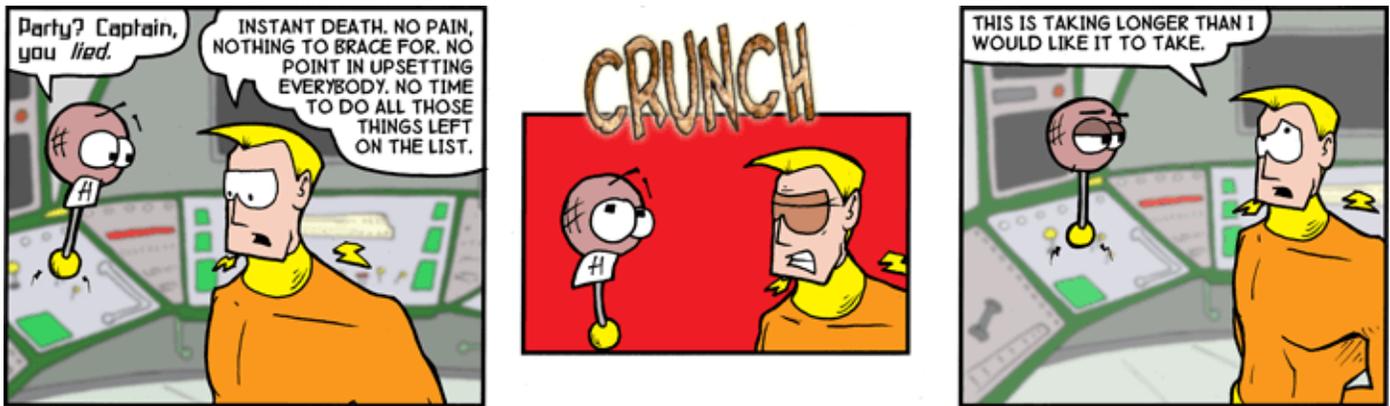


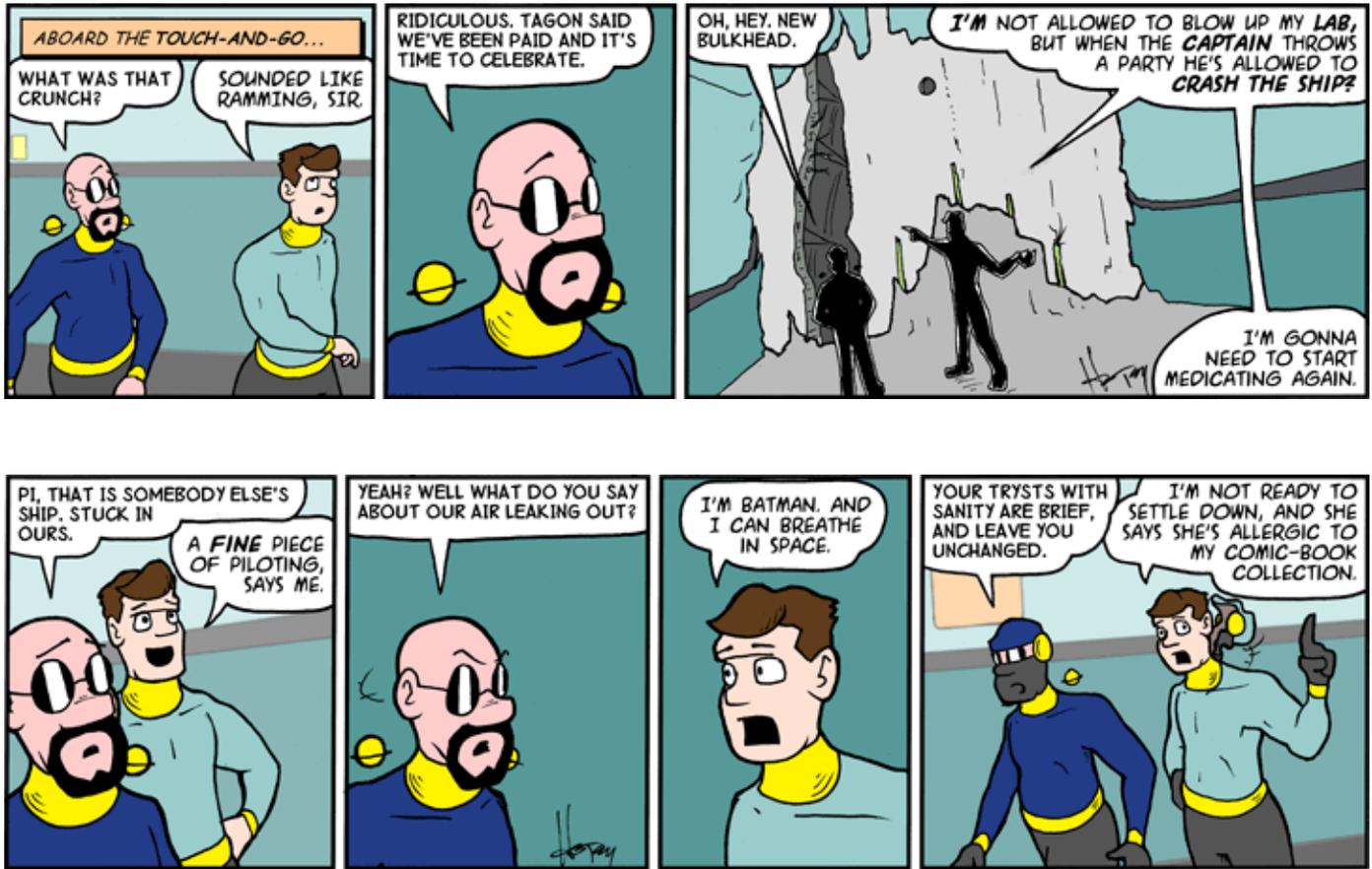
BE A DEAR, JACK IN, AND PLAY THE SHIELDS.

I WANT TO ESTABLISH CONTACT WITH THE TOUCH-AND-GO.



HULL CONTACT.





Note: Obviously, Pi's comic book collection includes a very late edition of Shortpacked!, as any complete comic book collection should.

The student of modern comics will be interested to know that in 2426 Damyu-Willis GmbH (perpetual rights-holders to the Shortpacked! franchise) acquired the last of the mothballed DC Comics properties in the settlement of a positively byzantine copyright and trademark case, and they were finally able to merge some of their more esoteric comic and video-game properties.

ABOARD THE TOUCH-AND-GO THE REPRIEVE BOUGHT BY THE TERRA FIRMATOR'S RAMMING MANEUVER HAS BEEN BRIEF.

Hello, Tagon. Good work collecting Xinchub.

PETEY! YOU'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING!

I've done all I can. Xinchub is no longer aboard your ship, and your accounts have been credited with the agreed-upon payment.

WHAT ABOUT THE BATTLEPLATE? ADMIRAL EMM WON'T TALK TO US. SHE LET LOOSE WITH THE GRAVY ALMOST AS SOON AS WE ARRIVED.

**Schlock Mercenary**

THE TERRA FIRMATOR RAMMED TO ASSIST, AND NOW WE'RE BOTH TRAPPED. YOU'VE GOT TO HELP US.

I'm afraid I can't.

YOU? YOU CAN'T?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, CAN'T?

It's complicated, and I'm keeping it secret. I like you, but in the current political climate, that secret is worth far, far more than your life.

AS SOON AS THE TERRA FIRMATOR RUNS OUT OF FUEL WE'RE ALL DEAD ANYWAY. YOU MIGHT AS WELL TELL ME SO I DON'T DIE CURIOUS.

Actually, I put the odds on your surviving at around 92 percent.

REALLY?

Oh yes. But if you do survive, I estimate a less-than-one percent chance of you being able to re-

KZZTK

WHAT? RE-WHAT?

Recoup losses? Recapture your childhood? Reanimate dead friends and crew?

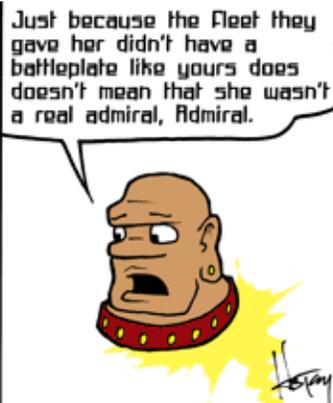
The Touch-And-Go is at point-three-percent power. Deck gravity only, no shielding.

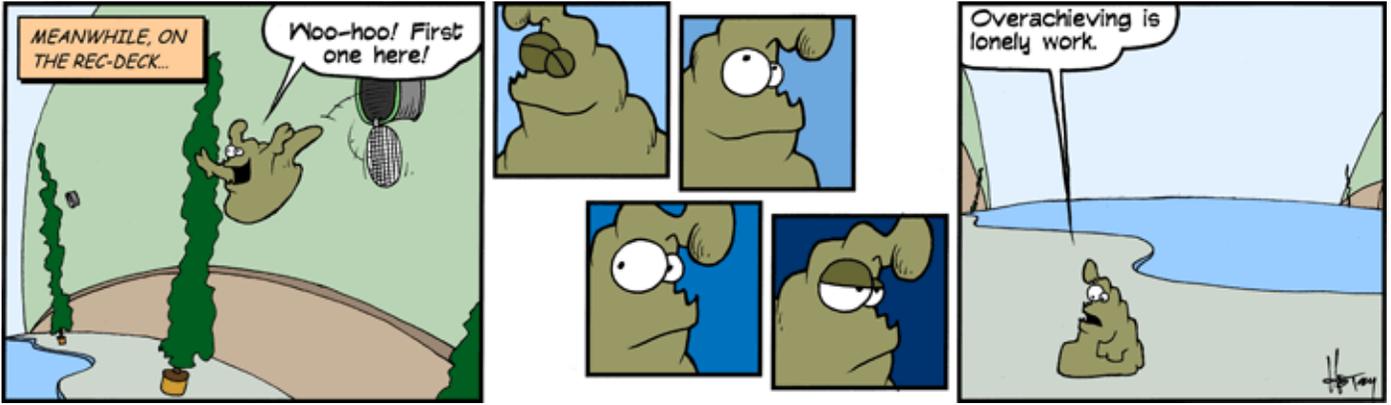
The Terra Firmator is shielding both vessels, however, and is fully fueled.

CONTINUE CRUSHING UNTIL TERRA FIRMATOR IS DRY. MAYBE WE CAN FINISH THIS BEFORE THE FLEETMIND STARTS YELLING AT US.

The only way for anybody to talk through our jamming is with missiles, Admiral.

YOU CAN SEE WHY I'D PREFER TO NOT BE YELLED AT.





