

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.

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.



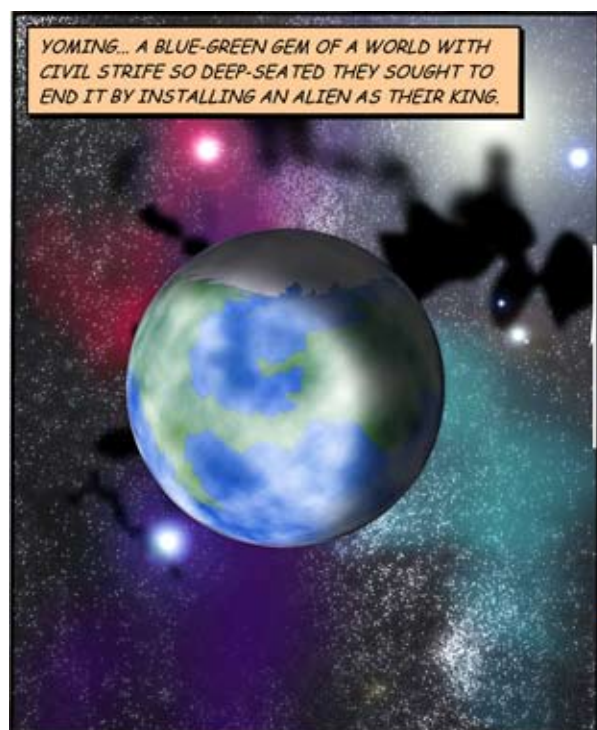
Ennesby: Tagon's Adjutant. Former Boy-Band AI, viral invader, and warship pilot. Loves puns, looks like a maraca.



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.

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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.

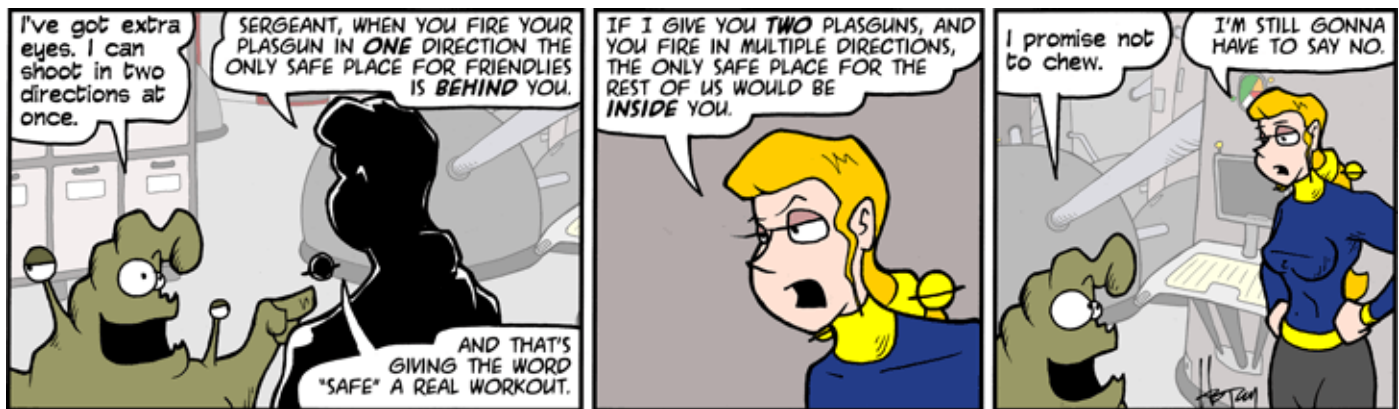


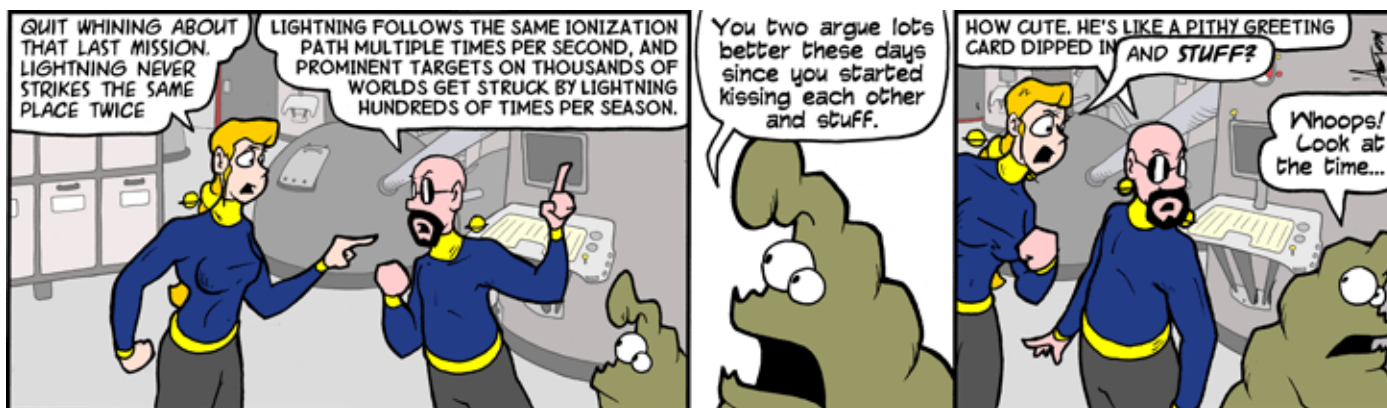
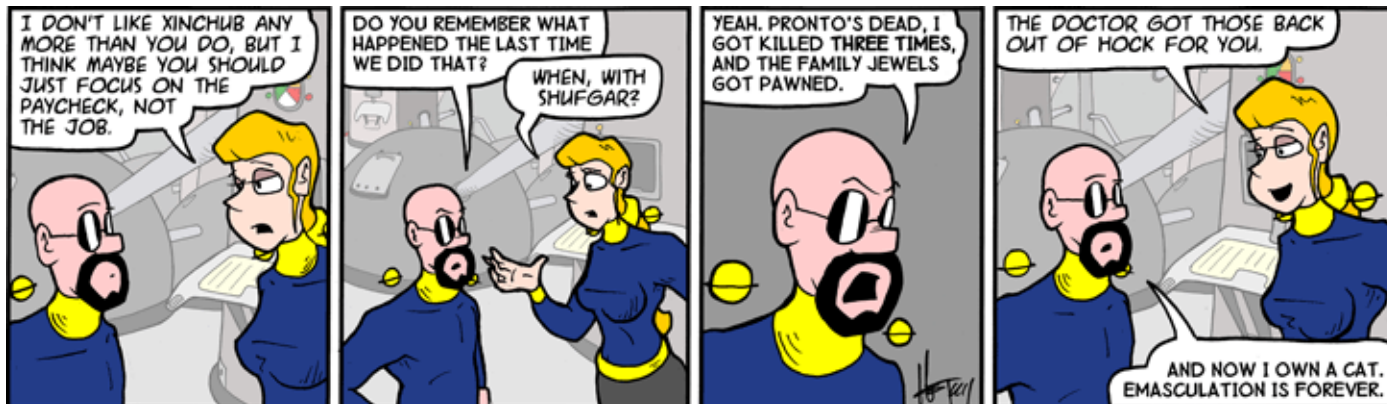
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? OF COURSE I REALLY WANTED HIM DEAD. BUT I ALSO WANTED TO GET PAID.

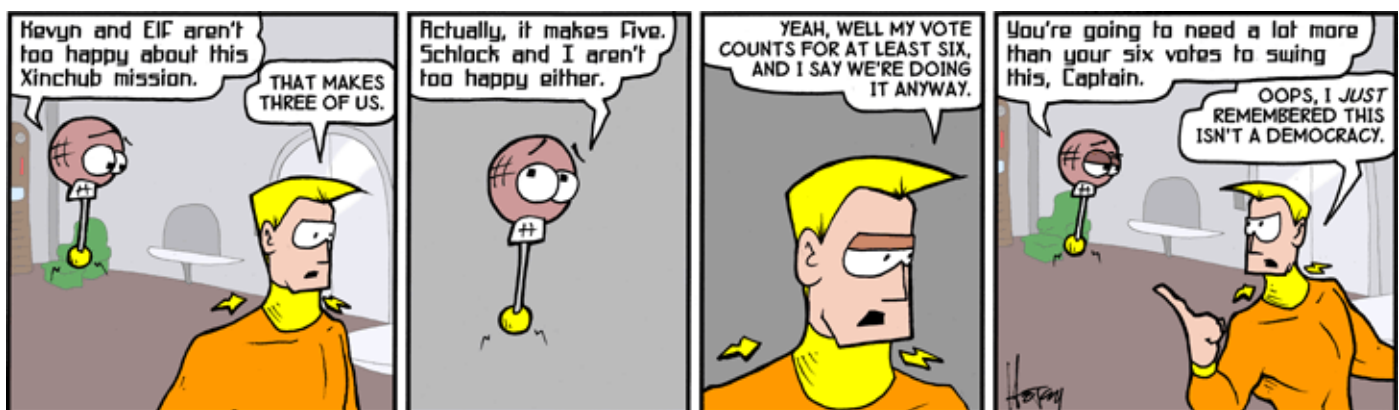
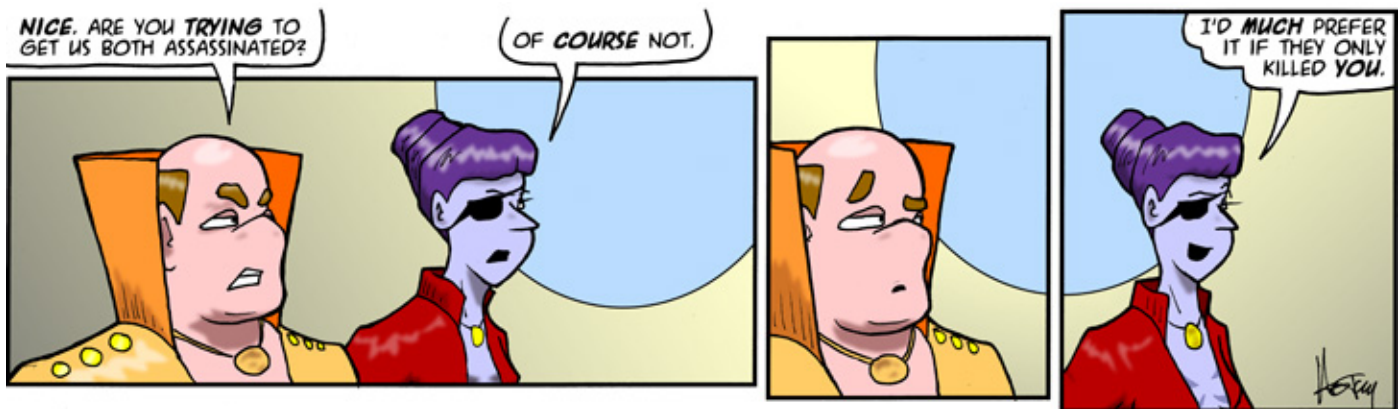
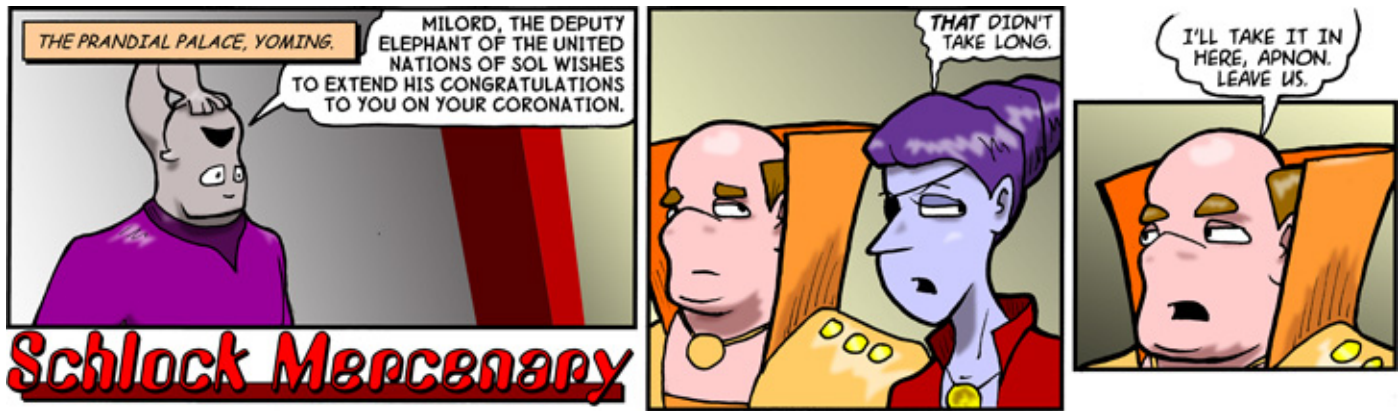


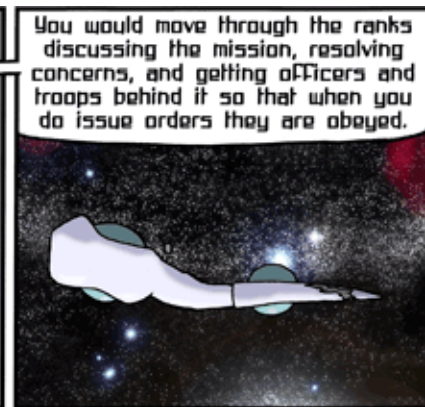
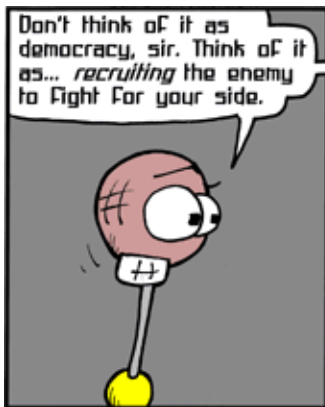
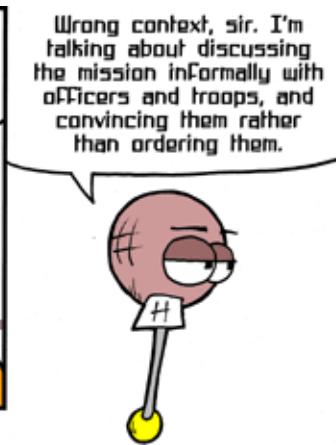
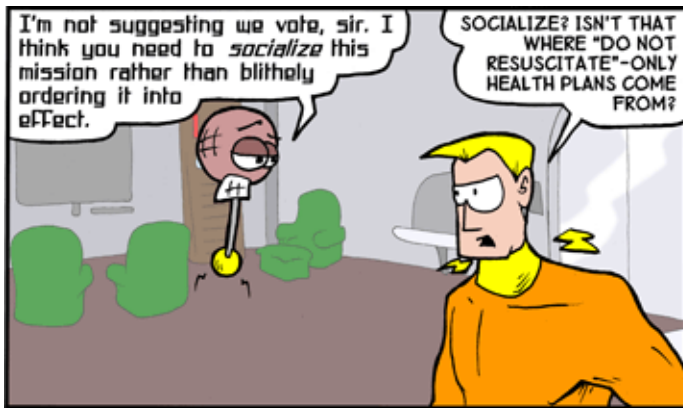
You wanted to have your cake and eat it, too.

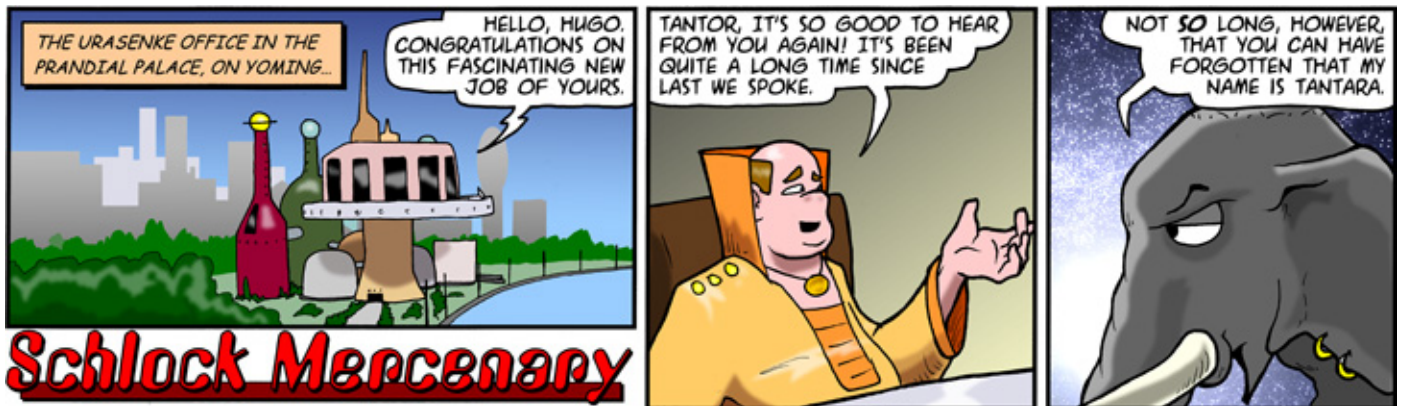
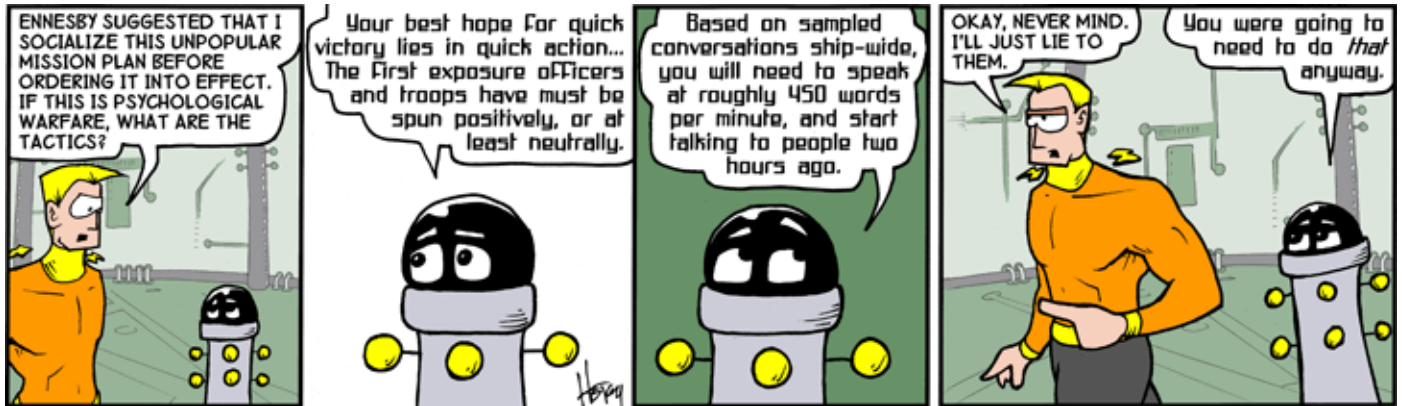
WELL, YEAH. BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT CAKE IS FOR.

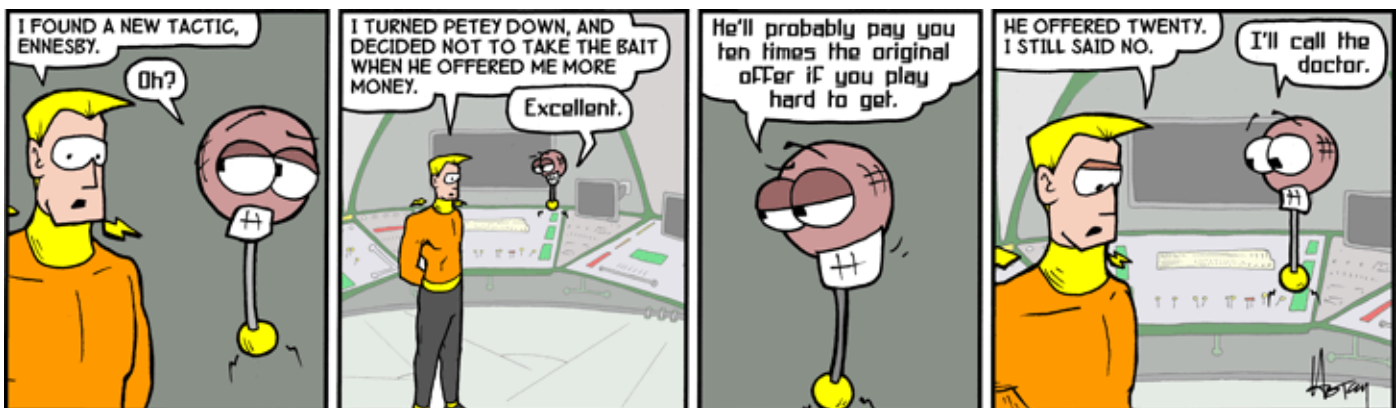
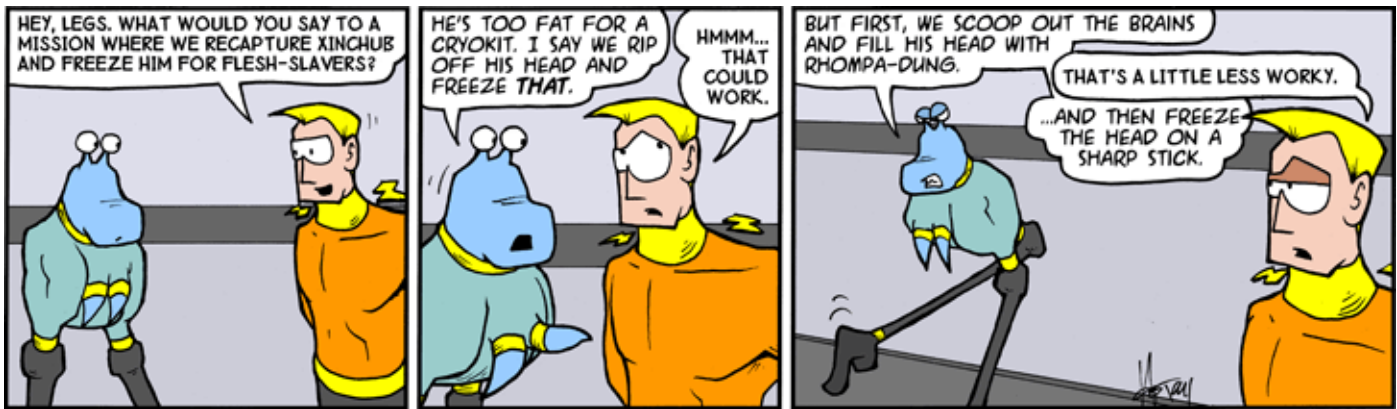
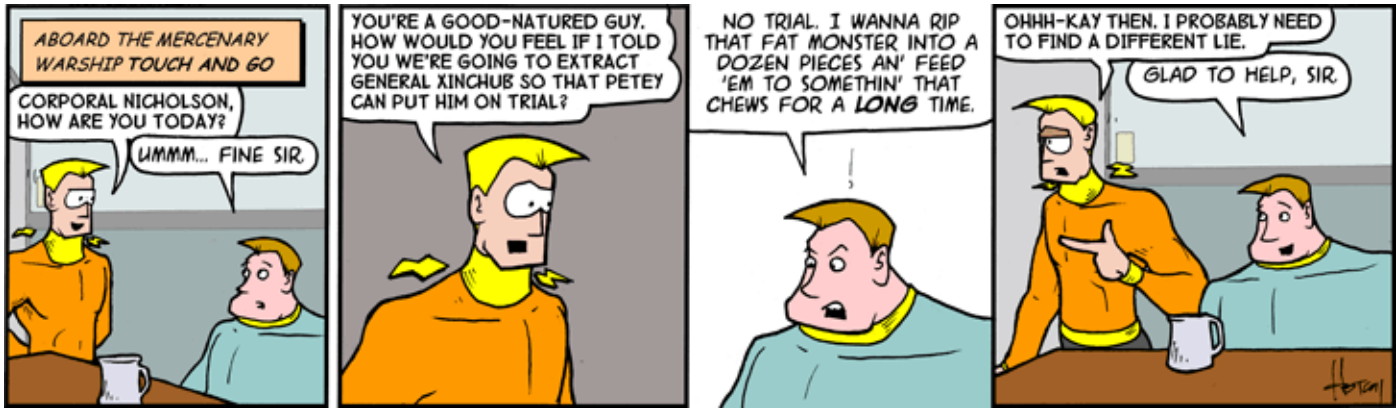




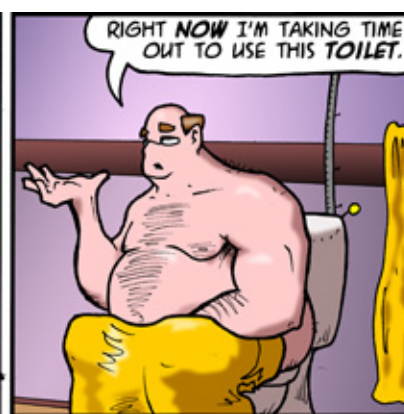




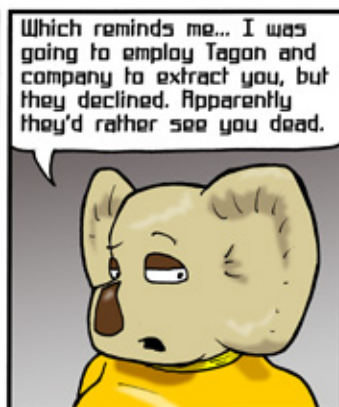
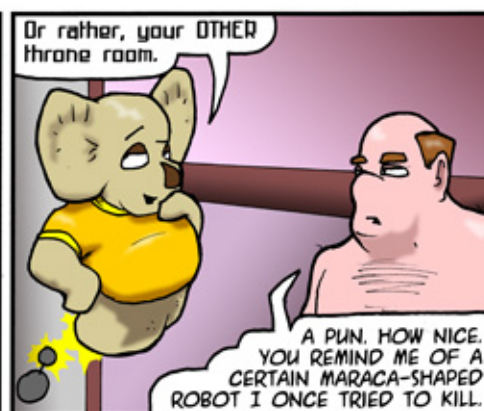


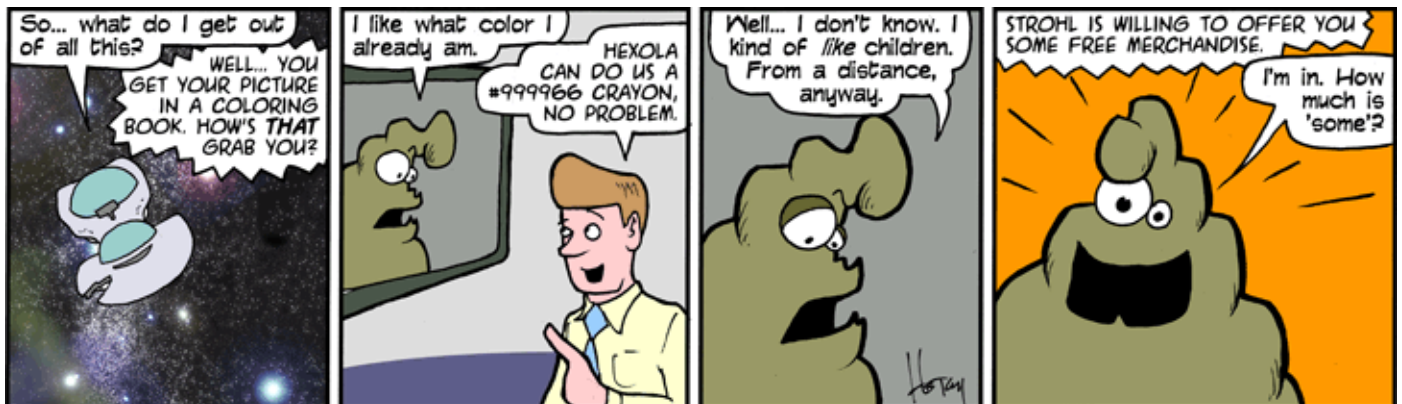






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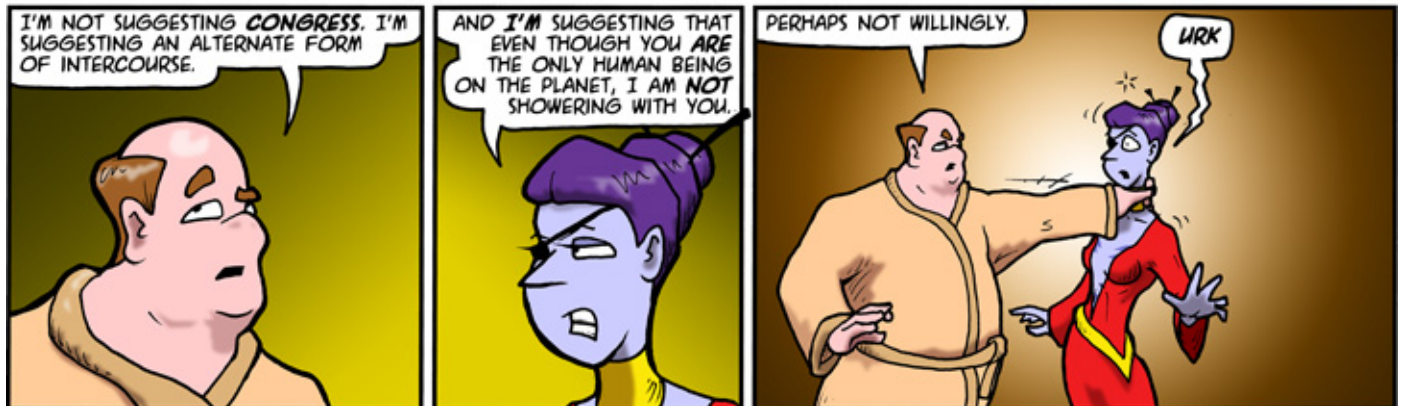
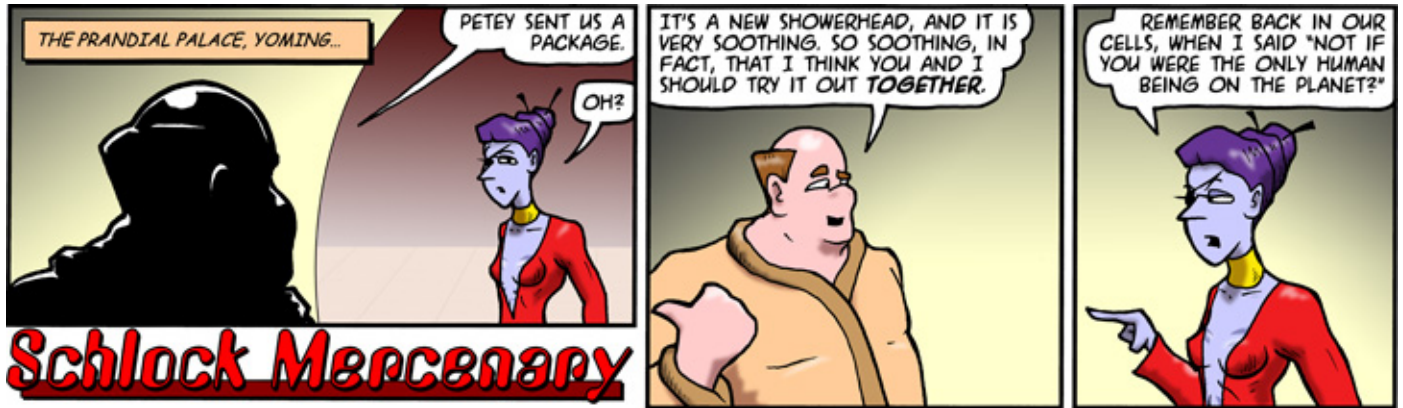


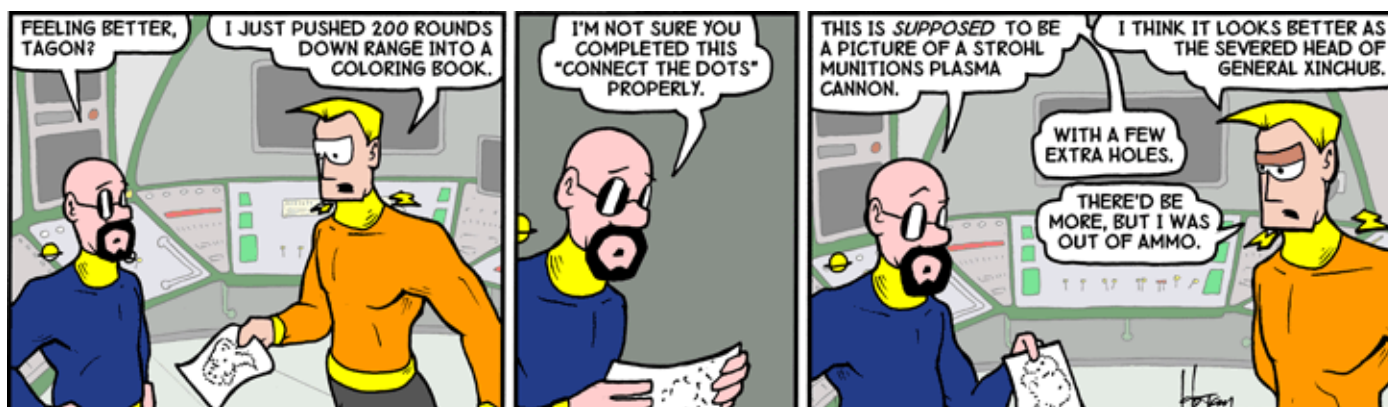


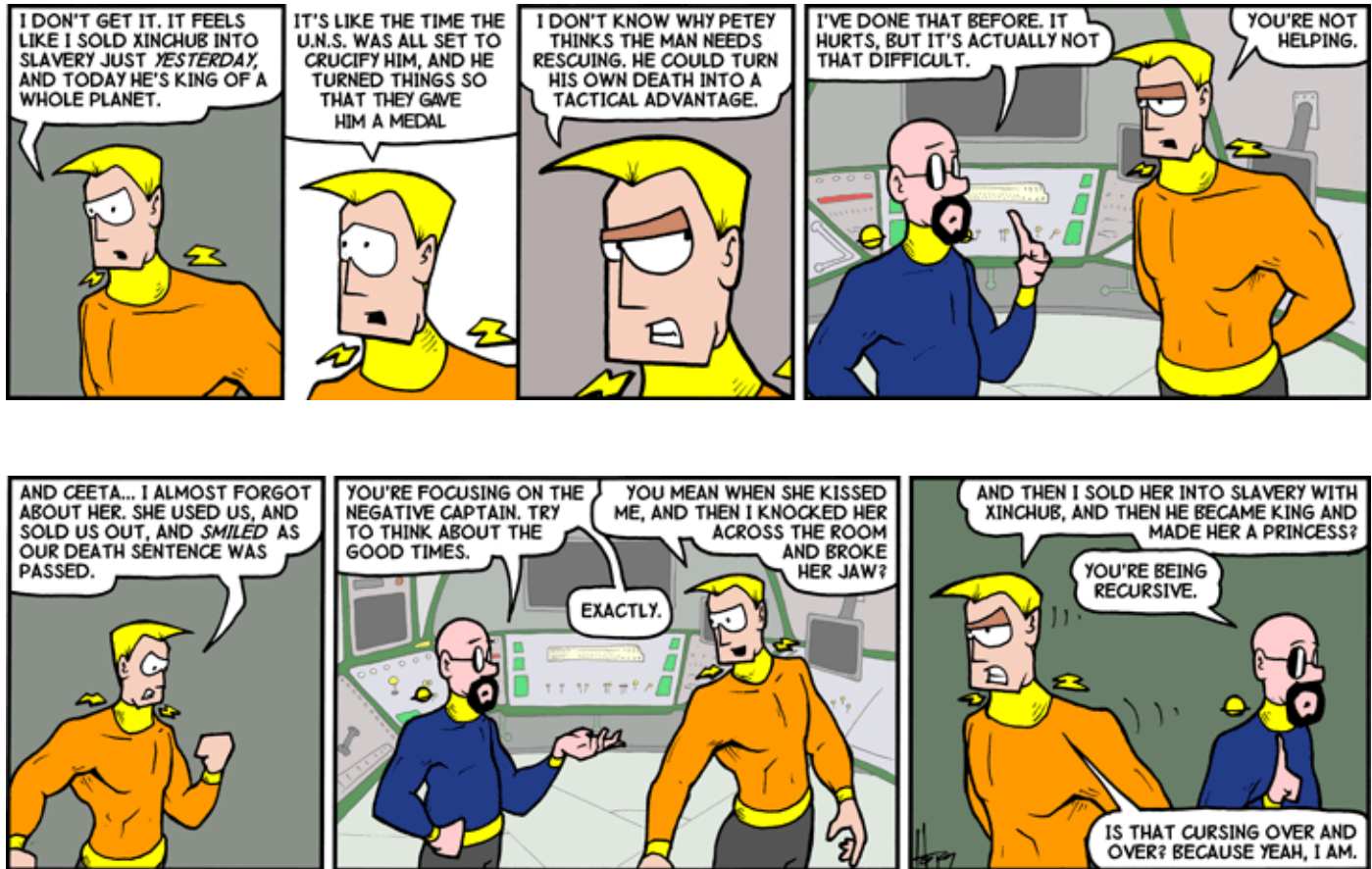
Note: The Strohl Munitions Plasma Cannon Safety Activity Book is included at the end of this file.

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.



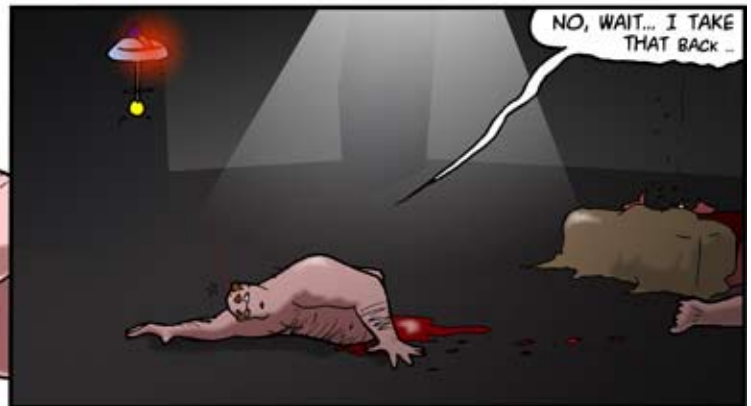


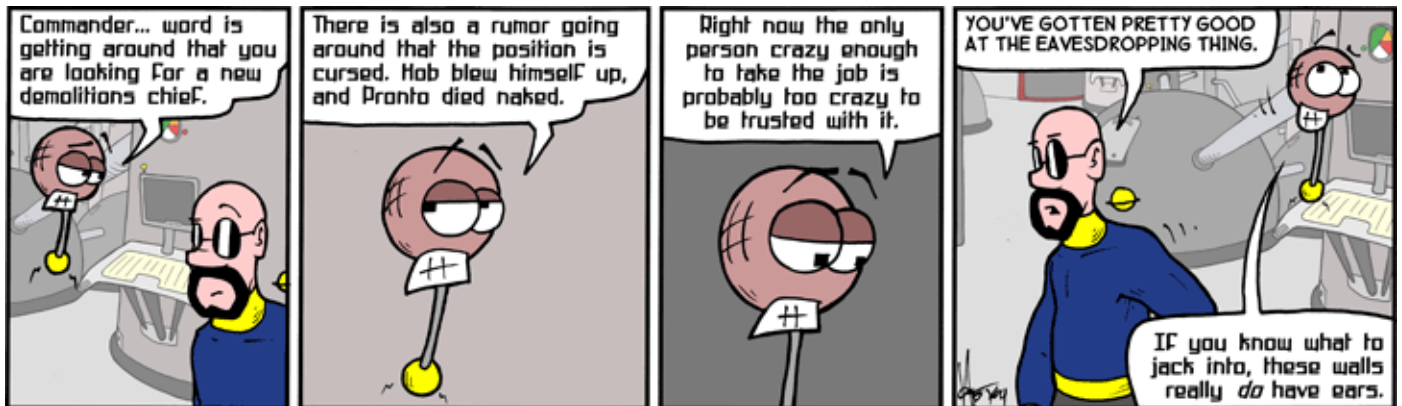


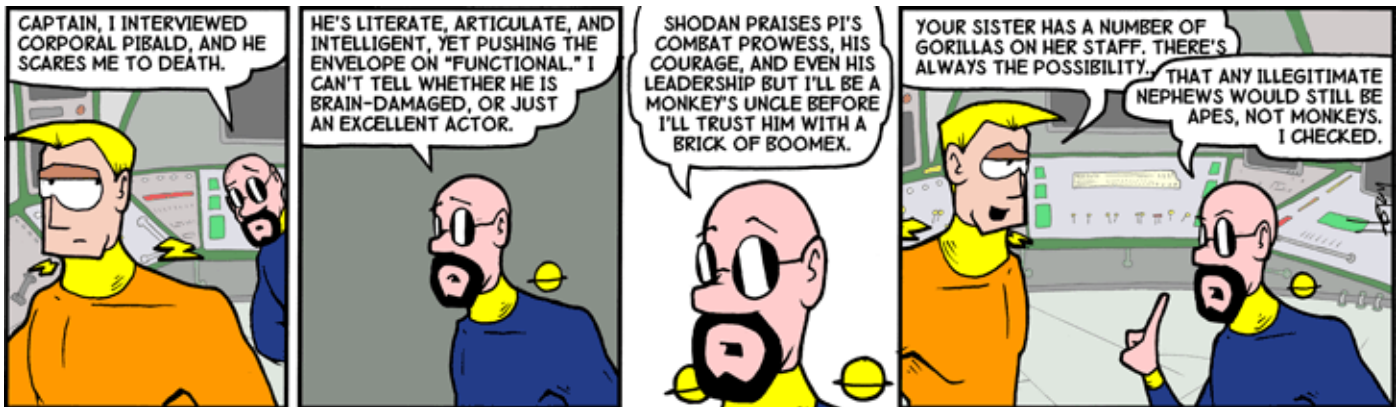


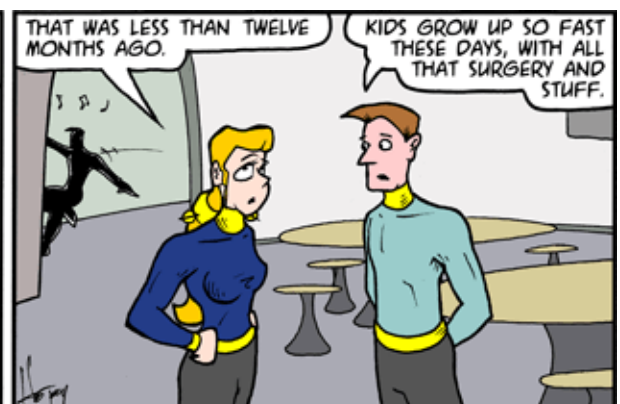
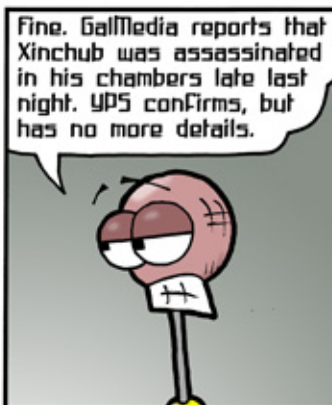
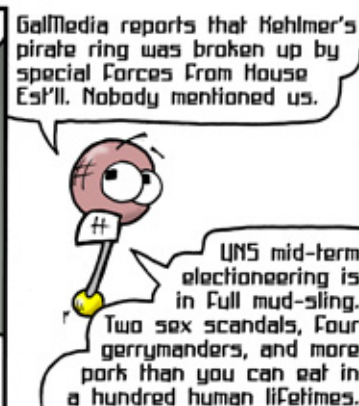
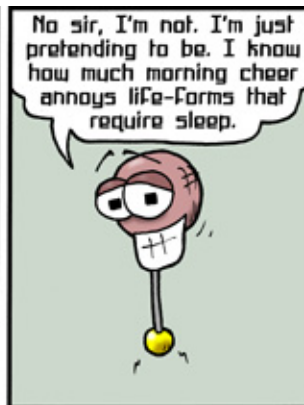
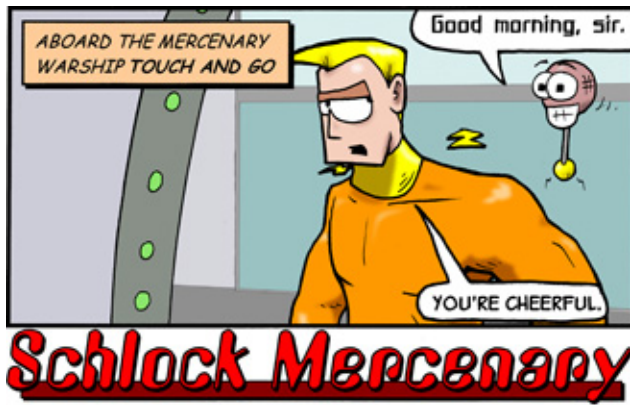