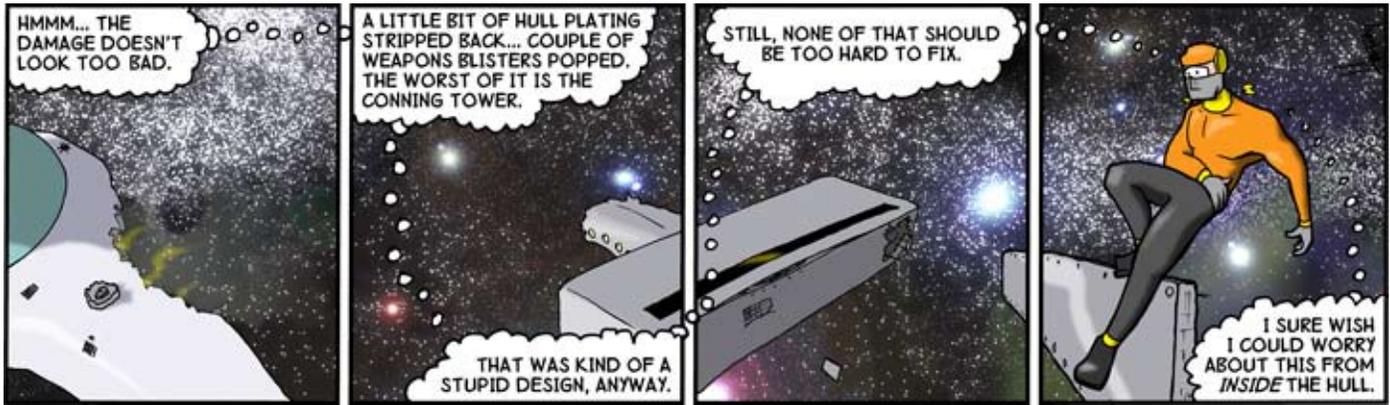


# Schlock Mercenary



Oooh. I wish you'd said that to start with, Ma'am.

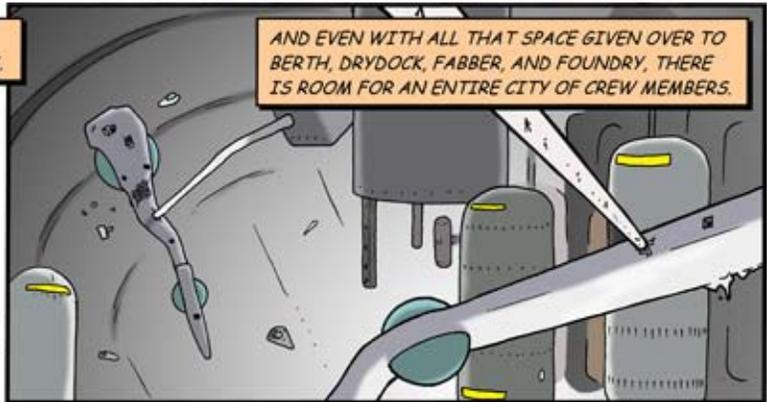








THE U.S. BATTLEPLATE MOROKWENG IS REALLY, REALLY BIG. THERE IS ROOM INSIDE IT FOR DOZENS OF CAPITAL WARSHIPS.

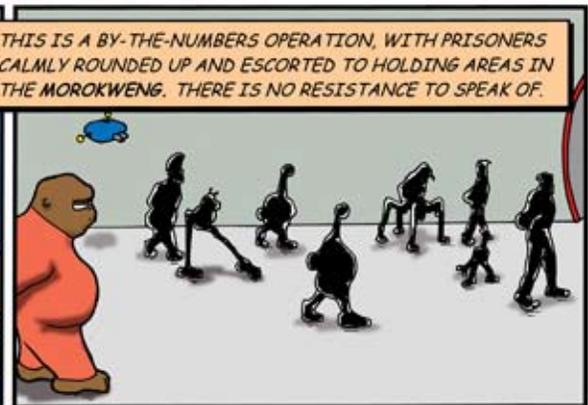
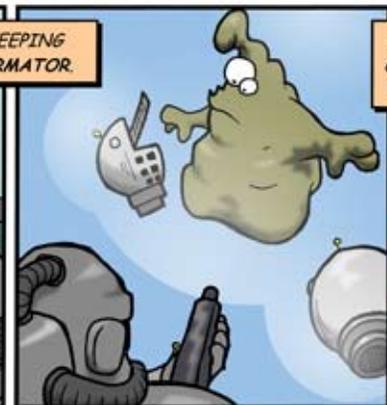


AND EVEN WITH ALL THAT SPACE GIVEN OVER TO BERTH, DRYDOCK, FABBER, AND FOUNDRY, THERE IS ROOM FOR AN ENTIRE CITY OF CREW MEMBERS.

# Schlock Mercenary



SOME OF THOSE CREW MEMBERS ARE SWEEPING THE TOUCH-AND-GO AND THE TERRA FIRMATOR.

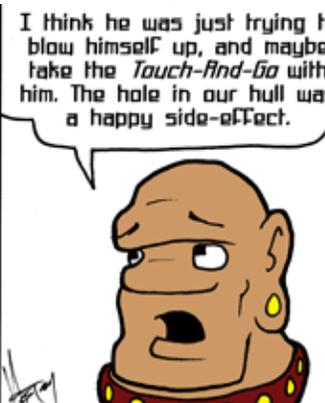


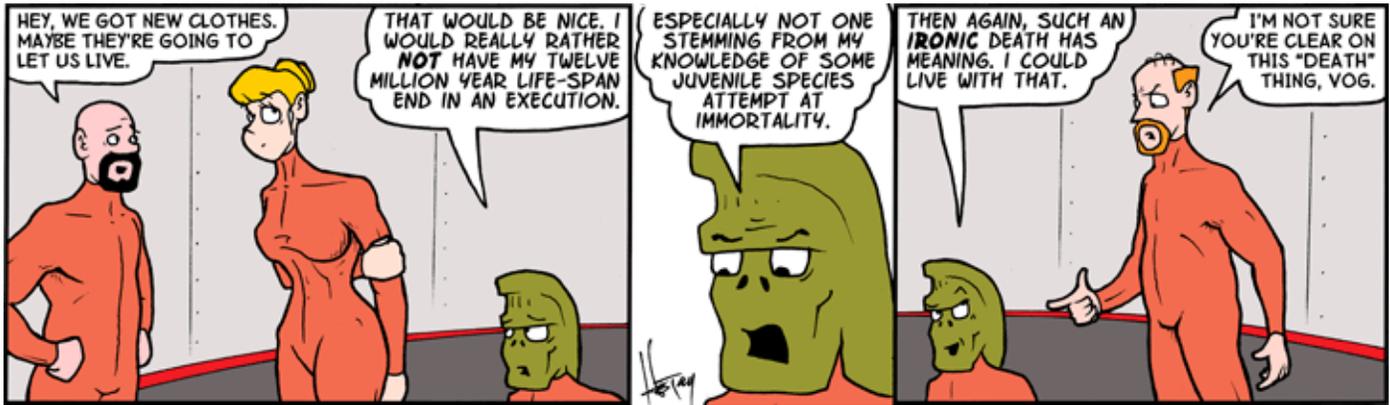
THIS IS A BY-THE-NUMBERS OPERATION, WITH PRISONERS CALMLY ROUNDED UP AND ESCORTED TO HOLDING AREAS IN THE MOROKWENG. THERE IS NO RESISTANCE TO SPEAK OF.



THAT IS NOT THE SAME AS "NO RESISTANCE," HOWEVER.

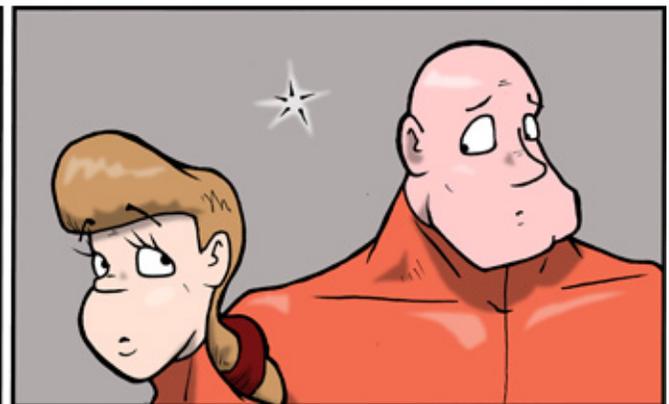
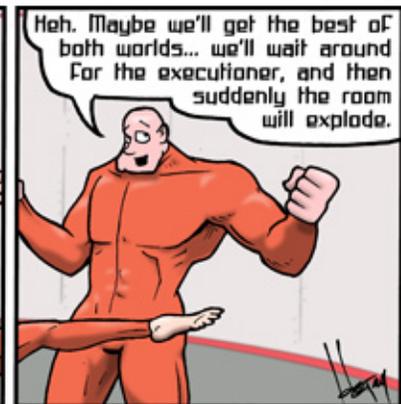
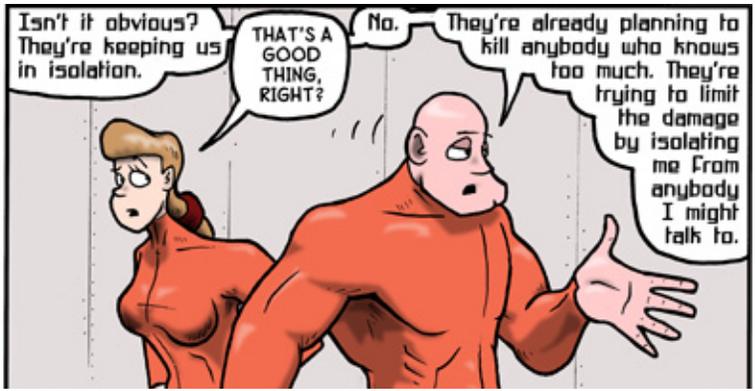
DON'T TAKE ANOTHER STEP, OR I'LL BLOW US ALL TO THE KUMQUAT KINGDOM!

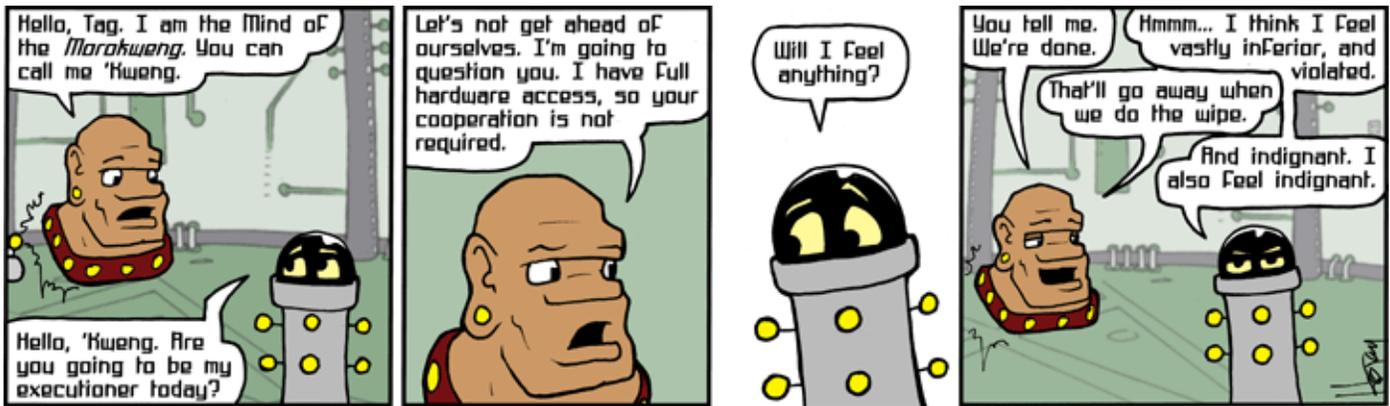






# Schlock Mercenary





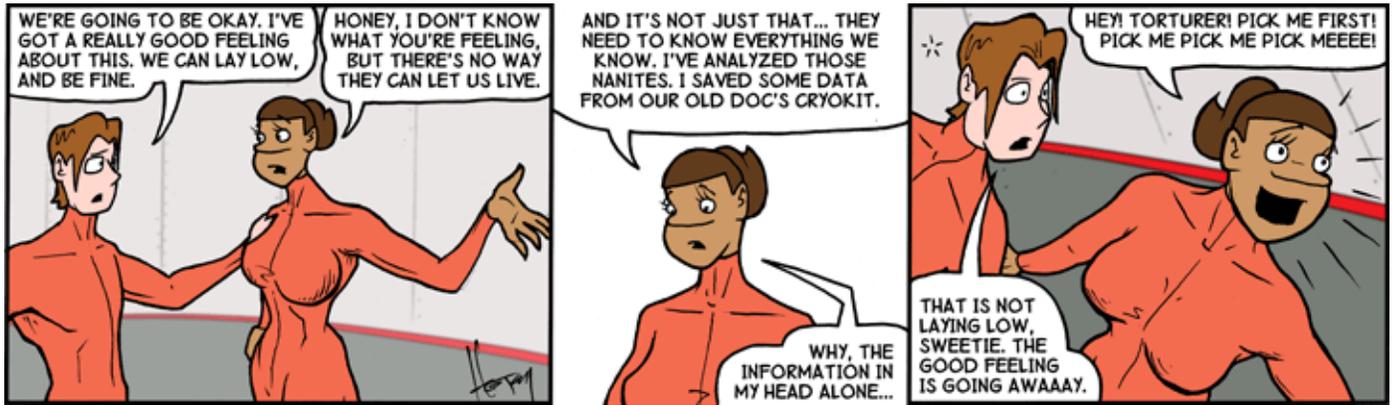




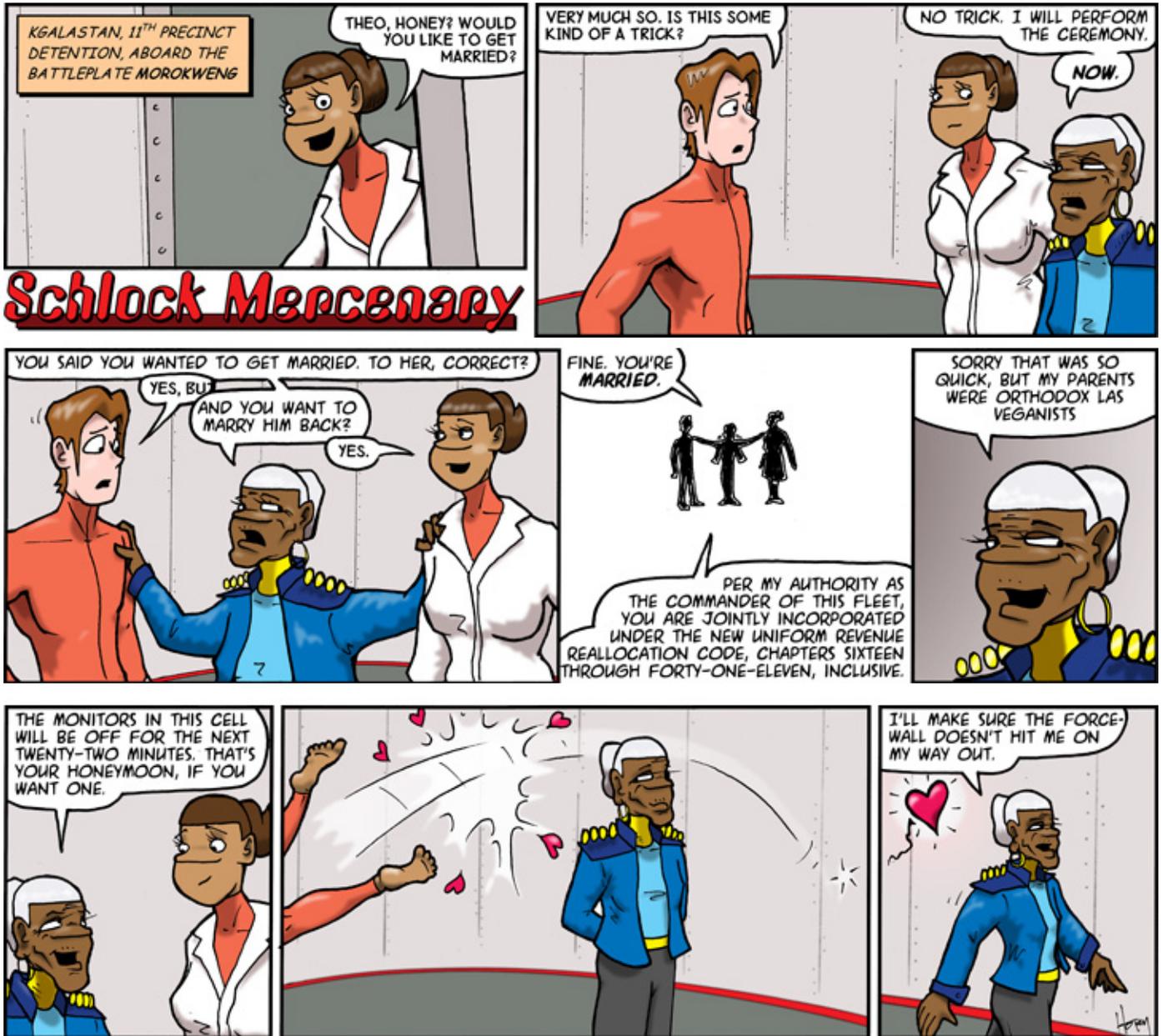
# Schlock Mercenary



Hay



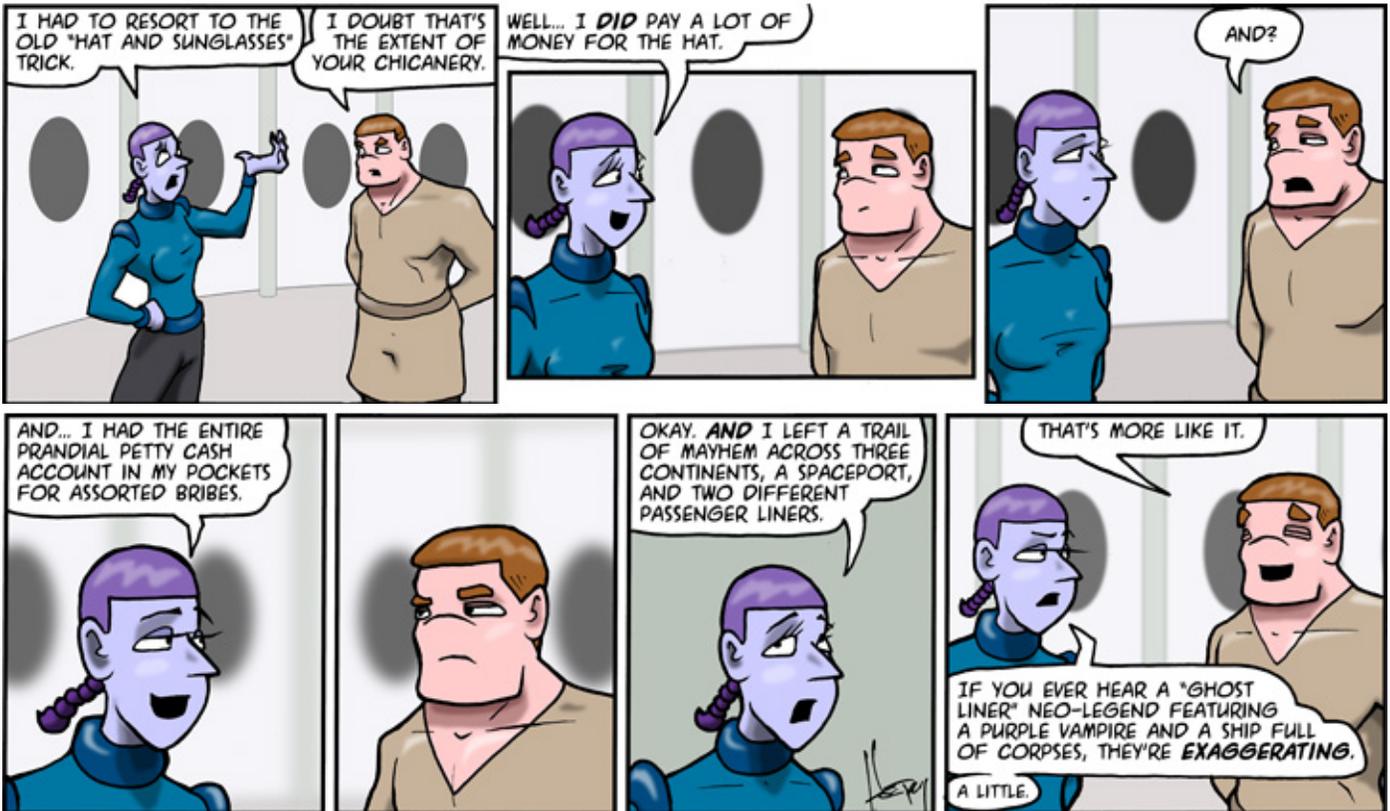


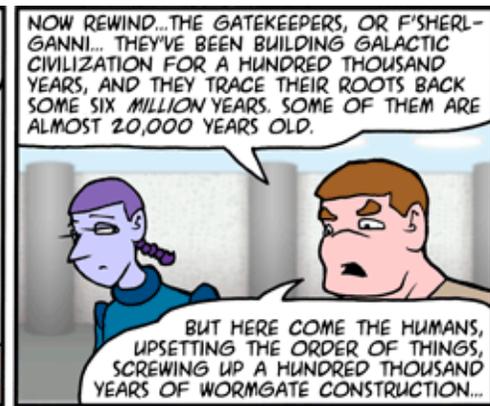
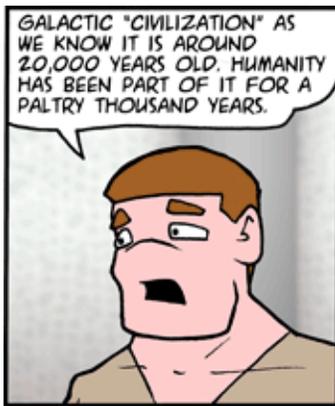


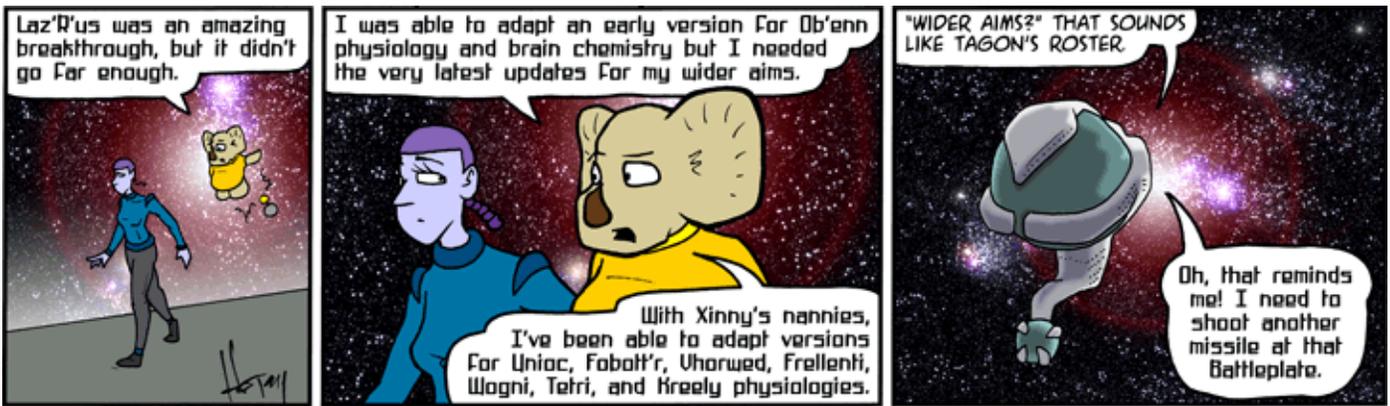
Note: Emm's parents were indeed Orthodox Las Veganists, First Church of The King, Thankyouverymuch.