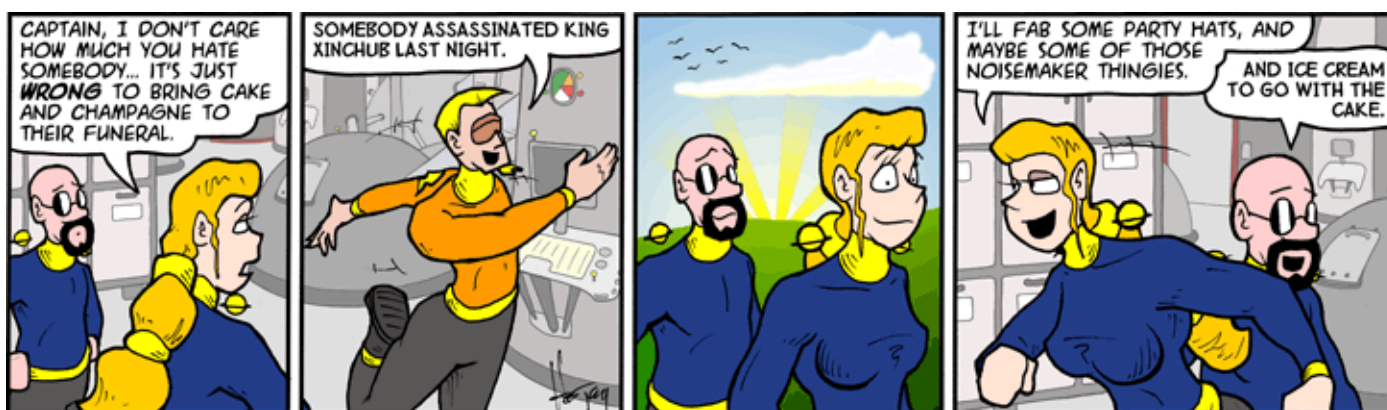
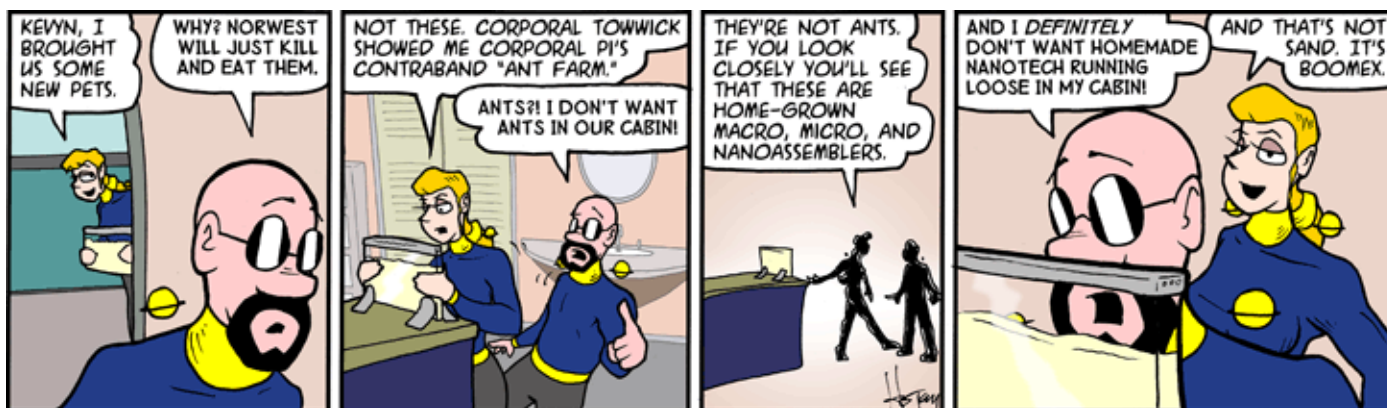
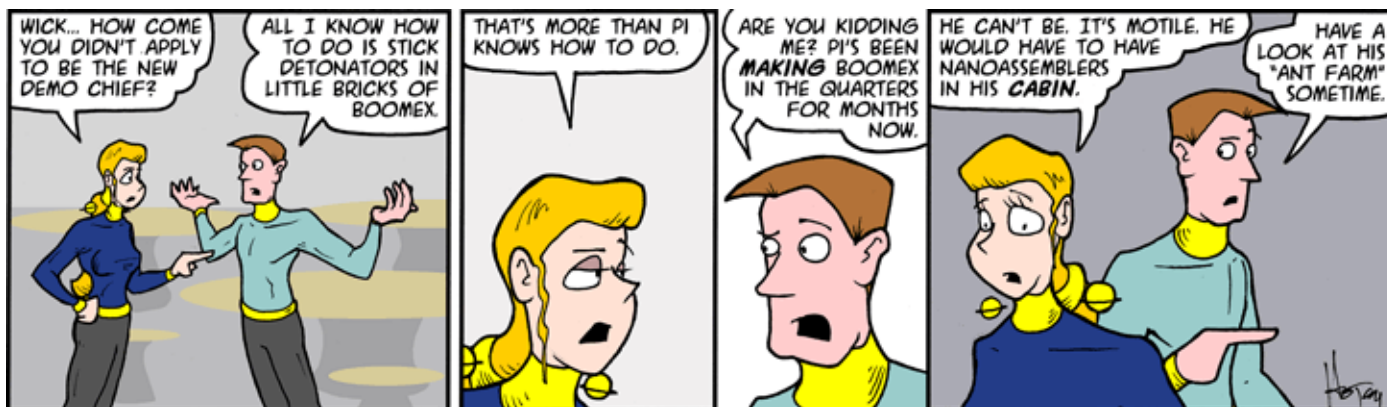
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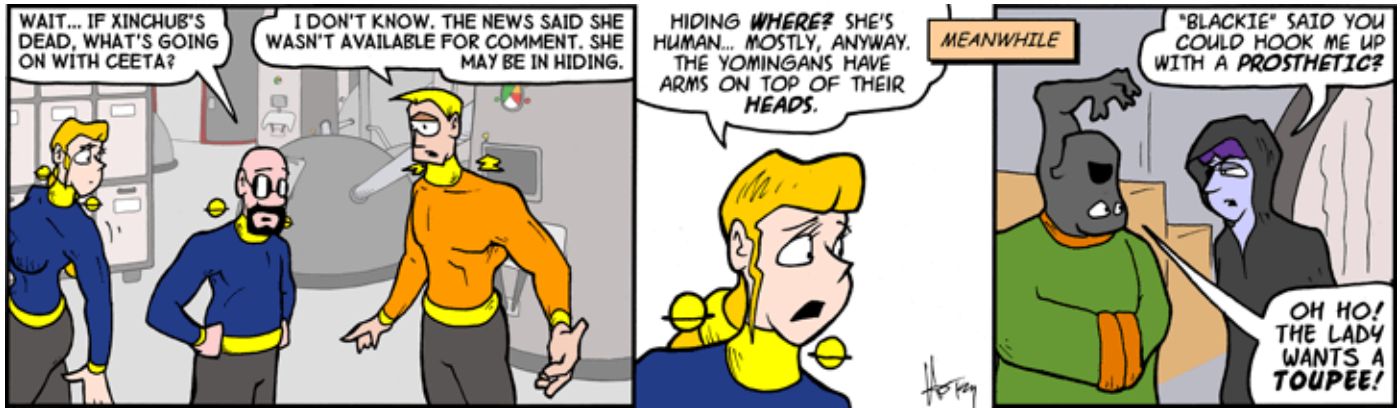






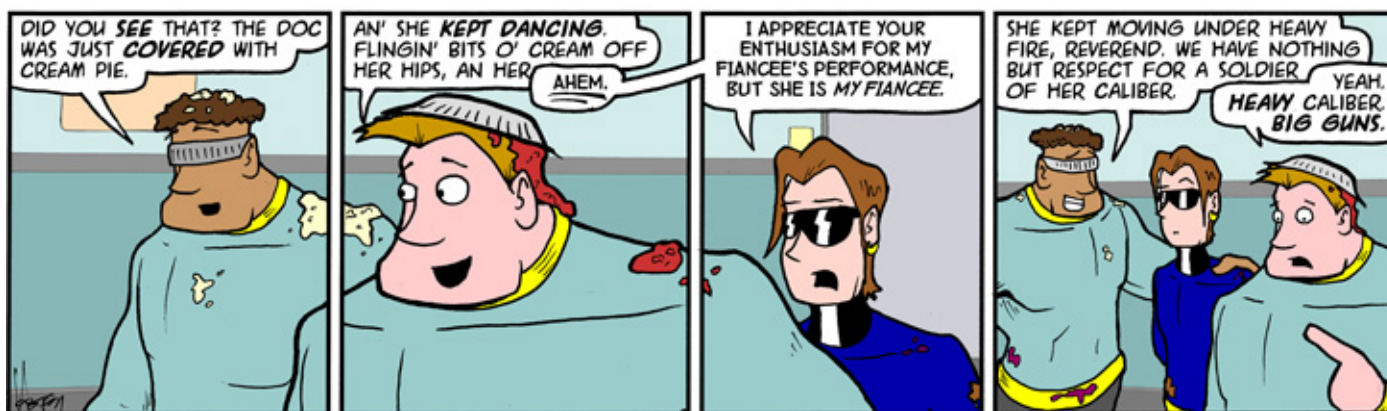
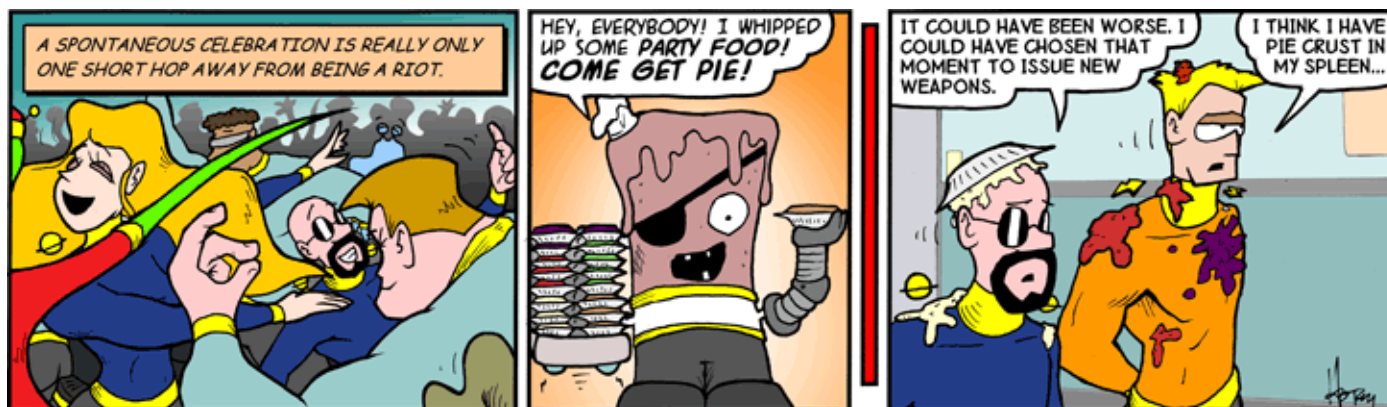


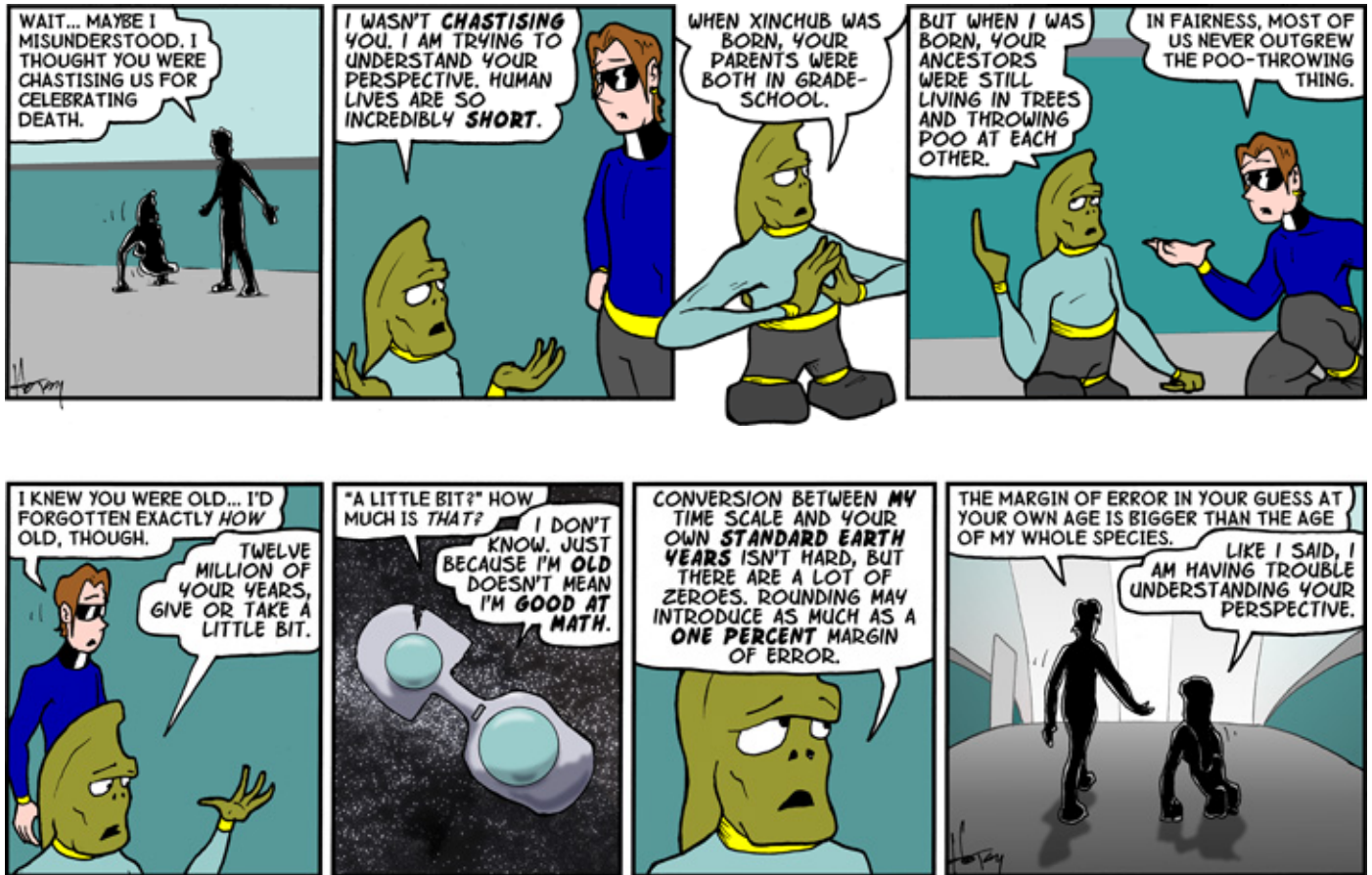


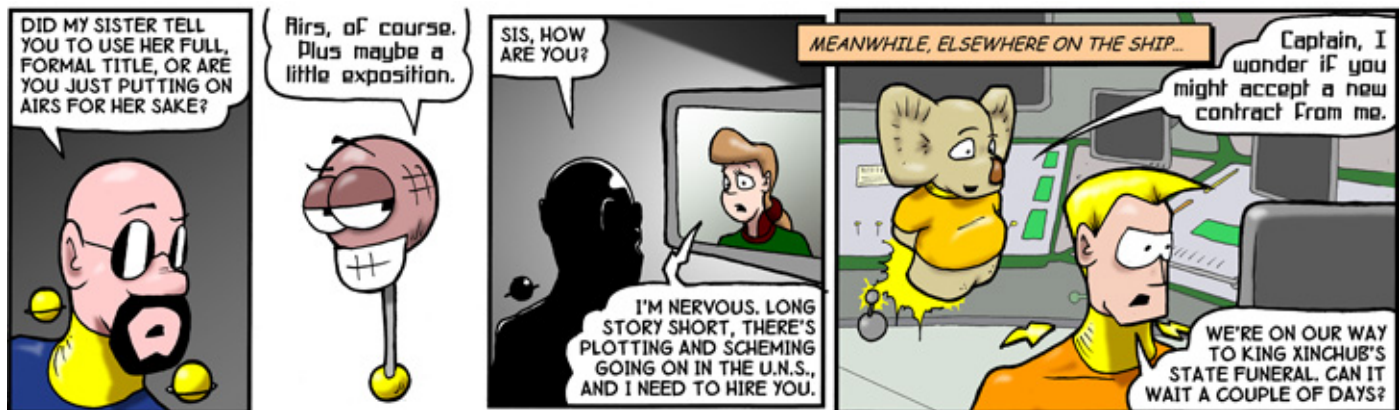
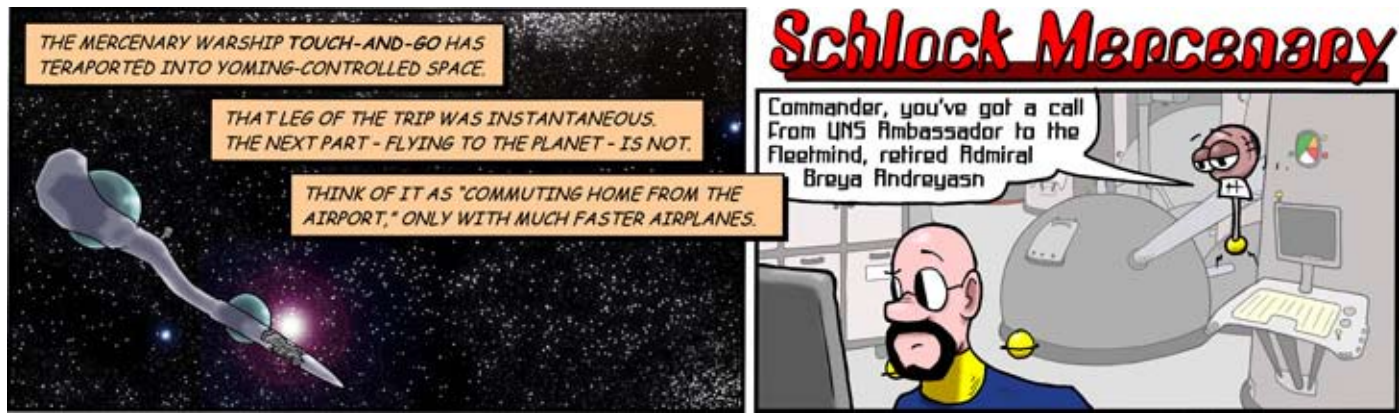


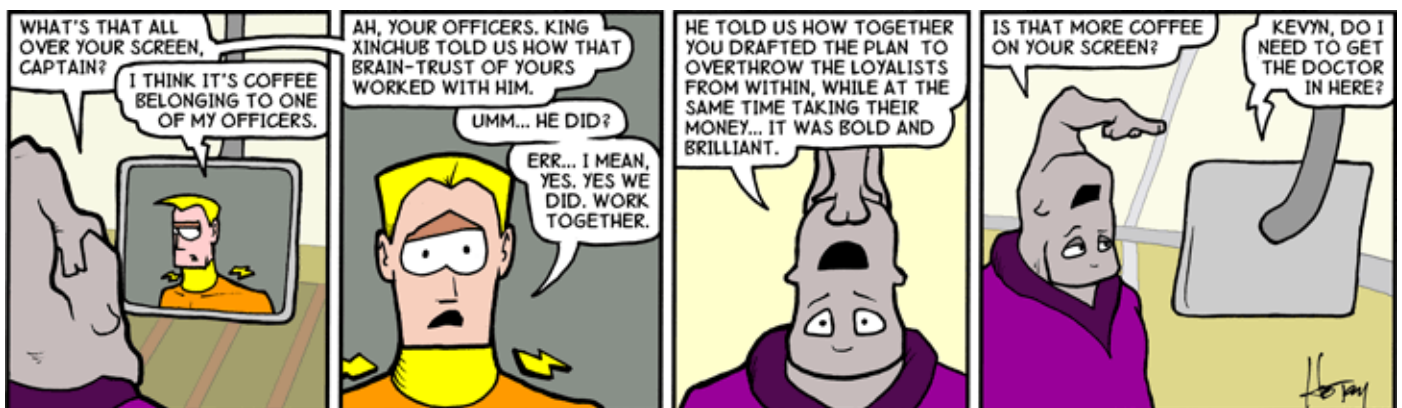
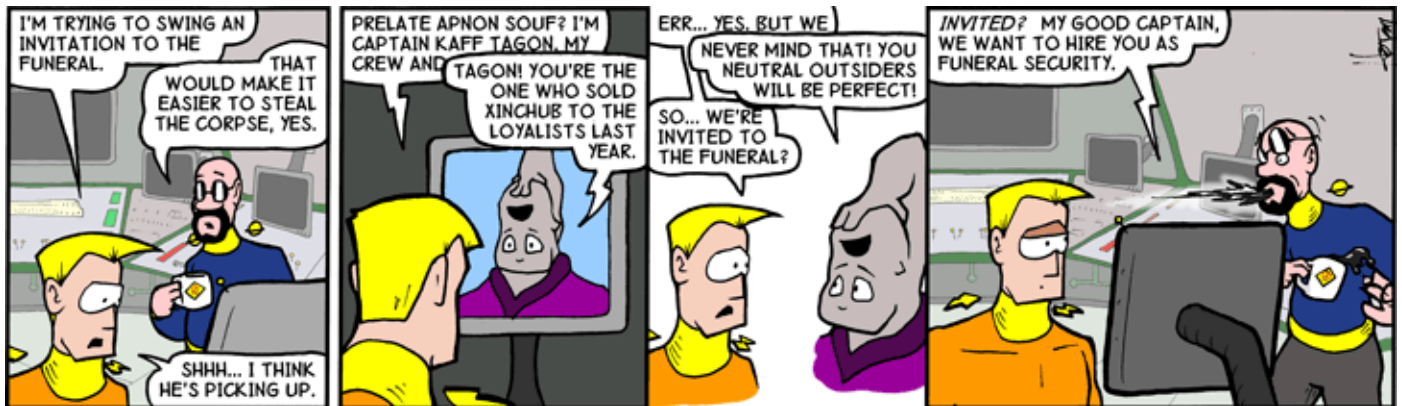
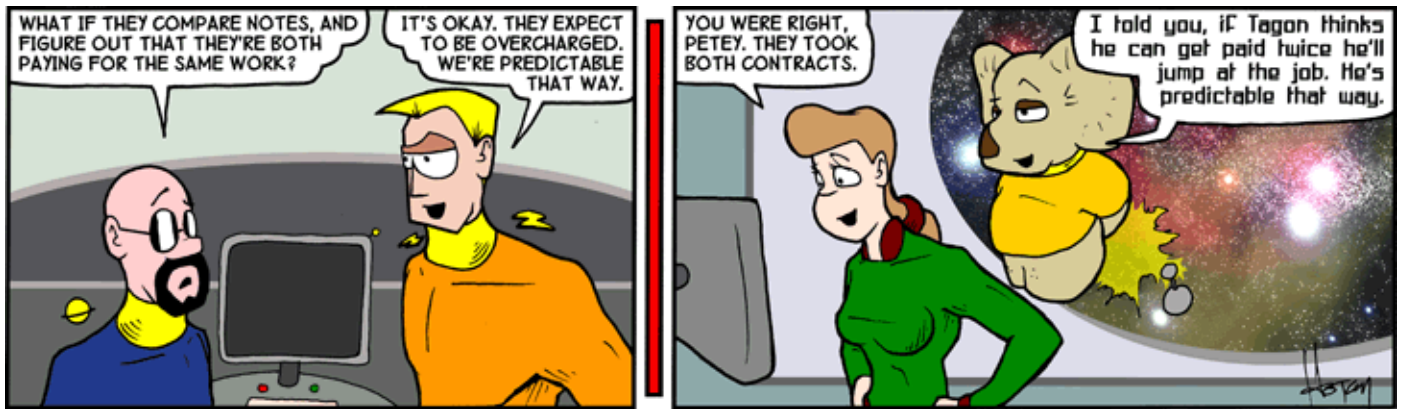
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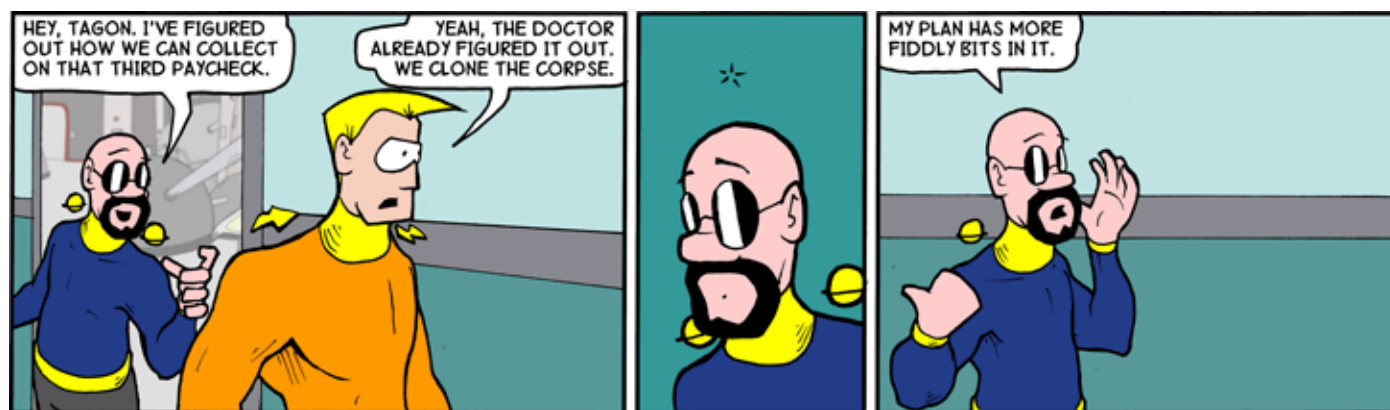
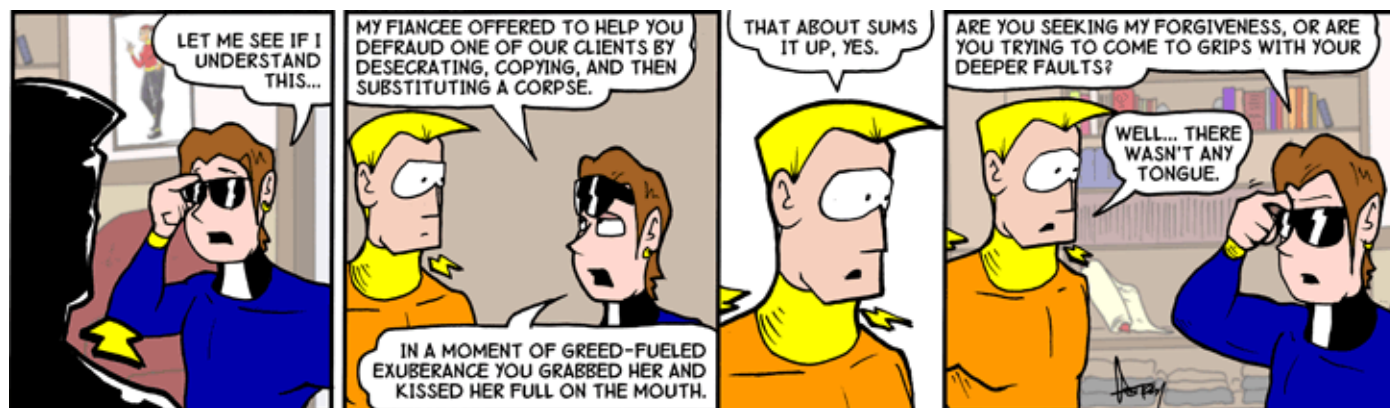


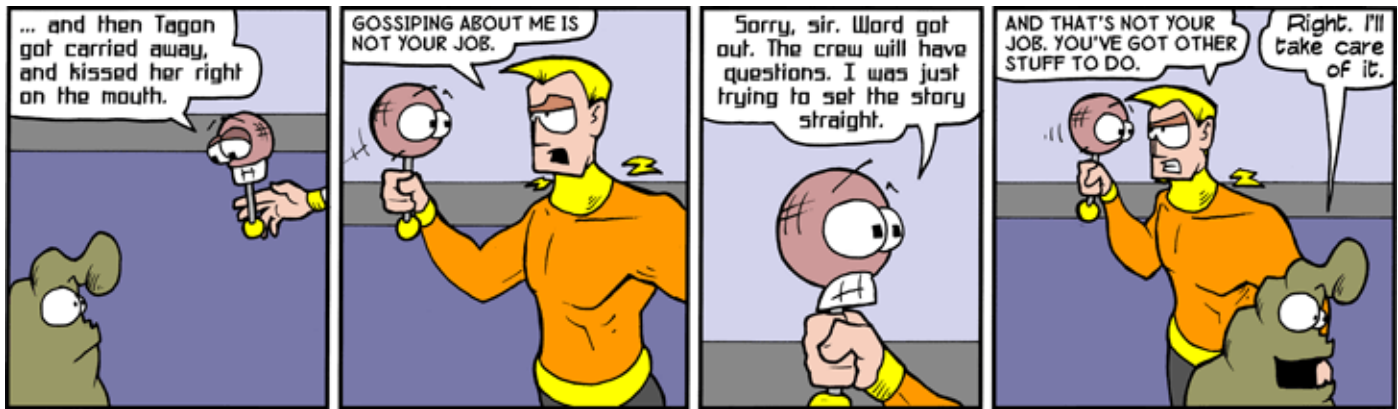






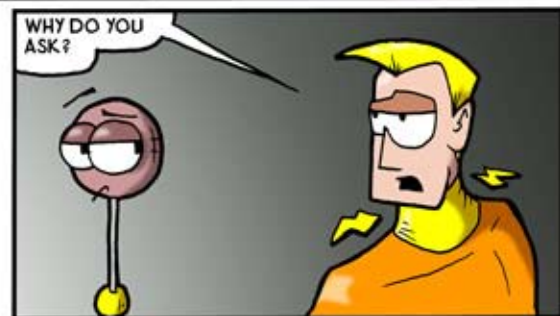


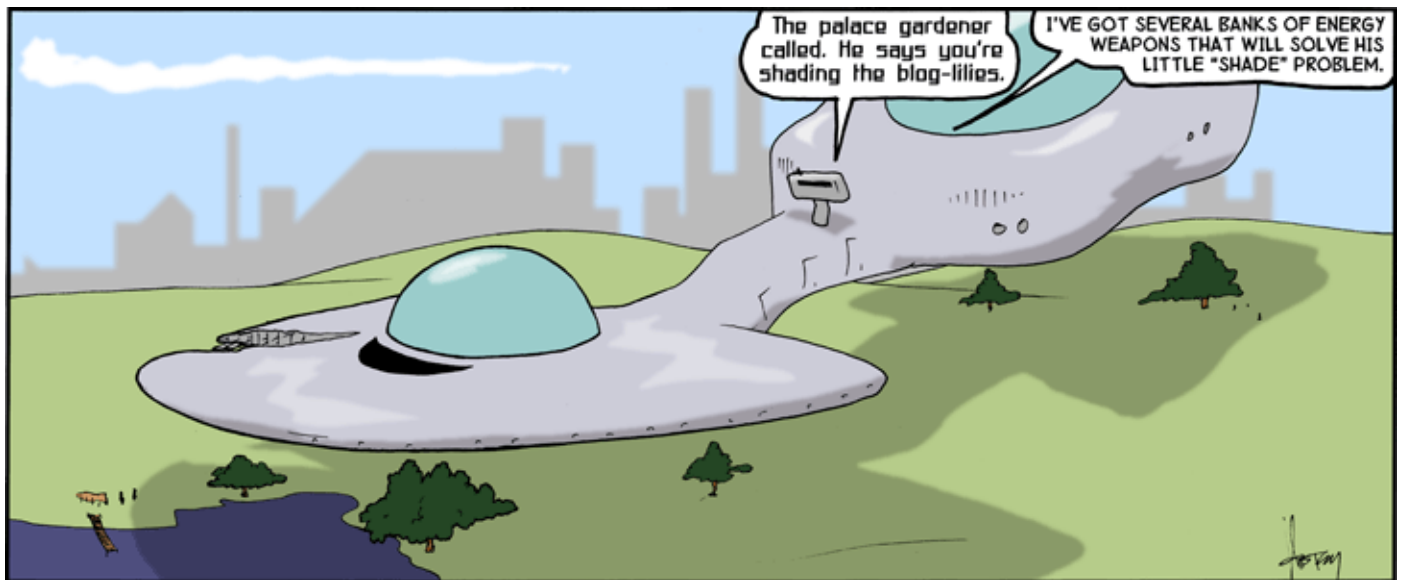
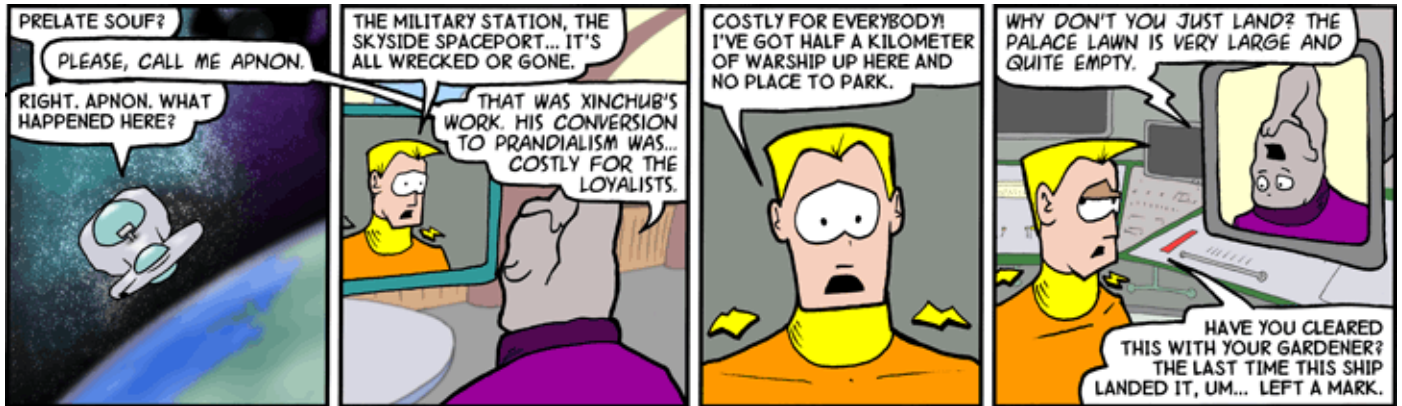


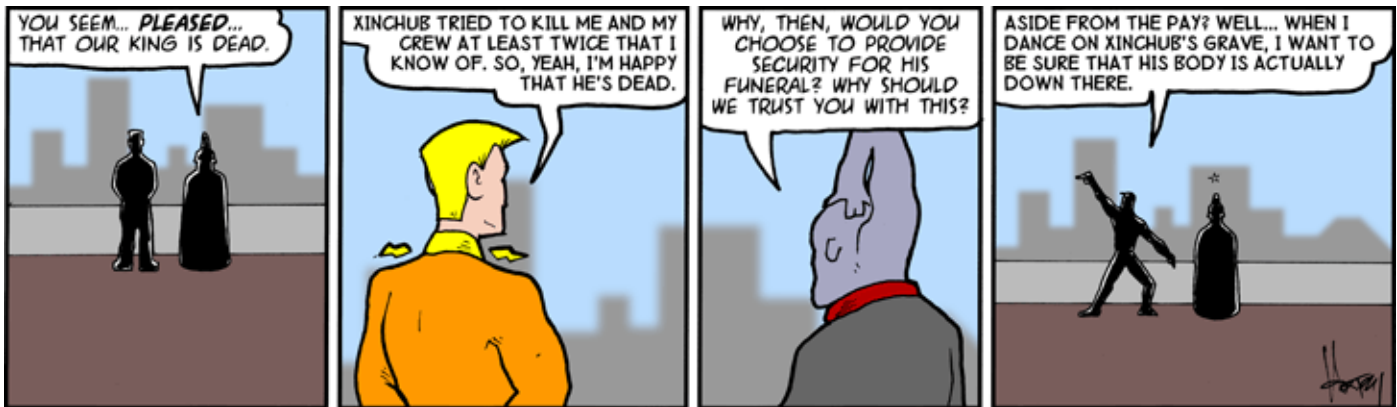


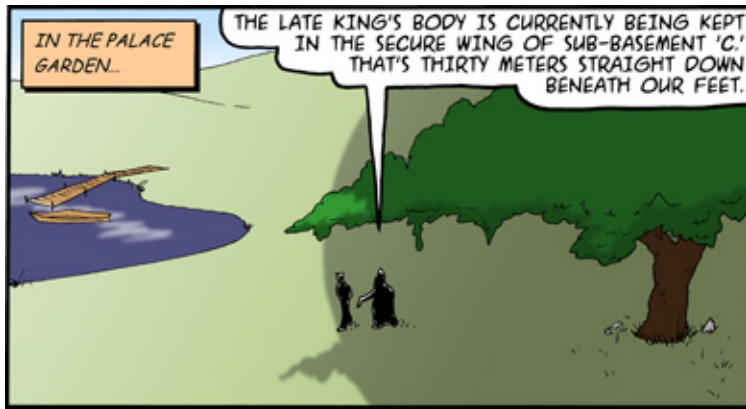


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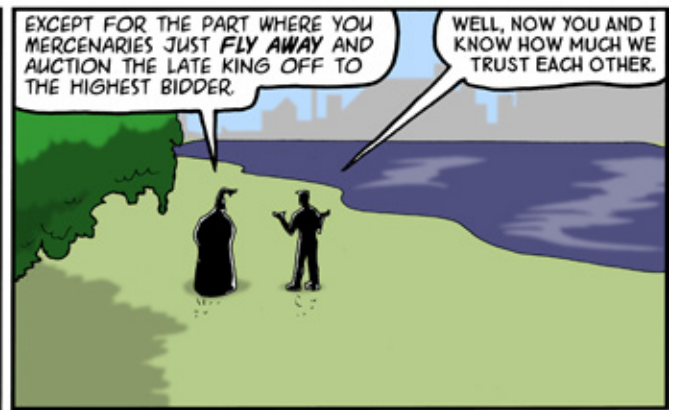


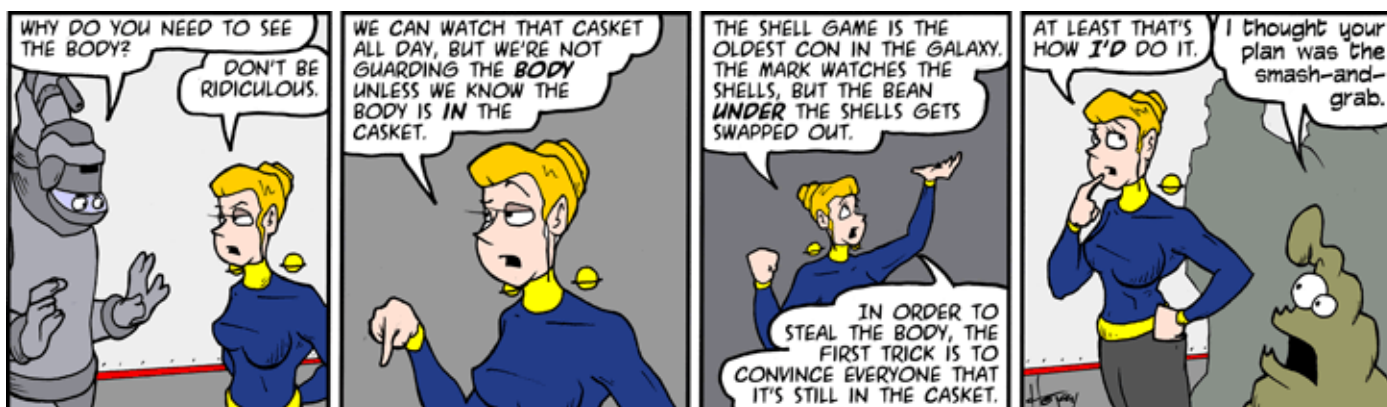
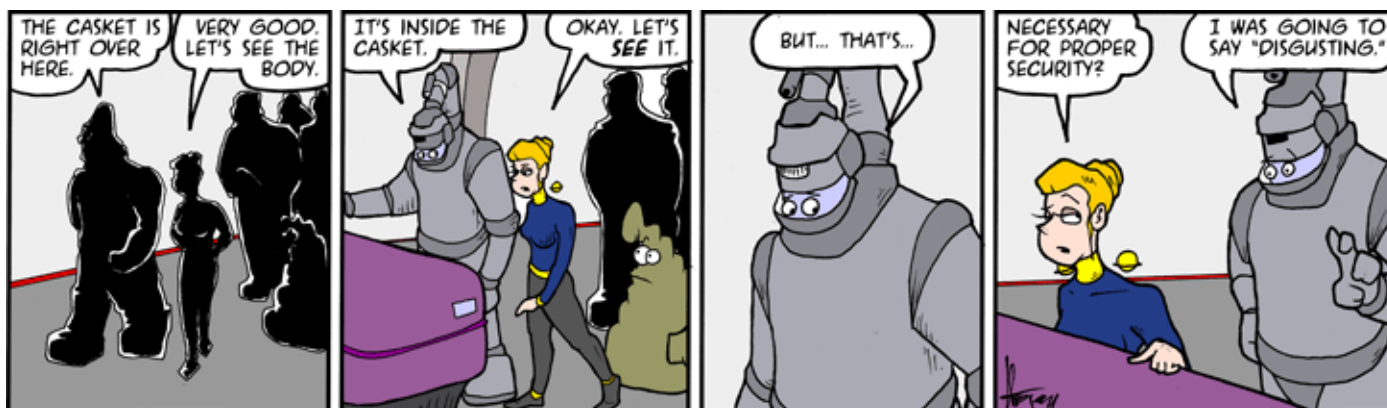
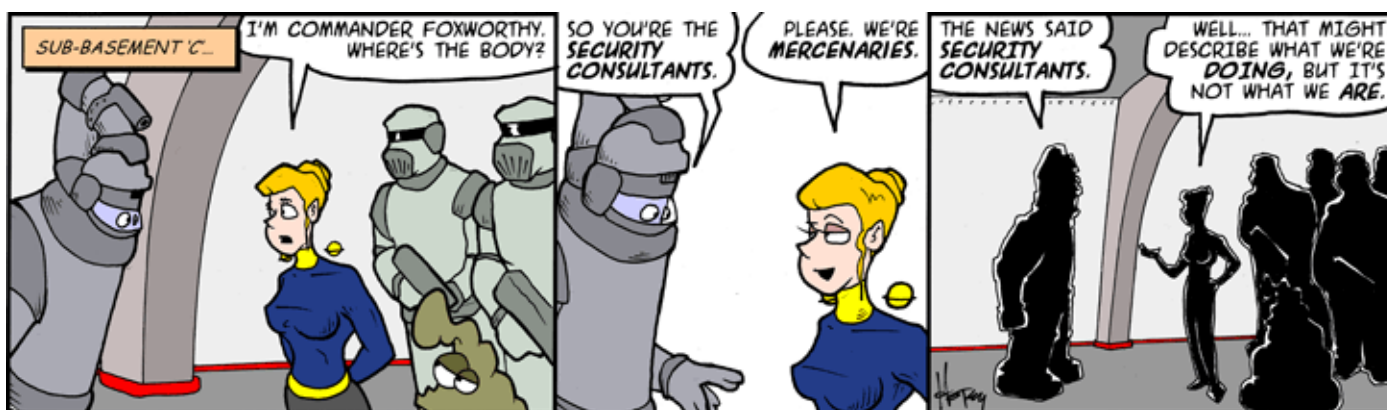


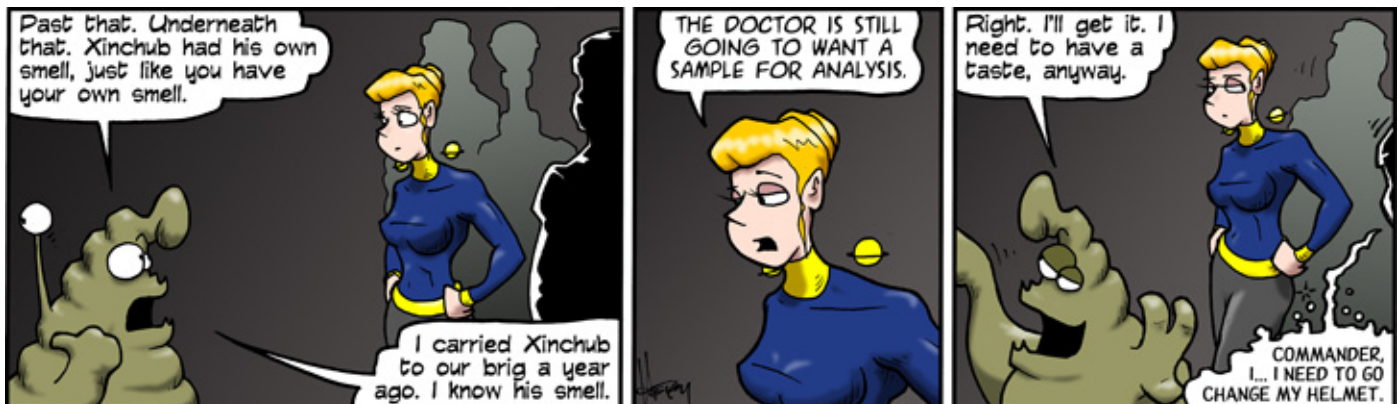
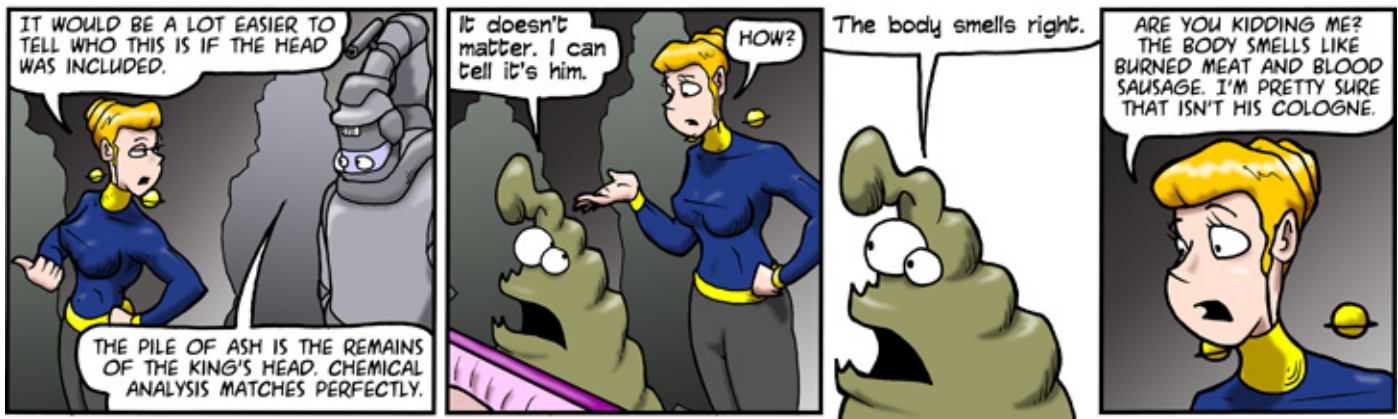
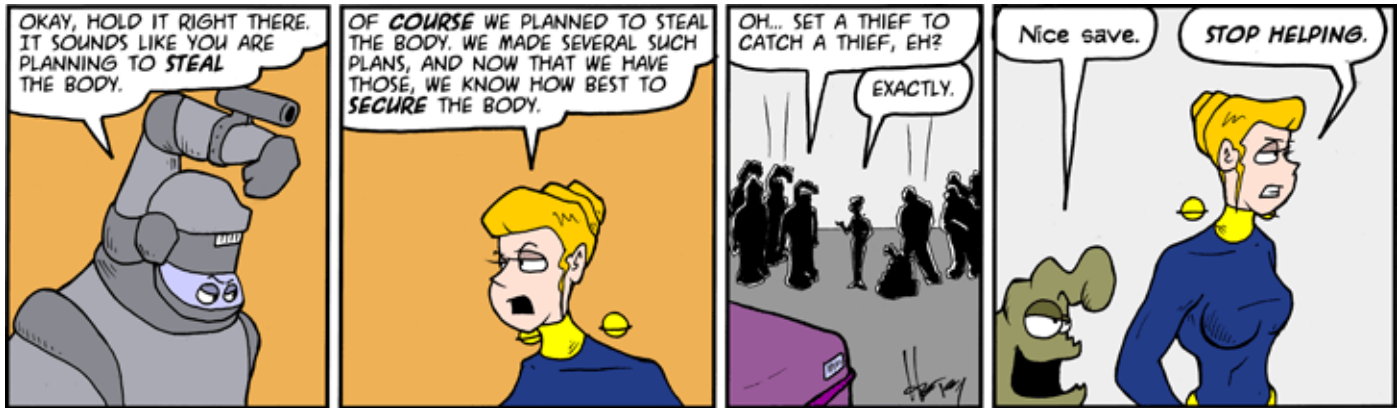