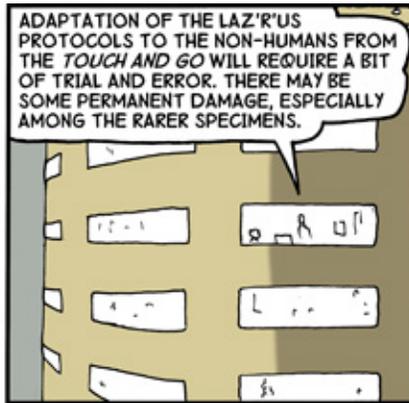




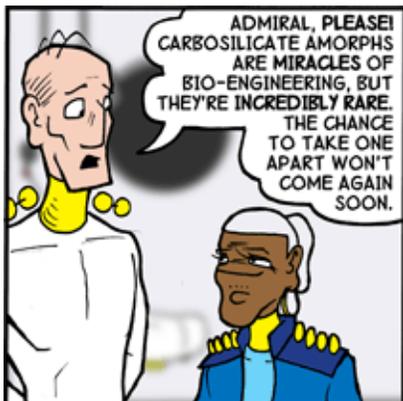
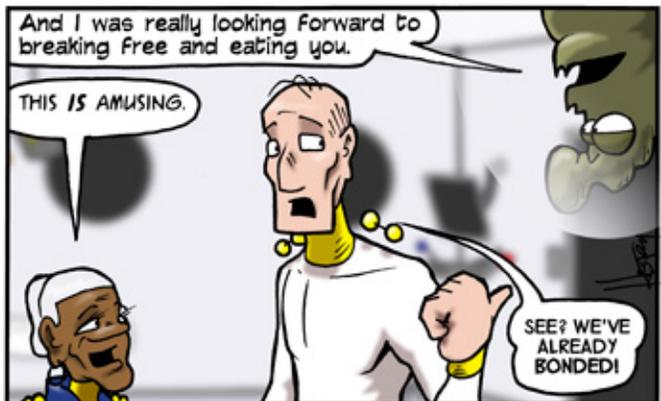
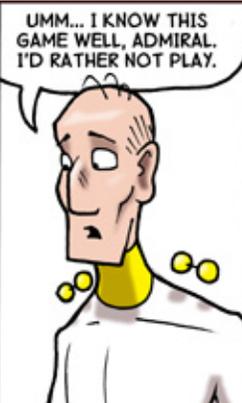