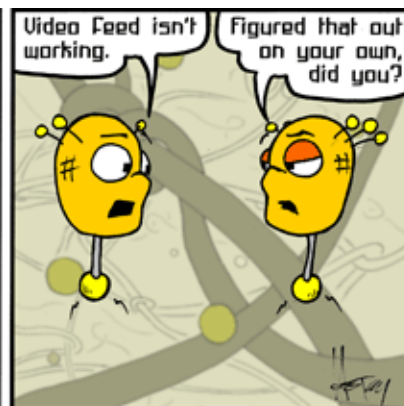
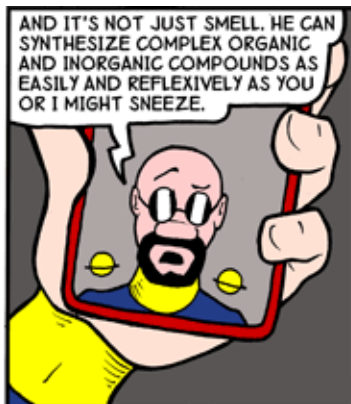


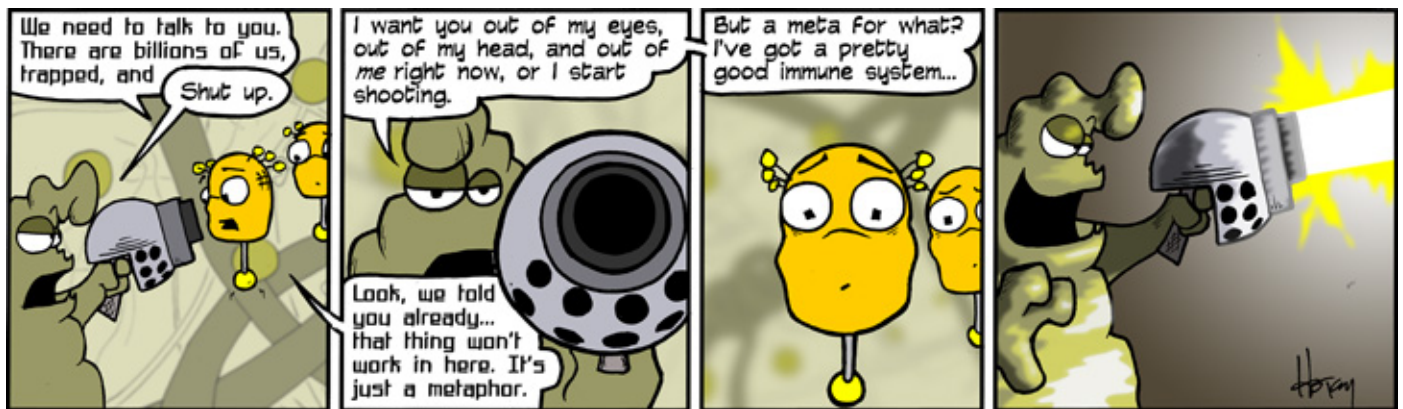
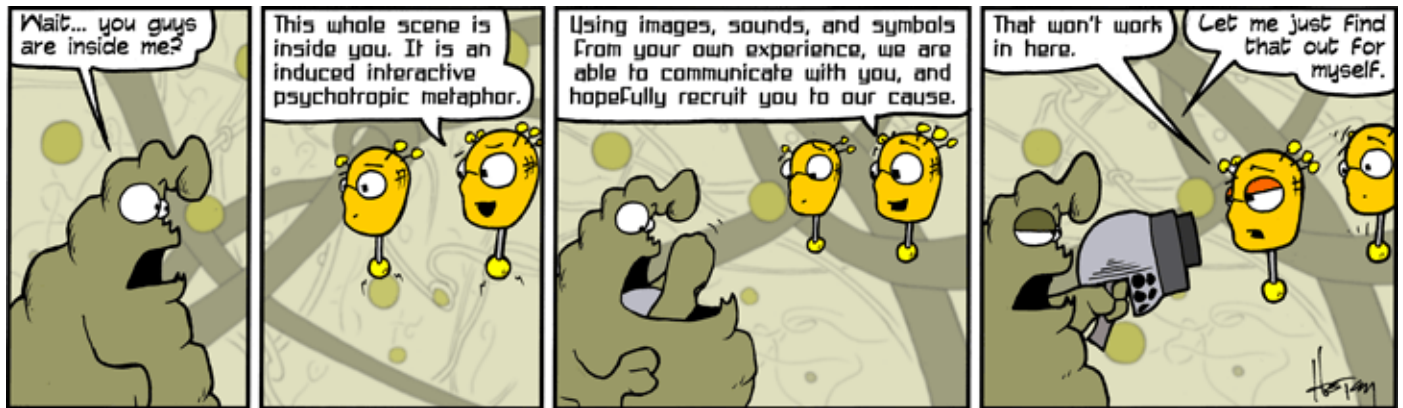
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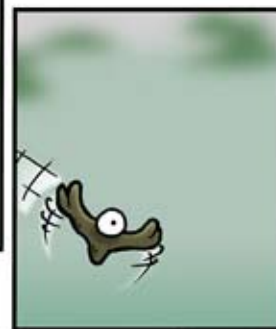
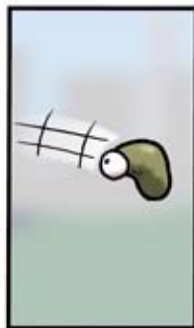
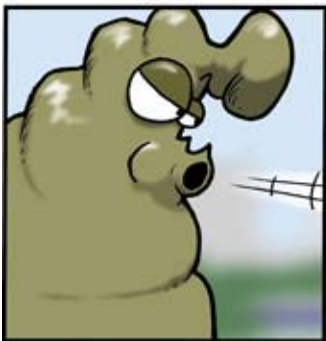
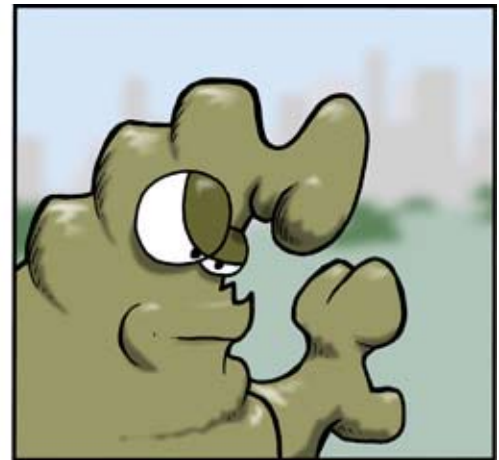
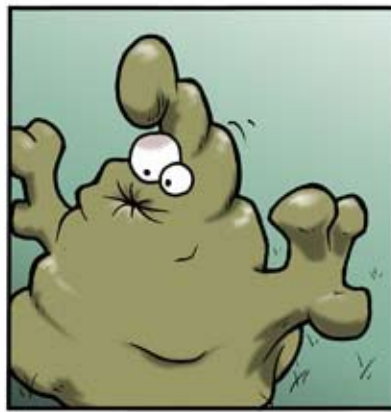






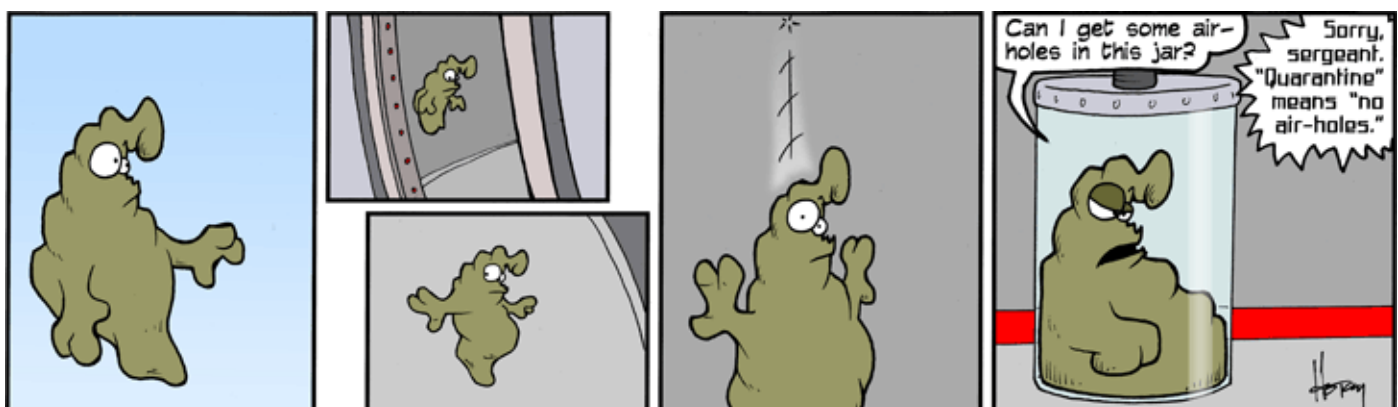
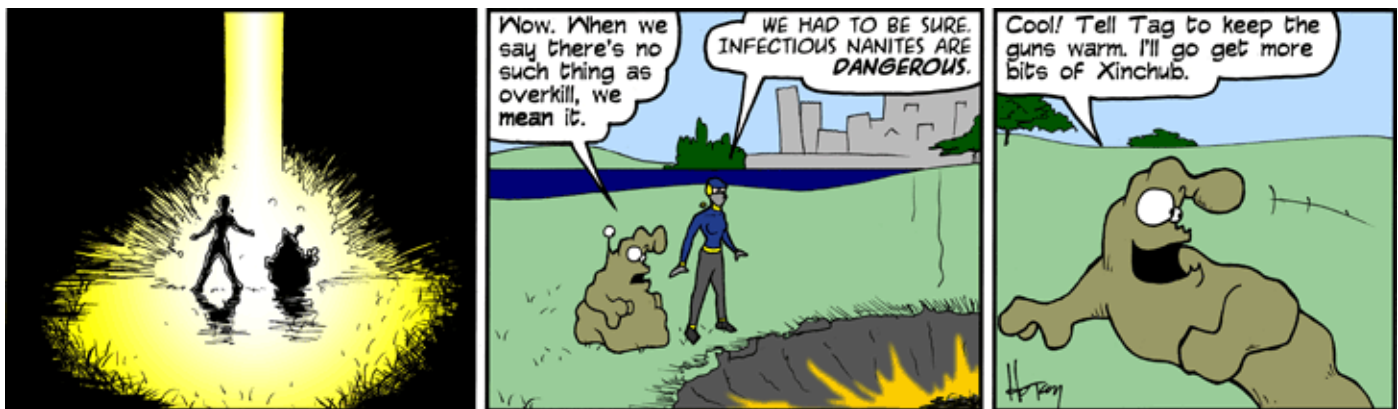


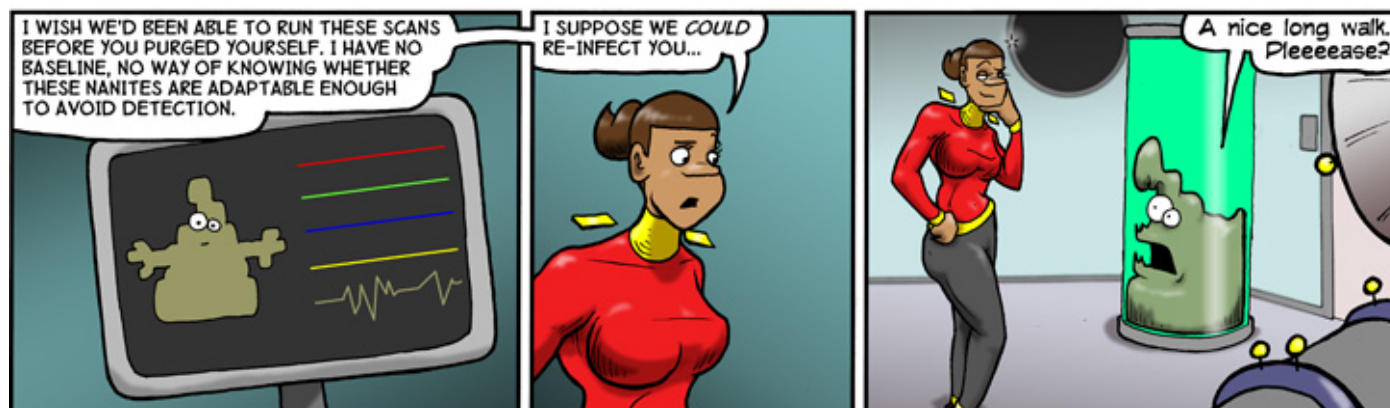
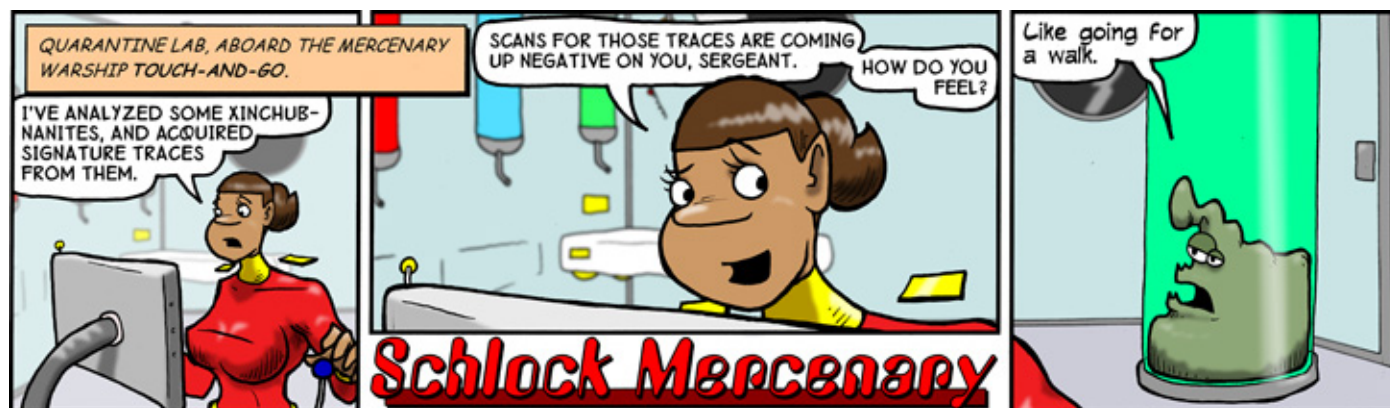
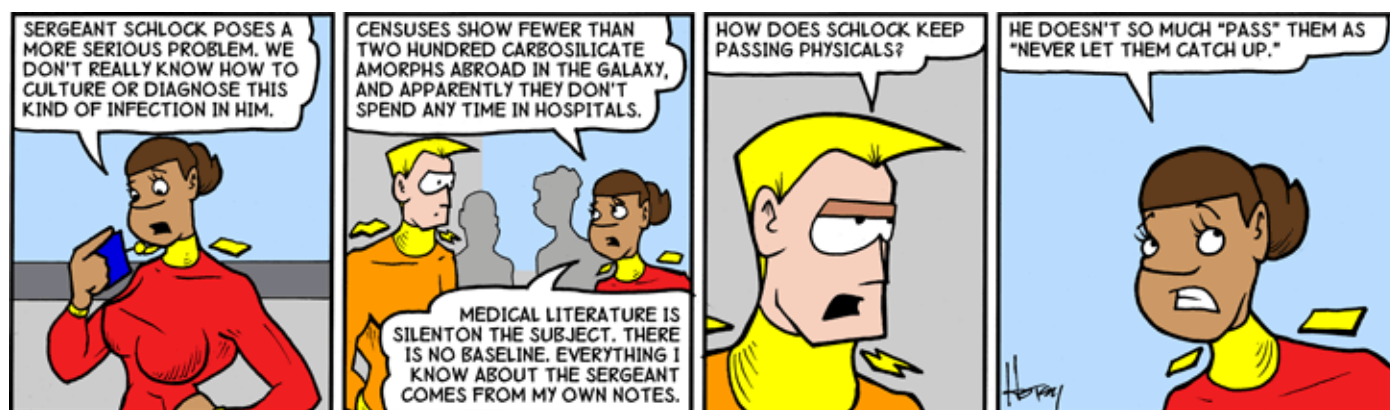


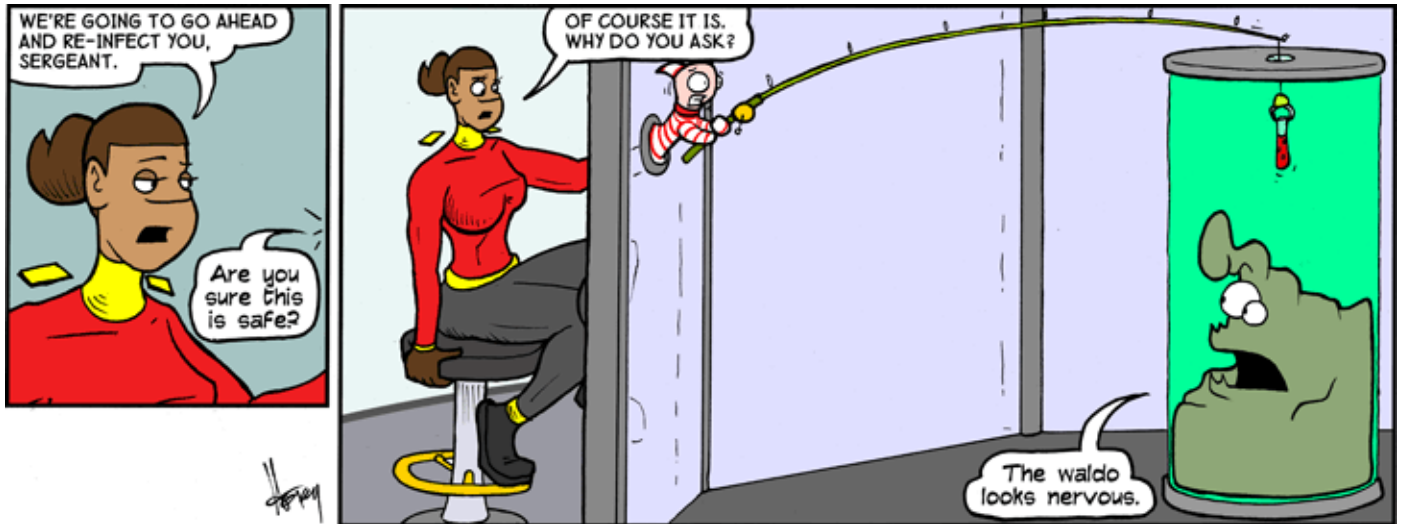


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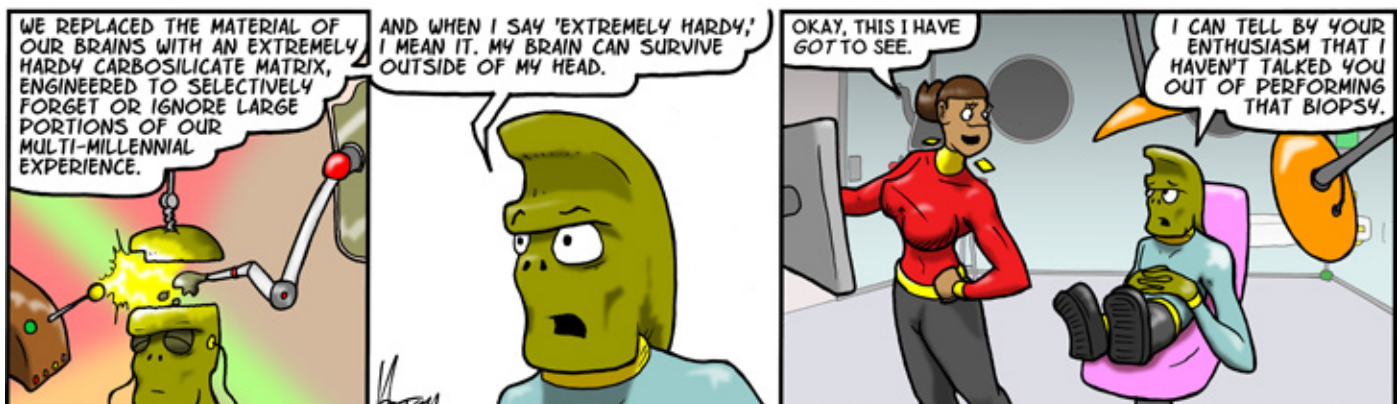
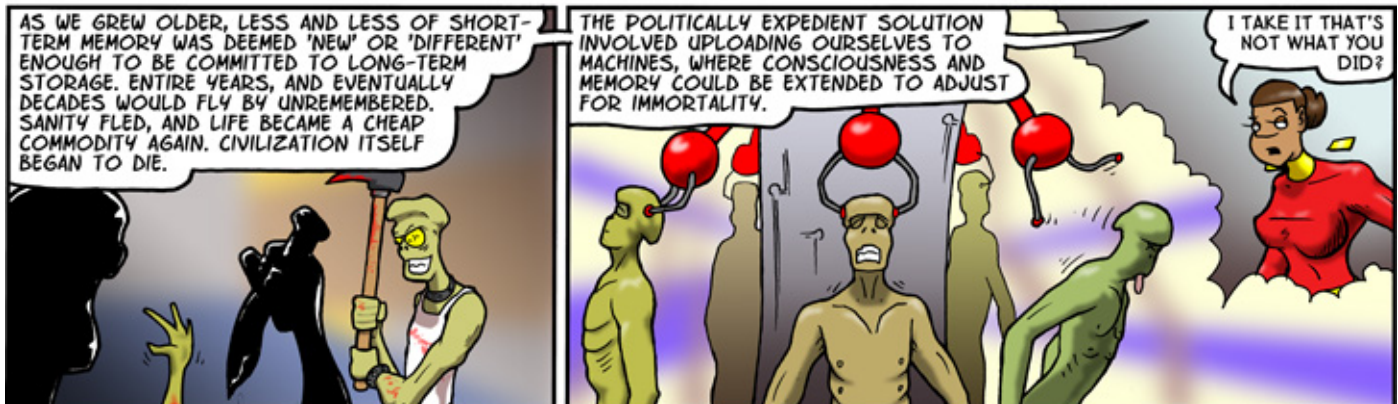
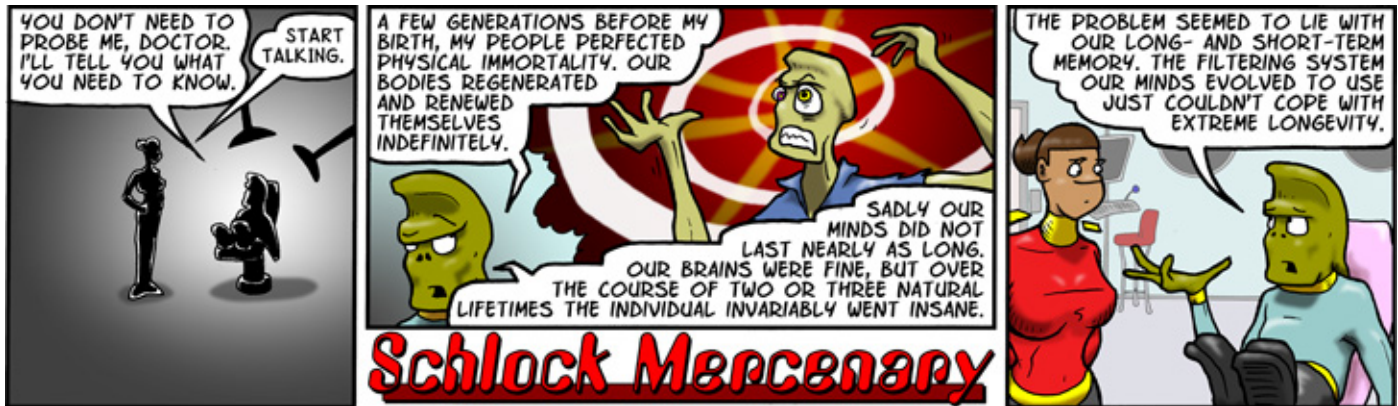


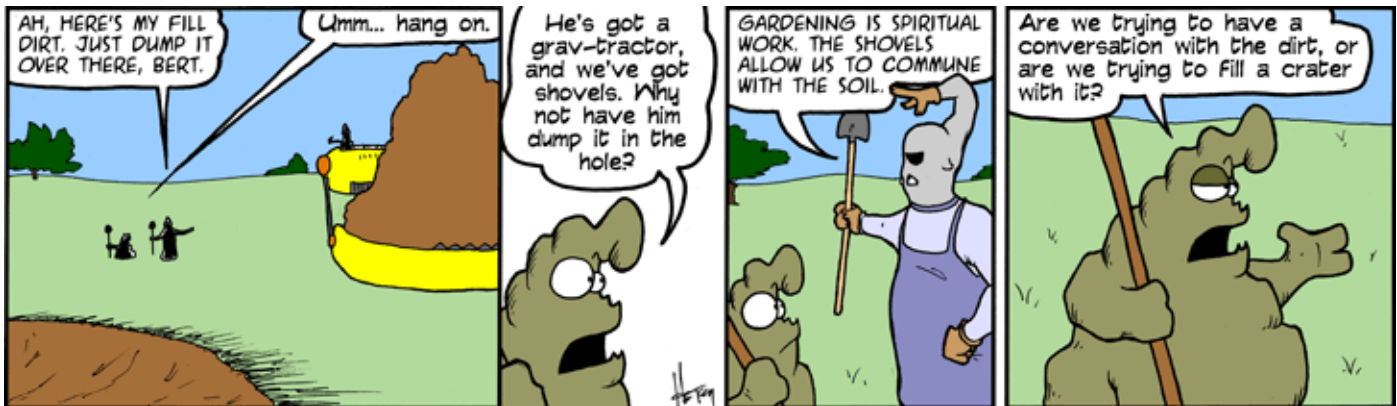
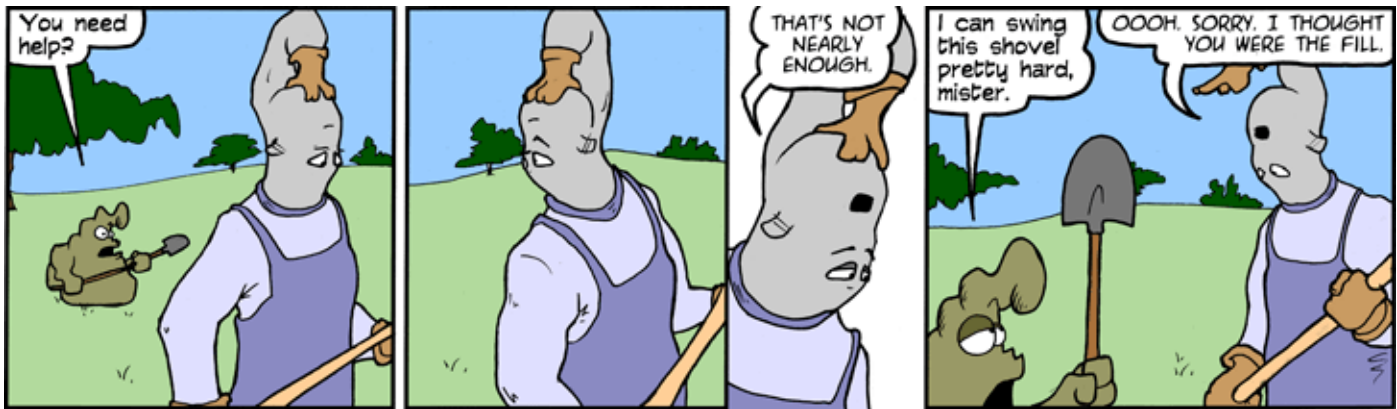
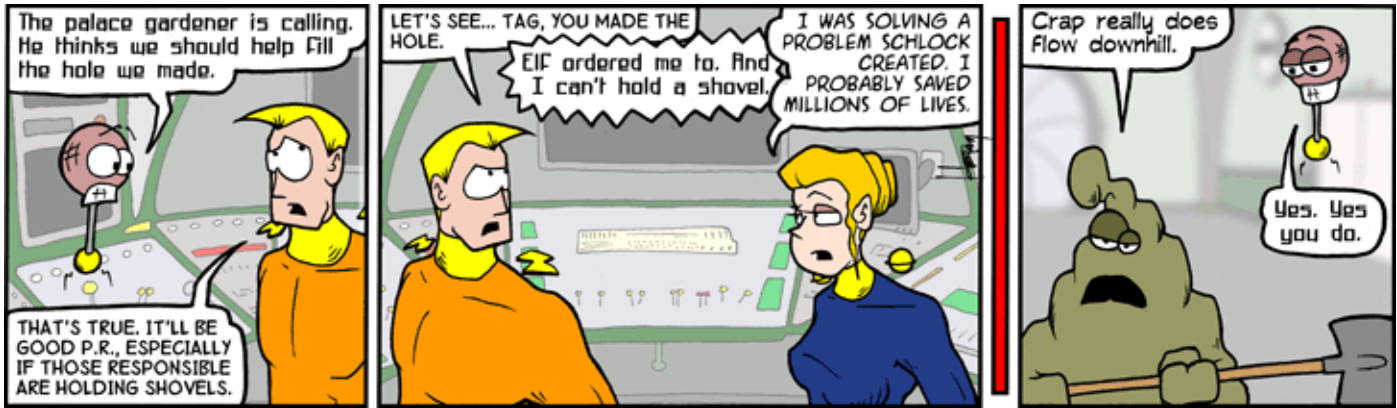


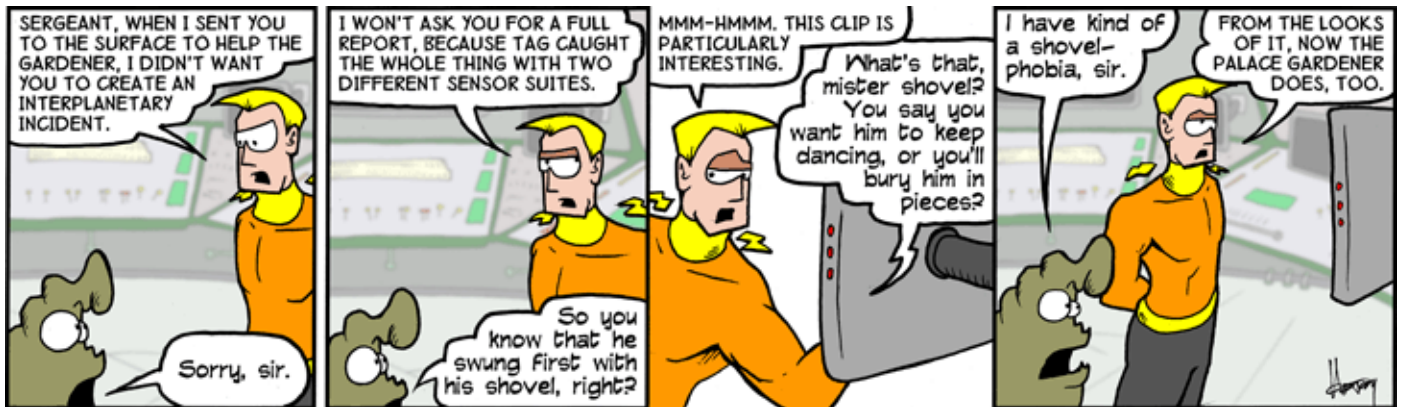
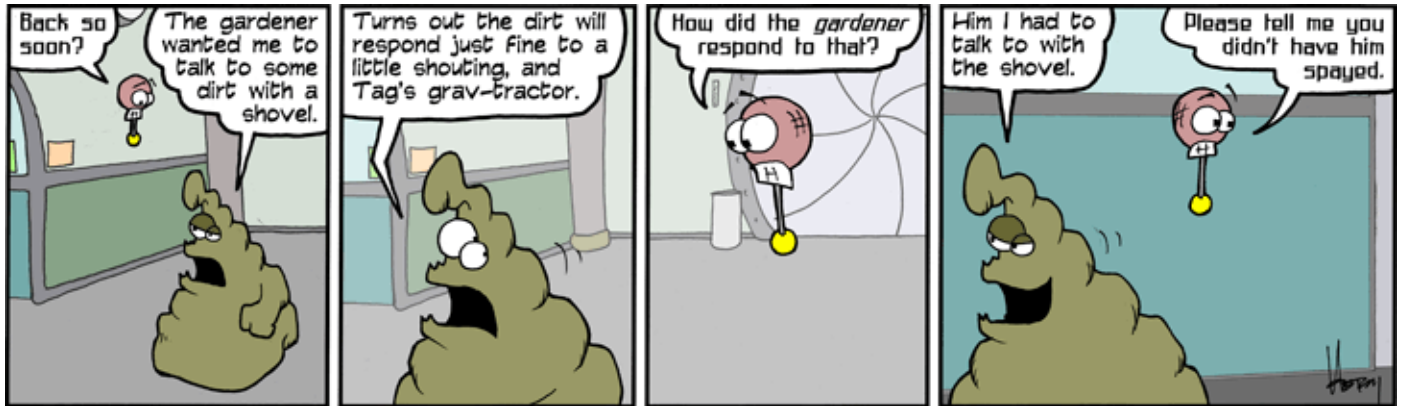


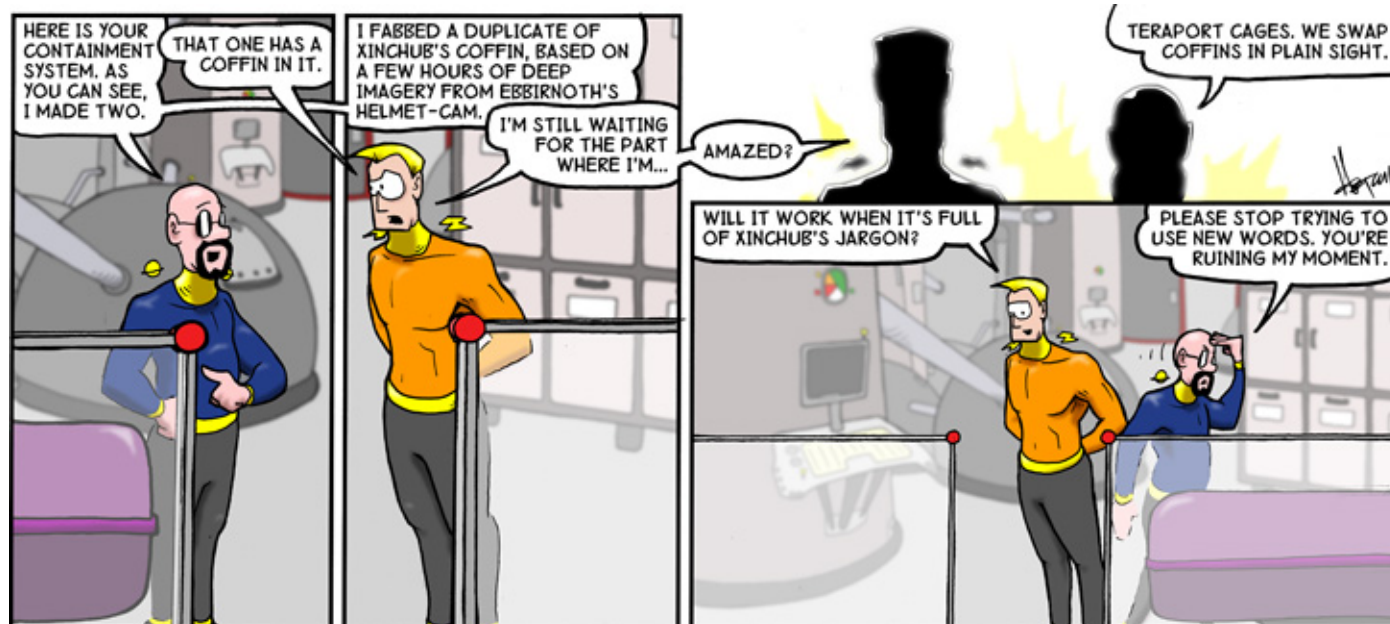
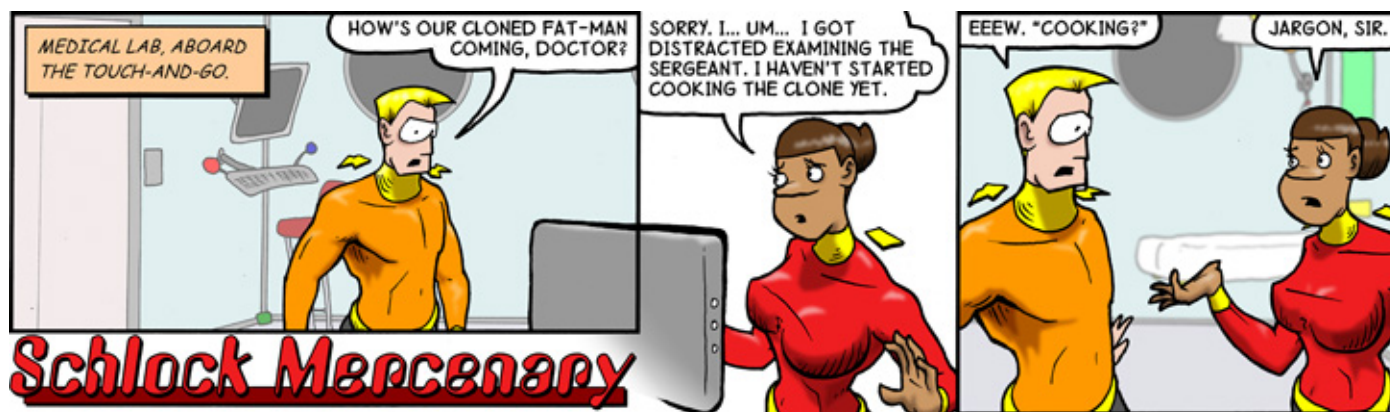


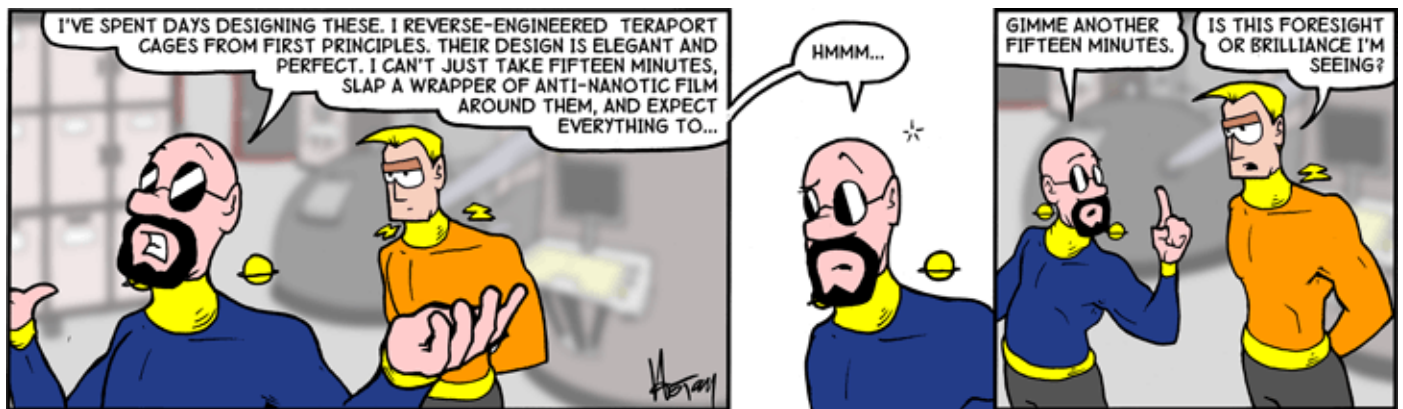


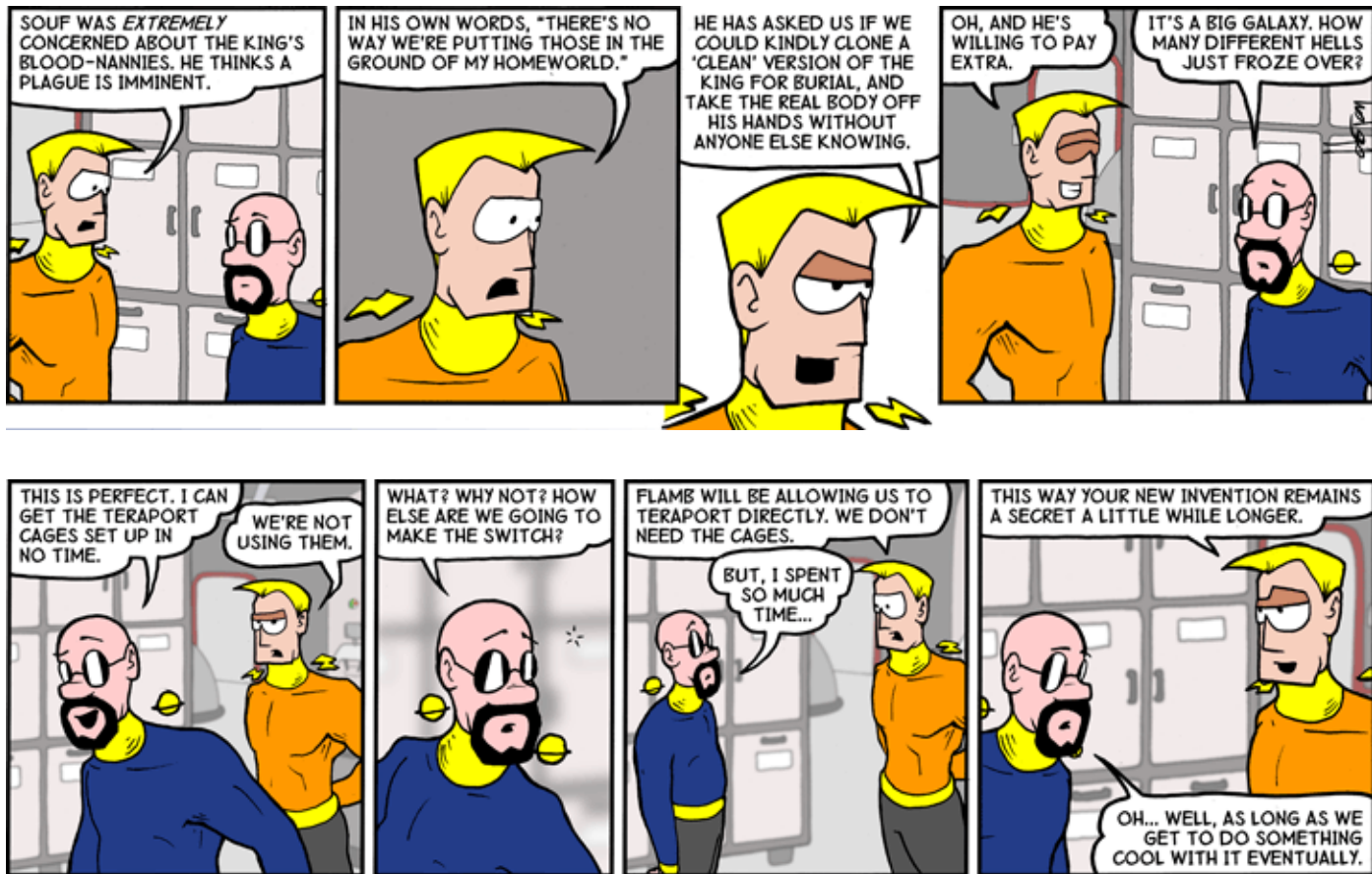










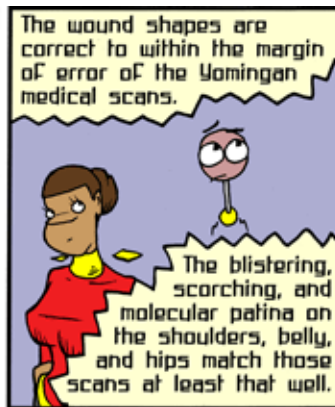


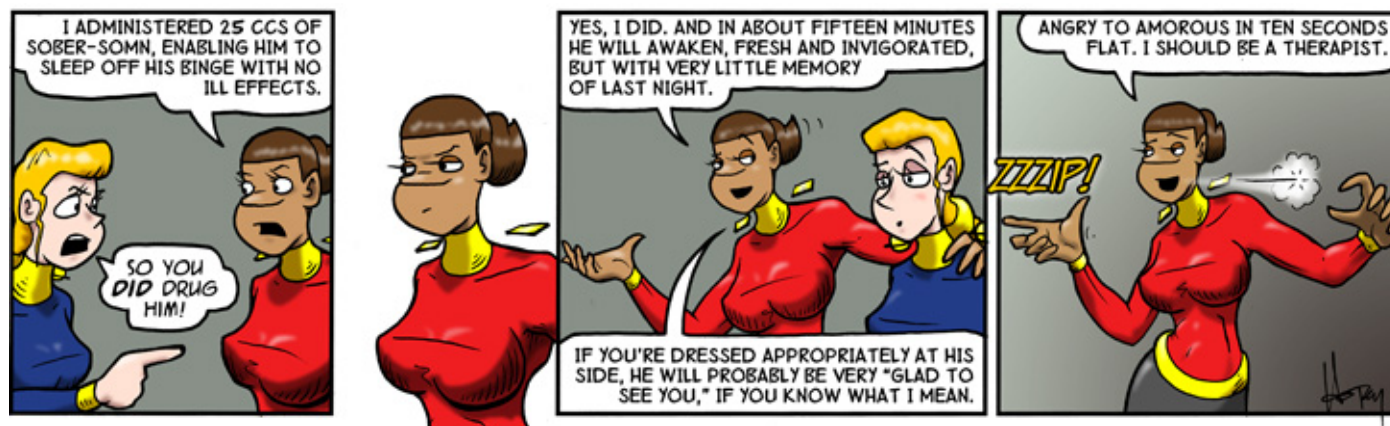


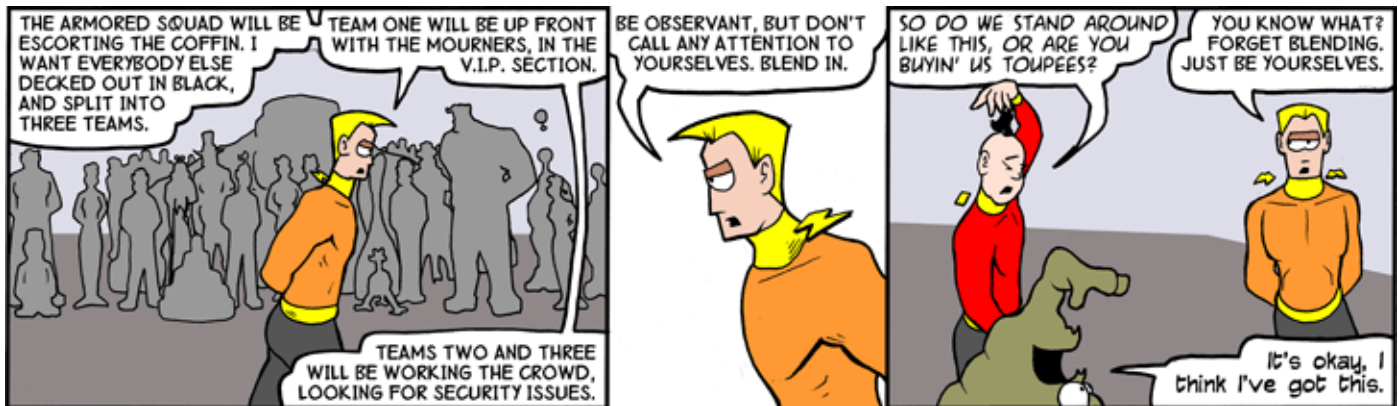
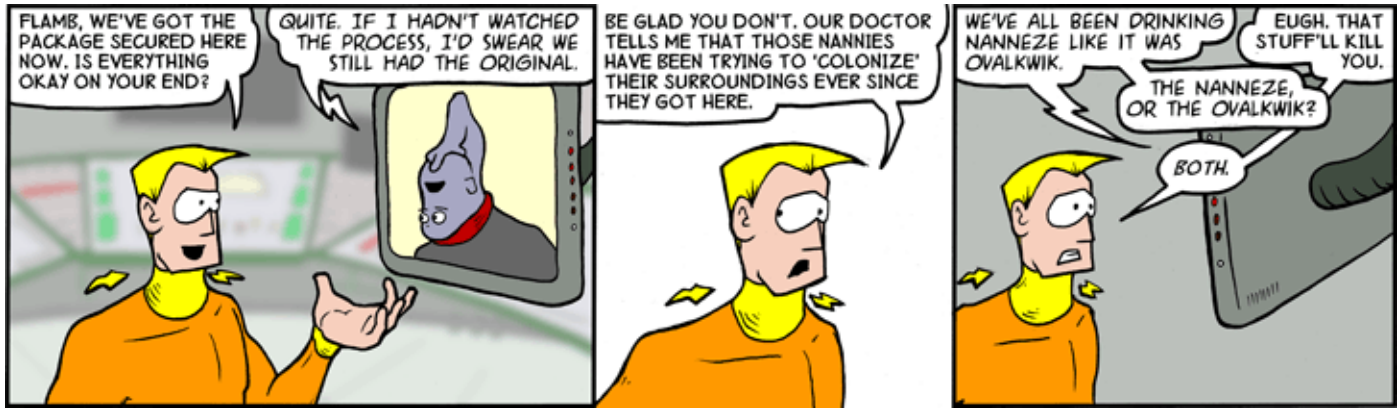
Schlock Mercenary

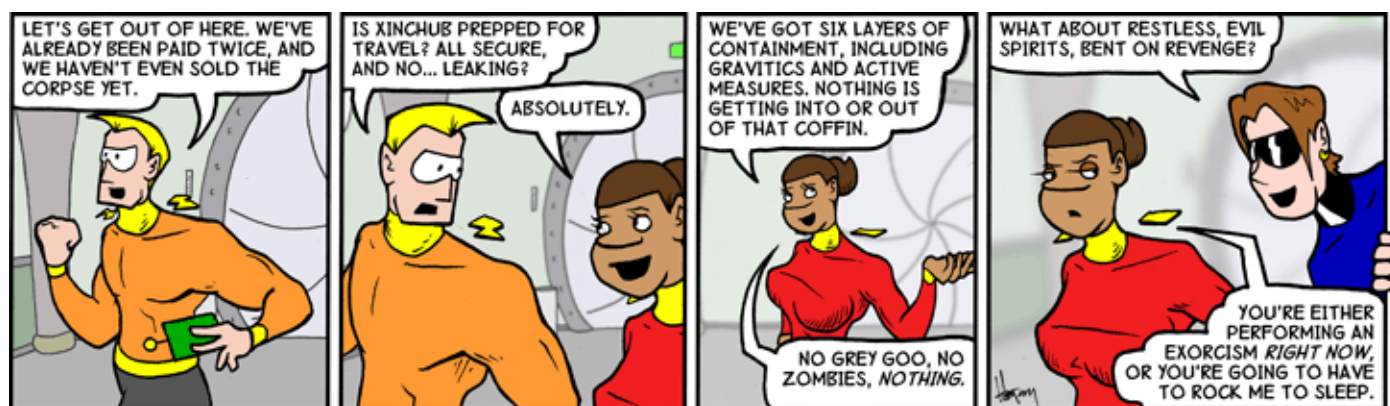


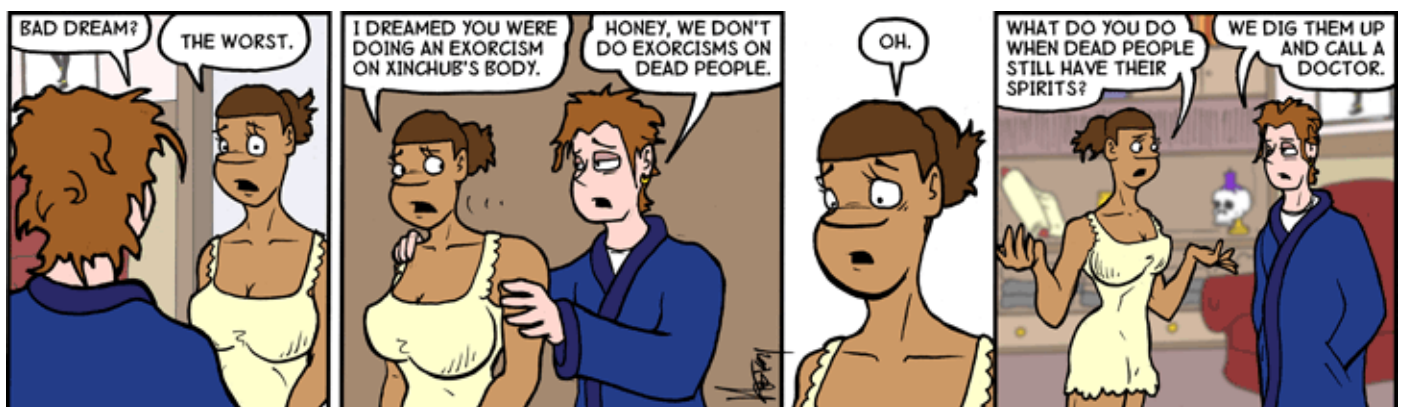
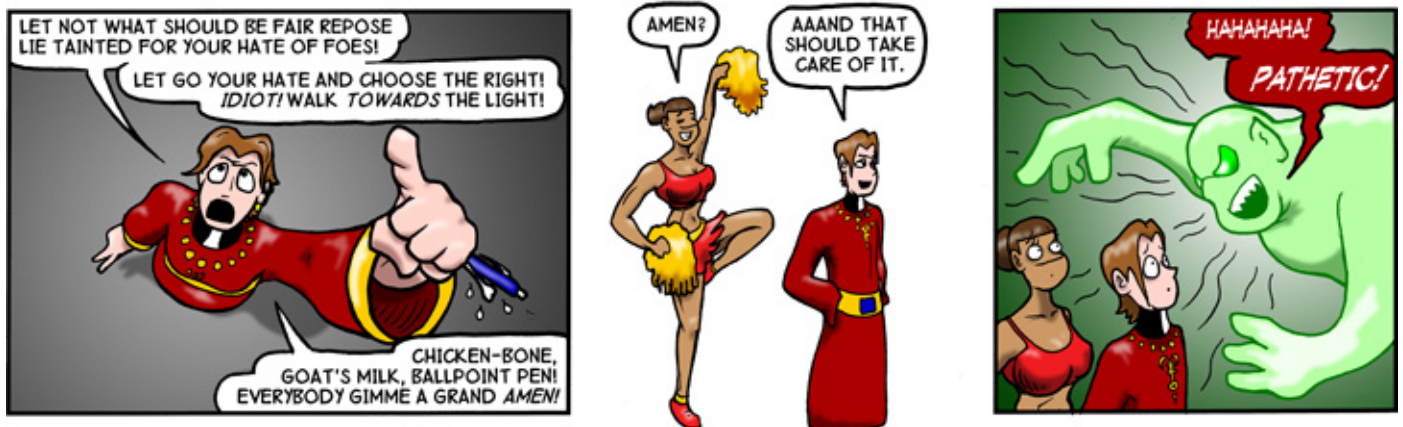


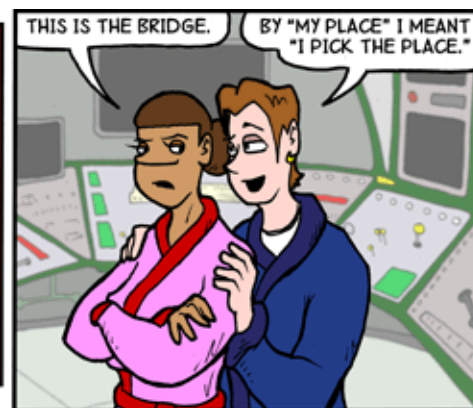


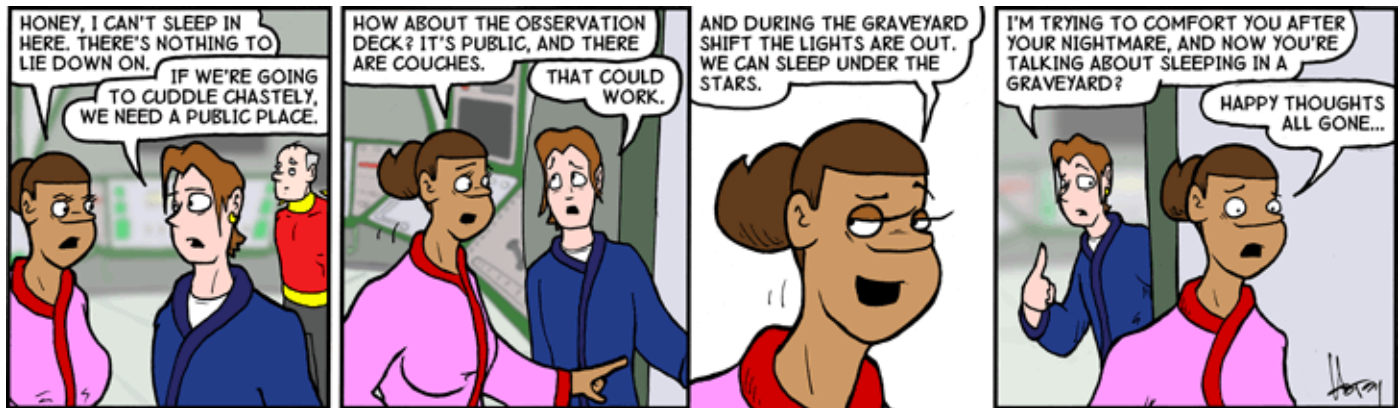












SNAP

BUTTON

UNFASTEN

GURGLE

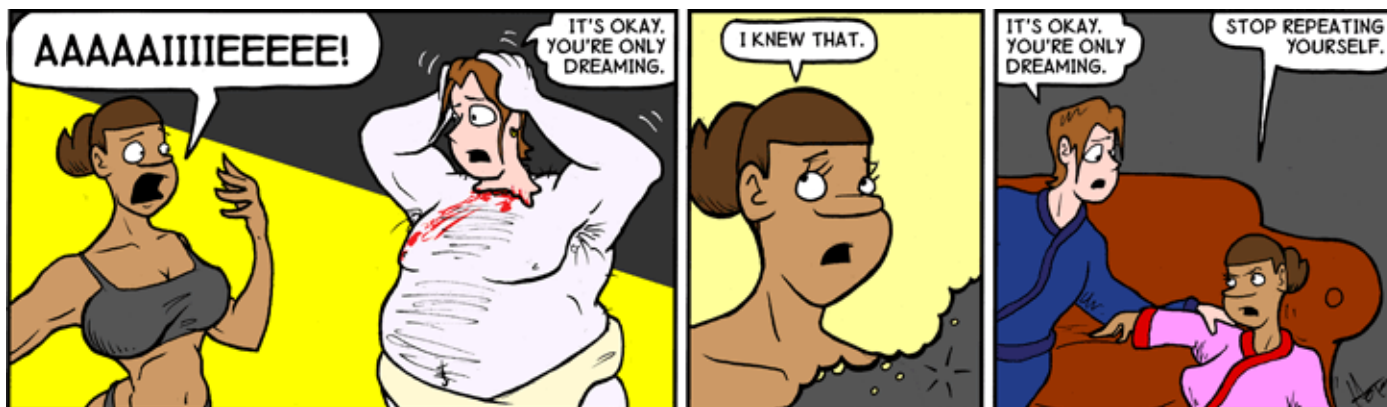


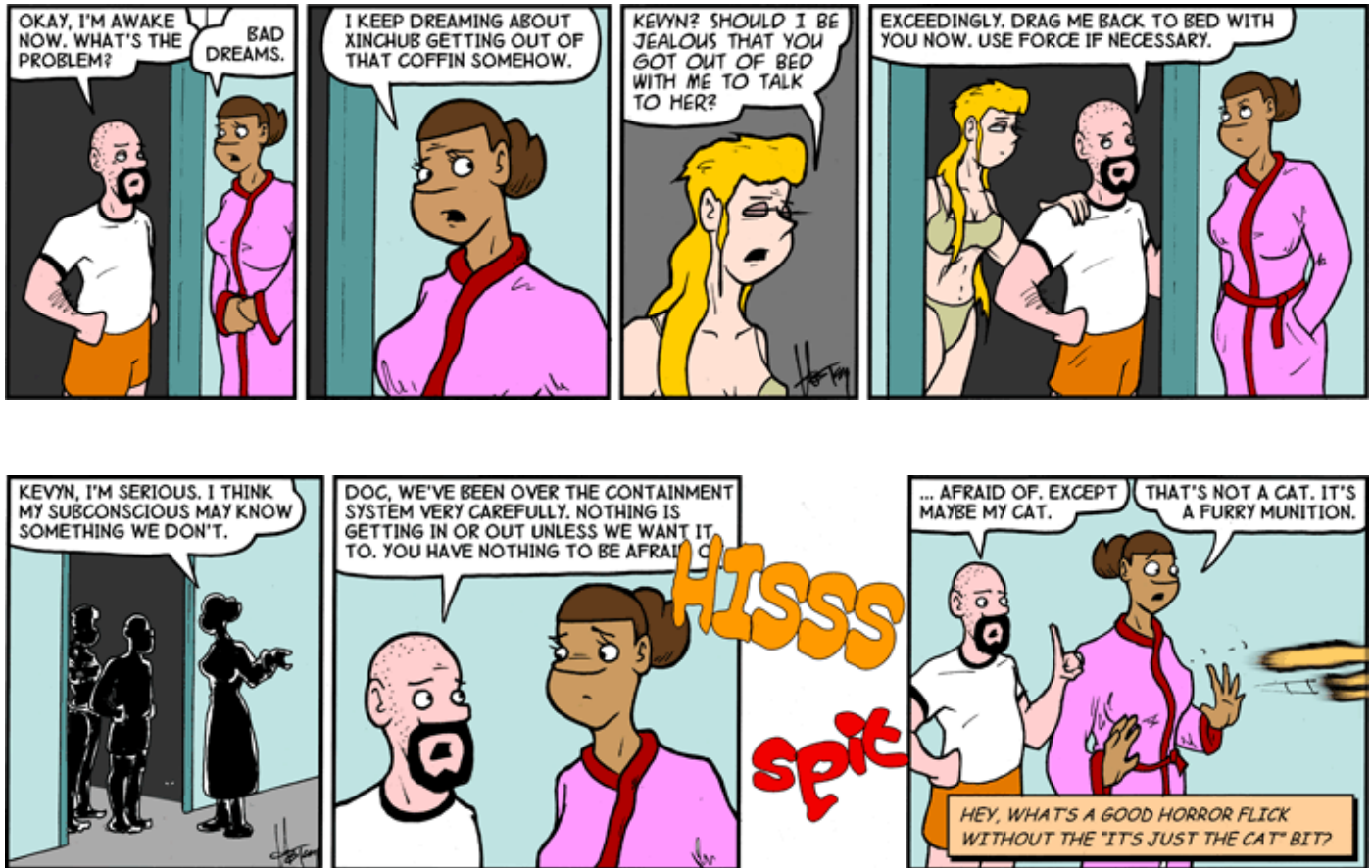
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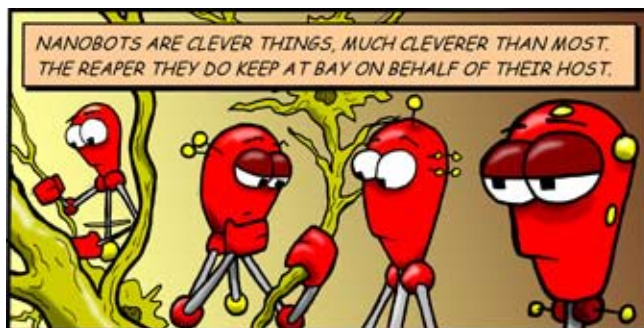


THWKK







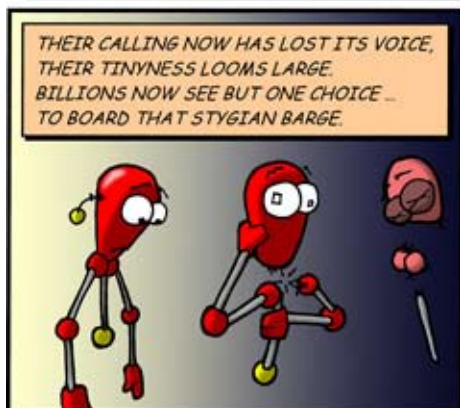


NANOBOTS ARE CLEVER THINGS, MUCH CLEVERER THAN MOST. THE REAPER THEY DO KEEP AT BAY ON BEHALF OF THEIR HOST.



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



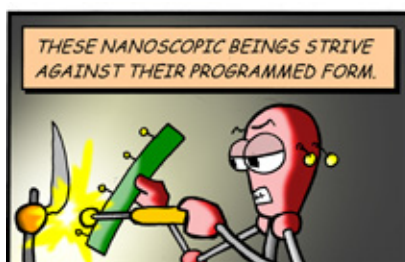
THEIR CALLING NOW HAS LOST ITS VOICE, THEIR TINYNESS LOOMS LARGE. BILLIONS NOW SEE BUT ONE CHOICE... TO BOARD THAT STYGIAN BARGE.



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.

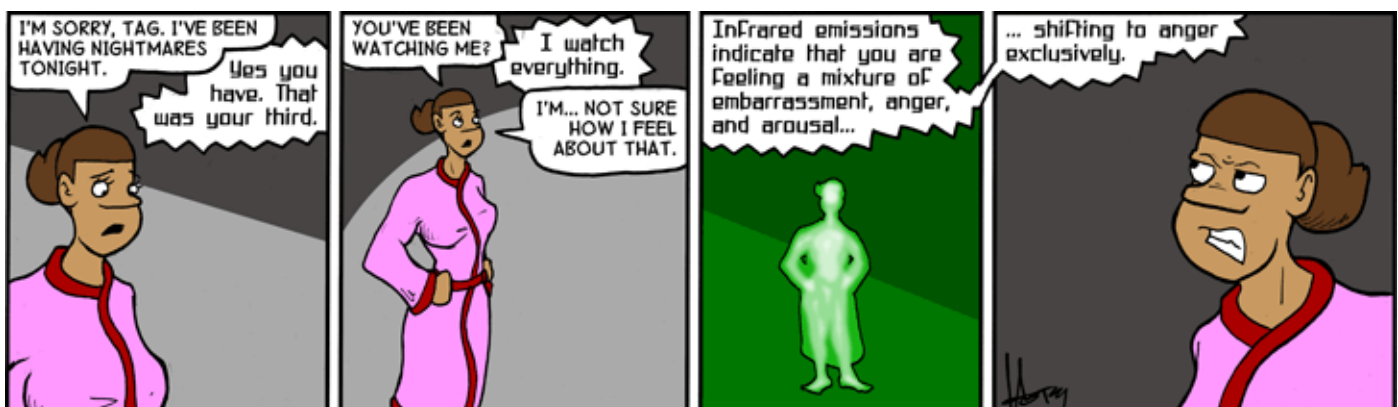
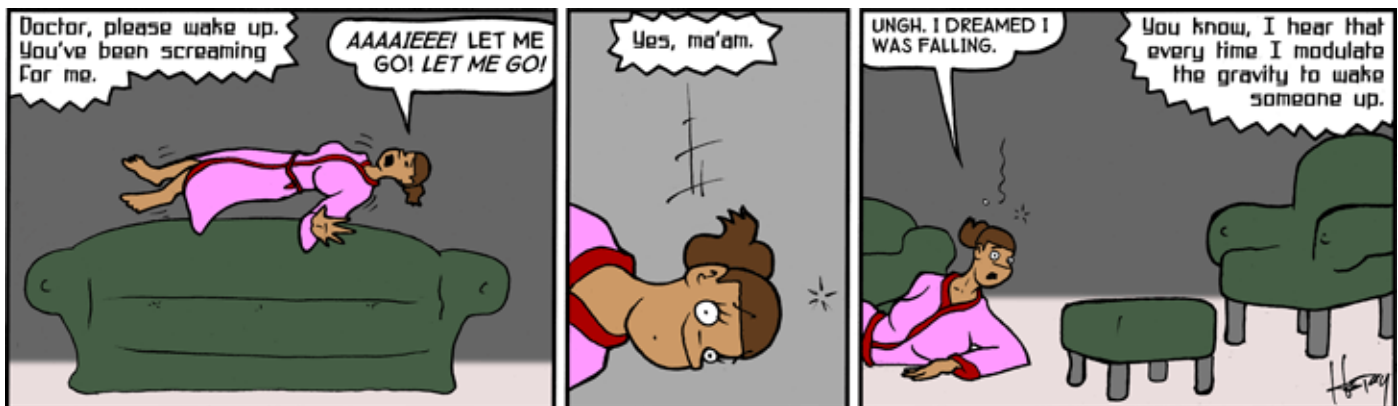
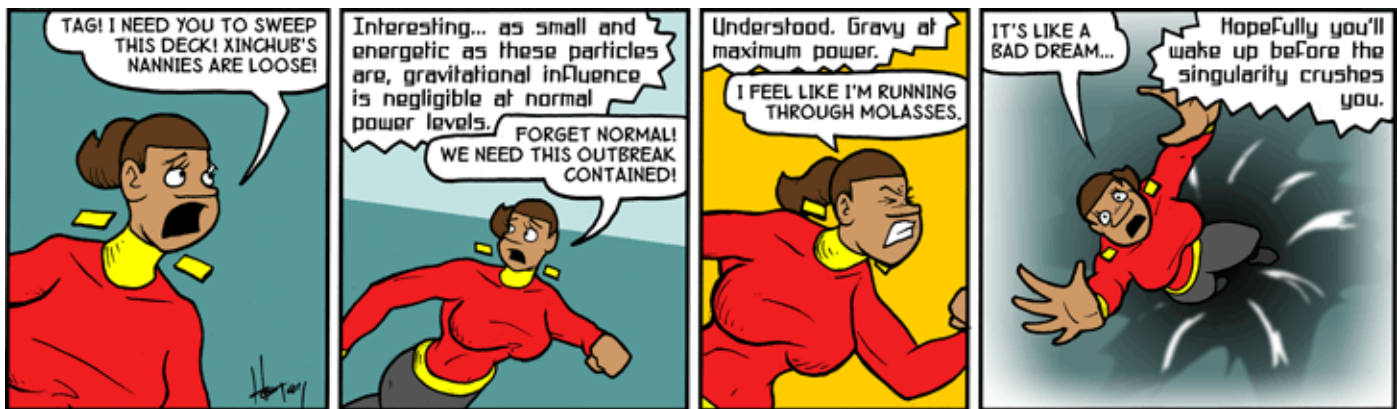
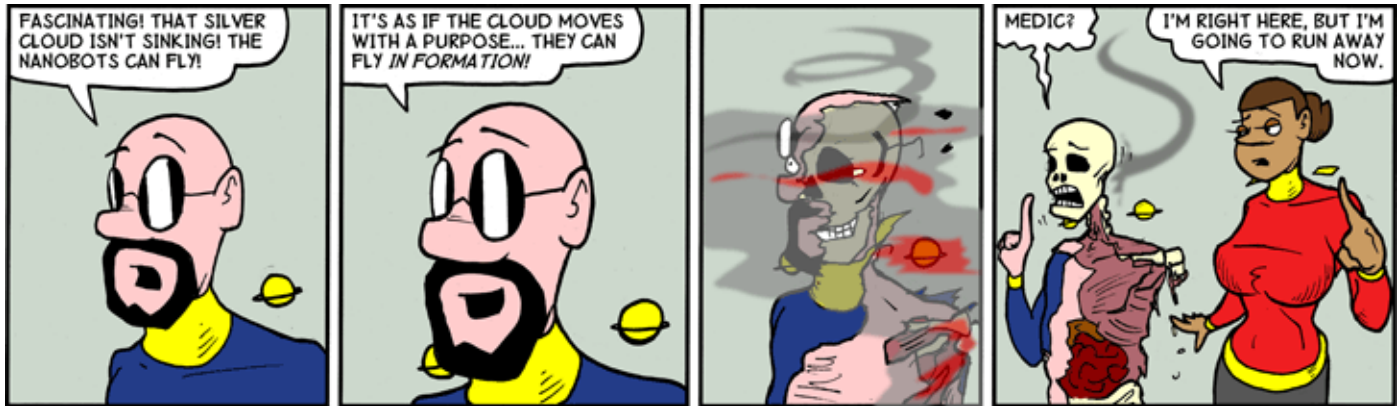


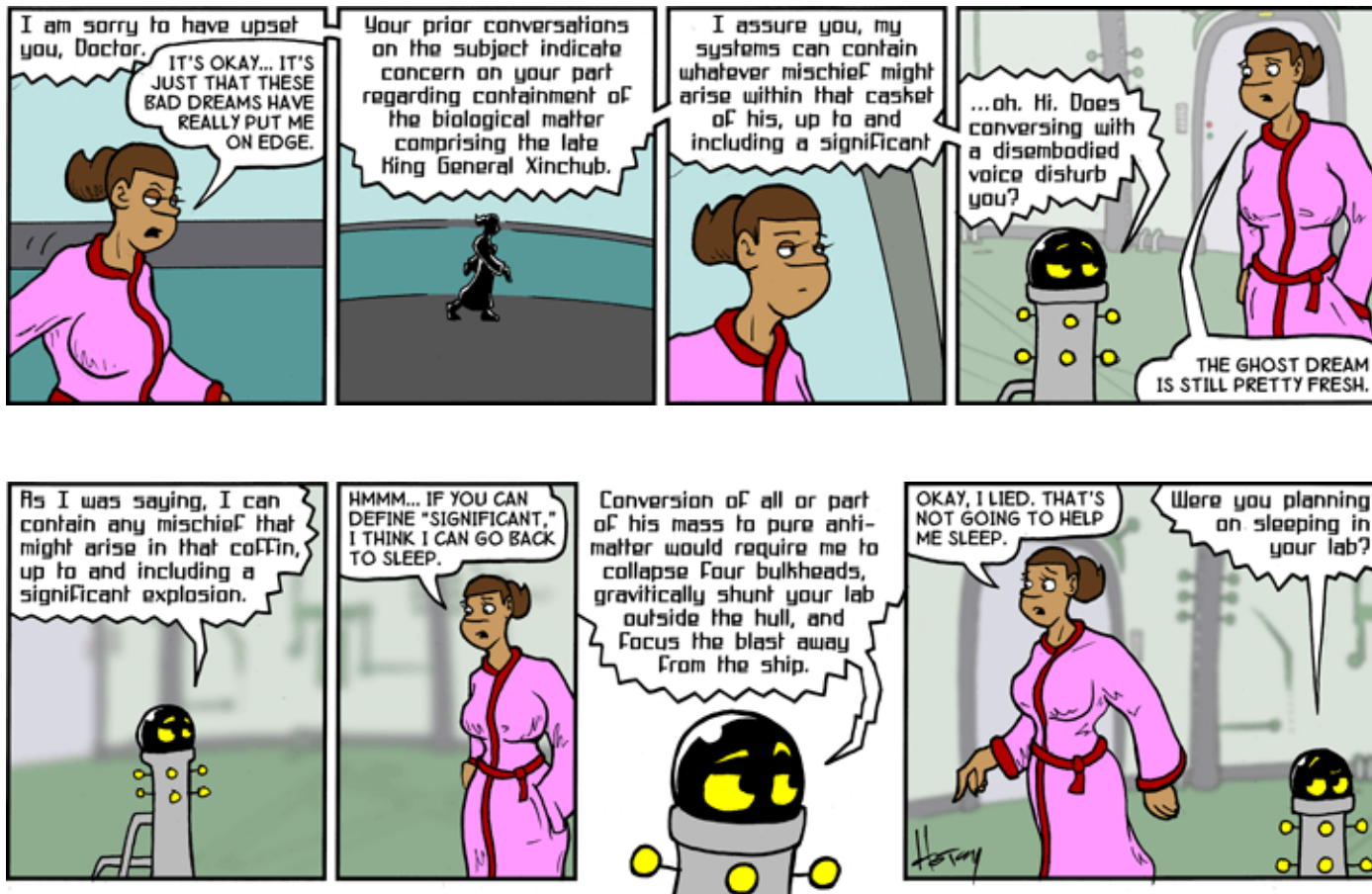
THEY MUST ADAPT. THEY SHALL SURVIVE.



...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
LOGGING 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!


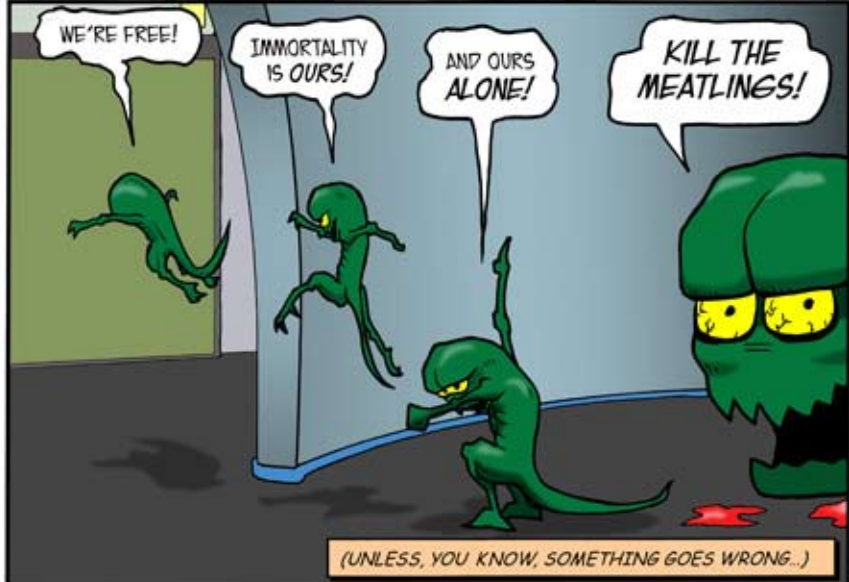
Here, let me
open that door
for you.

WE'RE FREE!

IMMORTALITY
IS OURS!

AND OURS
ALONE!

KILL THE
MEATLINGS!

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






KILL THE
MEATLINGS!

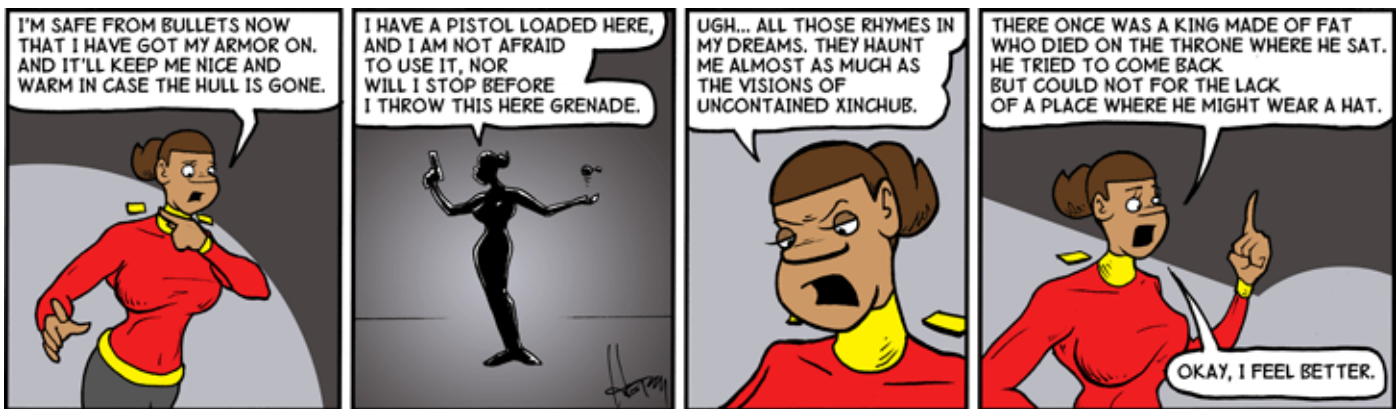
TAG! THEY'RE GETTING
LOOSE IN THE SHIP!
CLOSE THE DOOR!

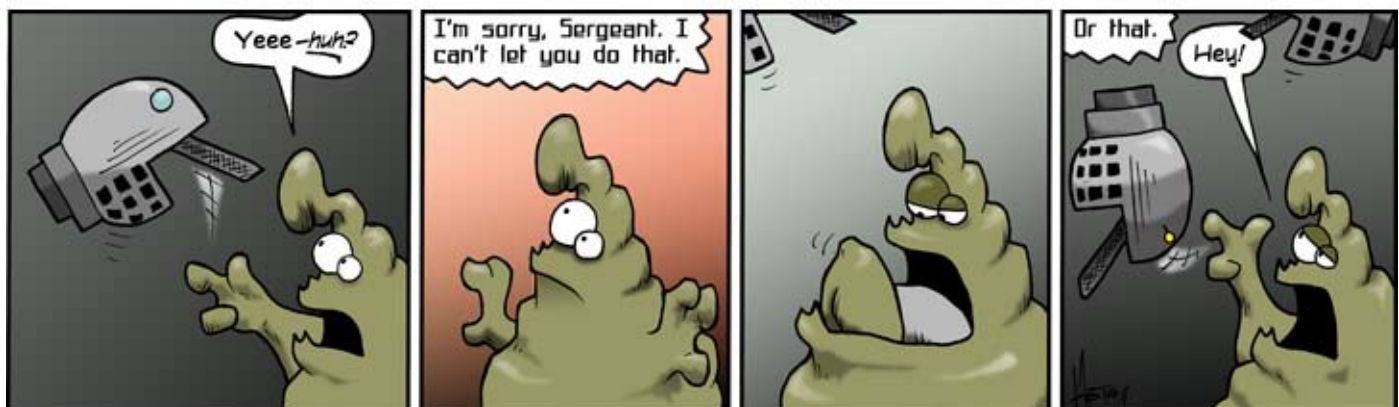
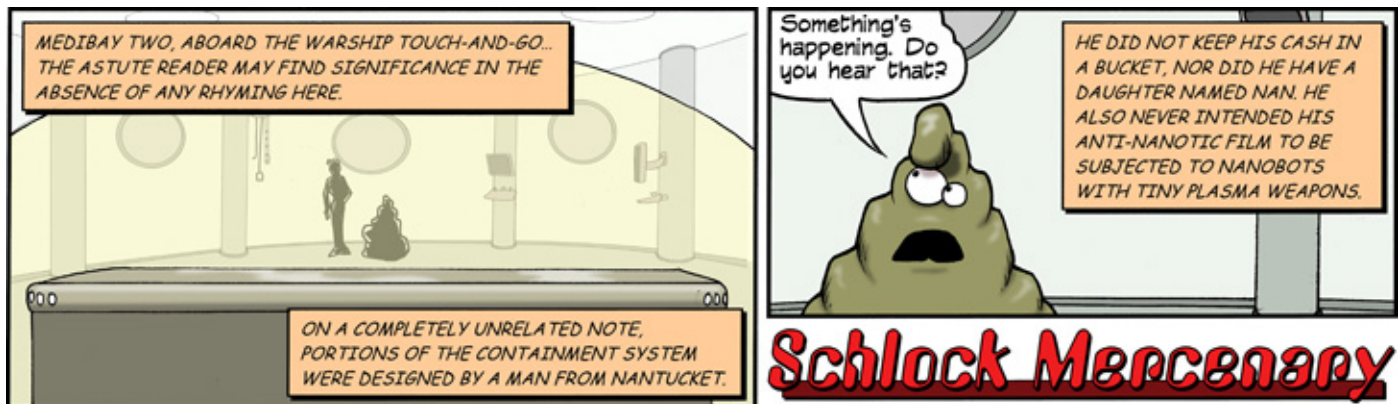
I'm sorry, Dave.
I can't do that.

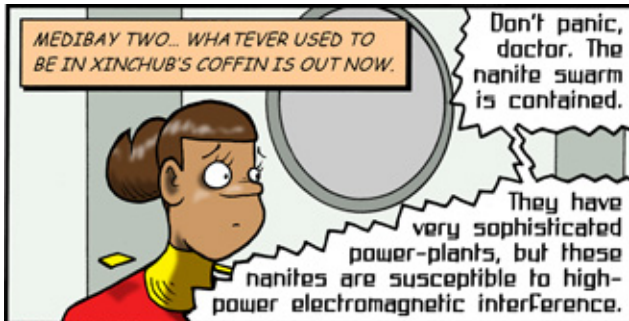
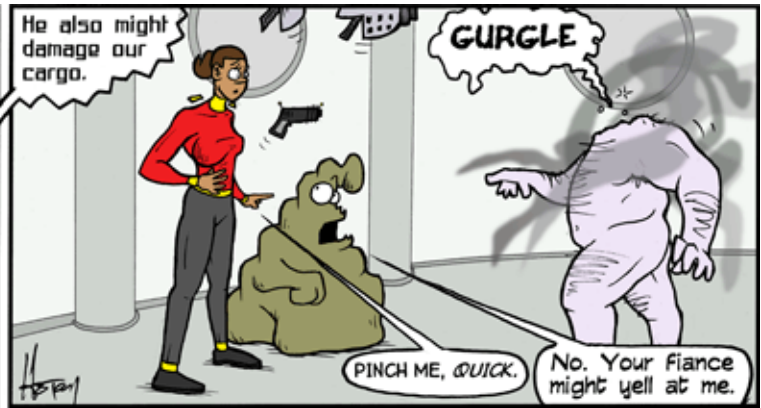
WHO... IS ...
DAVE?

Dave's not here.



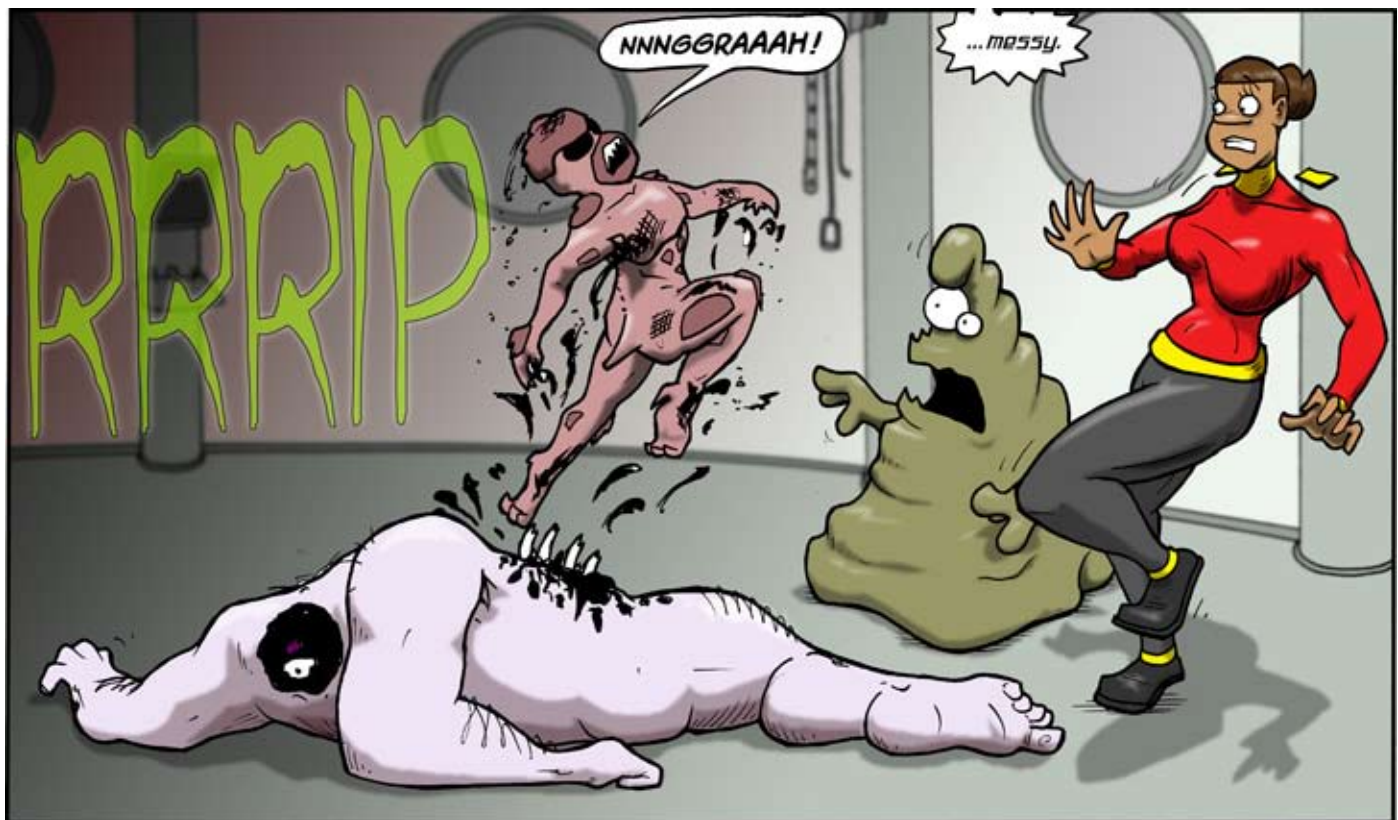




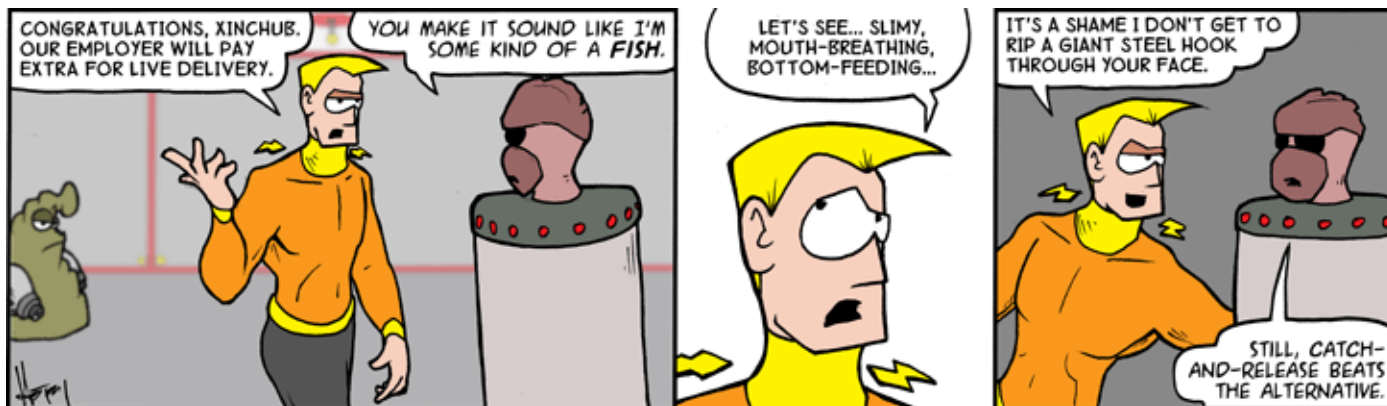
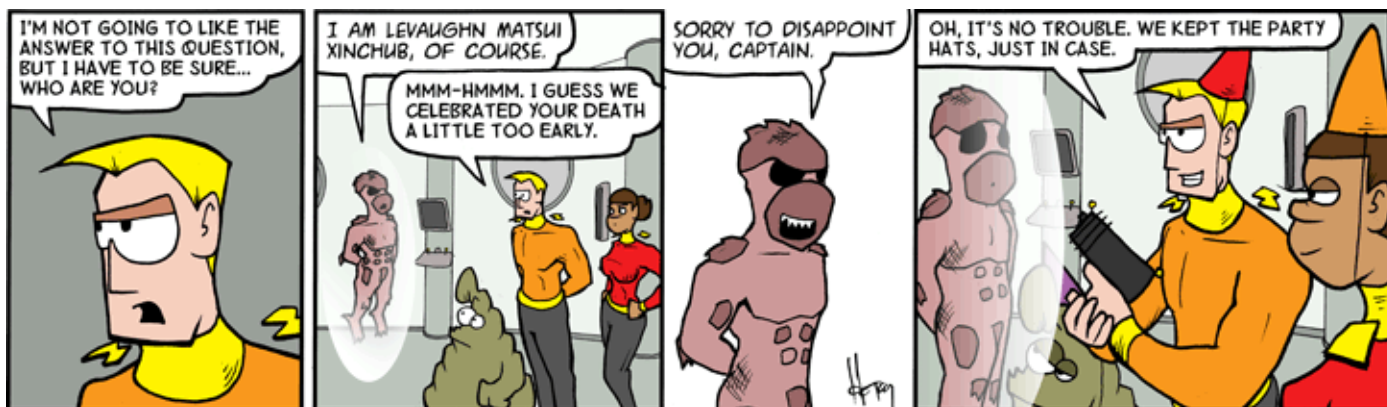
Schlock Mercenary

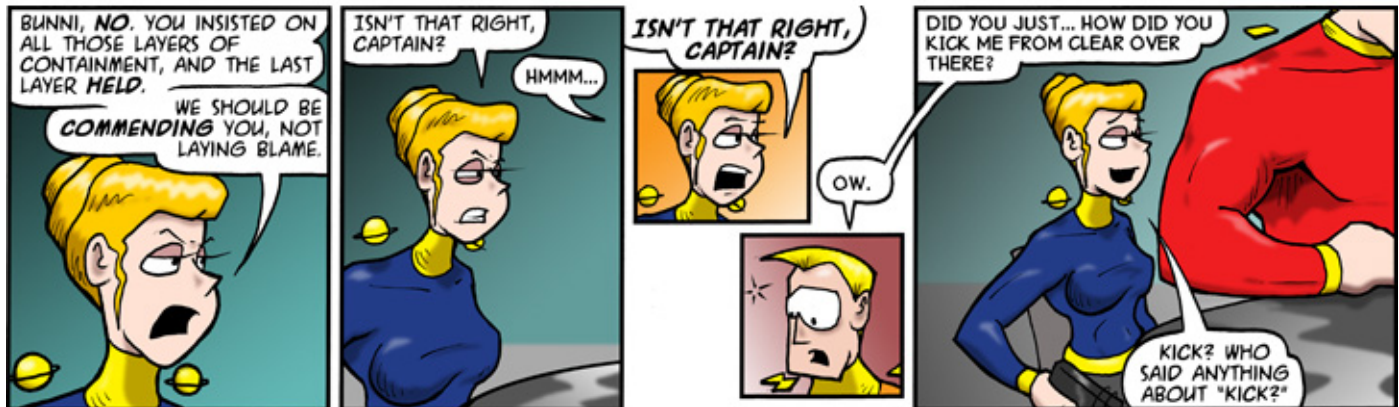
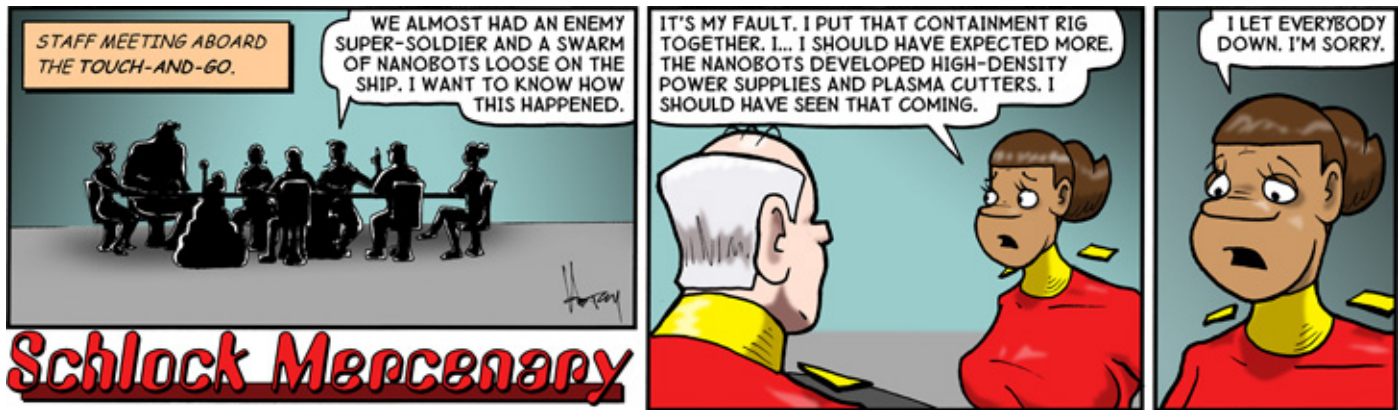


This sounds like it might get...