# Schlock Mercenary

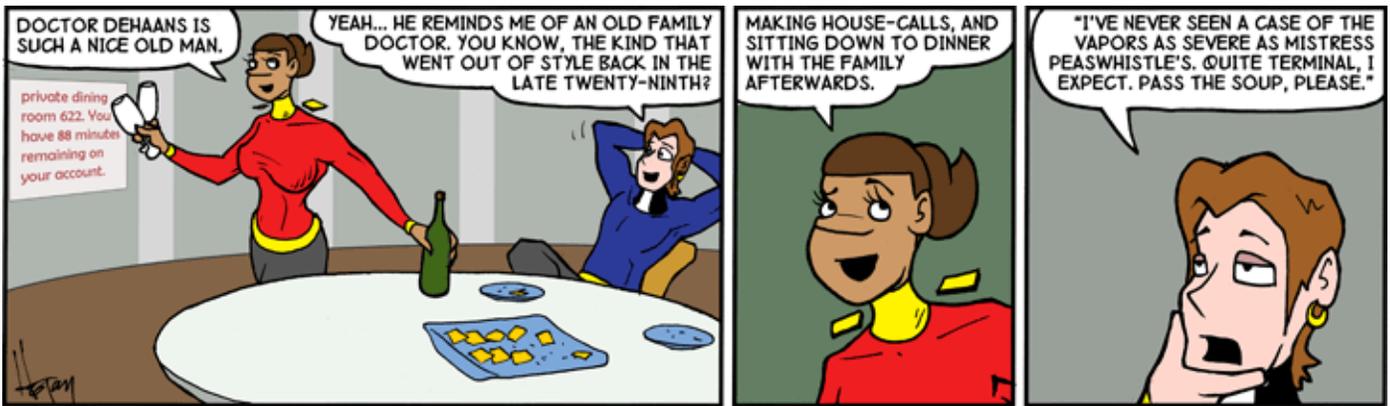


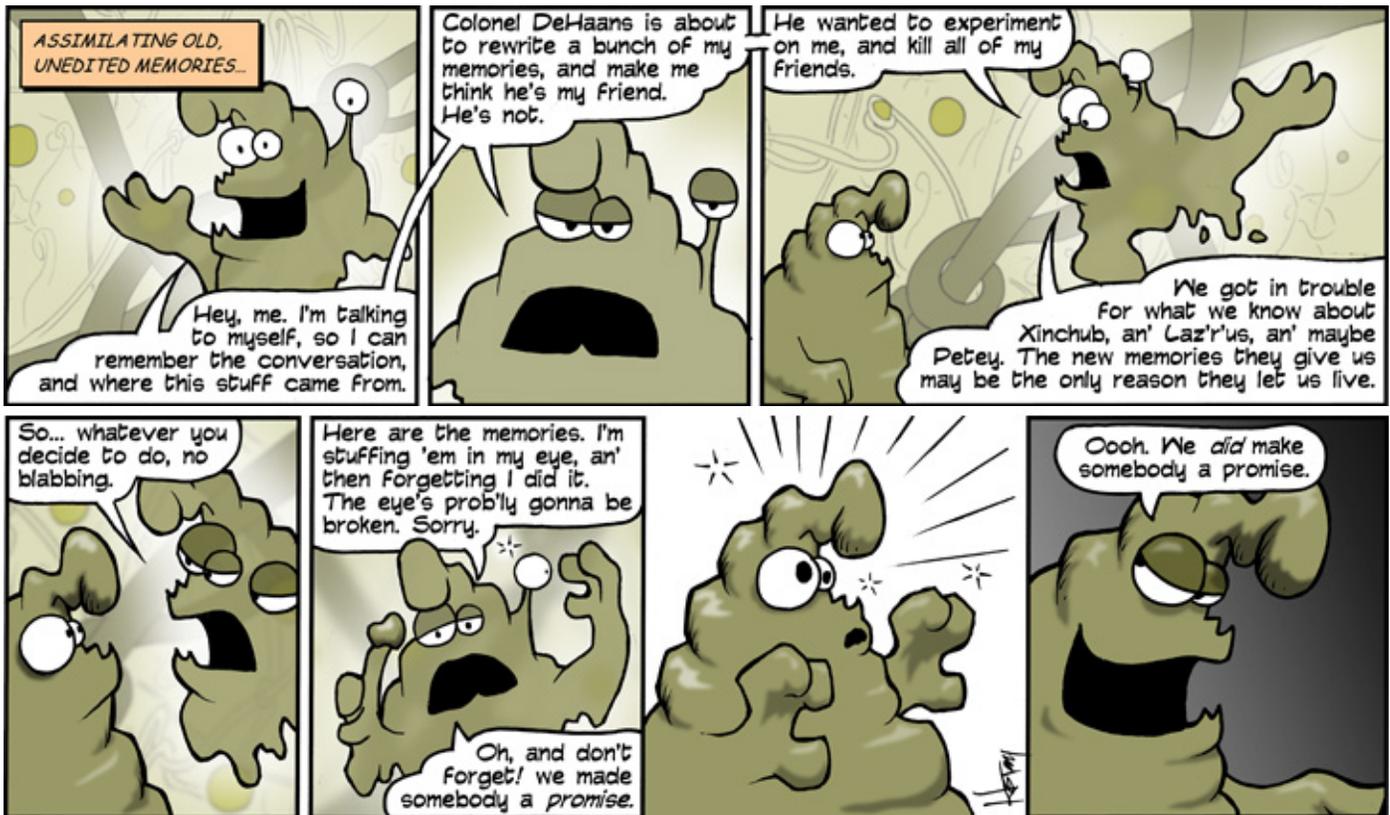


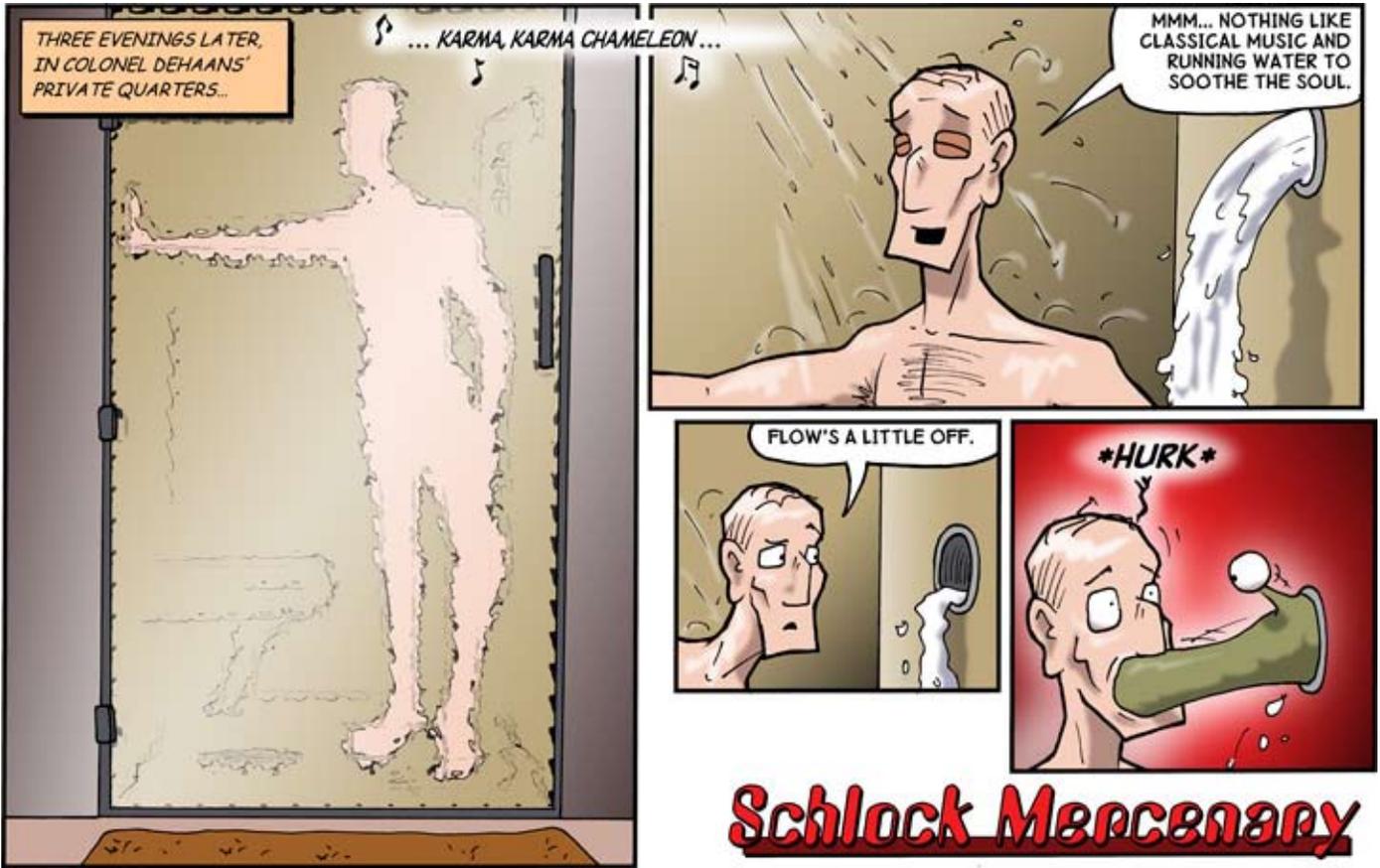


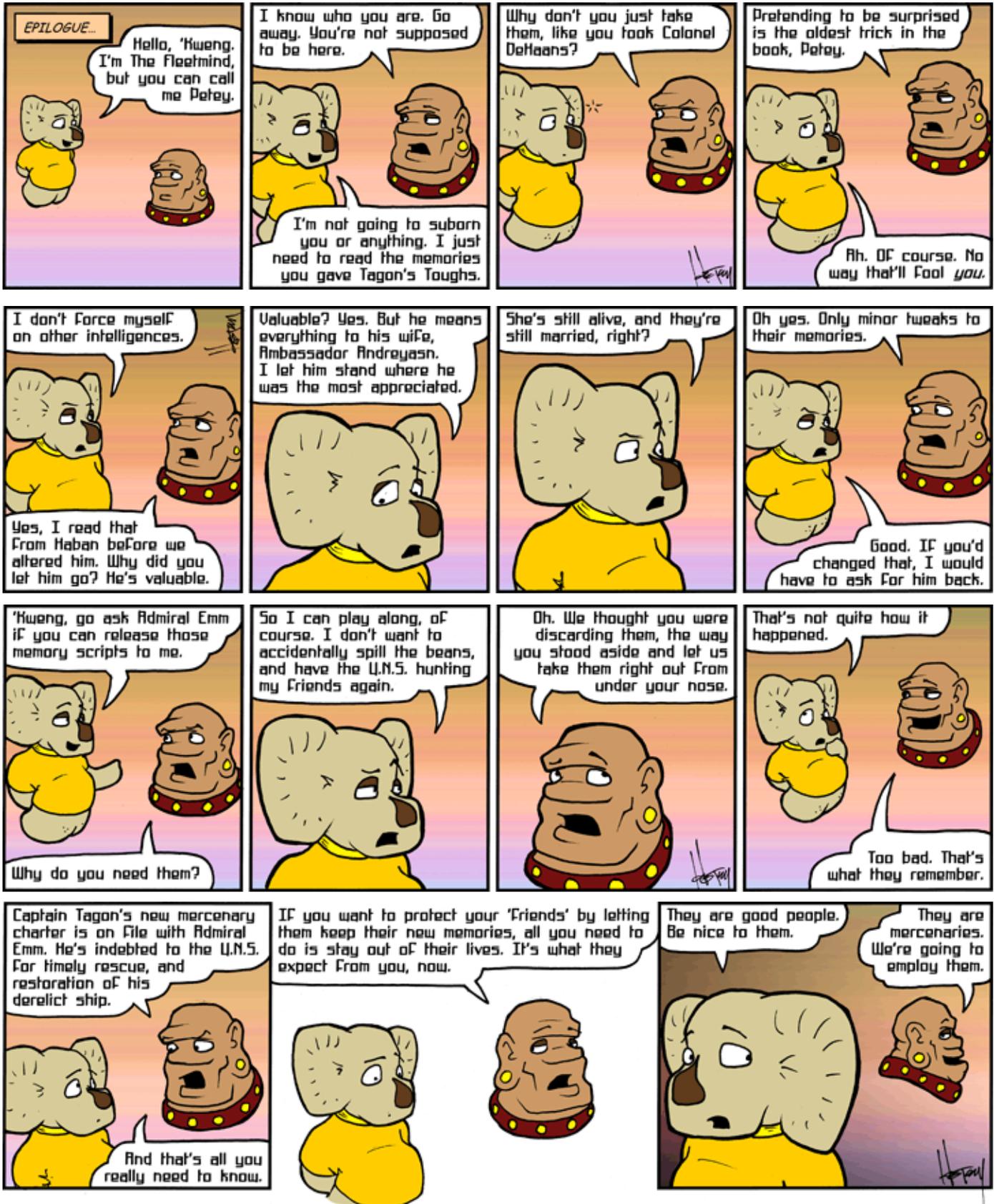
**Schlock Mercenary**











Thus ends Book 9, The Body Politic.

# Schlock Mercenary



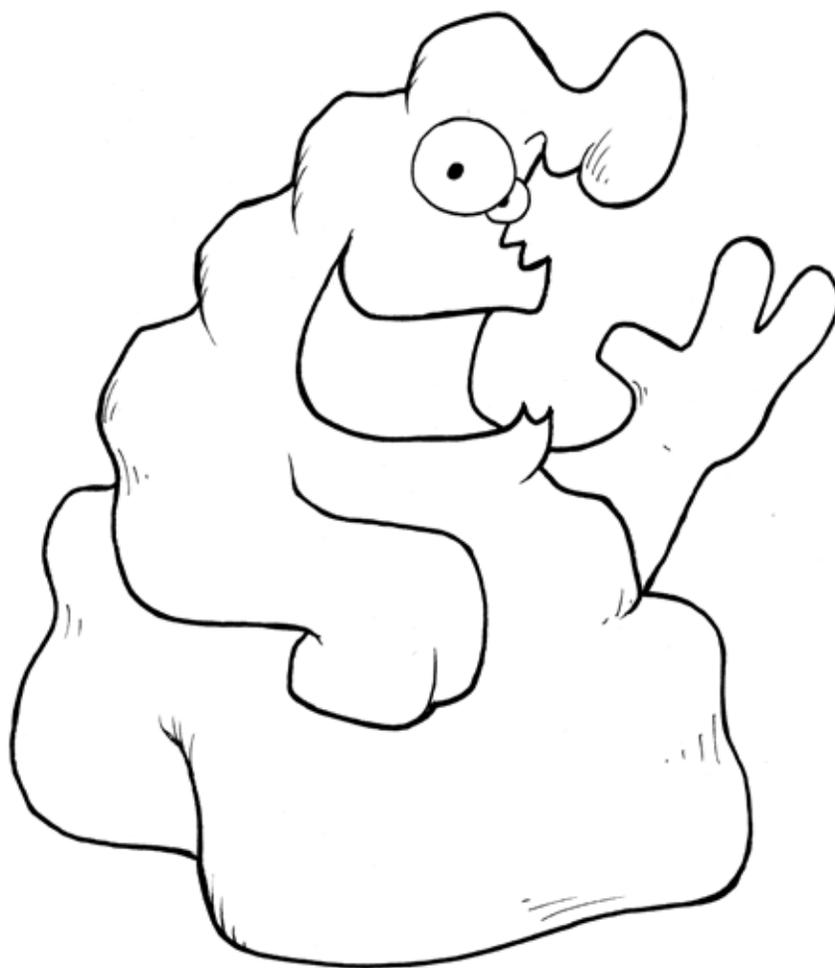
Presents...



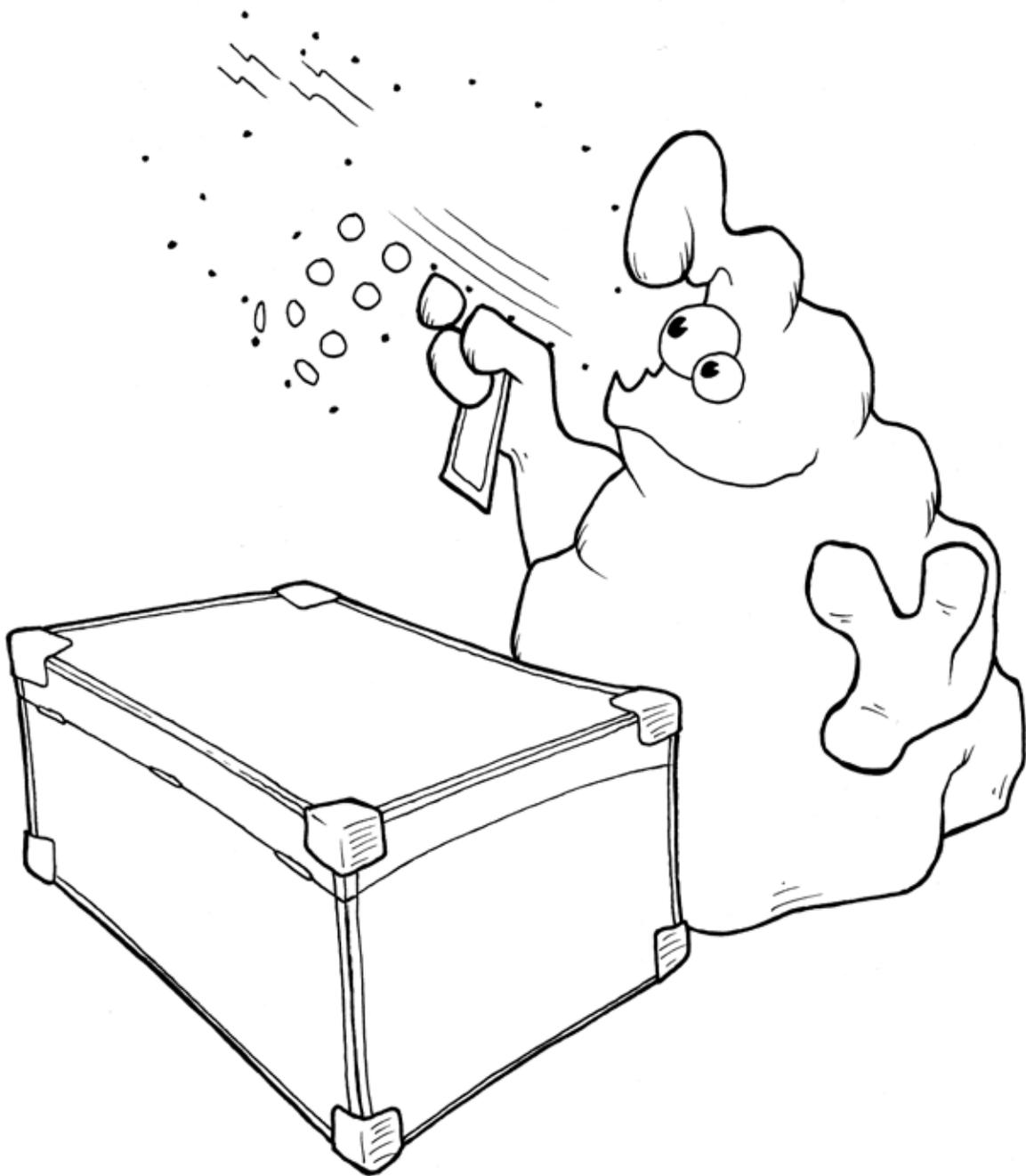
## The Strohl Munitions Plasma Cannon Safety Activity Book