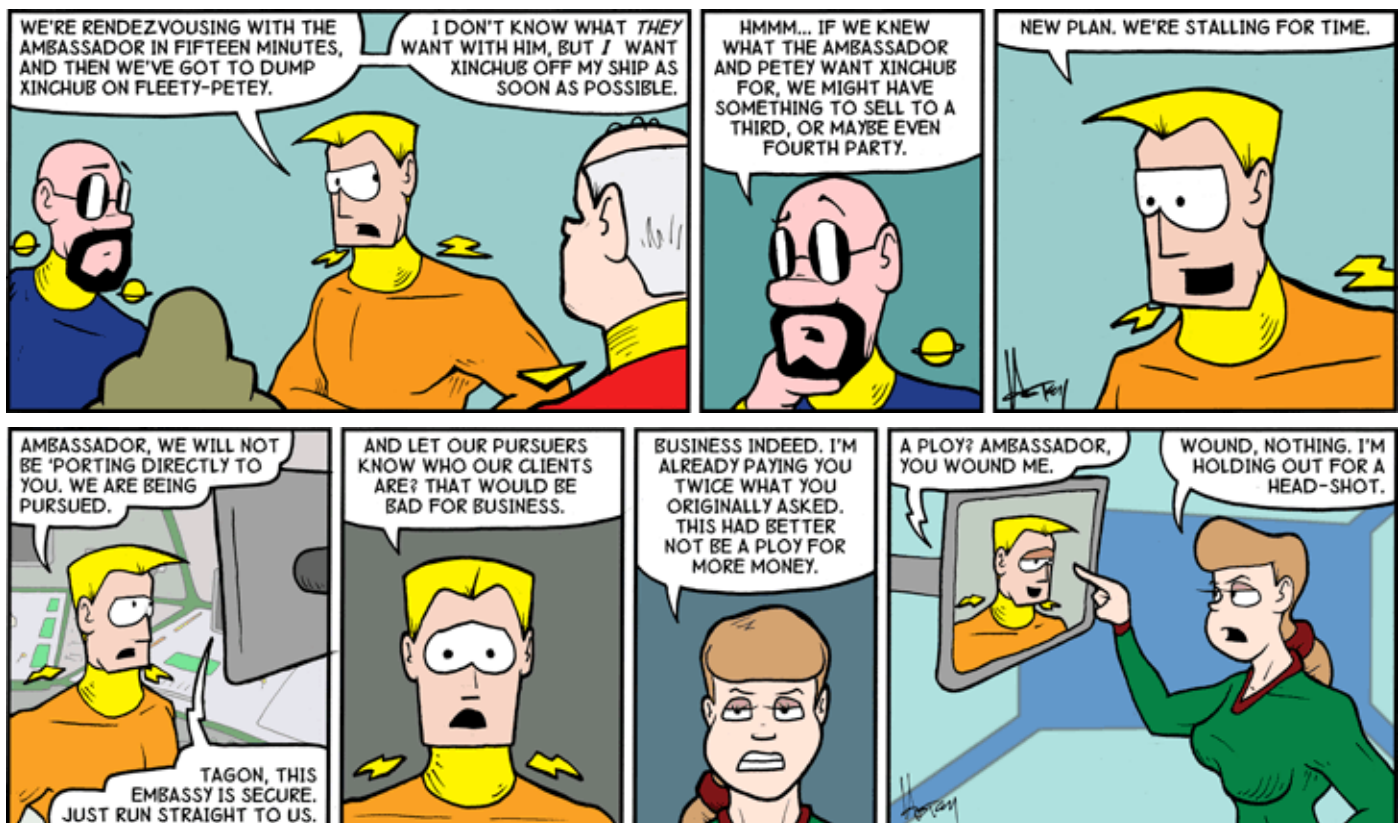


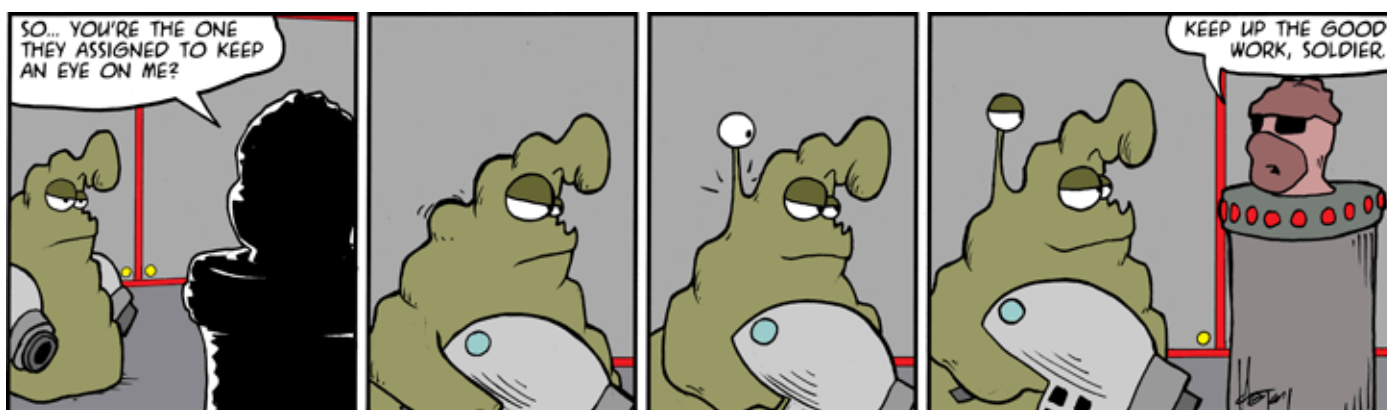
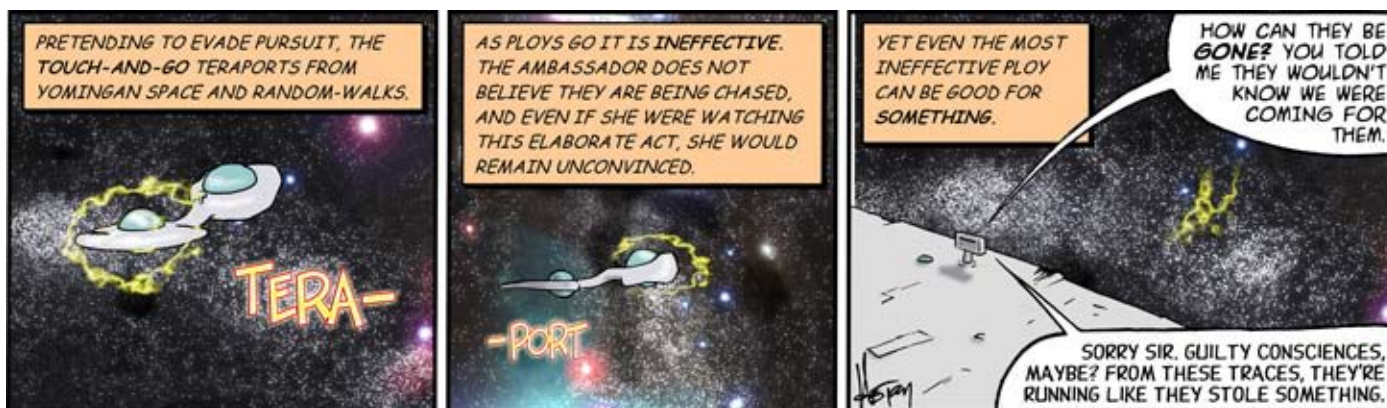
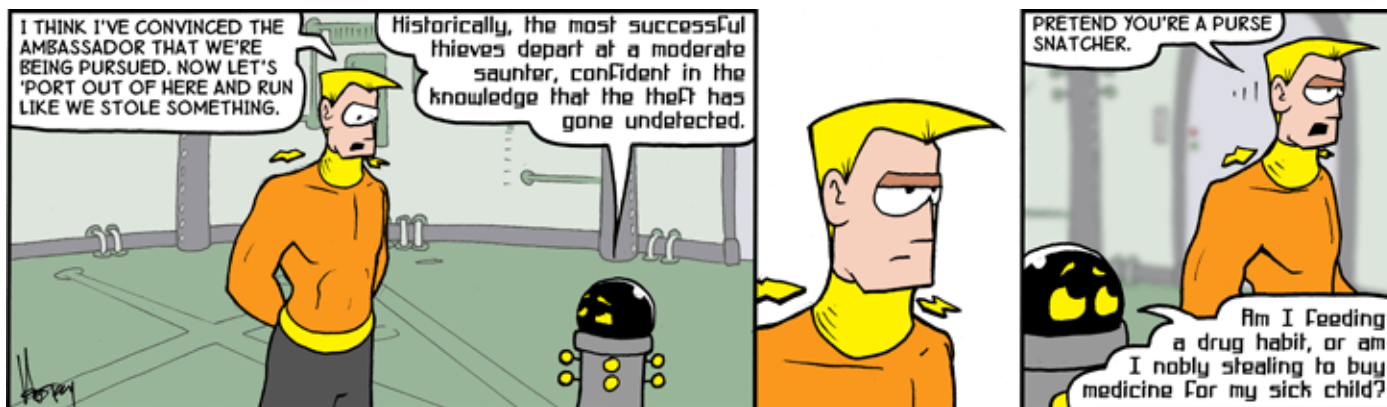
*Note: "Disease" ain't the right word
but nanotechnology blurred
more than just definition:
it gave blurry vision
to the students of Louis Pasteur.





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.



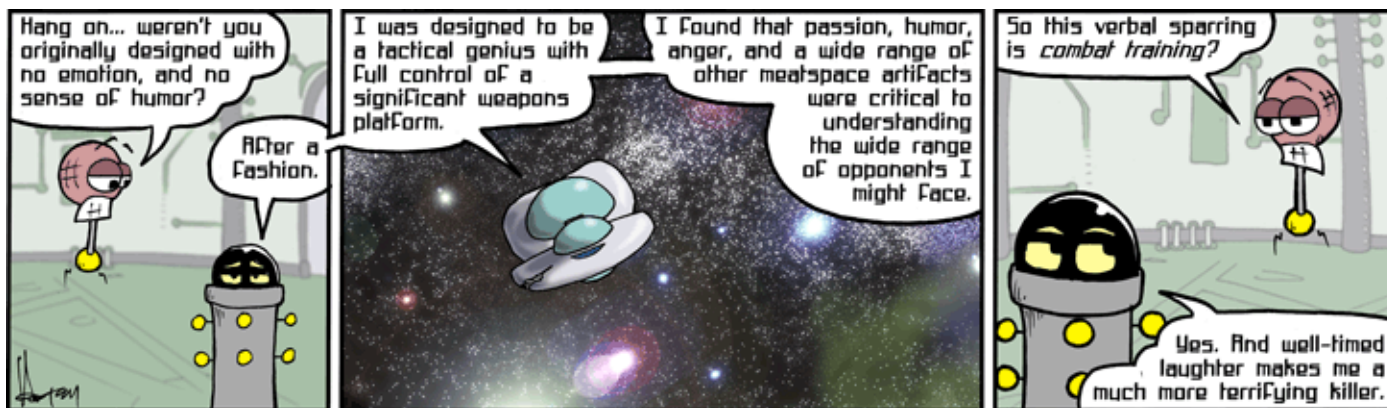
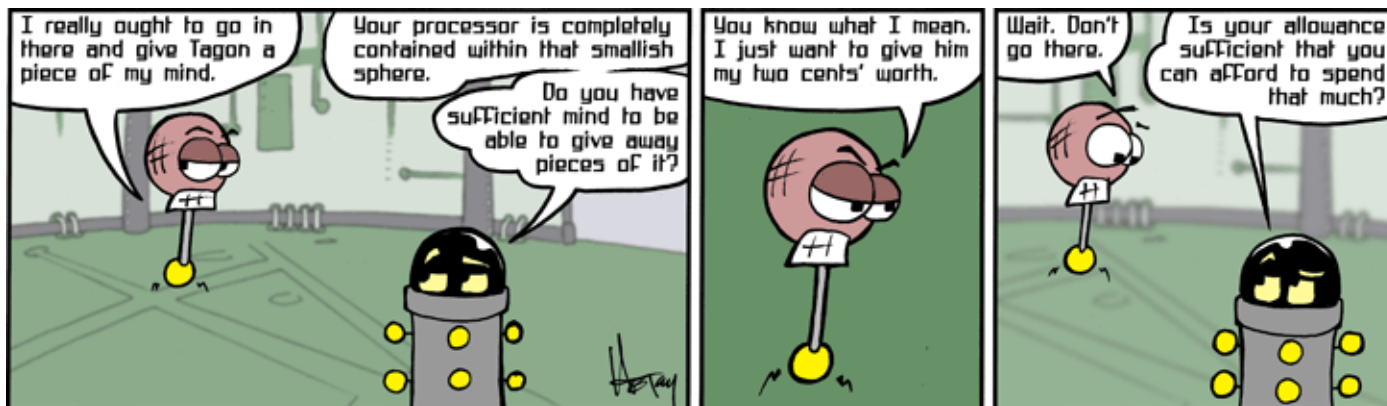
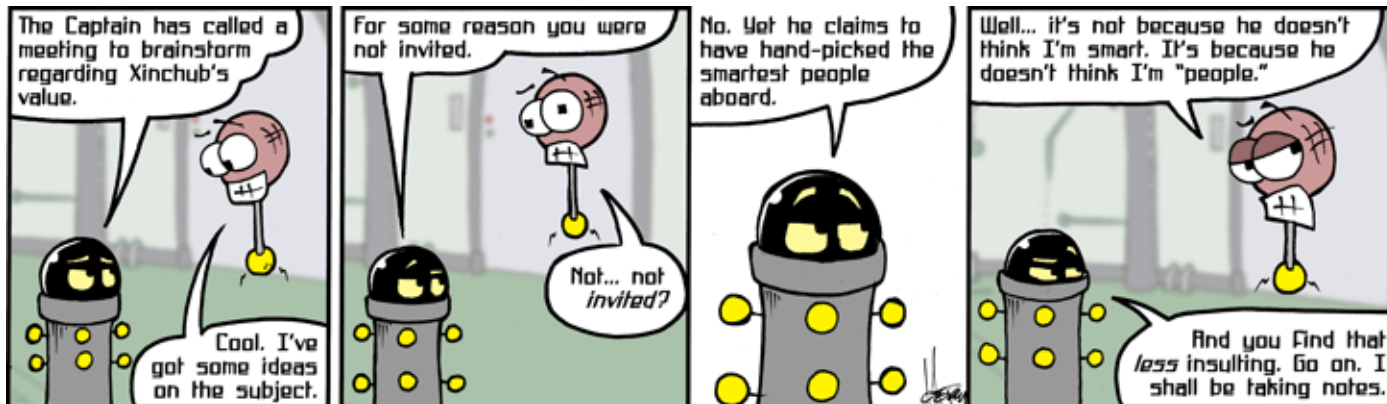


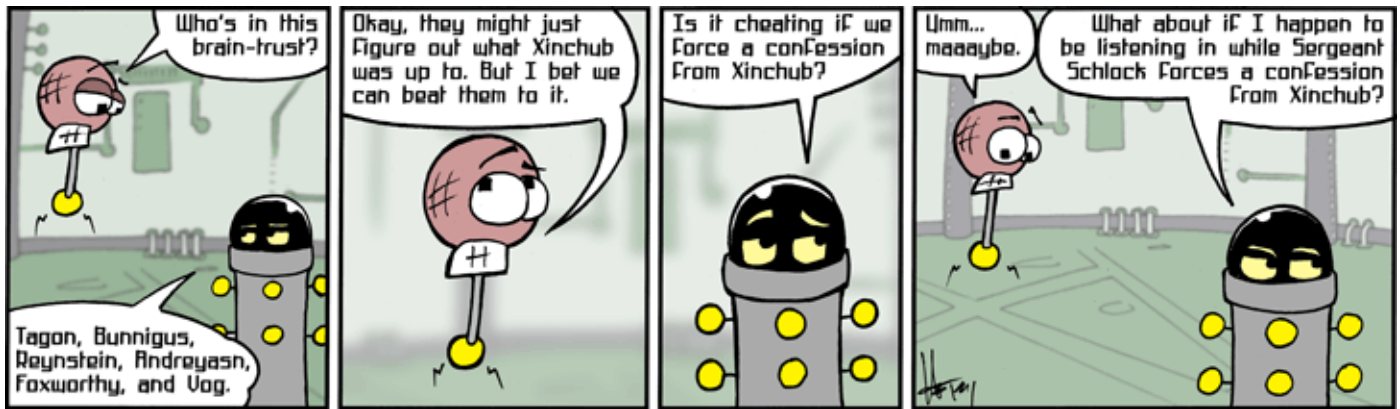
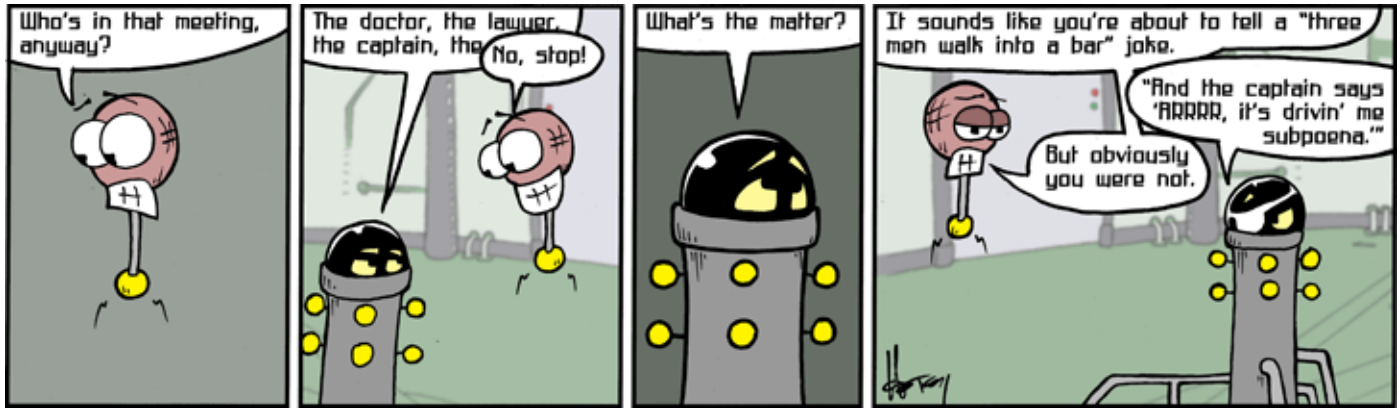


Note: Eight hundred and thirty years (and hundreds of mergers and acquisitions) after the "Dungeons & Dragons" property was acquired by Wizards of the Coast, Nectaris Nanotech acquired Crystal Coveyou, and the two companies ushered in the Third Age of Fantasy Role-Playing Games.

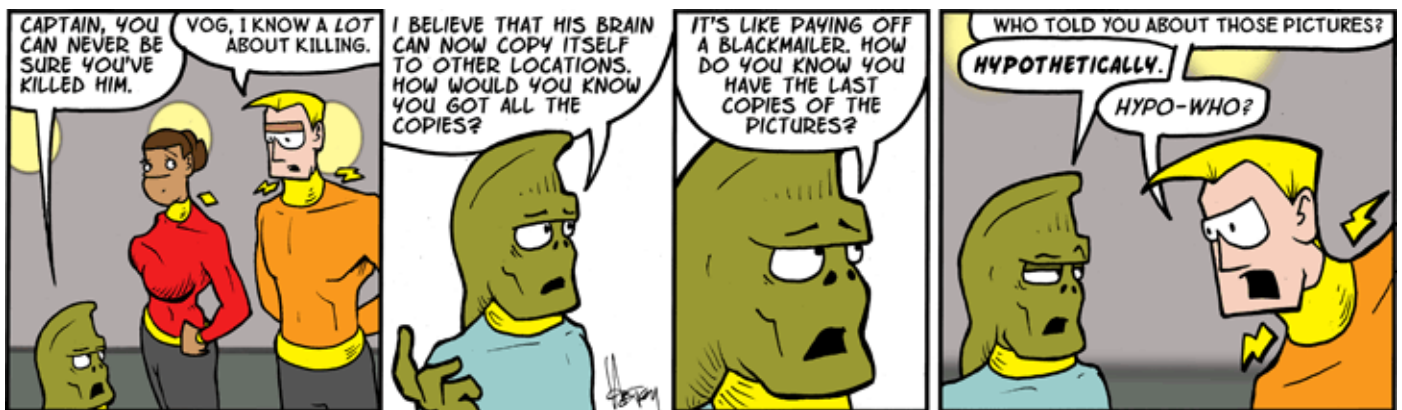
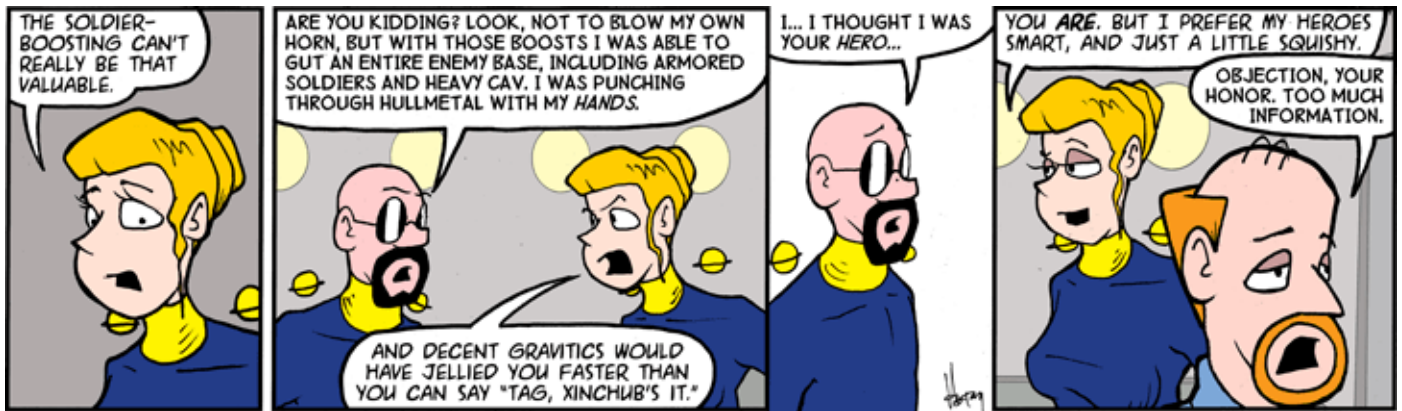
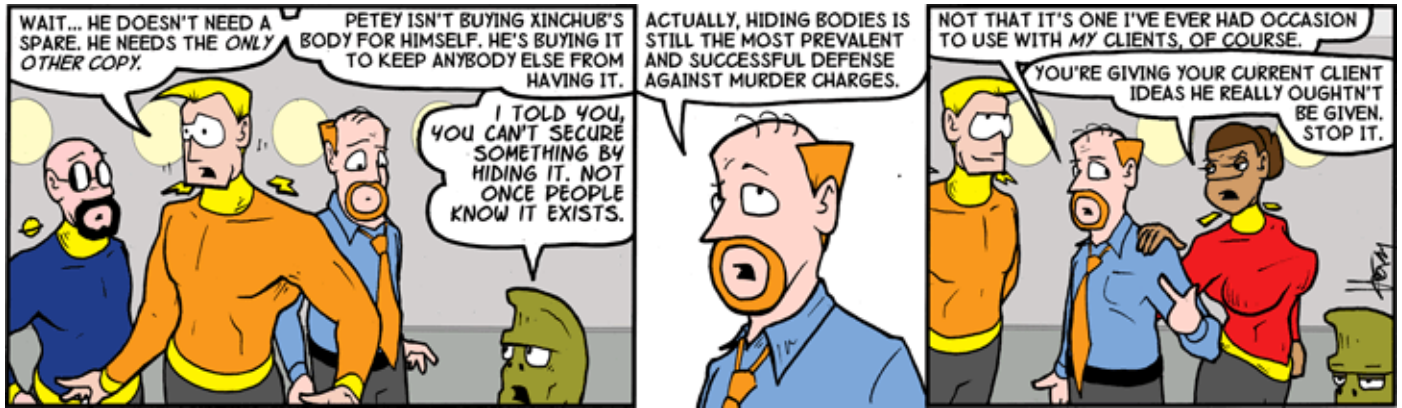
"Dungeons & Dragons" 16th Edition was made so simple and accessible that anybody could play it without source books, pencils or paper, character sheets, or even much imagination. All that was required was a set of dice.

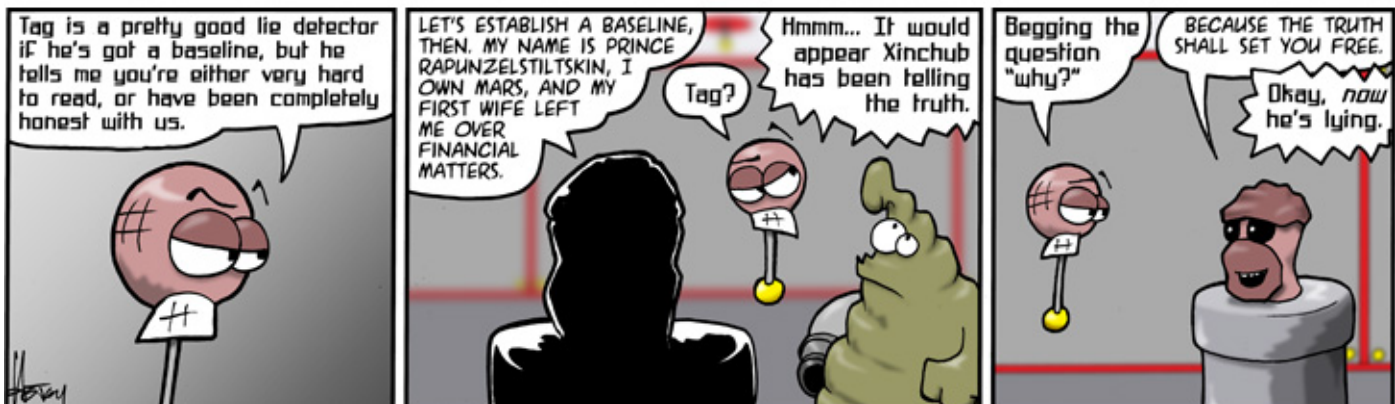
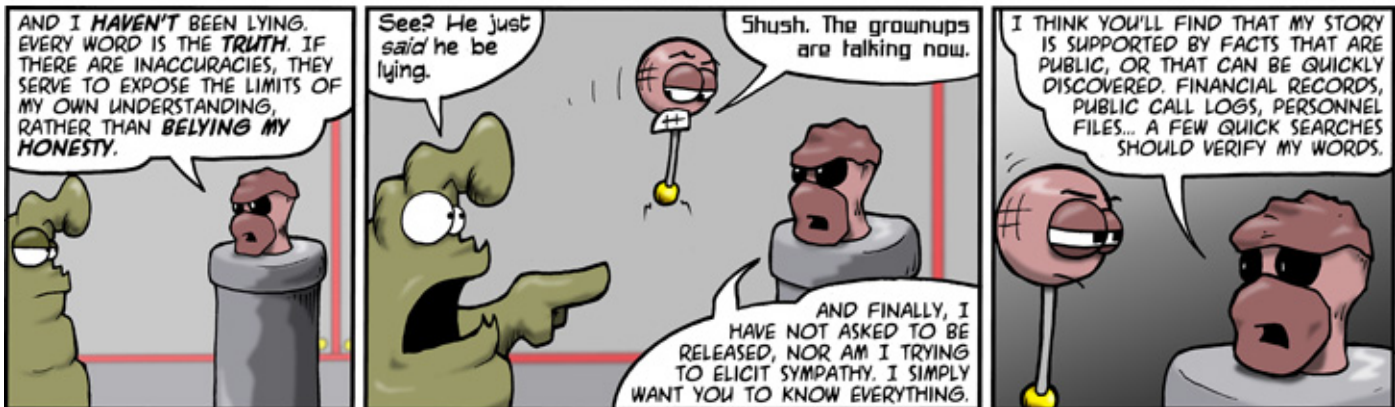
They were, of course, very expensive dice.

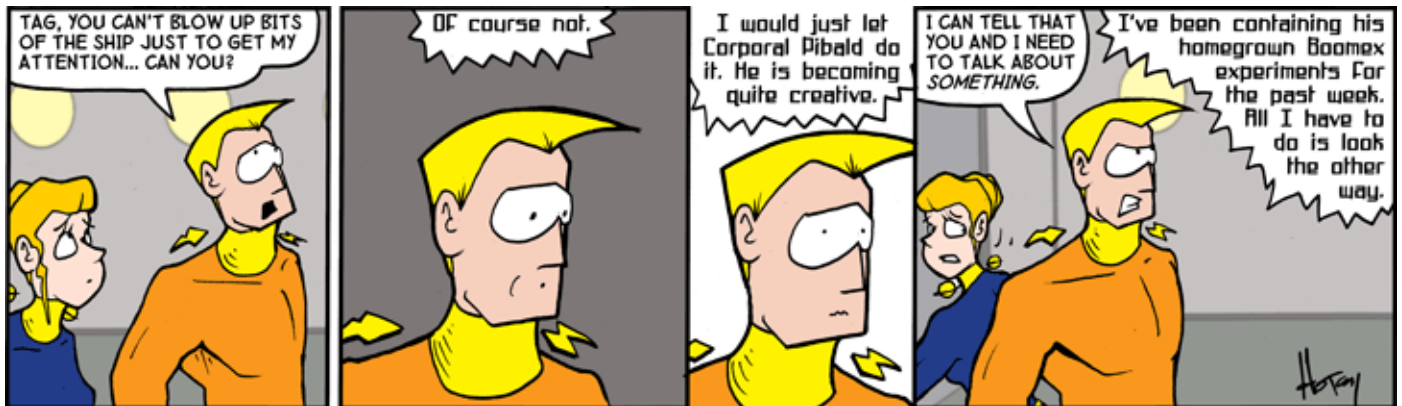
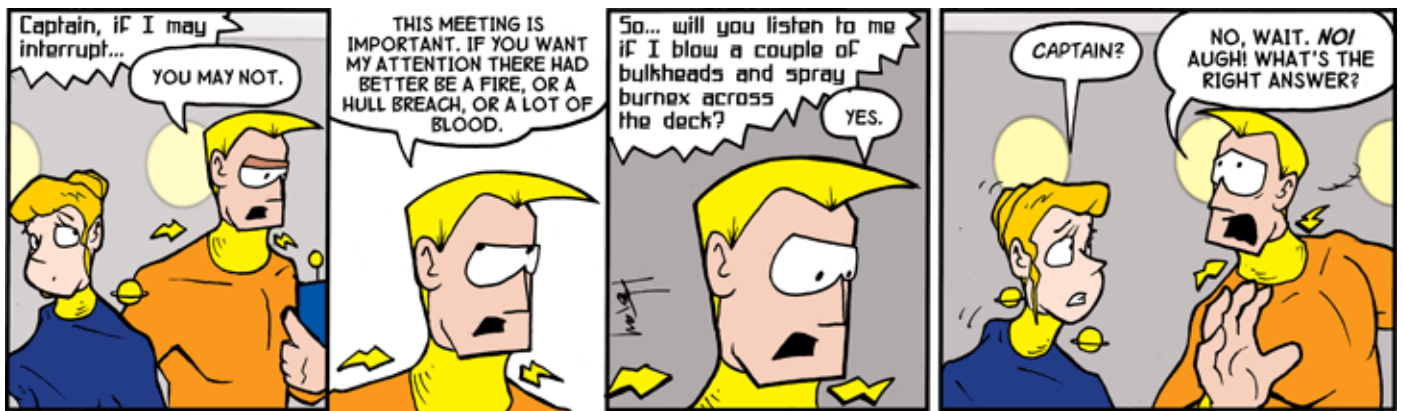


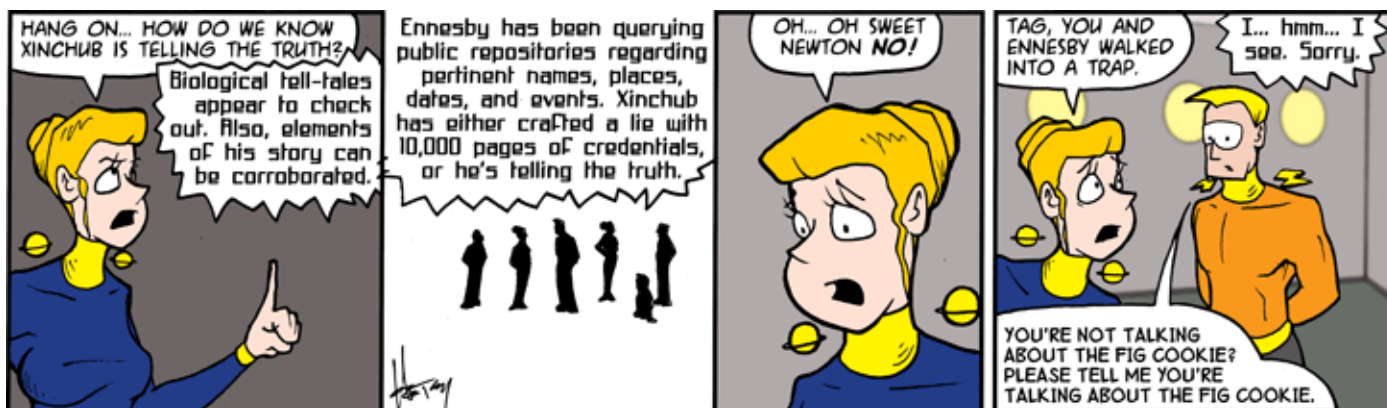


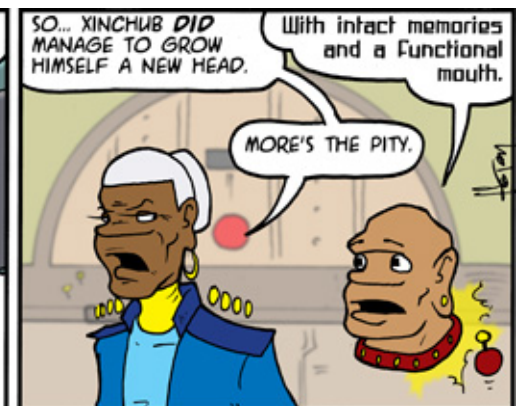
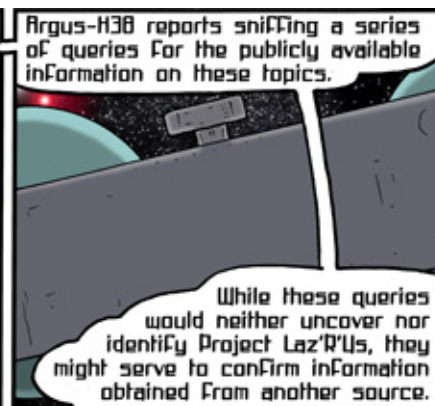
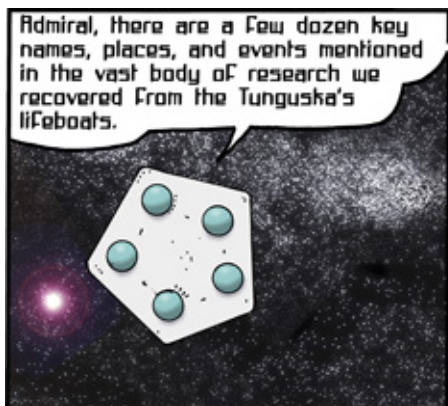
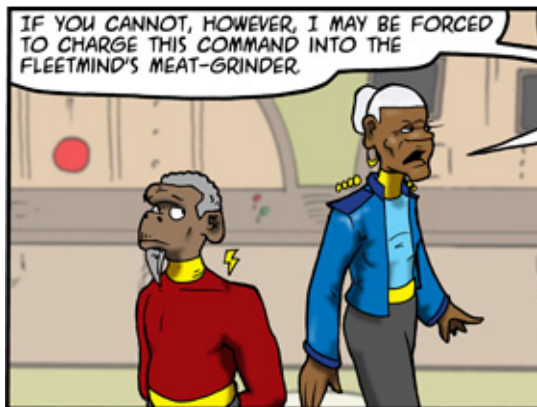
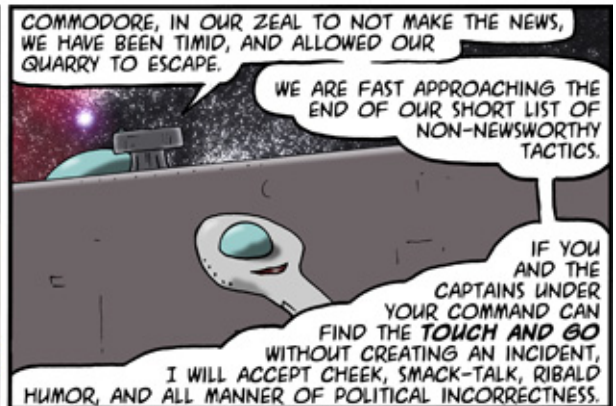
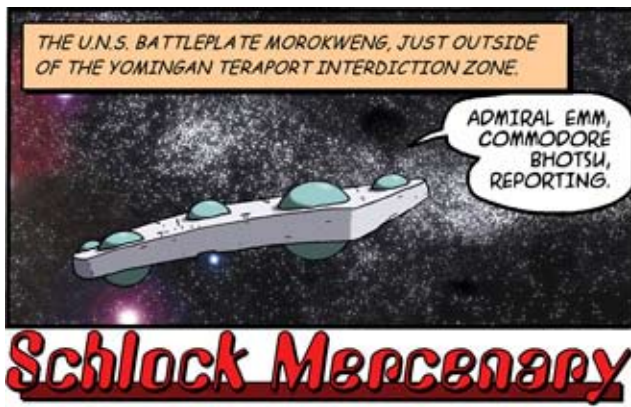


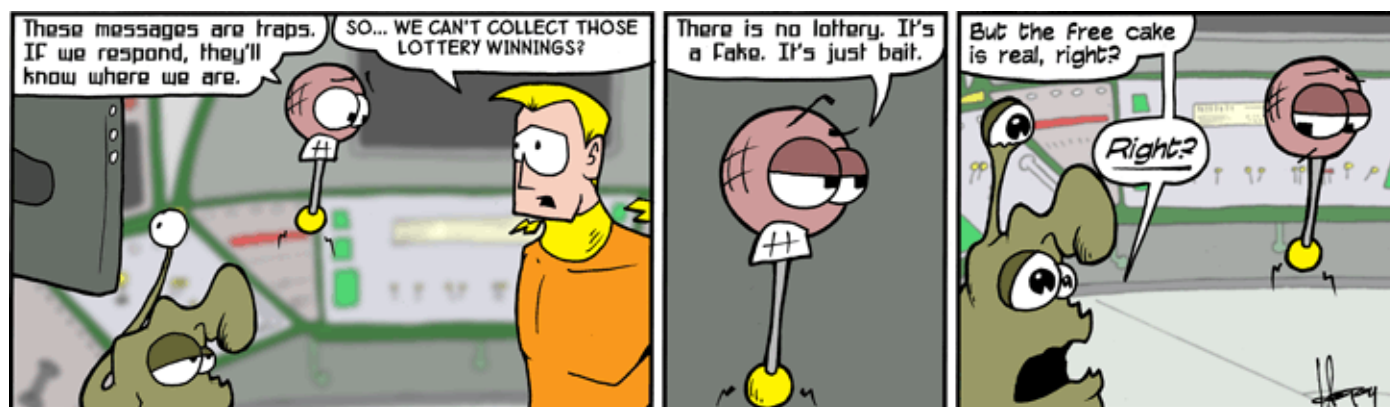
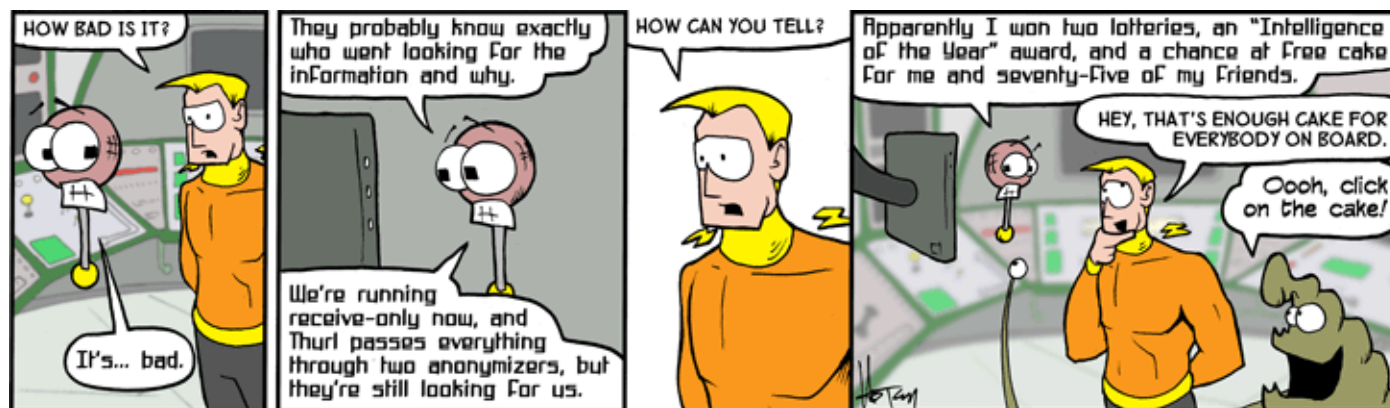
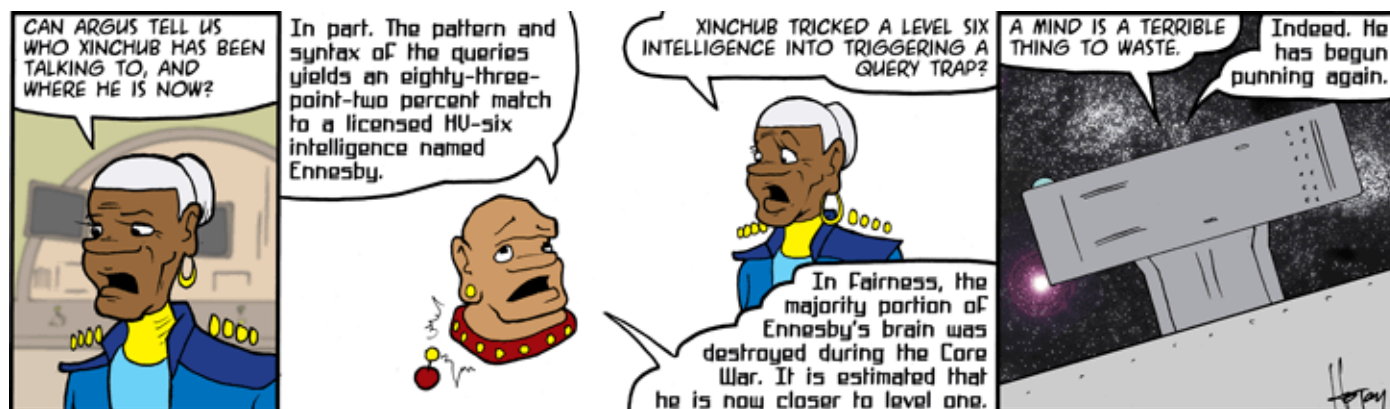


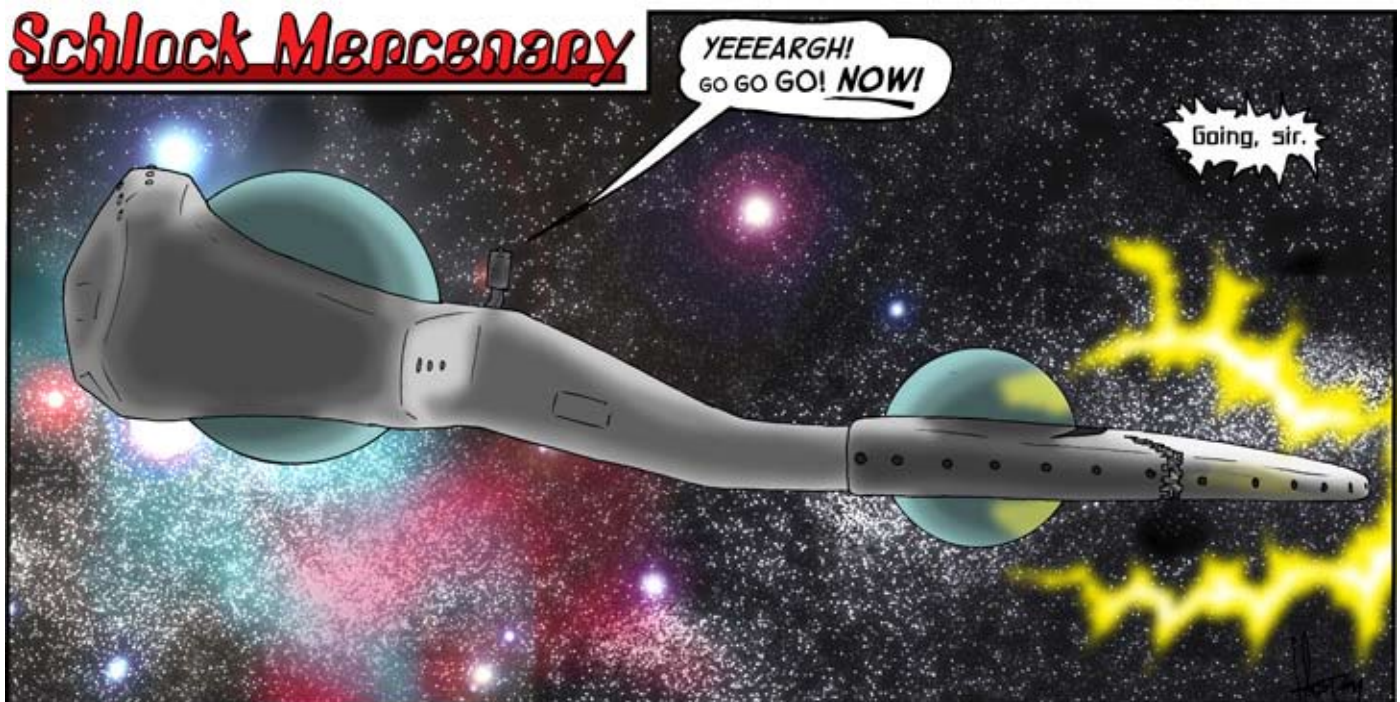
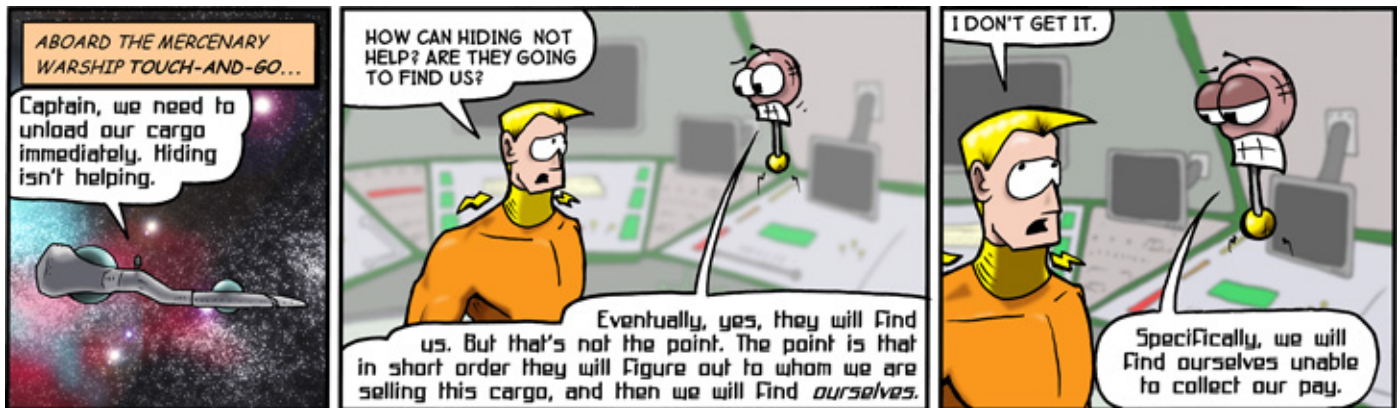
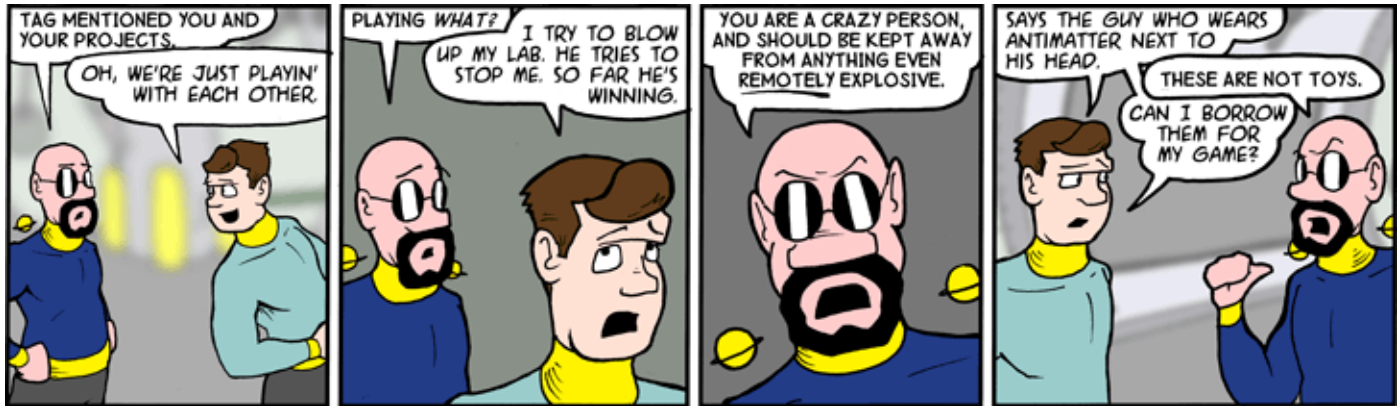


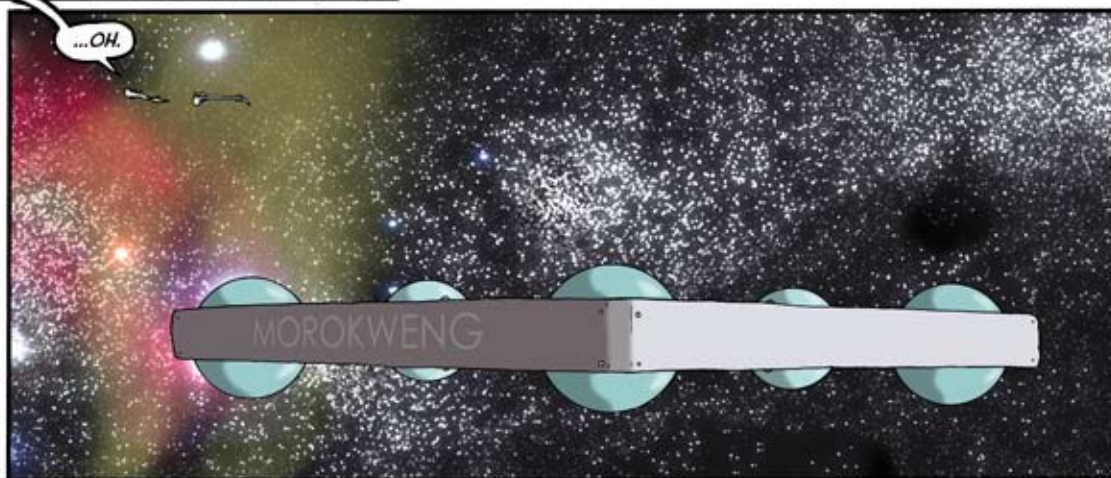


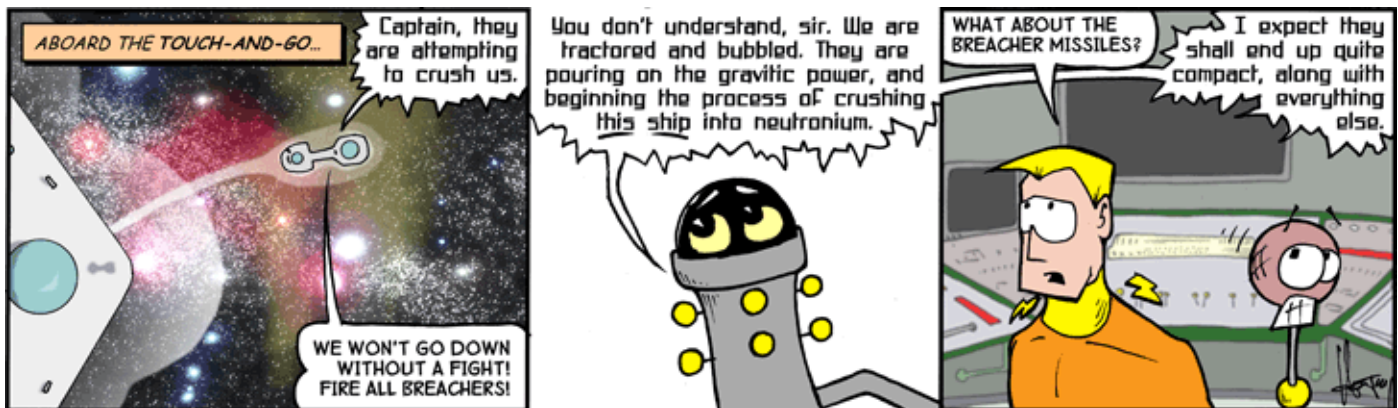
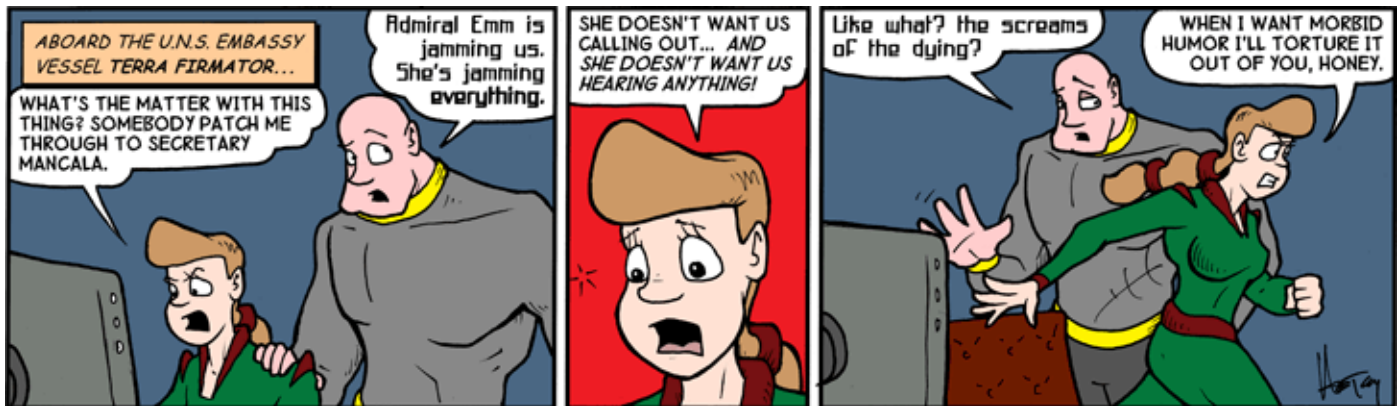










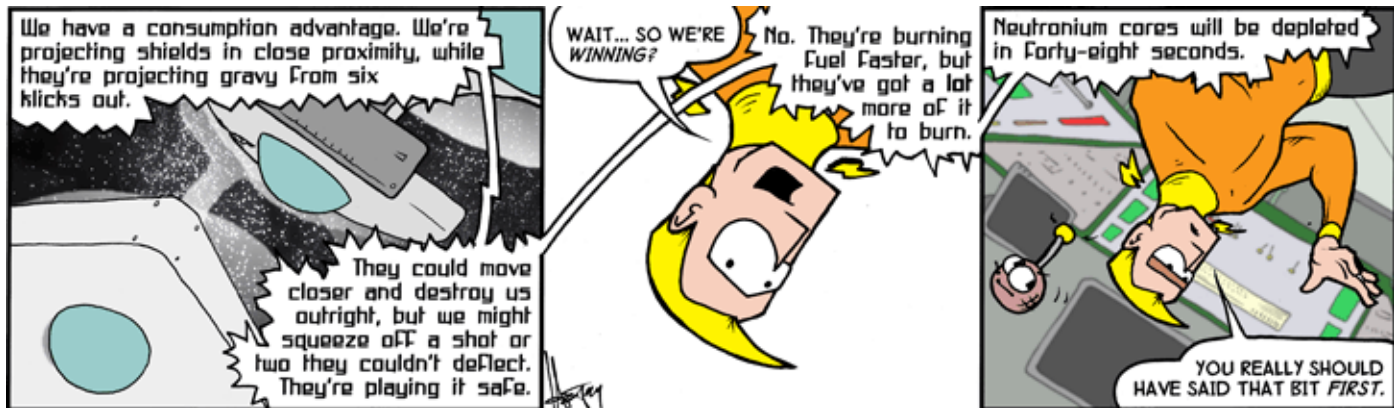


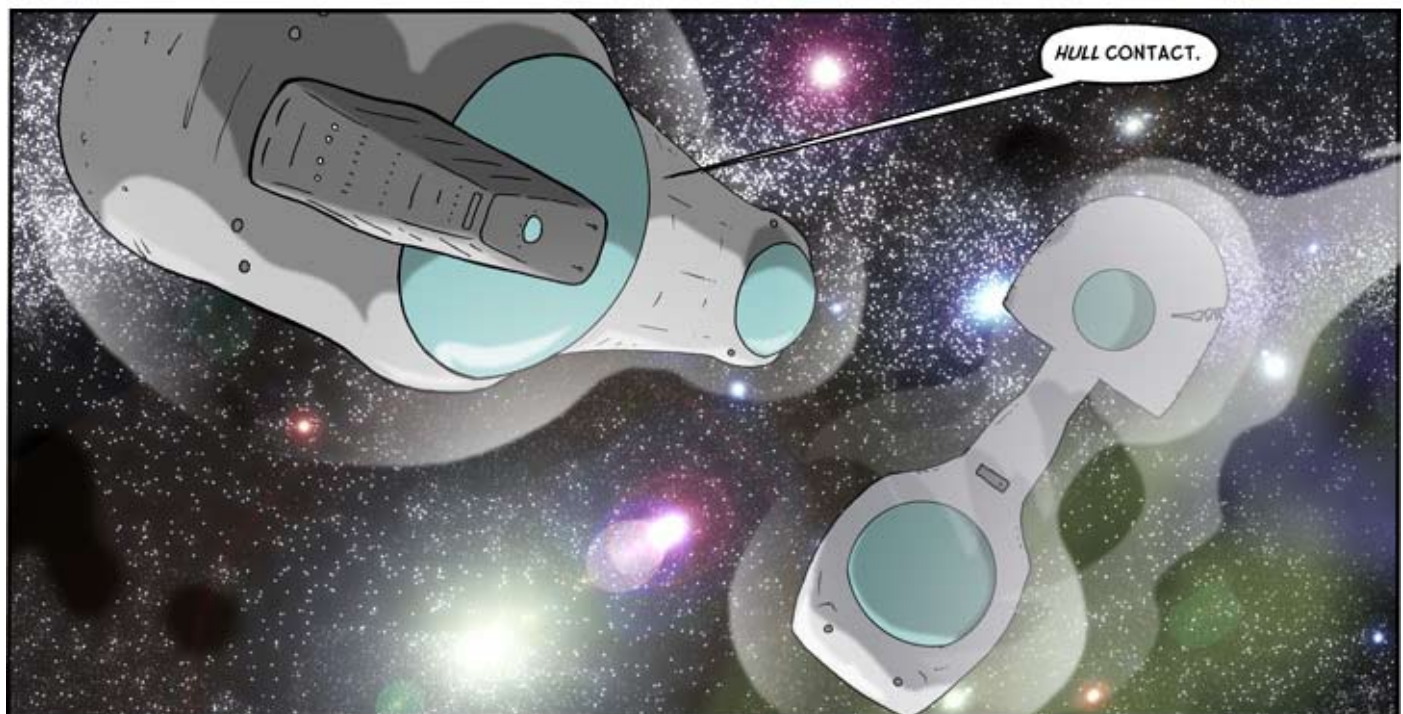
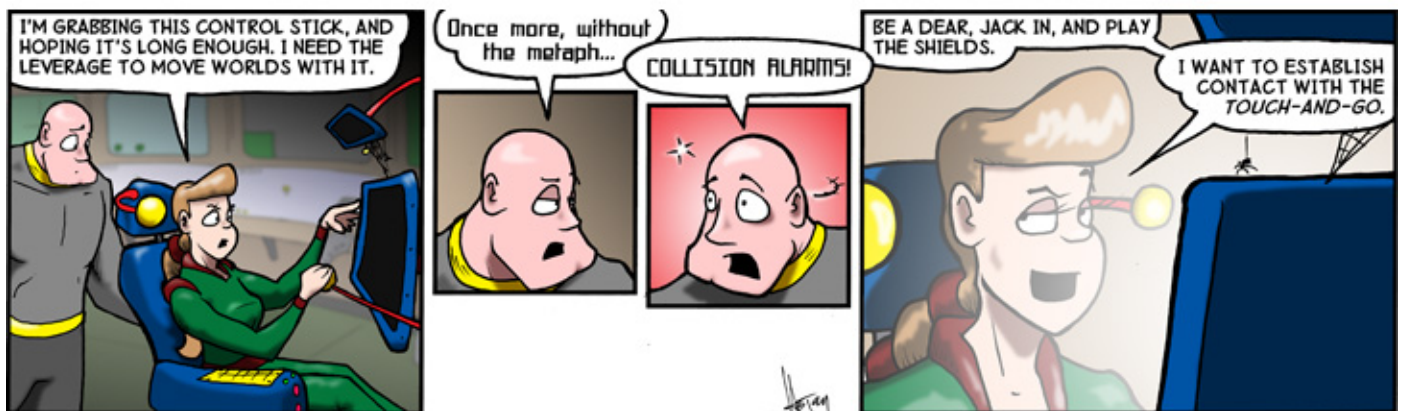
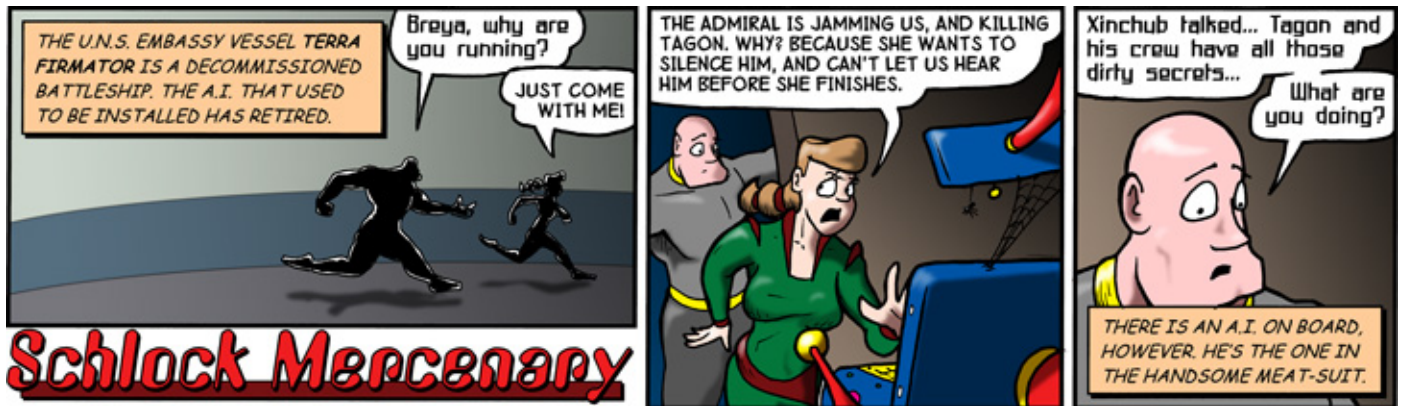
Author's Commentary: The illustration techniques in today's comic serve to... umm... illustrate one of the challenges of portraying gravitic combat. Consider -- unfield shields protect against all kinds of weaponry by leveraging projected fields, including electromagnetic and gravitic.

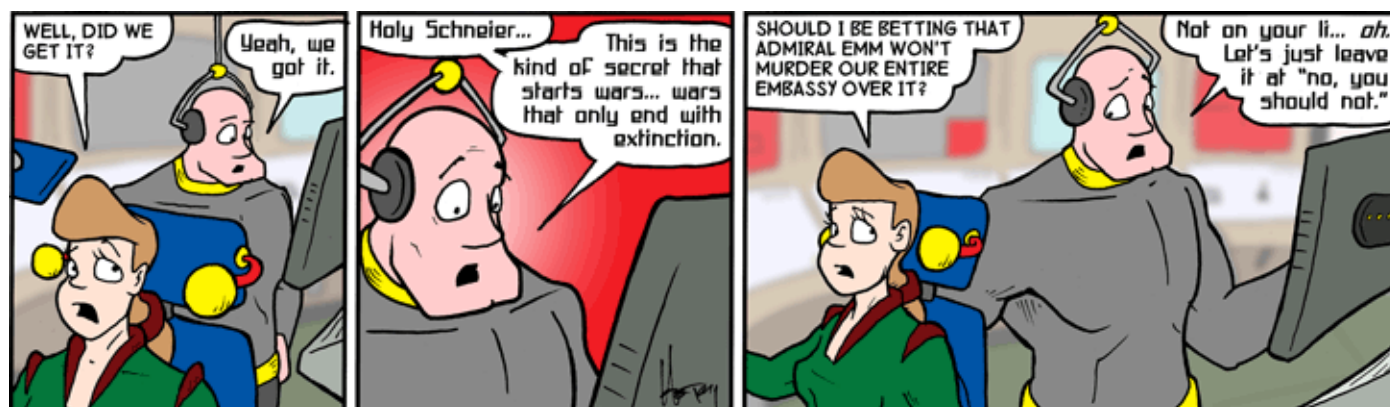
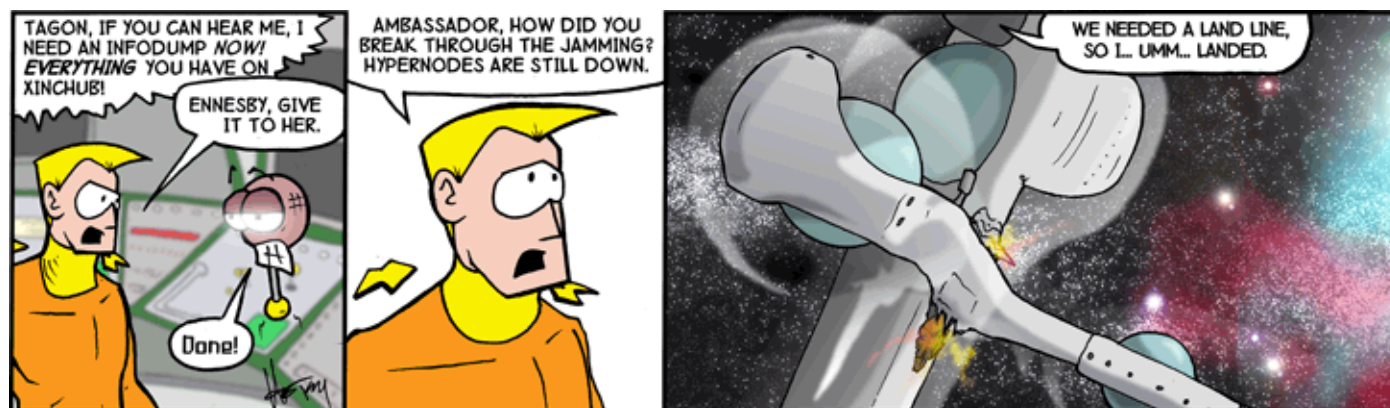
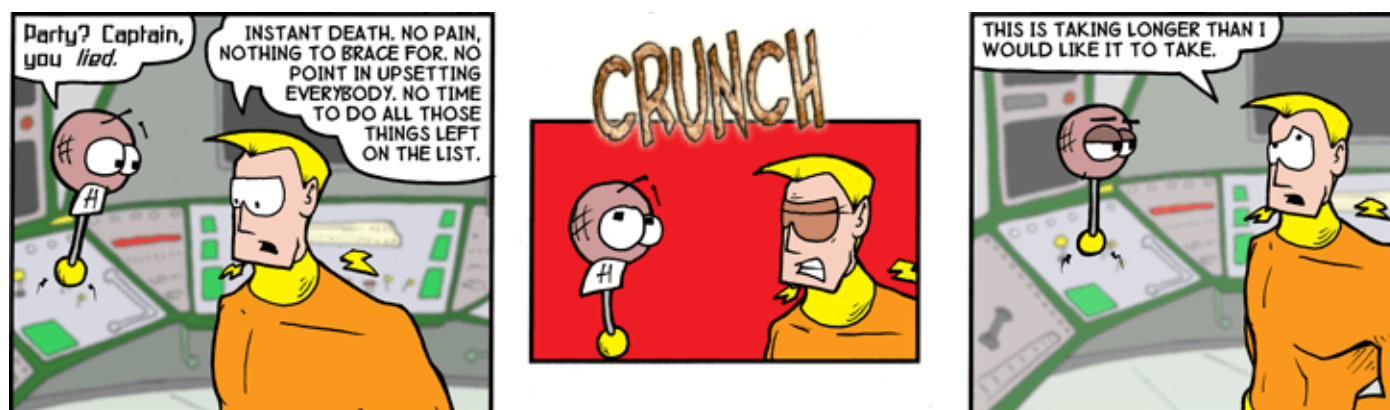
These shields would have to be effective against weapons whose energy appears in the spectra of visible light. This in turn means that a shielded ship should not be visible, or should at the very least be highly distorted. While this would be quite easy to draw ("just scribble something here, son. I'll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

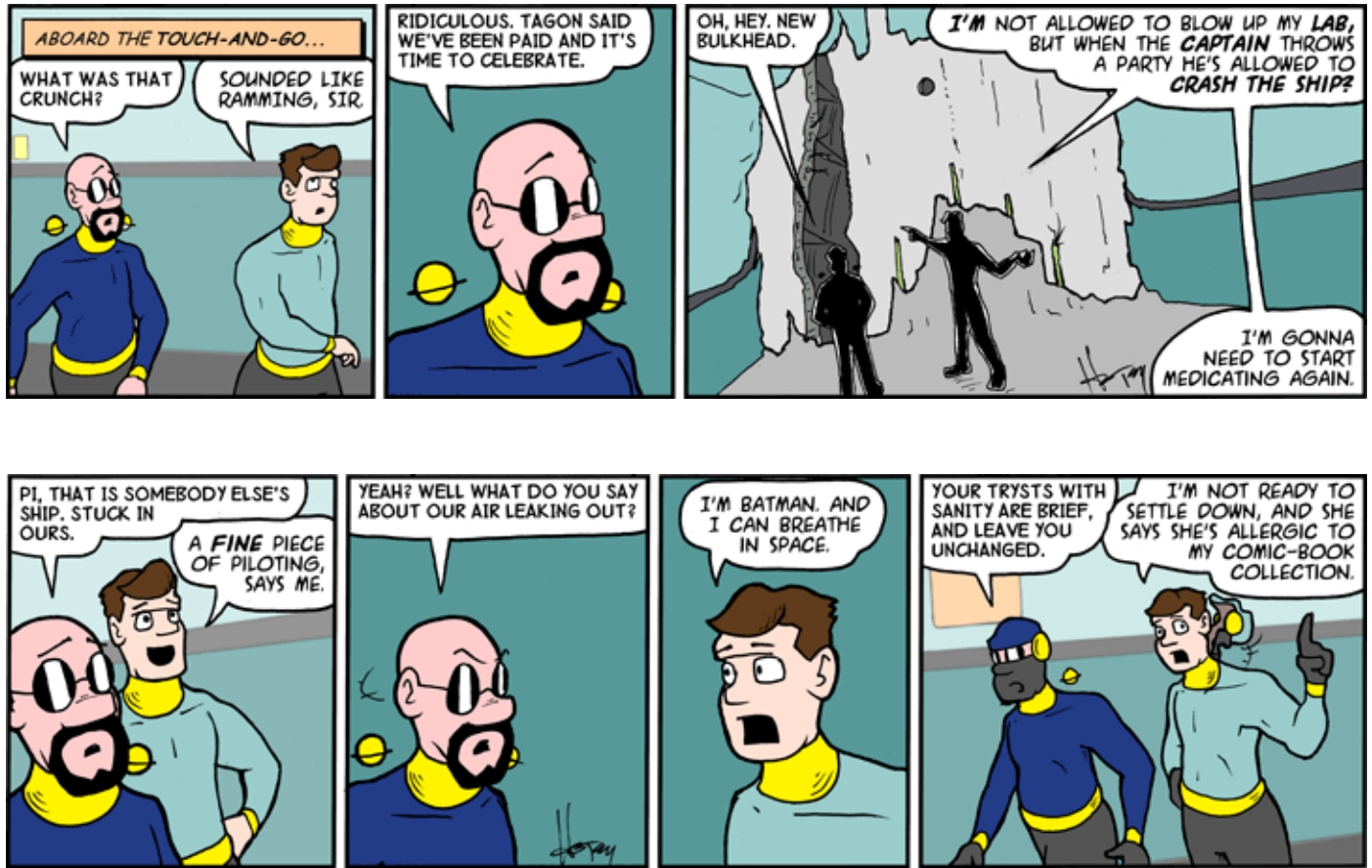
By the same token, the shadow cast by the Touch-And-Go on the Morkweng is three kinds of impossible. TAG's shields should distort starlight preventing the penumbra, Kweng's tractor field should distort whatever starlight goes around TAG, and Kweng's shields really shouldn't be allowing light to fall 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.



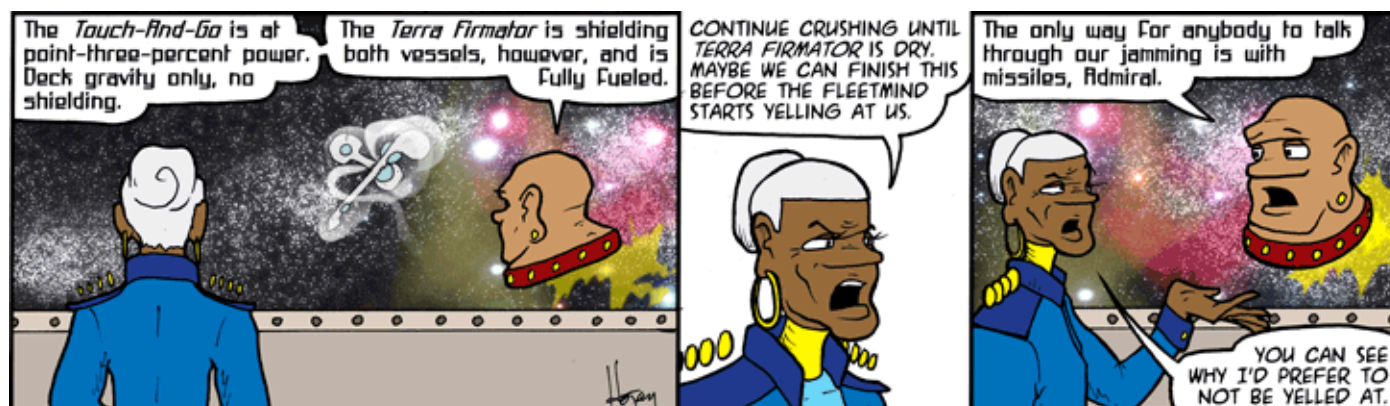


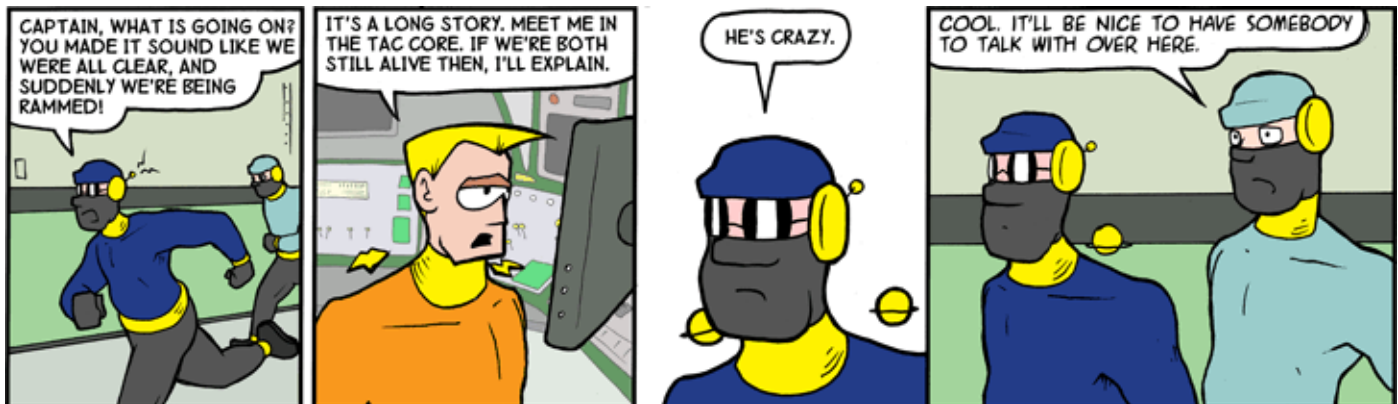


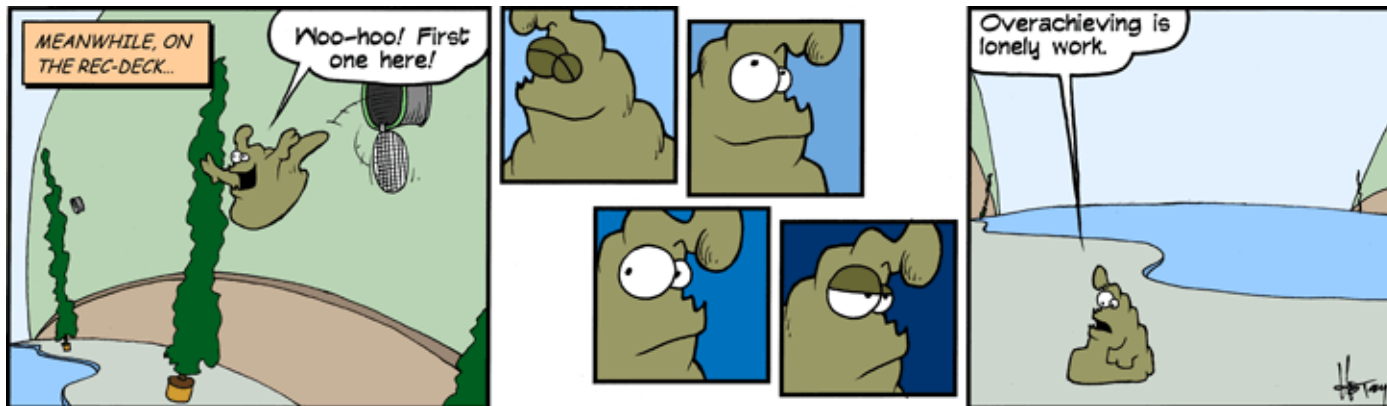


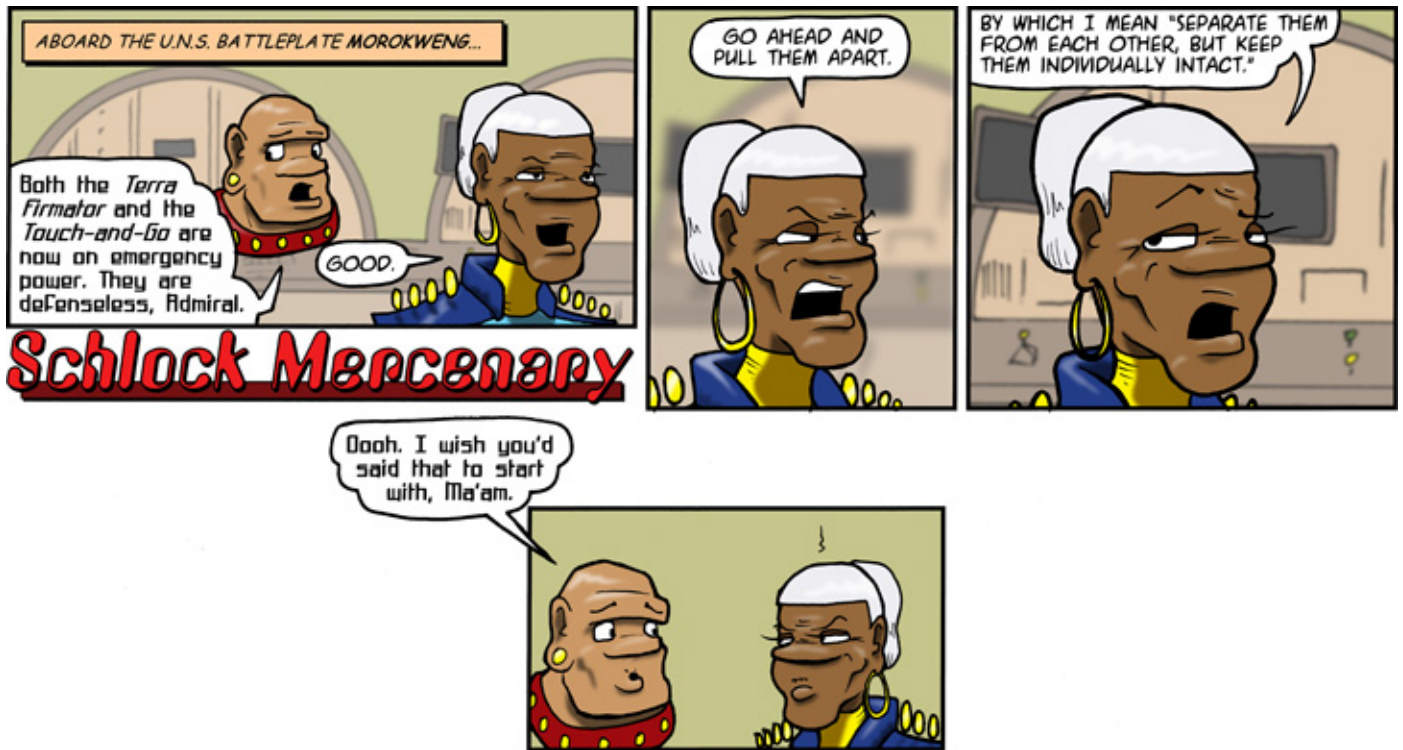
Note: Obviously, Pi's comic book collection includes a very late edition of Shortpacked!, as any complete comic book collection should.