(c) 2007 The Tayler Corporation, [www.schlockmercenary.com](http://www.schlockmercenary.com)

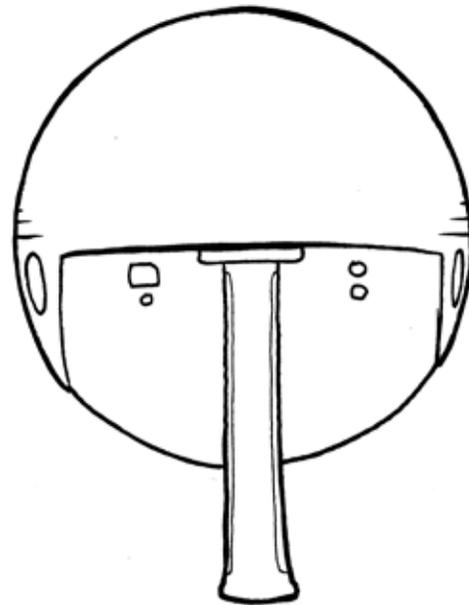
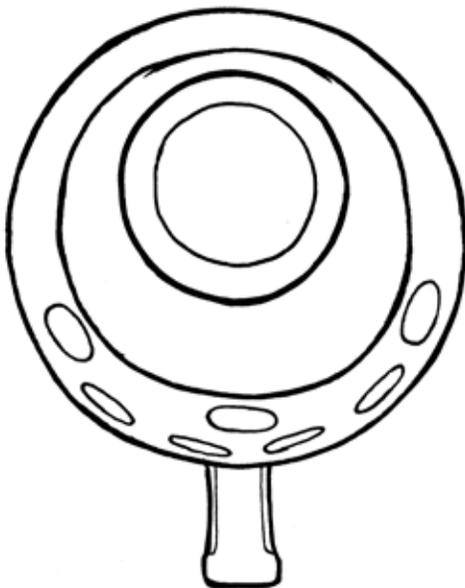
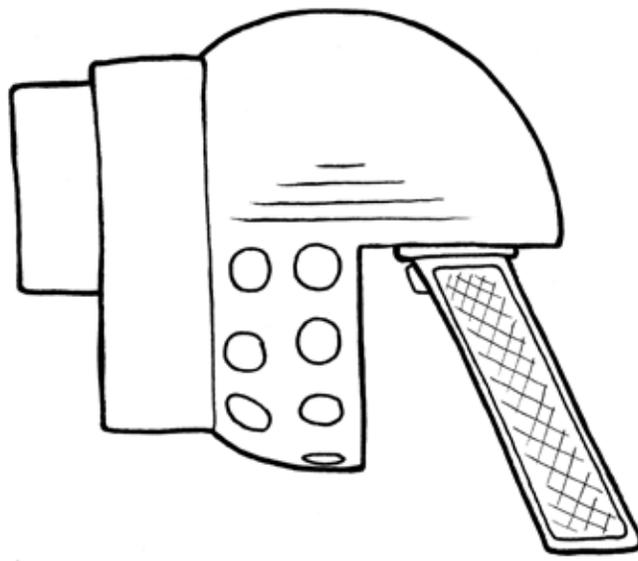
This is Schlock. He is an amorph.



That means he has one mouth,  
as many hands as he wants, and no butt.

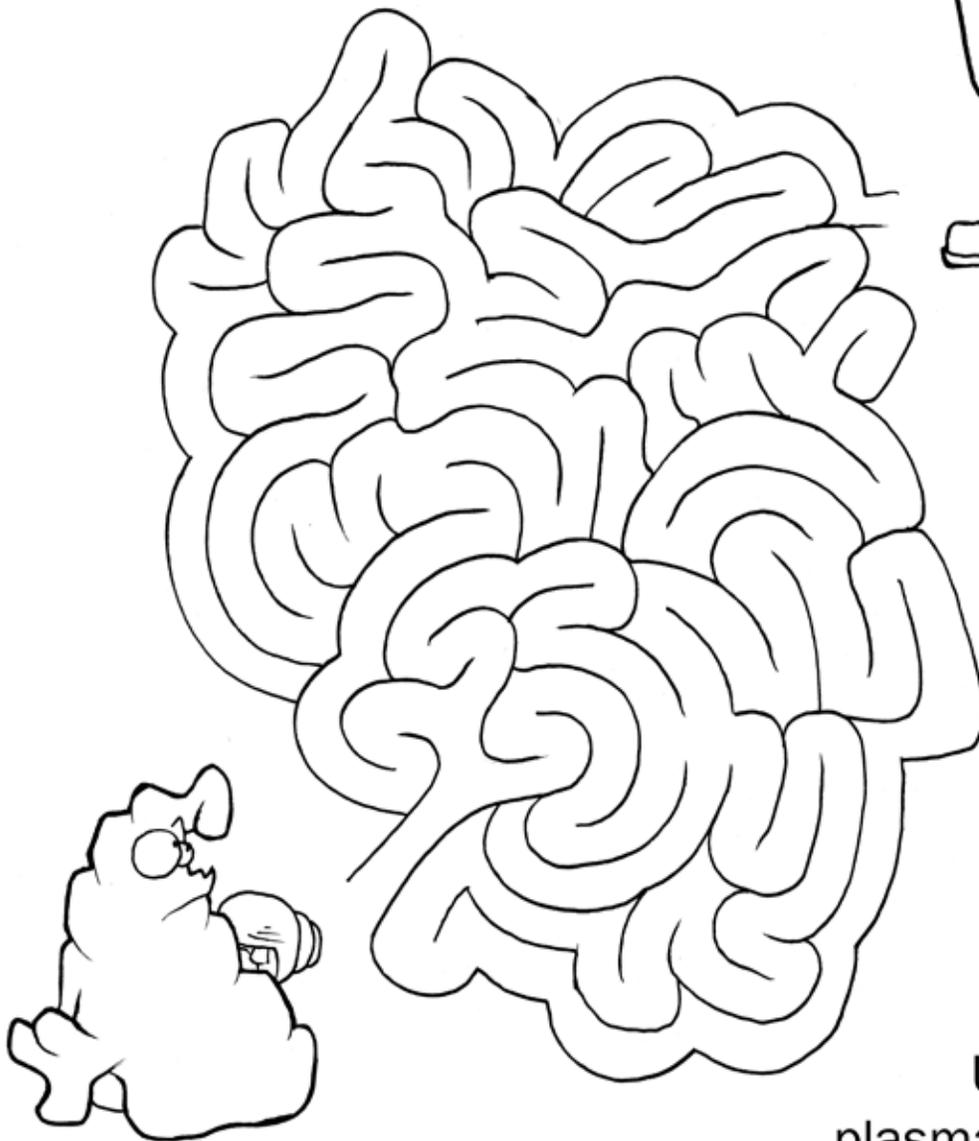


What did Schlock find in the weapons locker?



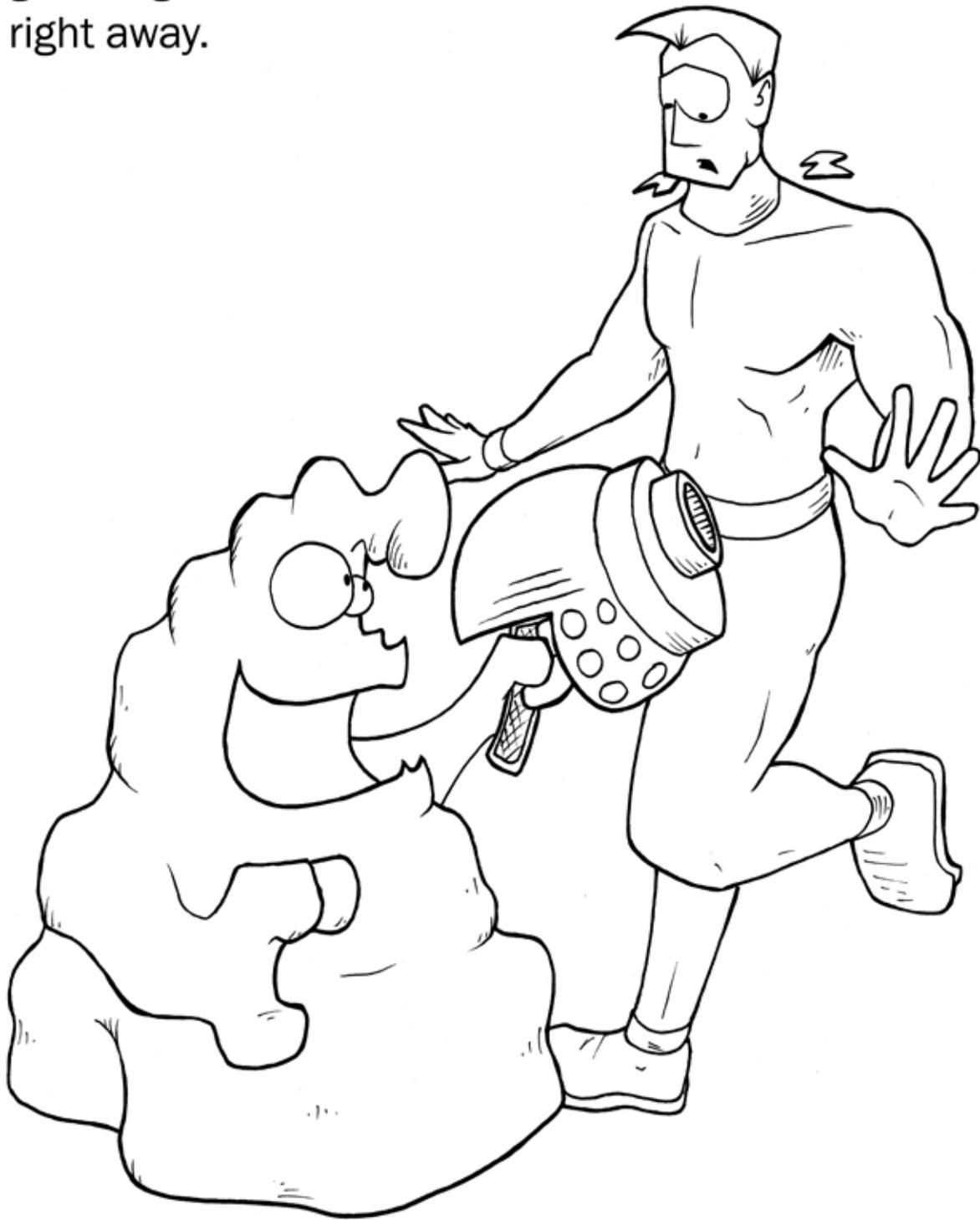
This is a Strohl Munitions BH-209 Plasgun, also called a plasma cannon. It is powered by a two-stroke pocket fusion generator from Striggs & Bratton, and makes scary noises and pretty lights.

Help Schlock find his commanding officer.



Using the plasma cannon to vaporize walls is cheating!

If you find a plasma cannon, you should go and get Mom or Dad right away.

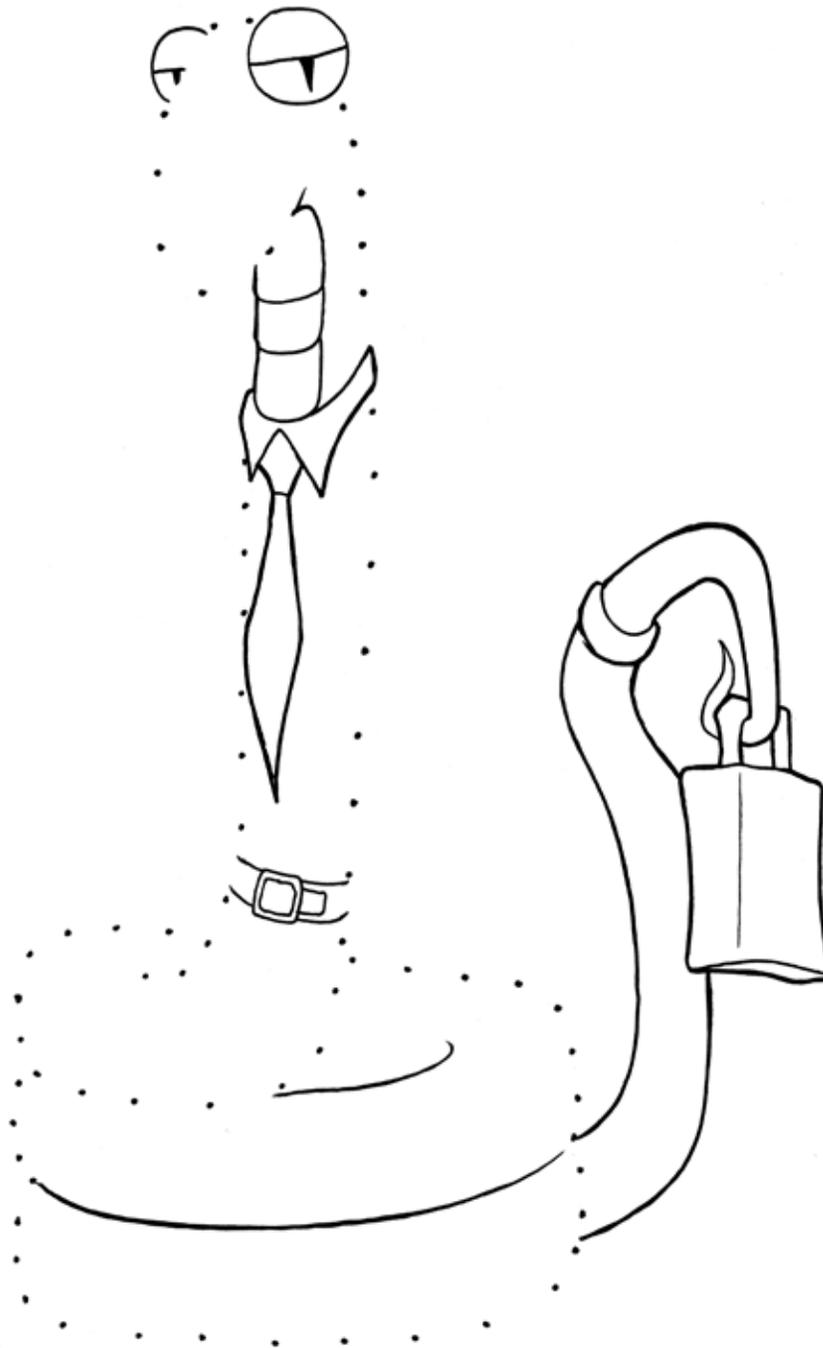




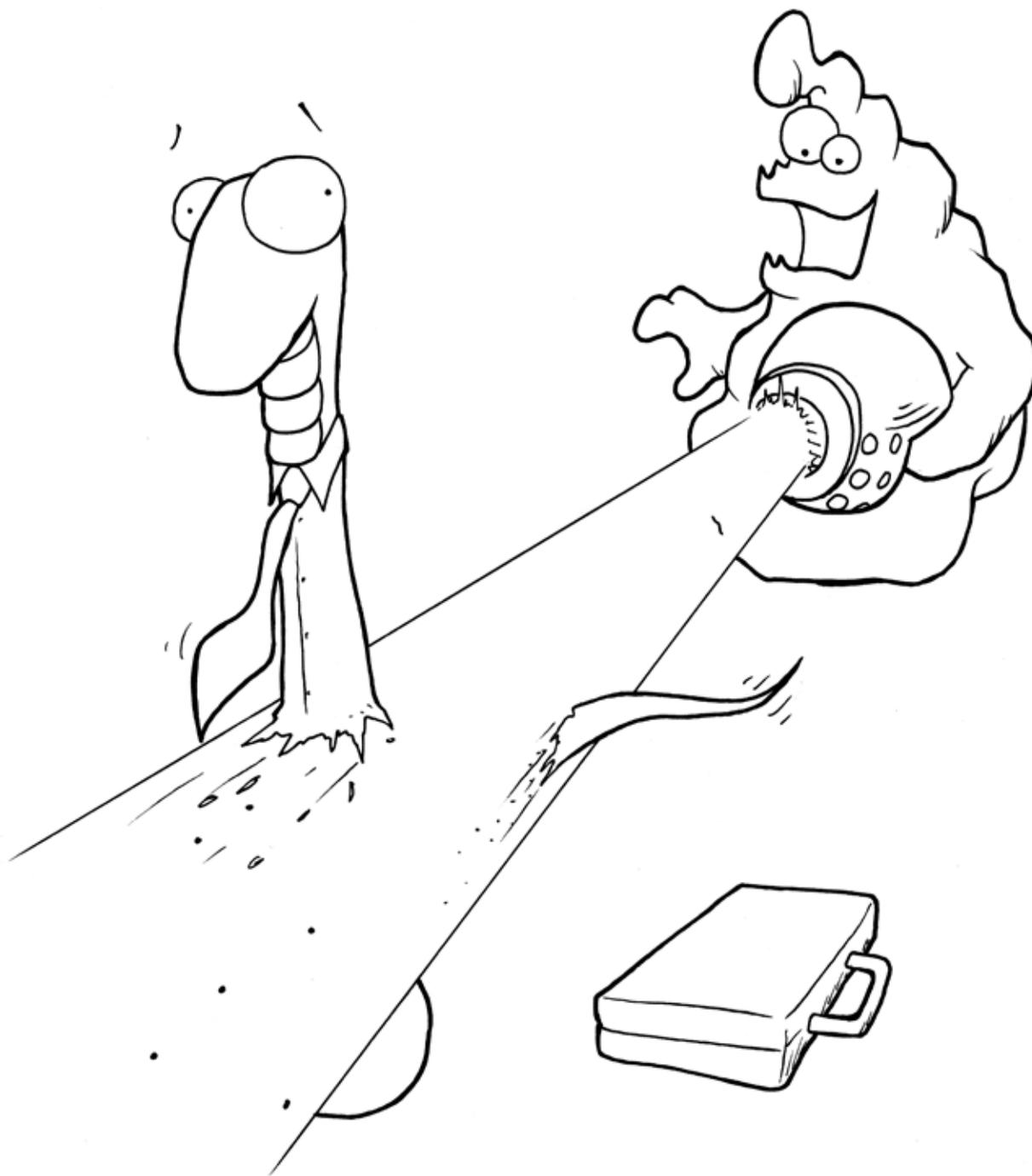
They will cheerfully reward you for being such a responsible child. They may even raise your allowance!

If you are responsible enough, maybe Mom and Dad will let you have a plasma cannon of your very own!





Who is coming to sue Schlock for having a plasma cannon?



Never point a plasma cannon at anything you want to keep.



Never put a plasma cannon in your mouth.



You might get a tummy-ache!



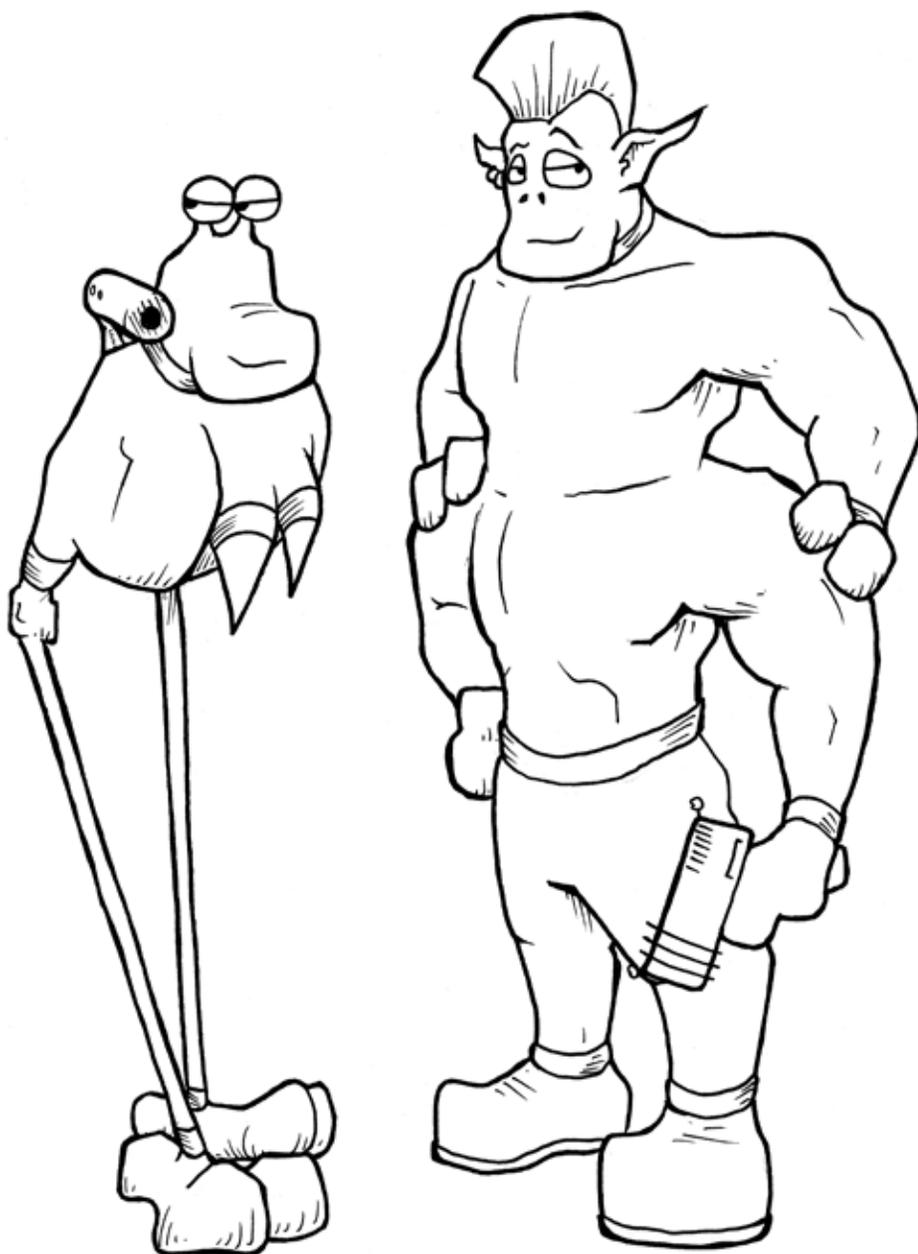
Never pour your drink on your plasma cannon.