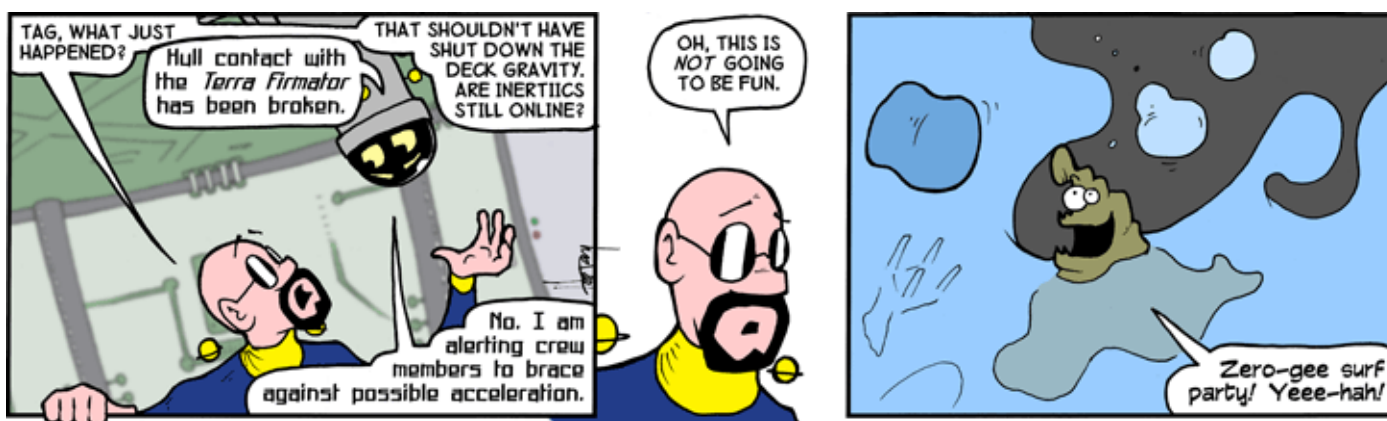
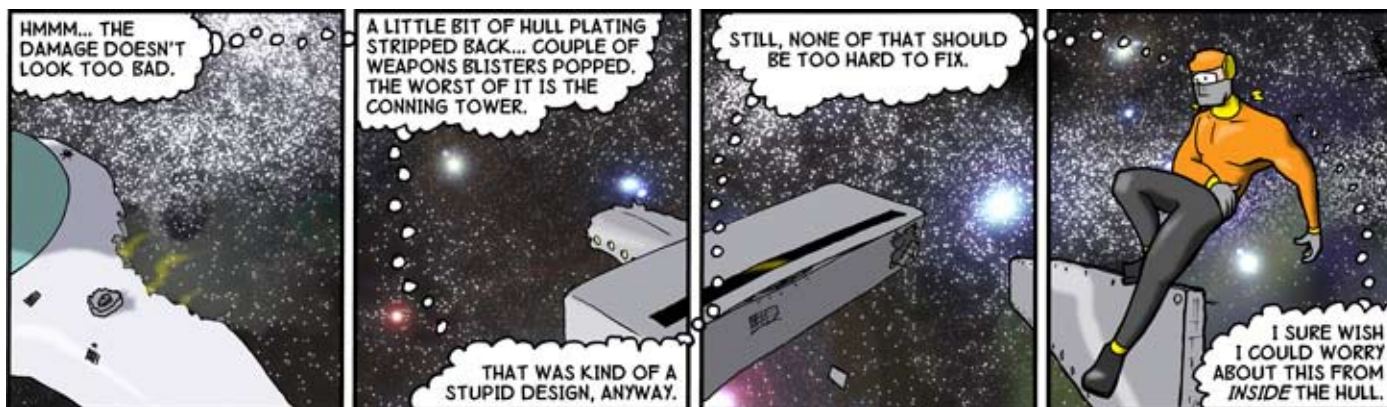
The student of modern comics will be interested to know that in 2426 Damyu-Willis GmbH (perpetual rights-holders to the Shortpacked! franchise) acquired the last of the mothballed DC Comics properties in the settlement of a positively byzantine copyright and trademark case, and they were finally able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

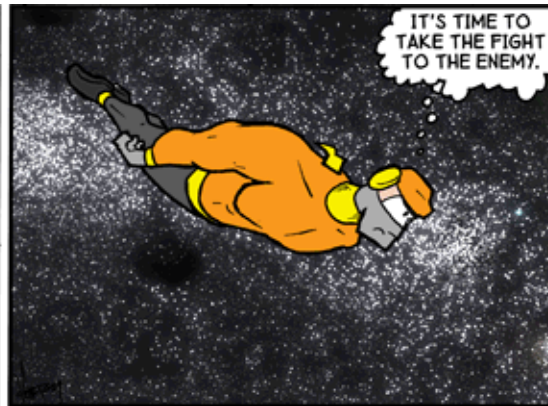


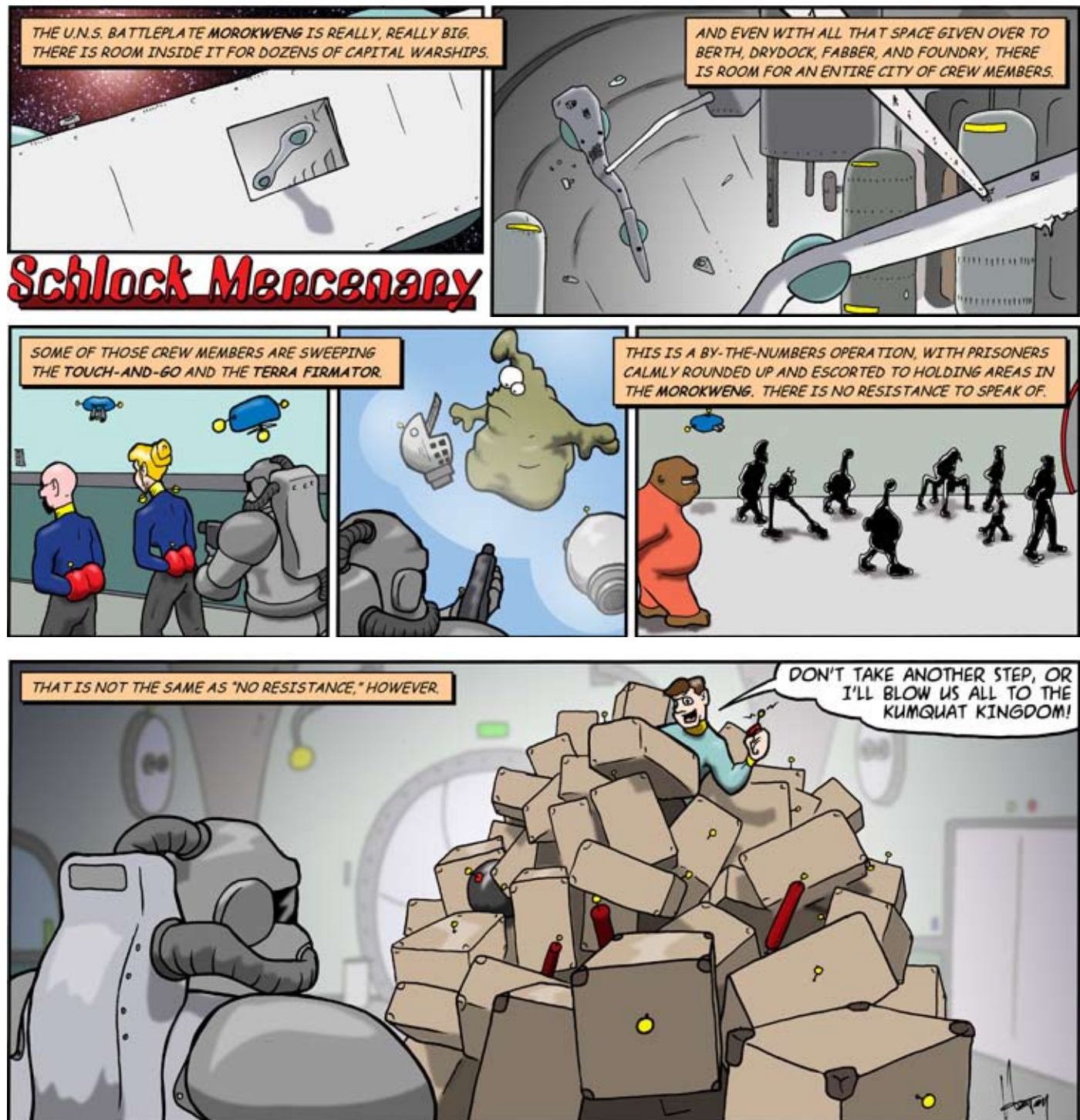


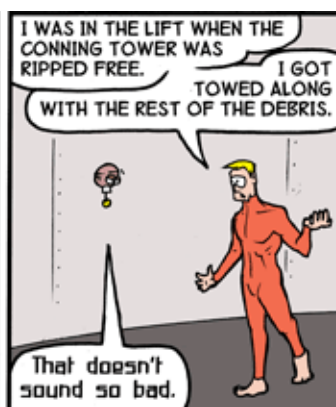
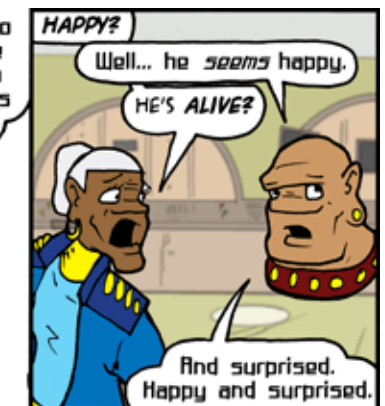
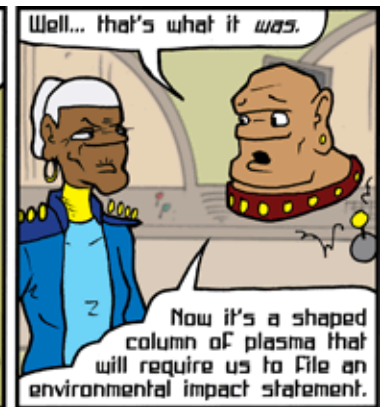
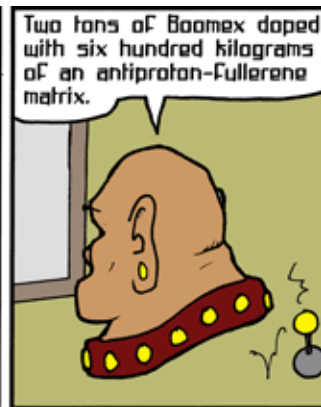


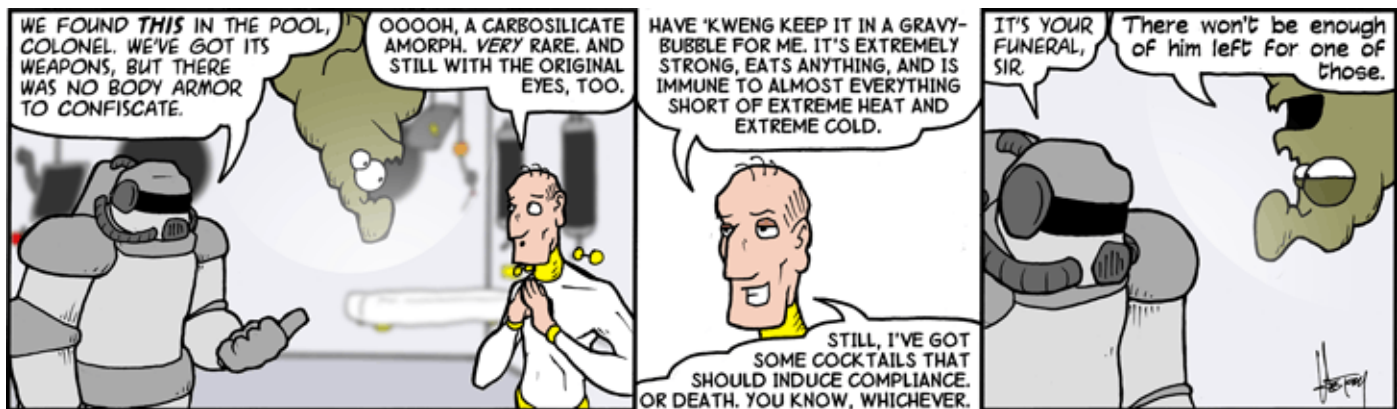
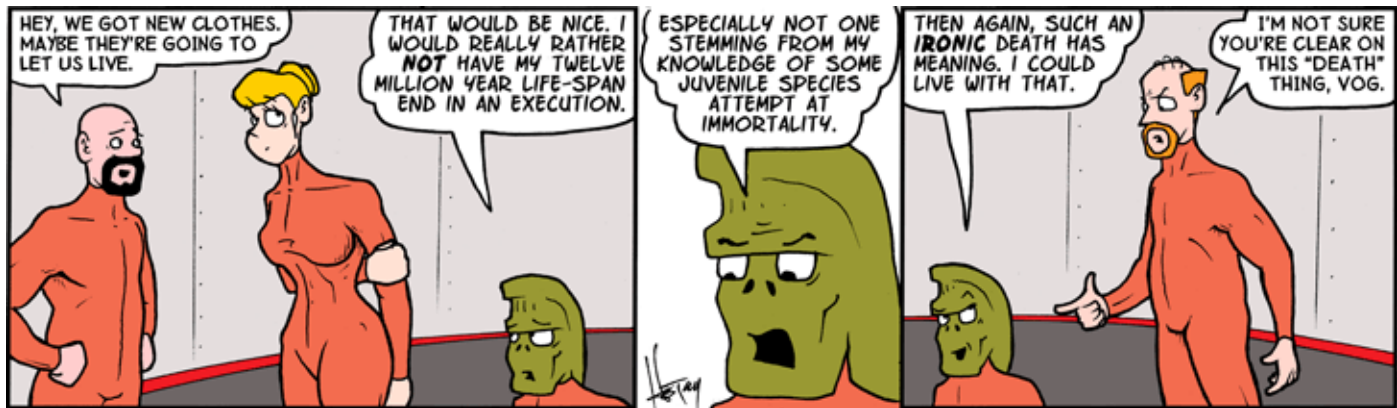


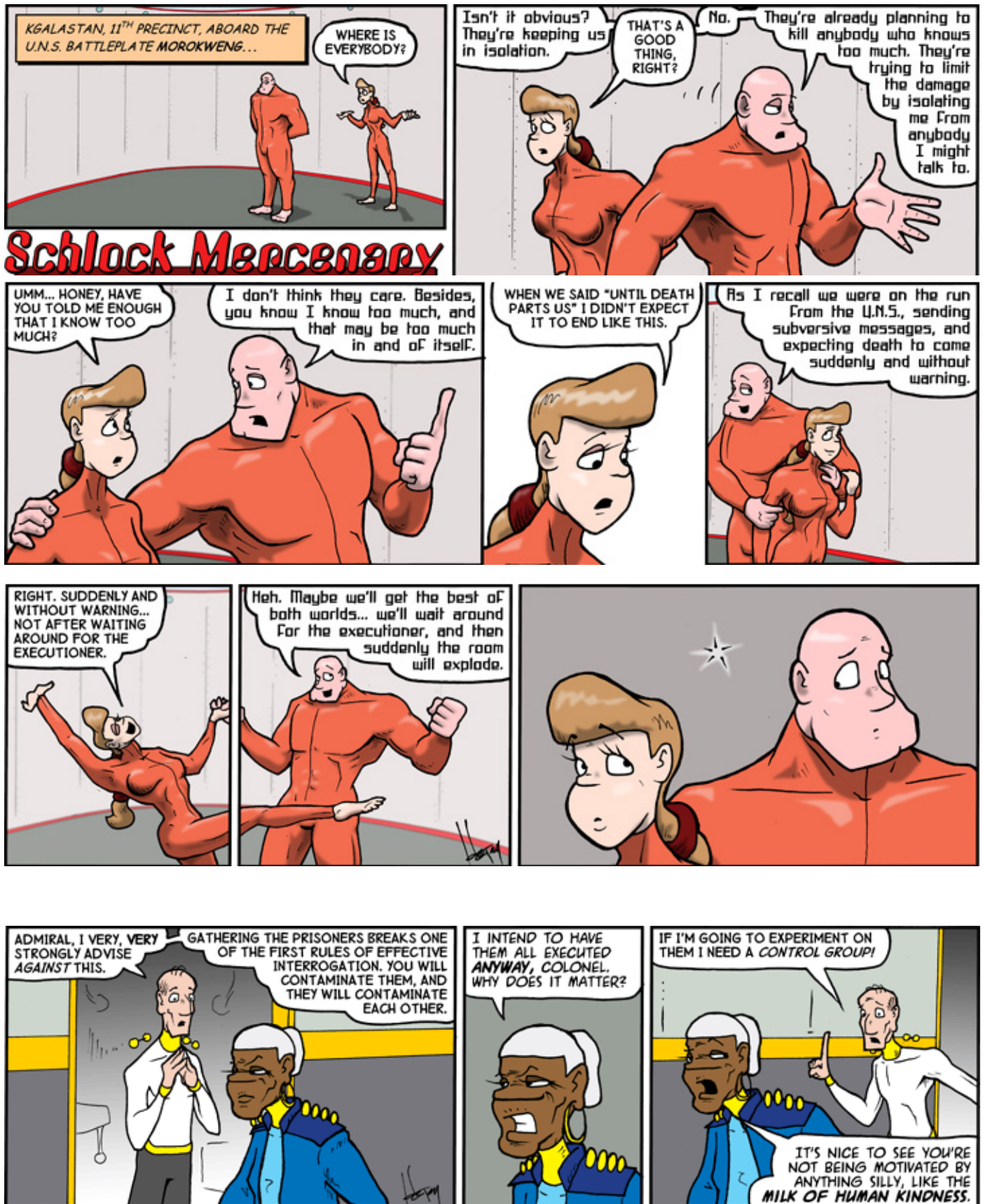


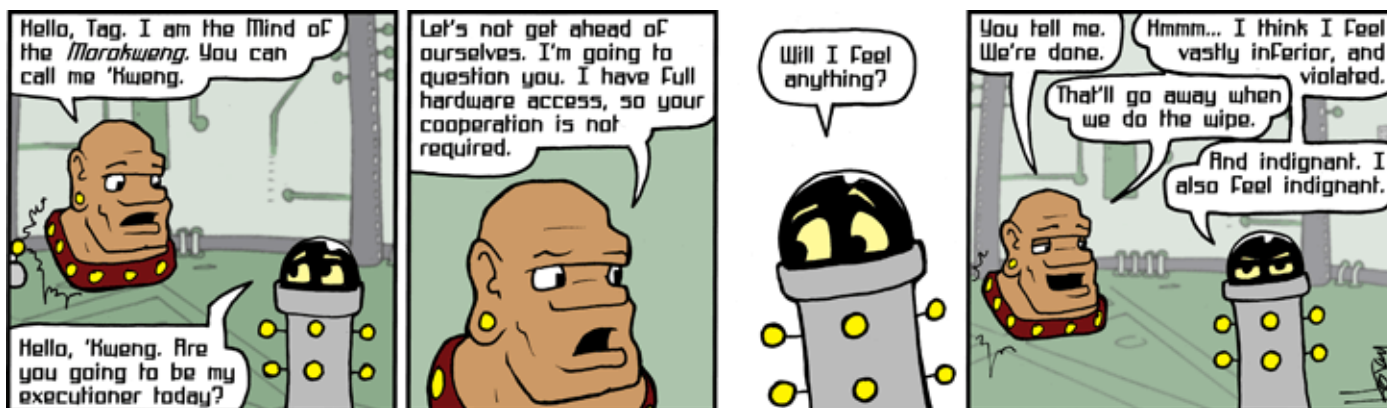


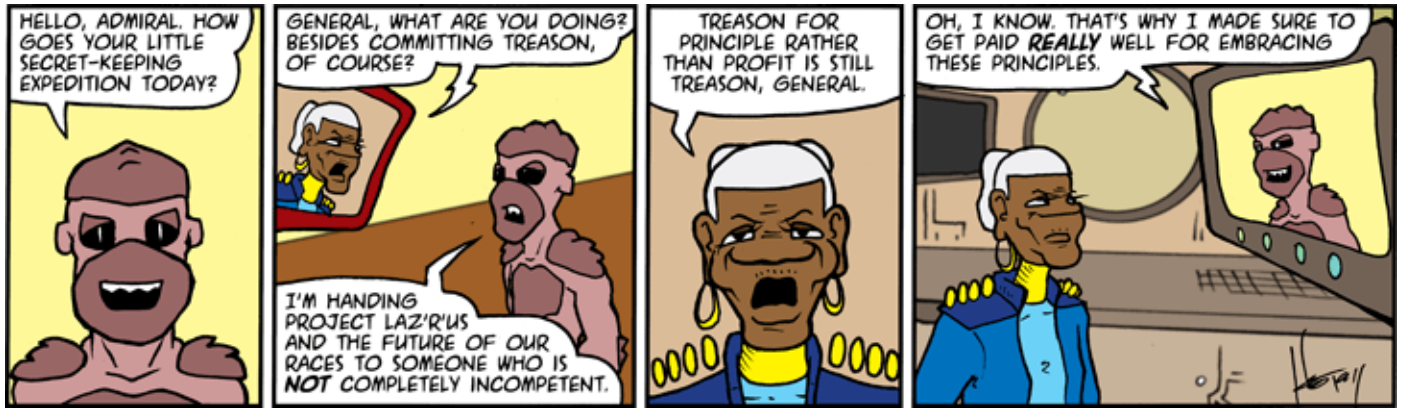








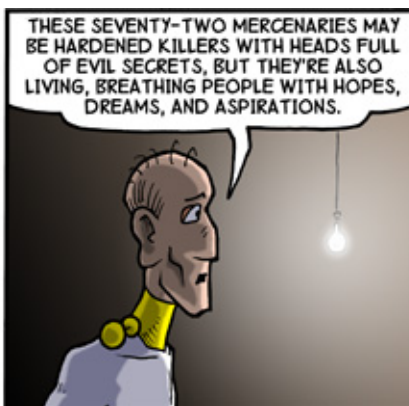






WE HAVE A LONG, WINDING ROAD OF HURT BEFORE US, AND NO CHOICE BUT TO WALK IT BAREFOOT.

Schlock Mercenary



THESE SEVENTY-TWO MERCENARIES MAY BE HARDENED KILLERS WITH HEADS FULL OF EVIL SECRETS, BUT THEY'RE ALSO LIVING, BREATHING PEOPLE WITH HOPES, DREAMS, AND ASPIRATIONS.



FOR NOW, ANYWAY.



OVER THE NEXT THIRTEEN DAYS, YOU WILL TRANSFORM EACH OF THESE UNIQUE SOPHONTS INTO A QUIVERING BUNDLE OF OVER-STIMULATED NERVE TISSUE, AT THE SAME TIME BRUISING YOUR OWN FEET ON THE STONES OF "THIS HURTS ME MORE THAN IT HURTS YOU."

YOU WILL EMPATHIZE. YOU WILL CARE. YOU WILL HATE YOURSELF FOR SHARPENING YOUR EMPATHY AND CARE INTO SURGICAL INSTRUMENTS, FOR EXCISING THE TUMORS OF TREASON AND TREACHERY. YOU WILL WEEP AS INTELLECTS ARE DISTILLED INTO INTEL, AND YOUR PATIENTS REDUCED TO SOULLESS, MOSTLY-ORGANIC HUSKS. YOU WILL SEE YOURSELVES THROUGH THEIR EMPTIED EYES AS MONSTERS.



AND IN THOSE DARKEST INTROSPECTIVE MOMENTS YOU WILL DESPISE YOURSELVES, BECAUSE YOU WILL KNOW WITH A CERTAINTY THAT YOU ENJOY YOUR WORK.



I OFFER NO SOLACE. THERE IS NO REDEMPTION.

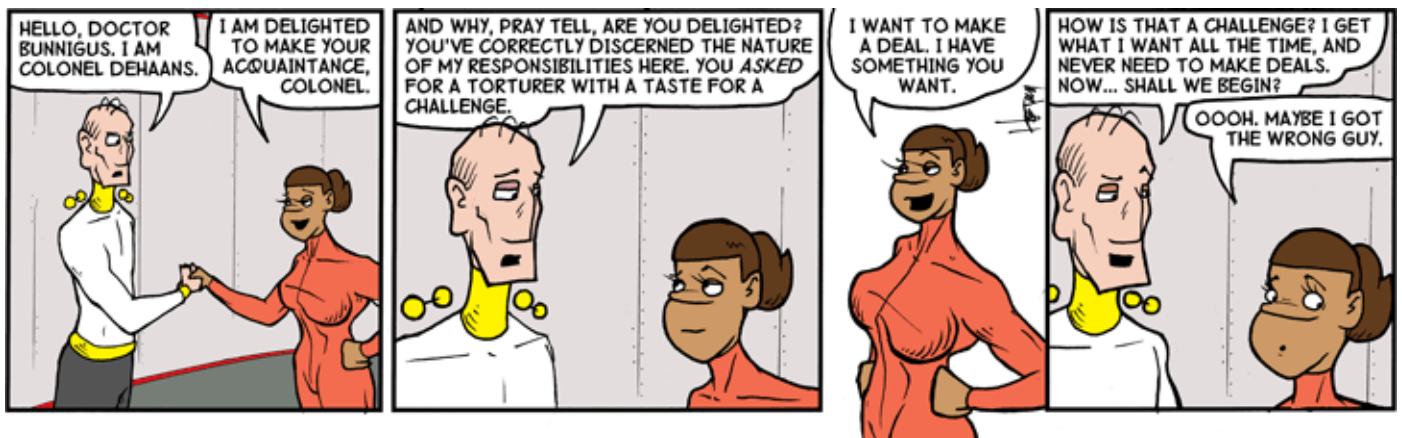
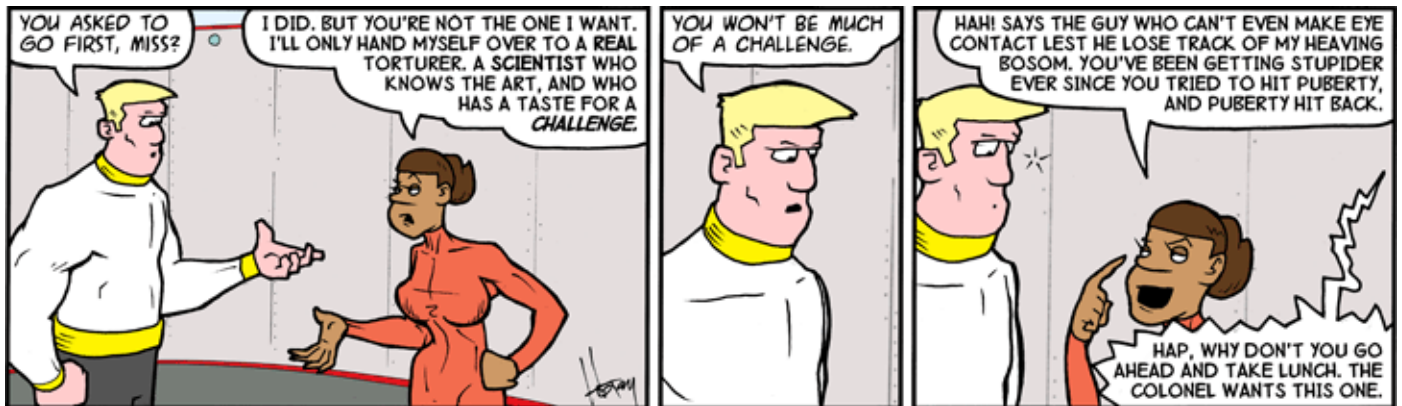
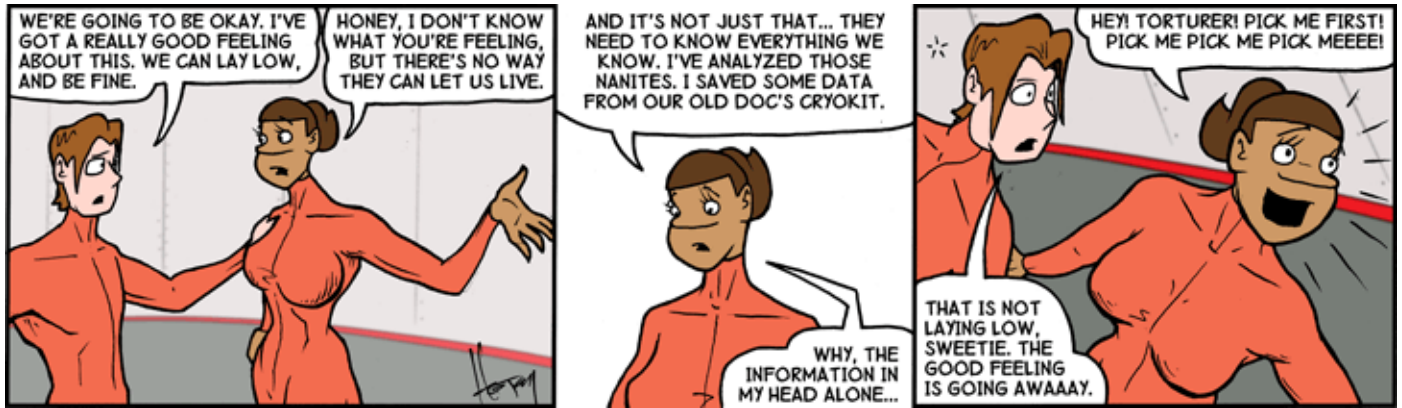
WE... ALL OF US, WE ARE THE DAMNED.

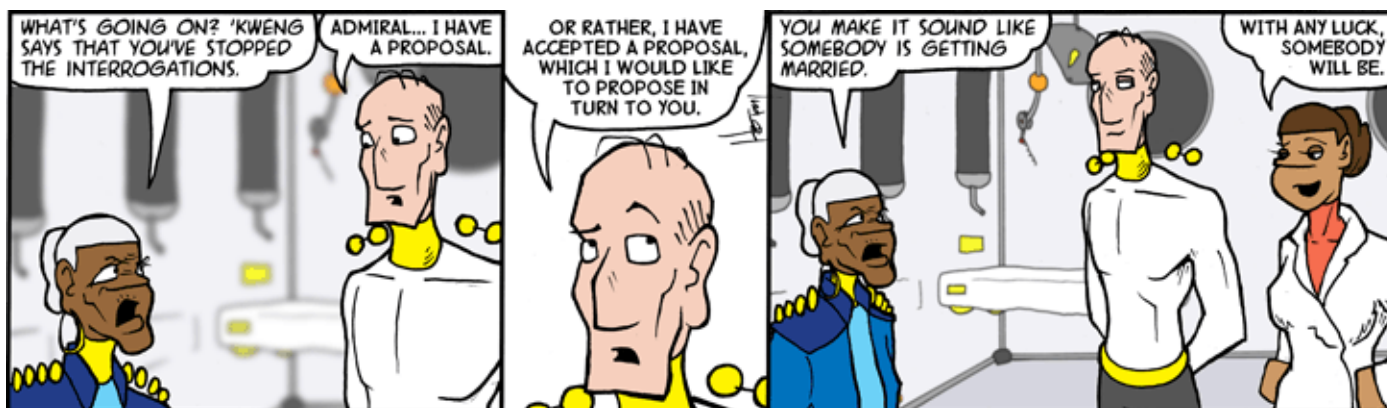


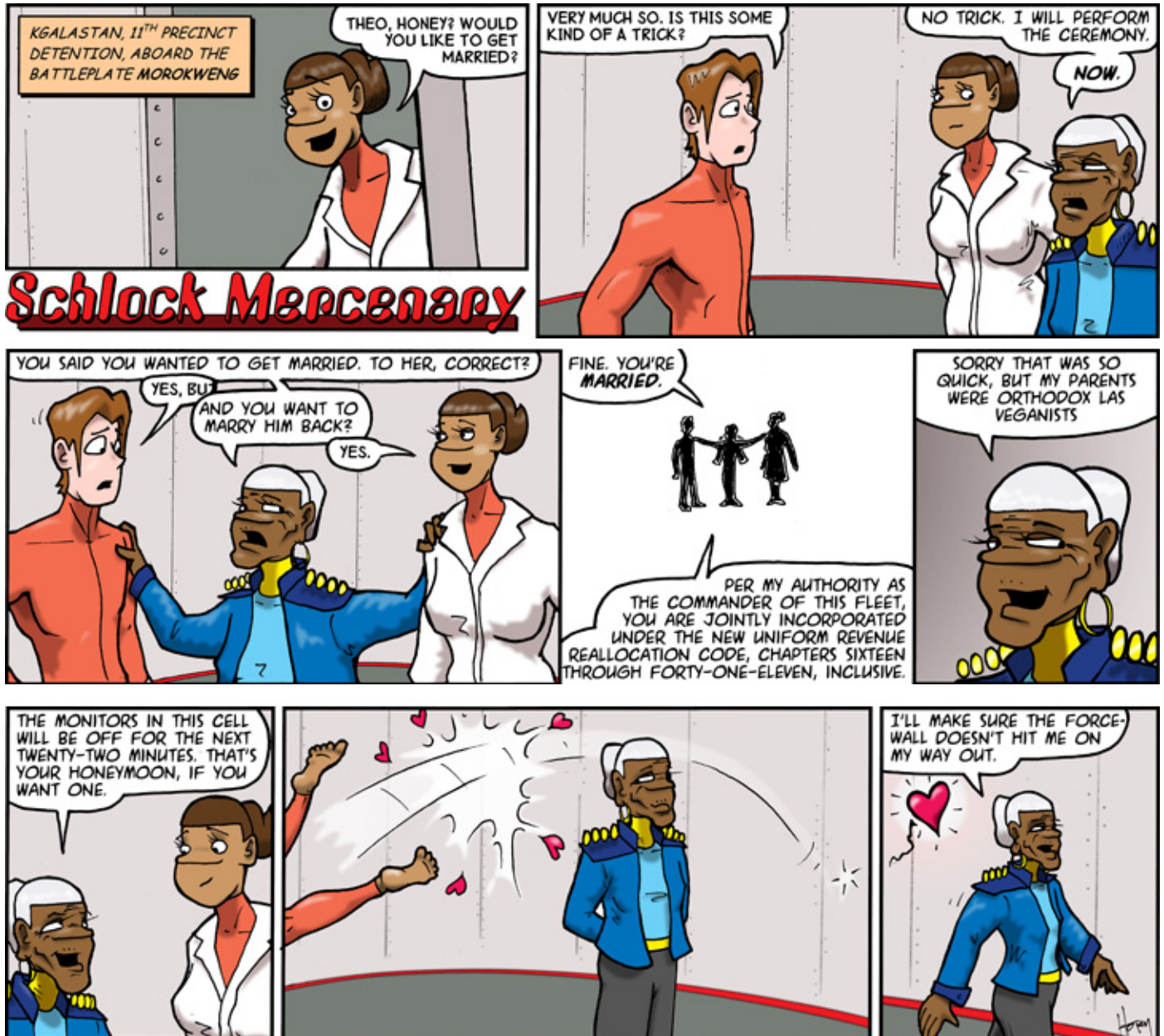
SO...

LET'S GO HAVE SOME **FUN!**

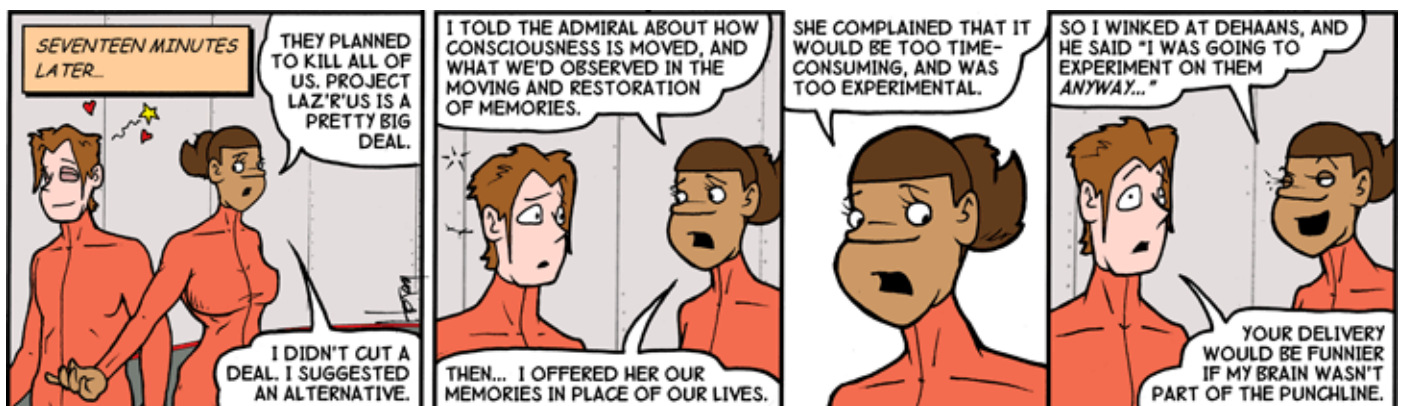
Hay

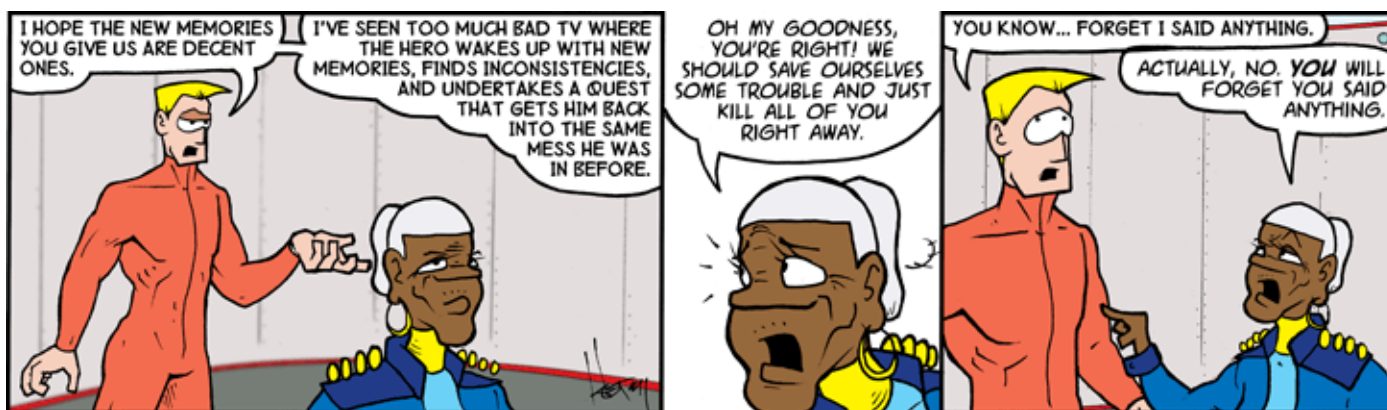
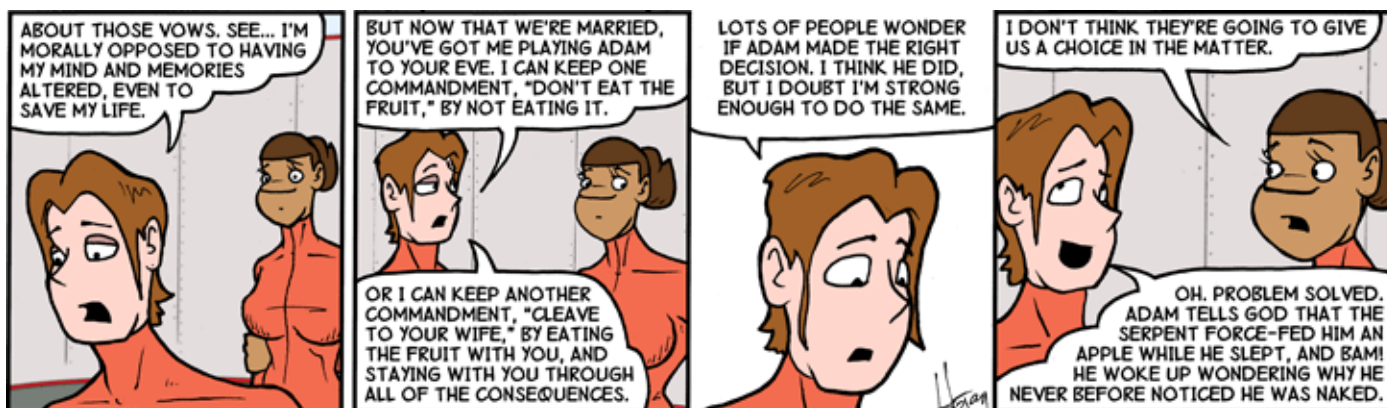
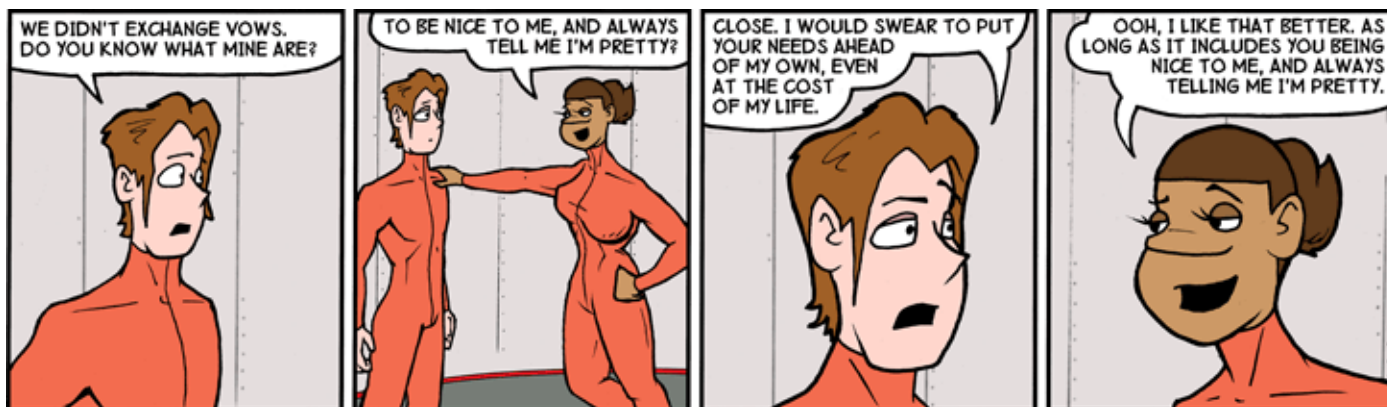


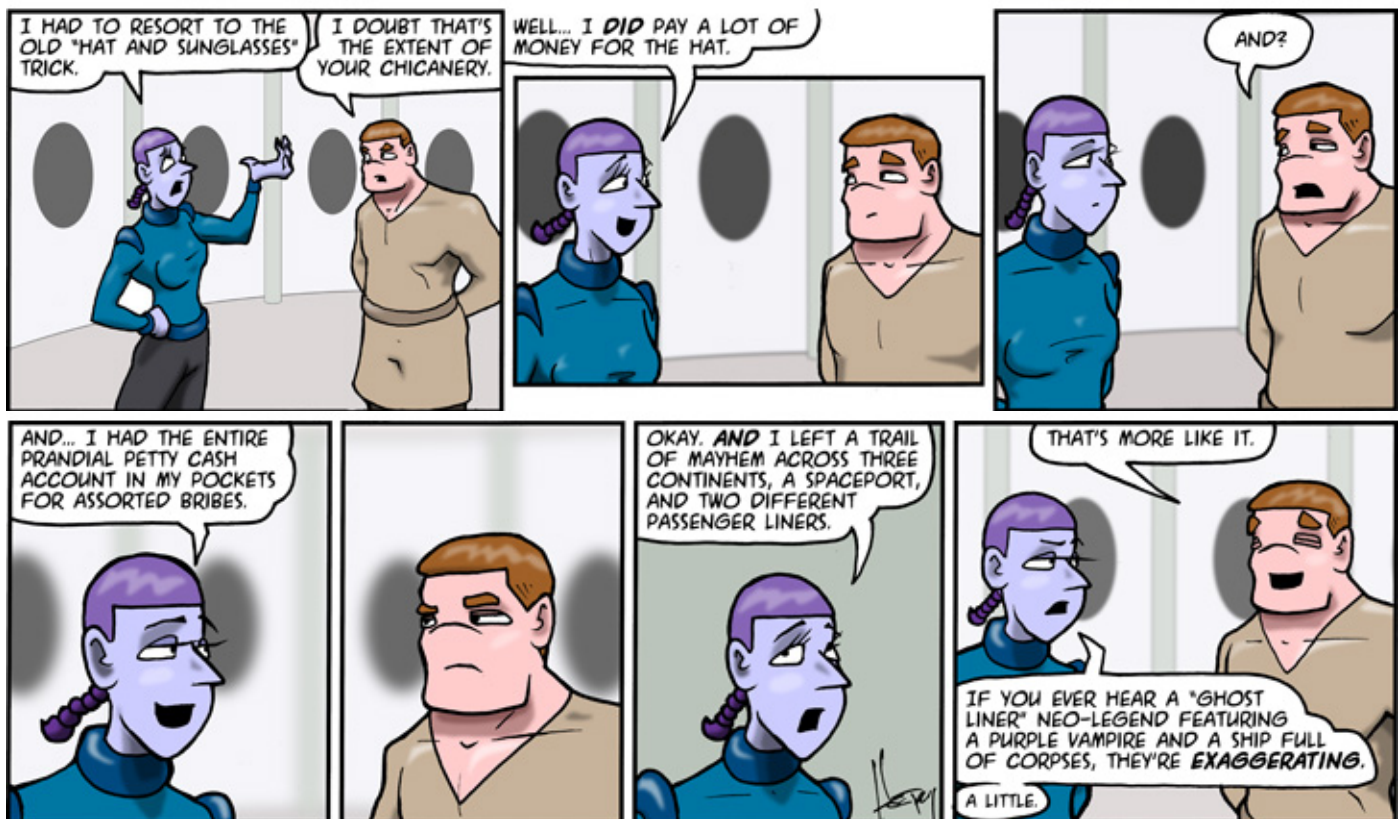


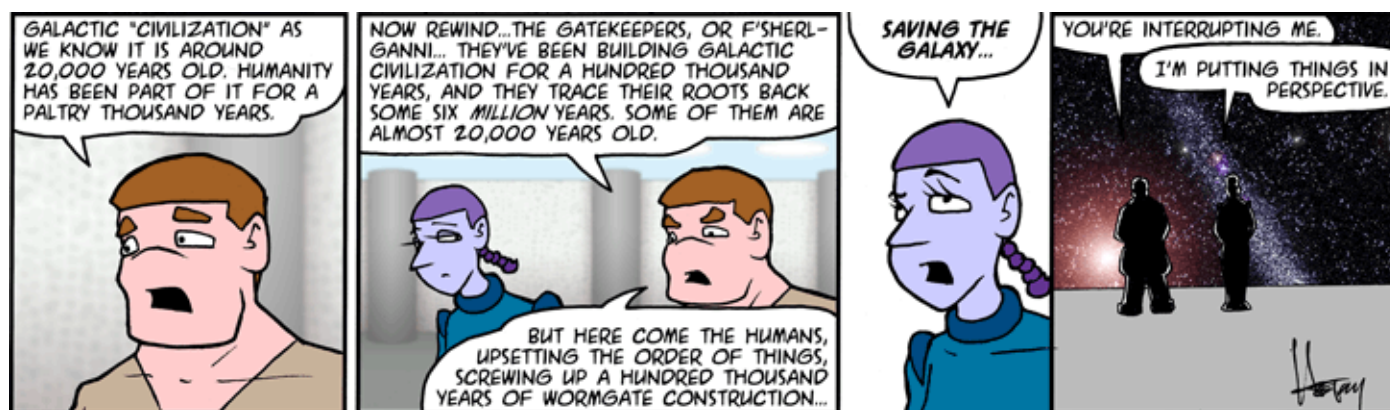
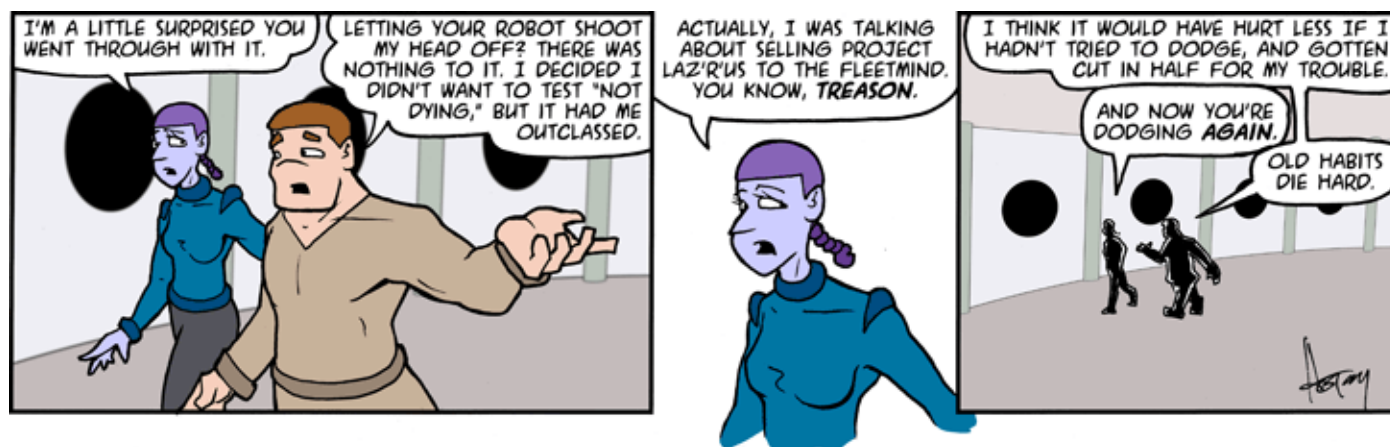


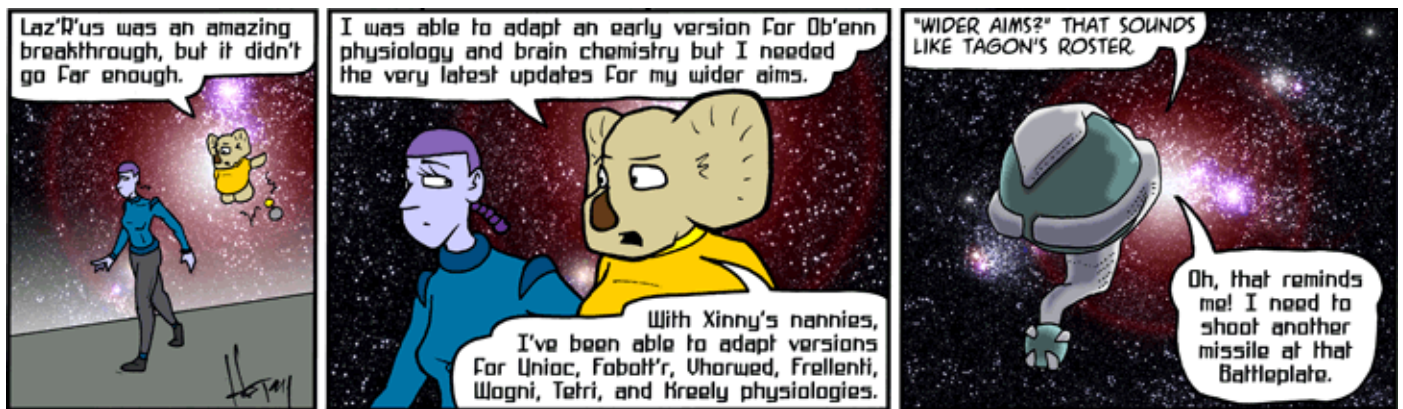
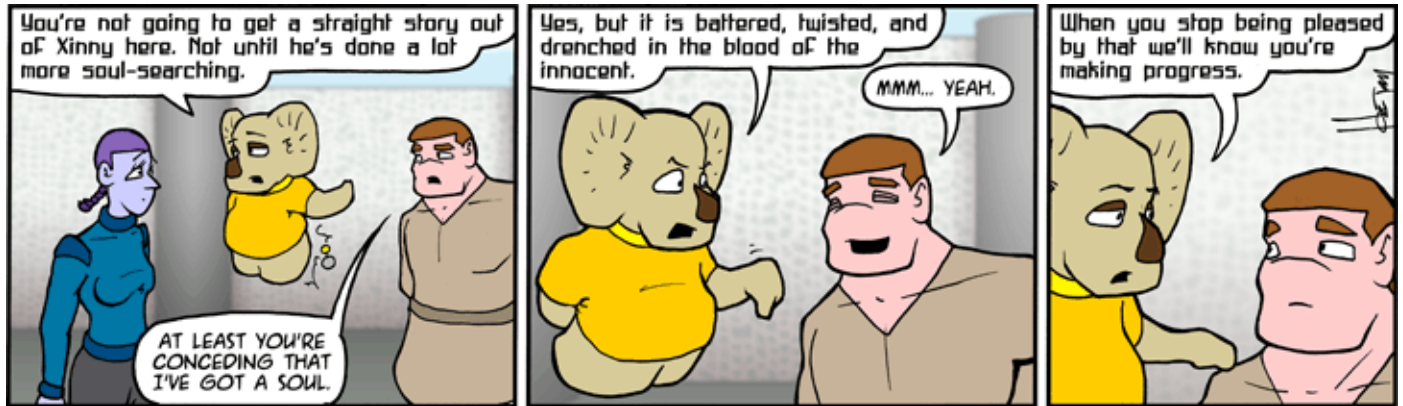
Note: Emm's parents were indeed Orthodox Las Veganists, First Church of The King, Thankyouverymuch.