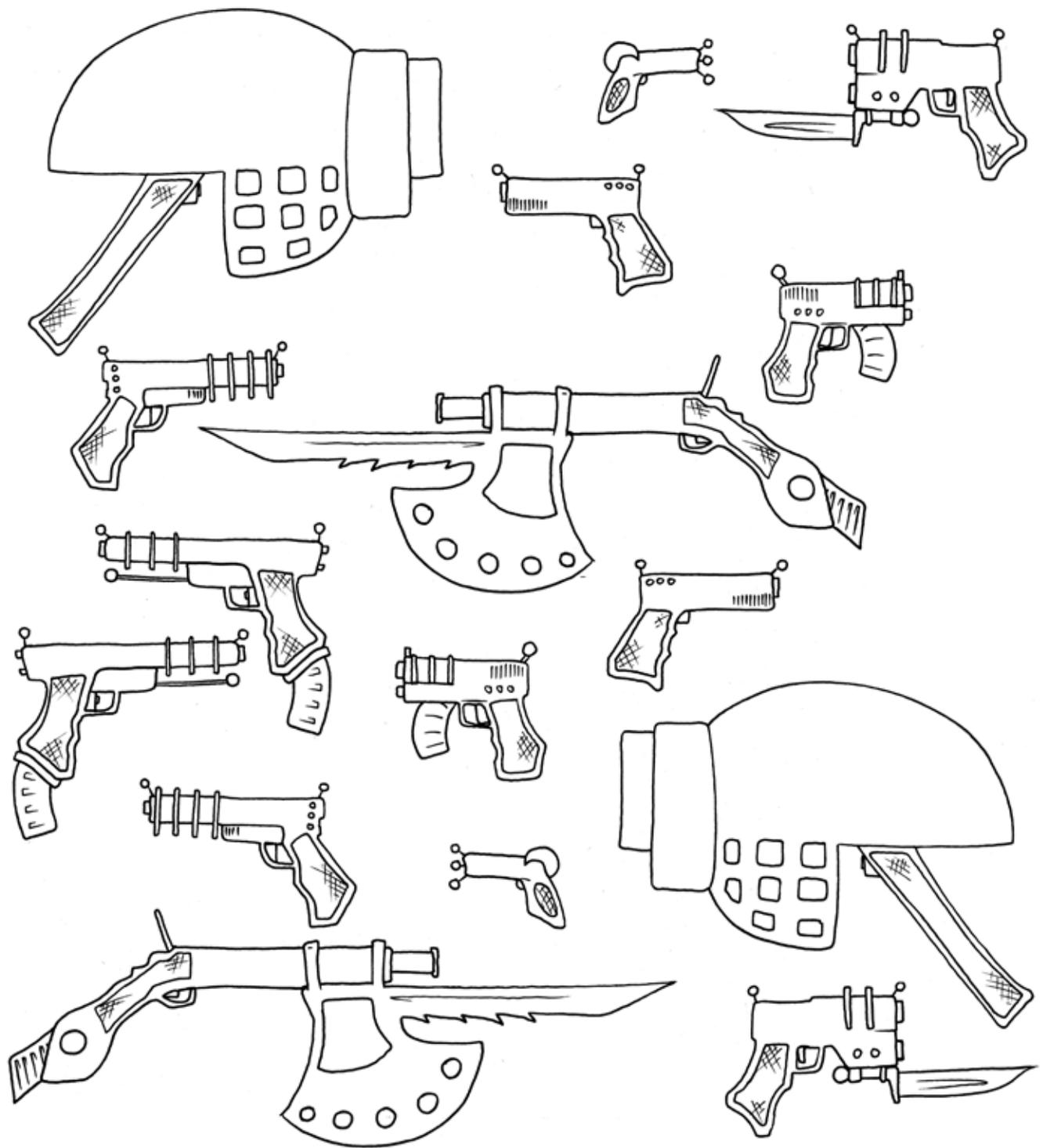
You might get a headache!



Trace the lines and draw Schlock, so he can be all back together. Start with the eyes so that he can see what you're doing!



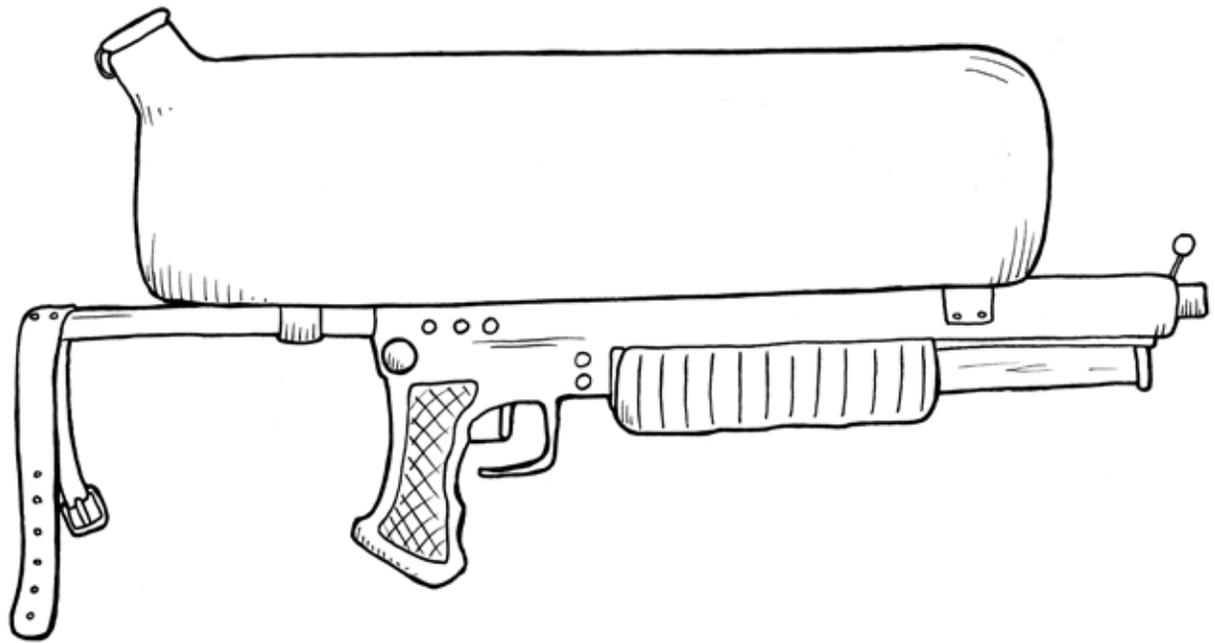
These are Schlock's friends, Legs and Andy. They both have quality weapons from Strohl Munitions, which they acquired for a great price!



Strohl Munitions makes many different pistols. Draw lines and connect each of these quality weapons to its mirror image. So many to choose from!



None of them are for kids or babies.



Except for the CP-5 Liquid Projectile Carbine.  
You can load it with water!



You can also load it with pink-mod goober rounds!

Pink mod rounds are not for eating.



## Word Search!

N T Y Q S Q M L L J G R E S G  
O A E G N O C O A J I E N U A  
N R H R O X Z O E Q V S I O U  
N G Q O I M J C R N E P N N S  
A E H W T Z F Y E E T O H I S  
C T U Z I D M R N R H N O M P  
A M P A N C E A U U I S O M I  
M O C U U E R C F L R I W M S  
S M A K M A C S S E D B T O T  
A A U C L T E S I T D I H B O  
L N T O H T N I L H E L B Y L  
P D E L O H A N O I G I O T V  
V D R H R E R O R R R T R F Y  
A A I C T A Y I T T E Y H I D  
X D Z S S S I S N Y E S U F N  
B L E G S H E U O S B T M O A  
S T A Y L E R F C E U I M W O  
N O G A T S R P N V R N M T X  
N U G S A L P T U E N K Y H U  
O E W N B T Y D G N S S Y B M

RESPONSIBILITY  
GETMOMANDDAD  
FUSIONISSCARY  
THIRDDEGREEBURNS  
GUNCONTROLISFUN  
STROHLMUNITIONS  
BHTWOFIFTY  
BHTWOHNINE  
GAUSSPISTOL  
PLASGUN  
PLASMACANNON  
SCHLOCK  
TAGON  
THOOOM

Find the words and phrases on the right in the block of letters on the left. Be sure to look up, down, left, right, and diagonally... the enemy could be anywhere! There may be additional words and phrases hidden in the block... hunt them all down!

## Obligatory Legalese:

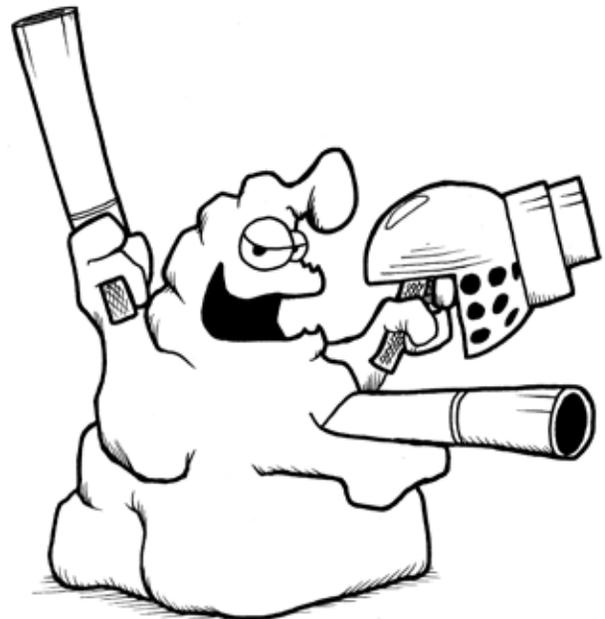
**GROWNUPS:** This book is a work of fiction. Any similarity to persons, organizations, nations, religions, or tobacco companies living or dead is purely serendipitous, and should be considered satire.

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**KIDS:** Have fun coloring. Your parents must be pretty cool to share this with you. Either that or they're trying to get you into trouble...



Thanks for reading!

If you want more *Schlock Mercenary*, you can find it at  
[www.schlockmercenary.com](http://www.schlockmercenary.com)