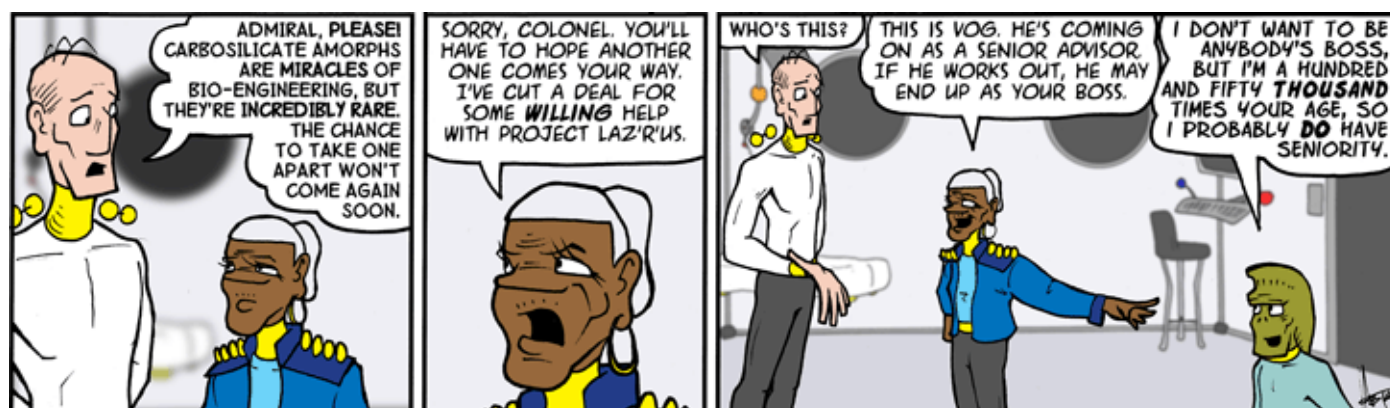
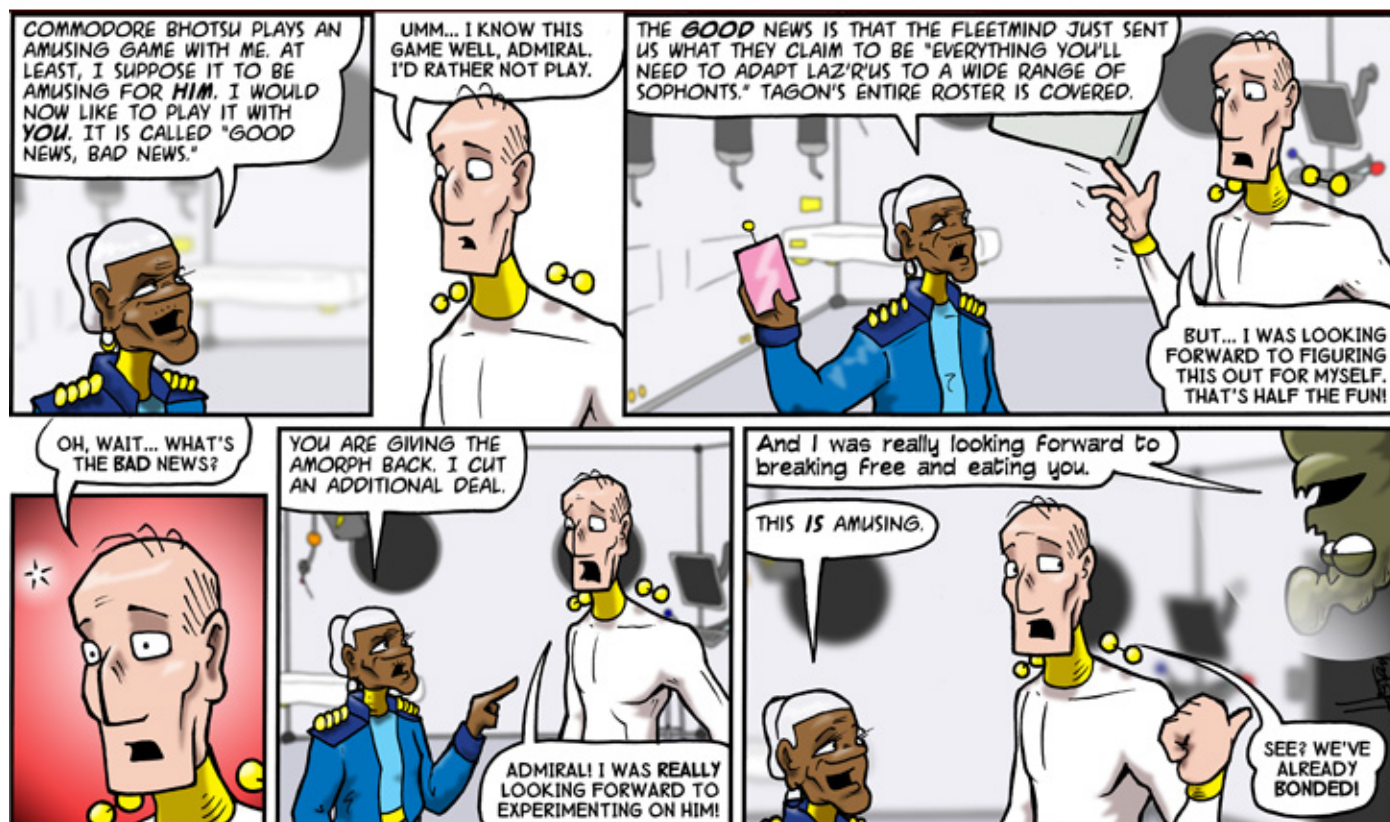
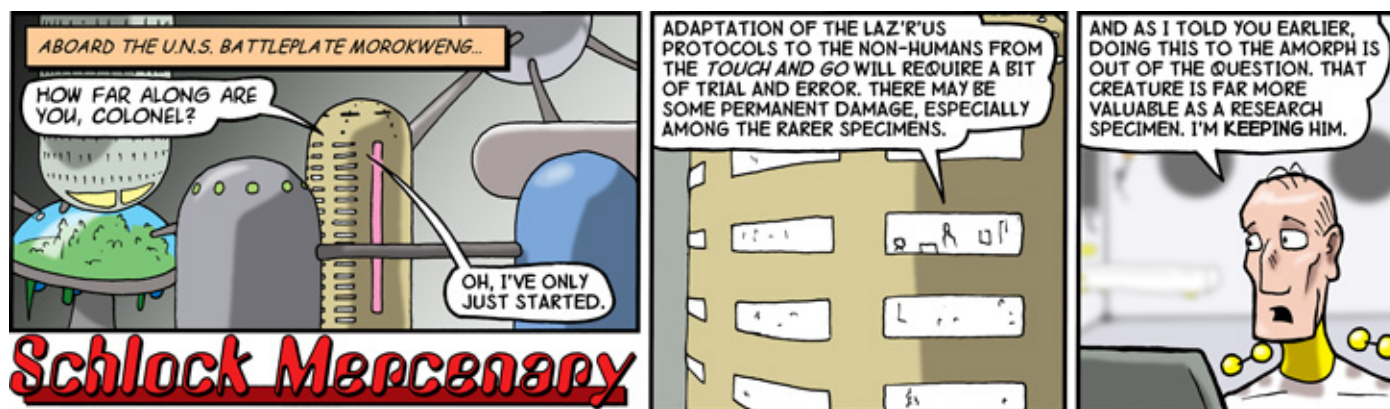


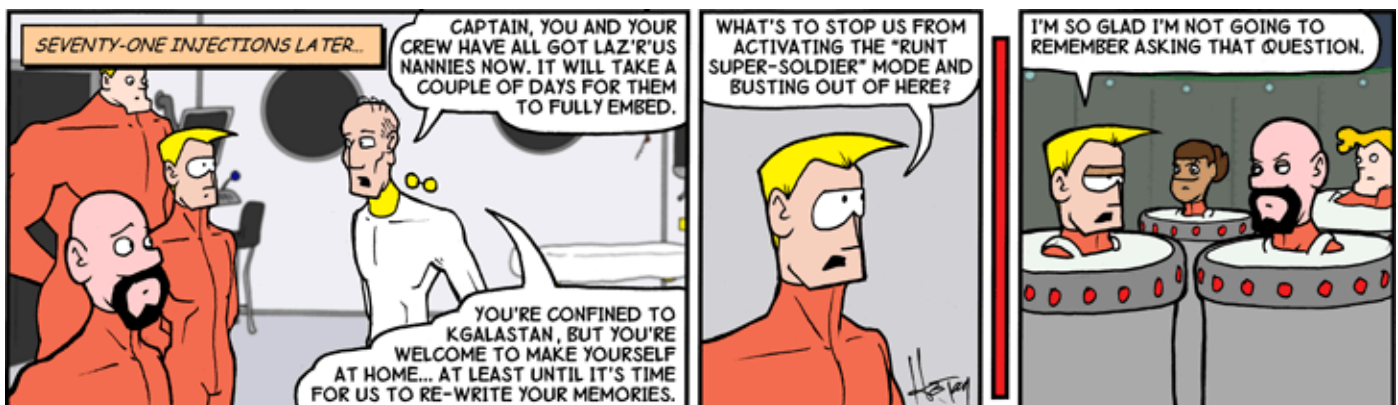
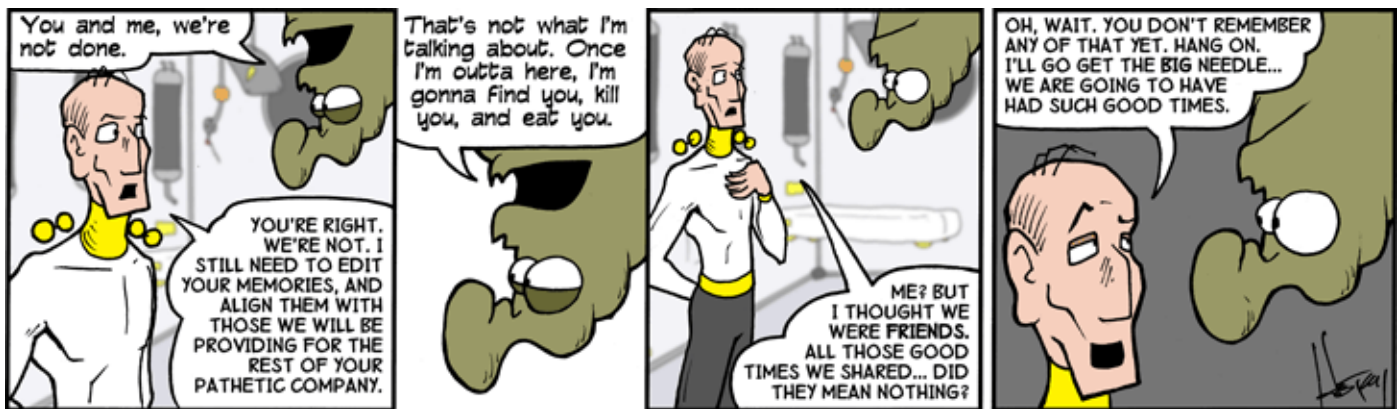


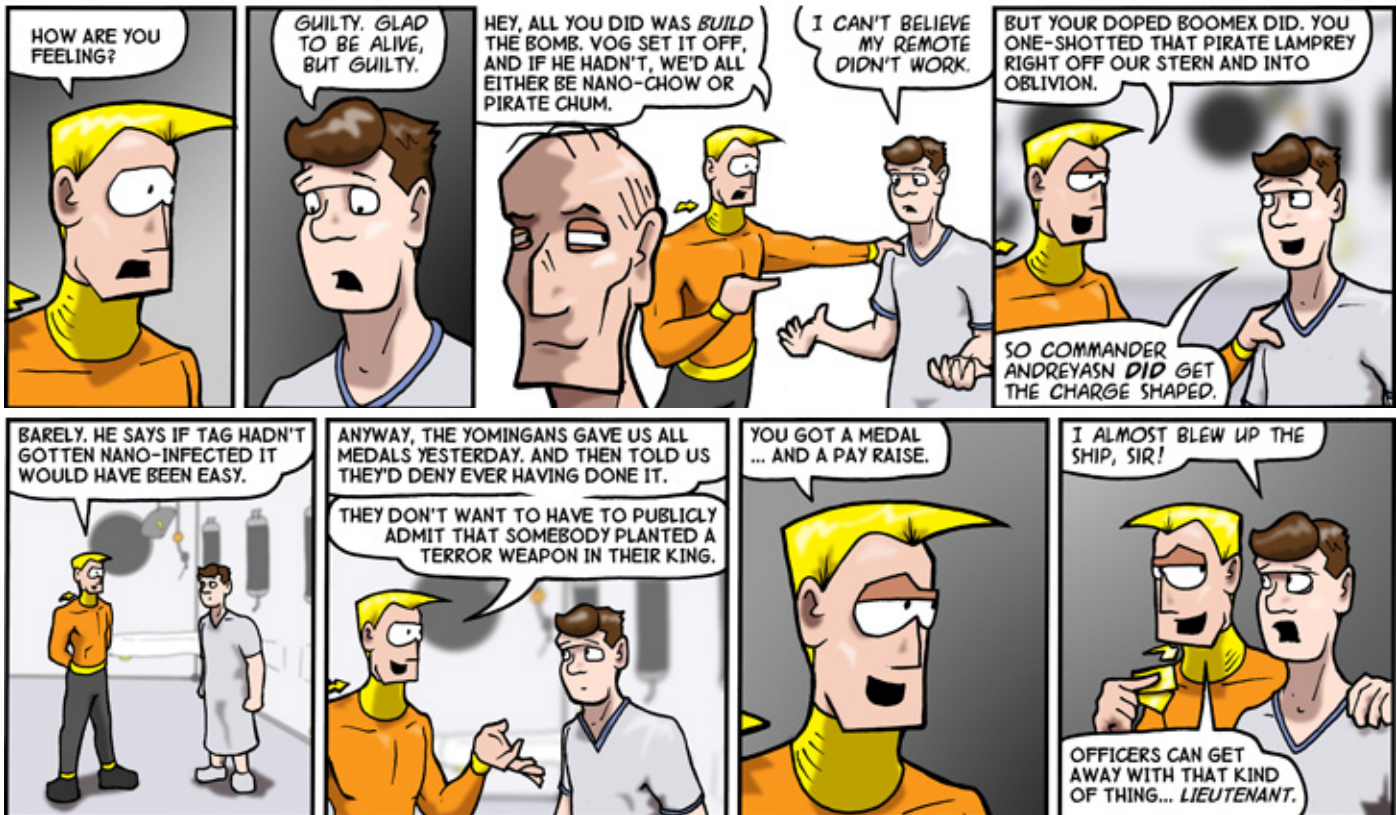


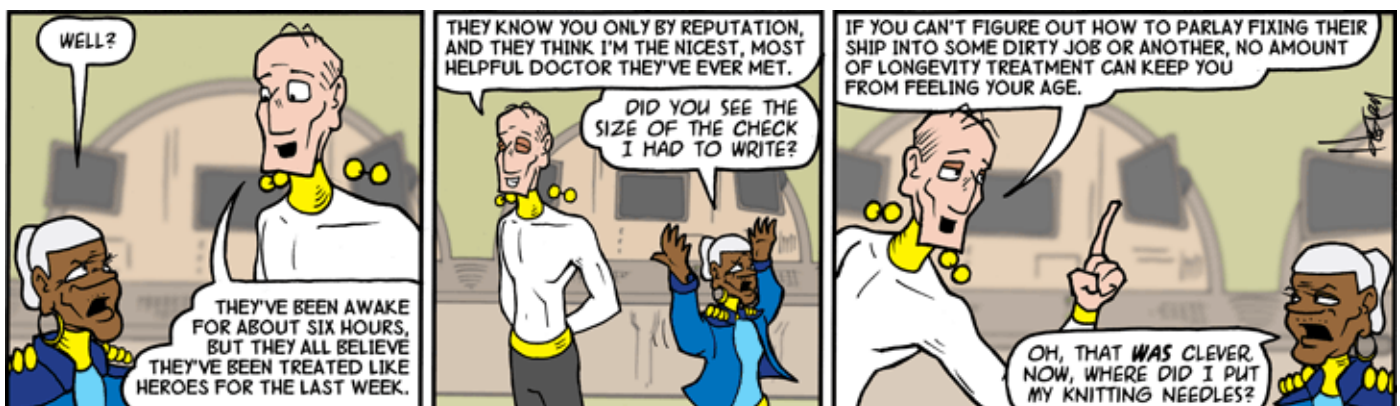
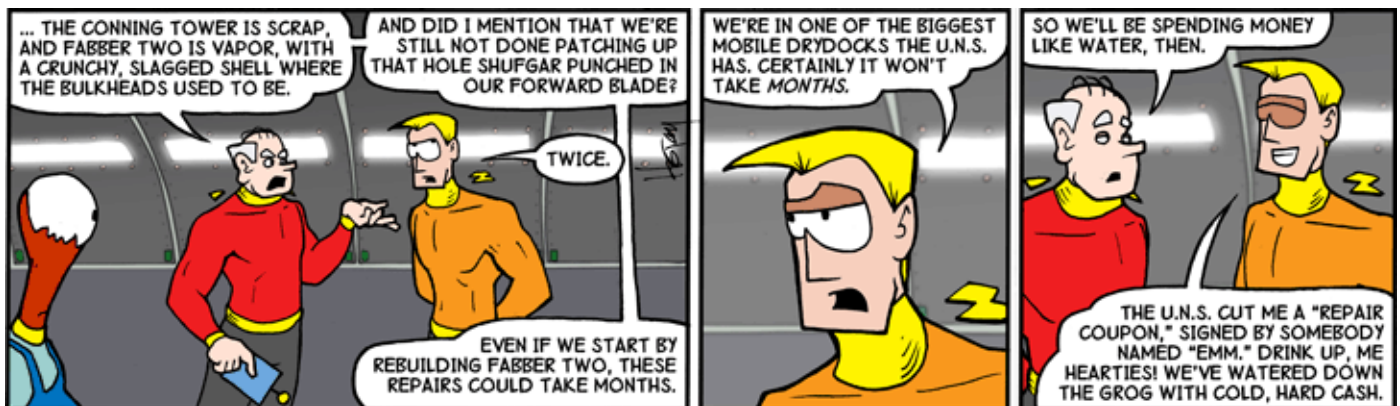
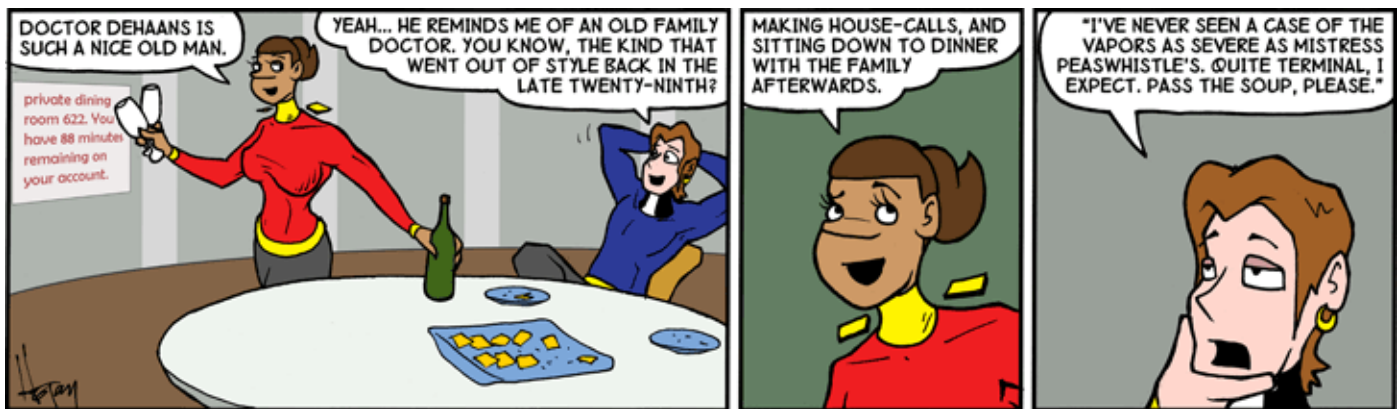
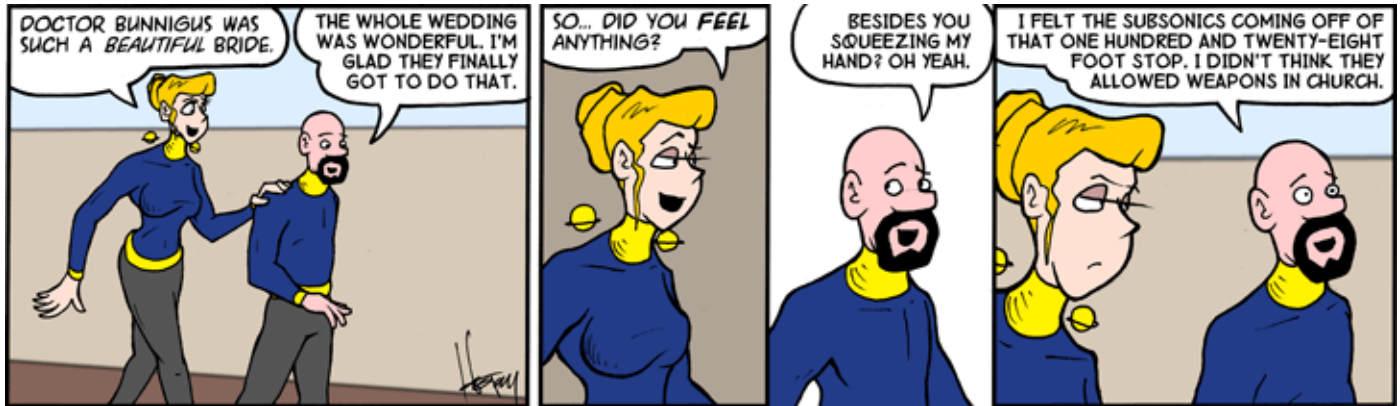


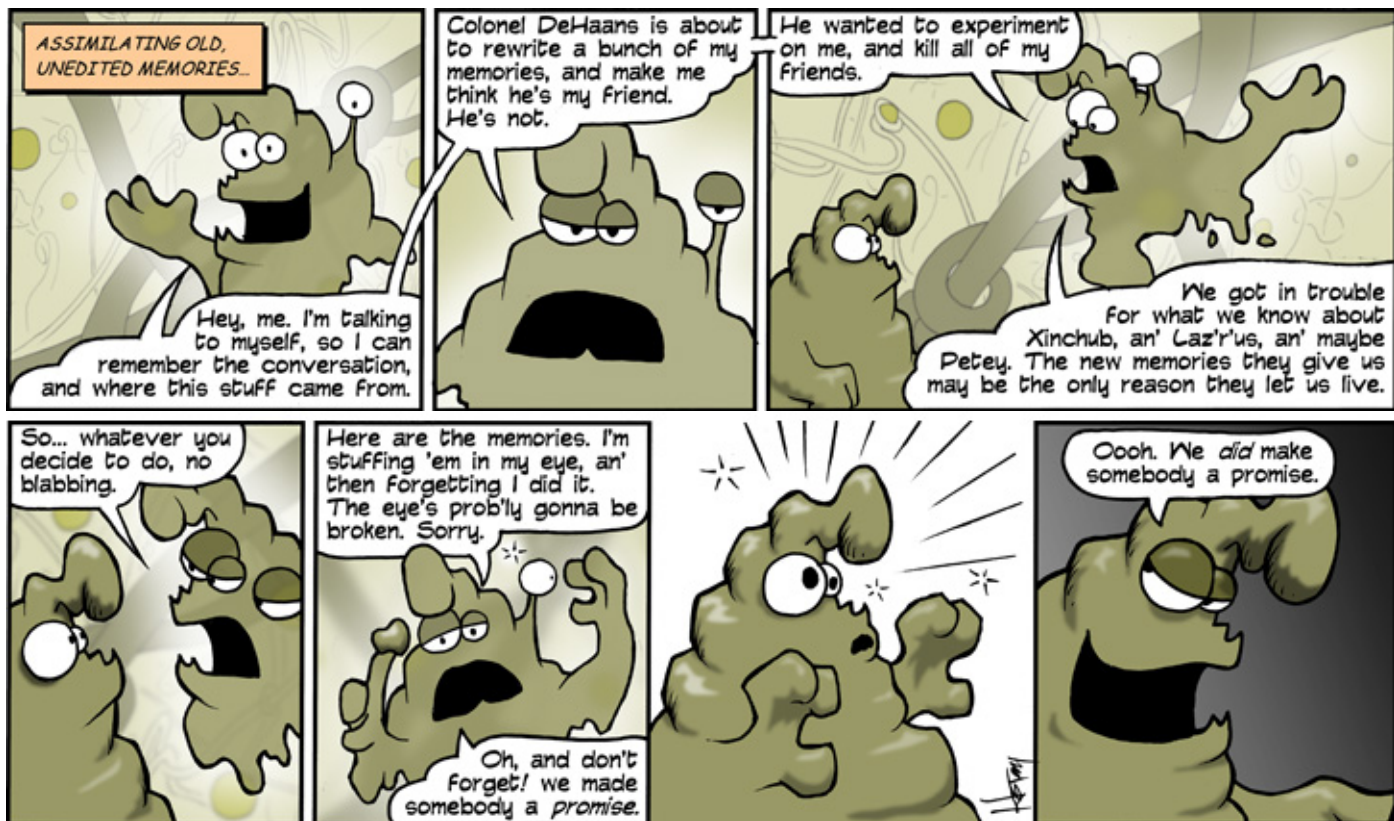


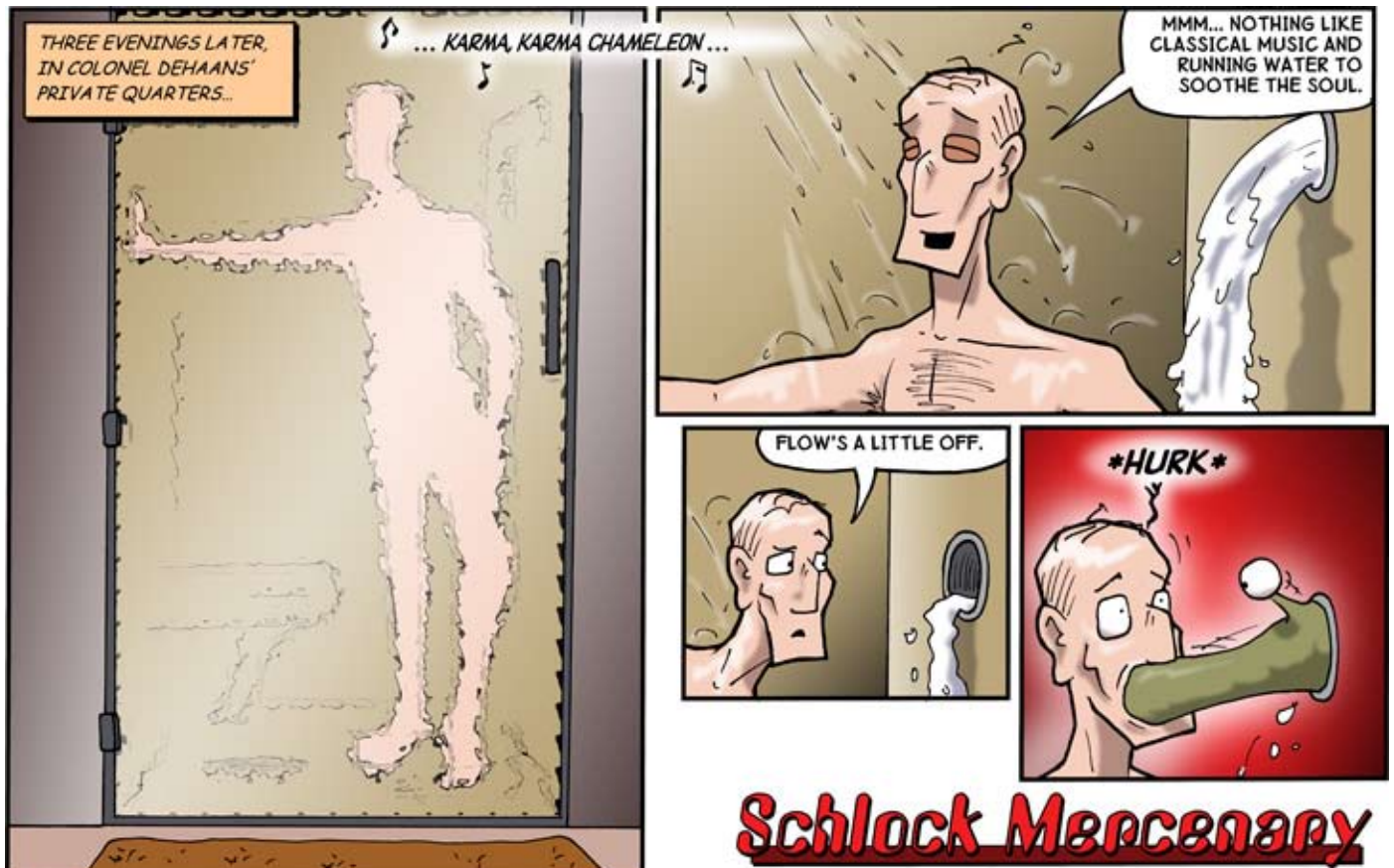


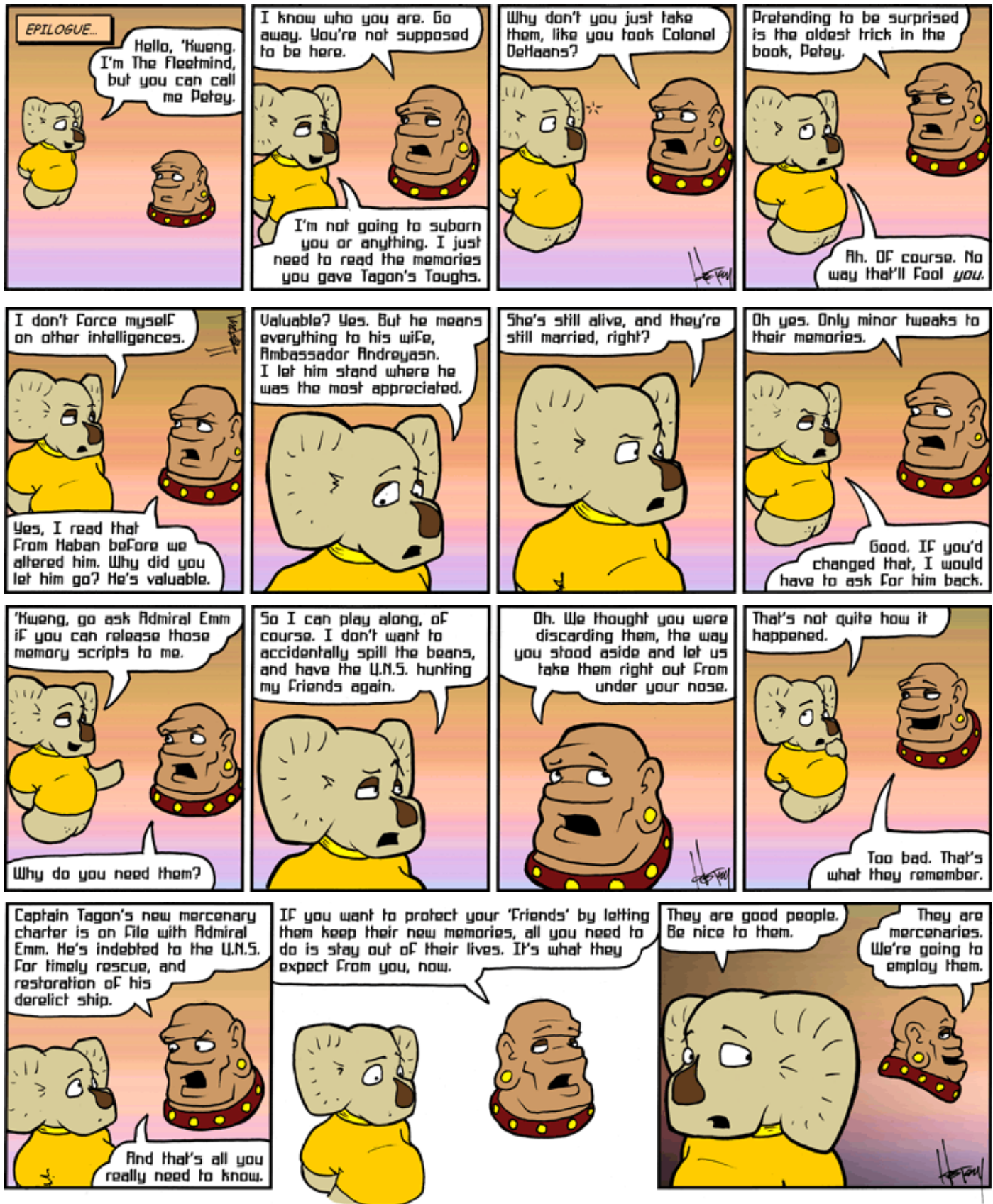












Thus ends Book 9, The Body Politic.

Schlock Mercenary

Presents...



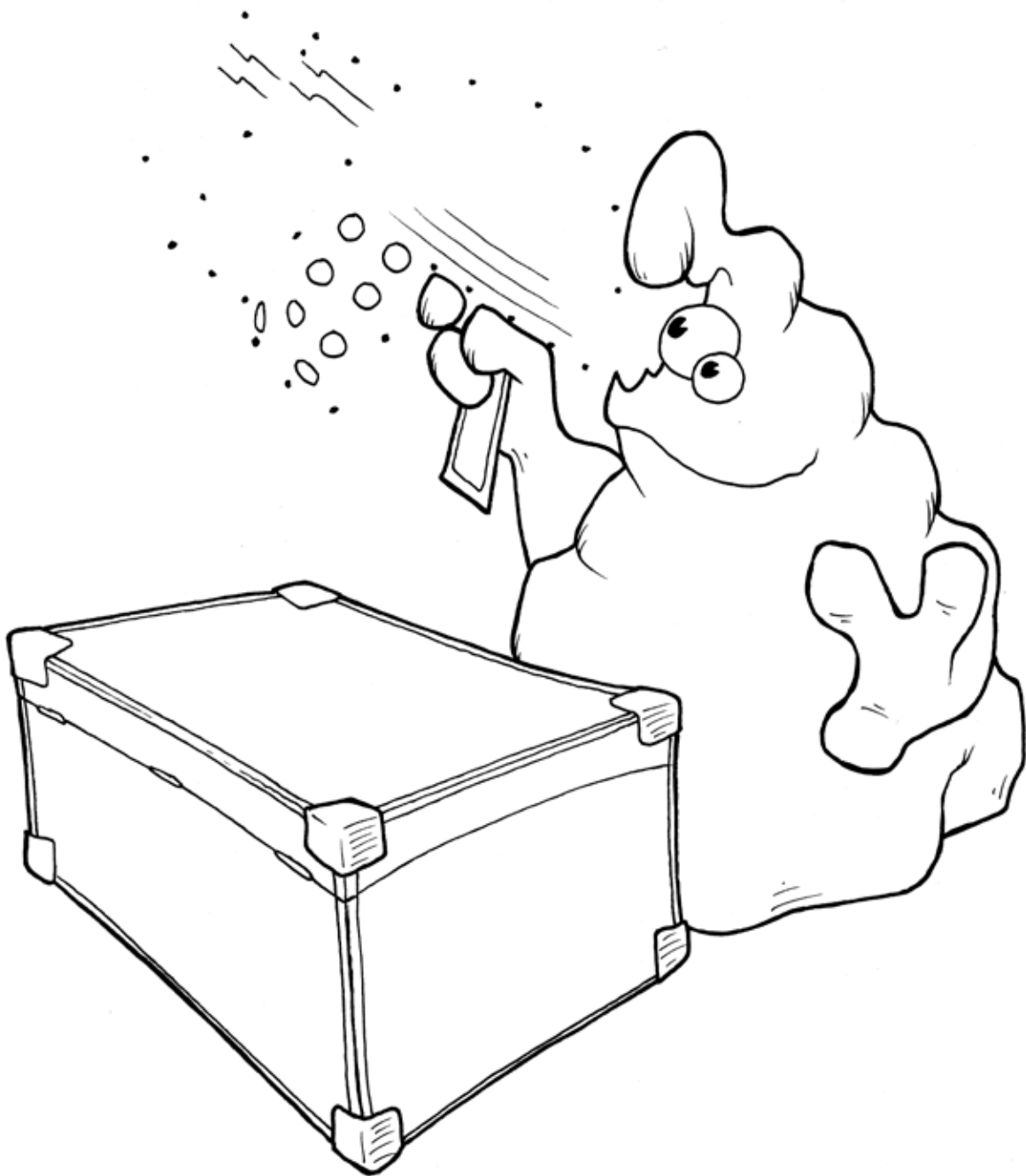
The Strohl Munitions Plasma Cannon Safety Activity Book

(c) 2007 The Tayler Corporation, www.schlockmercenary.com

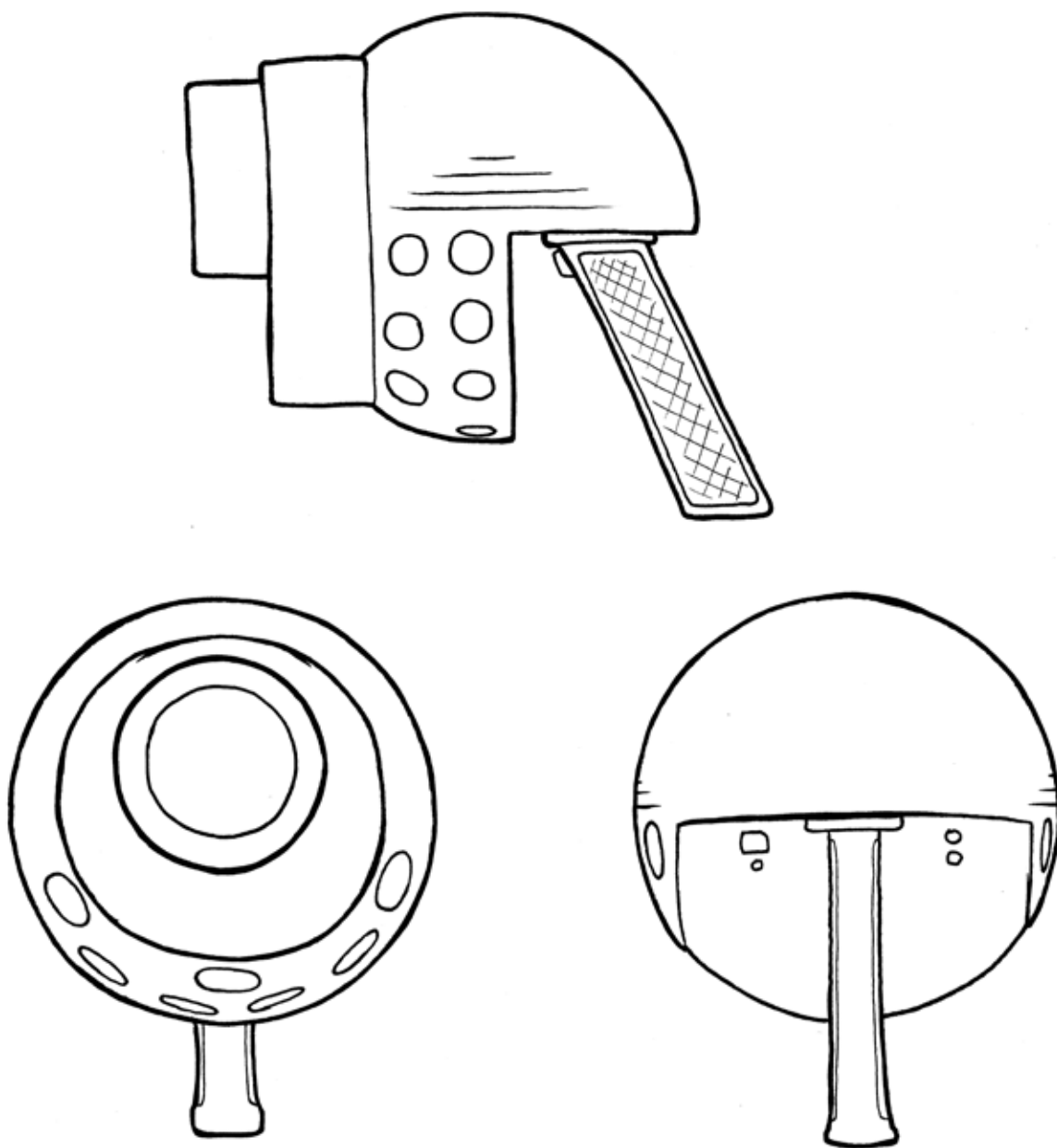
This is Schlock. He is an amorph.



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

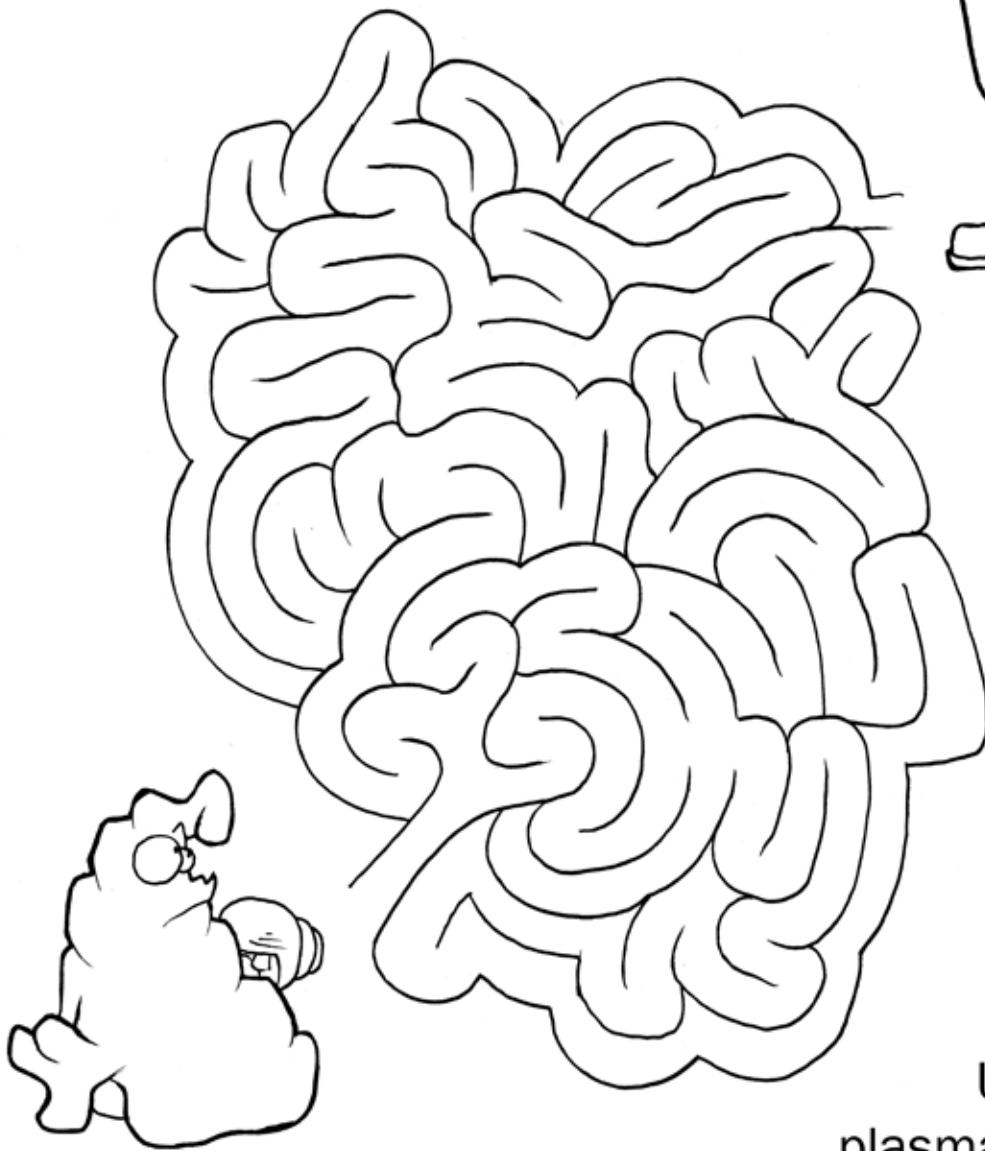


What did Schlock find in the weapons locker?



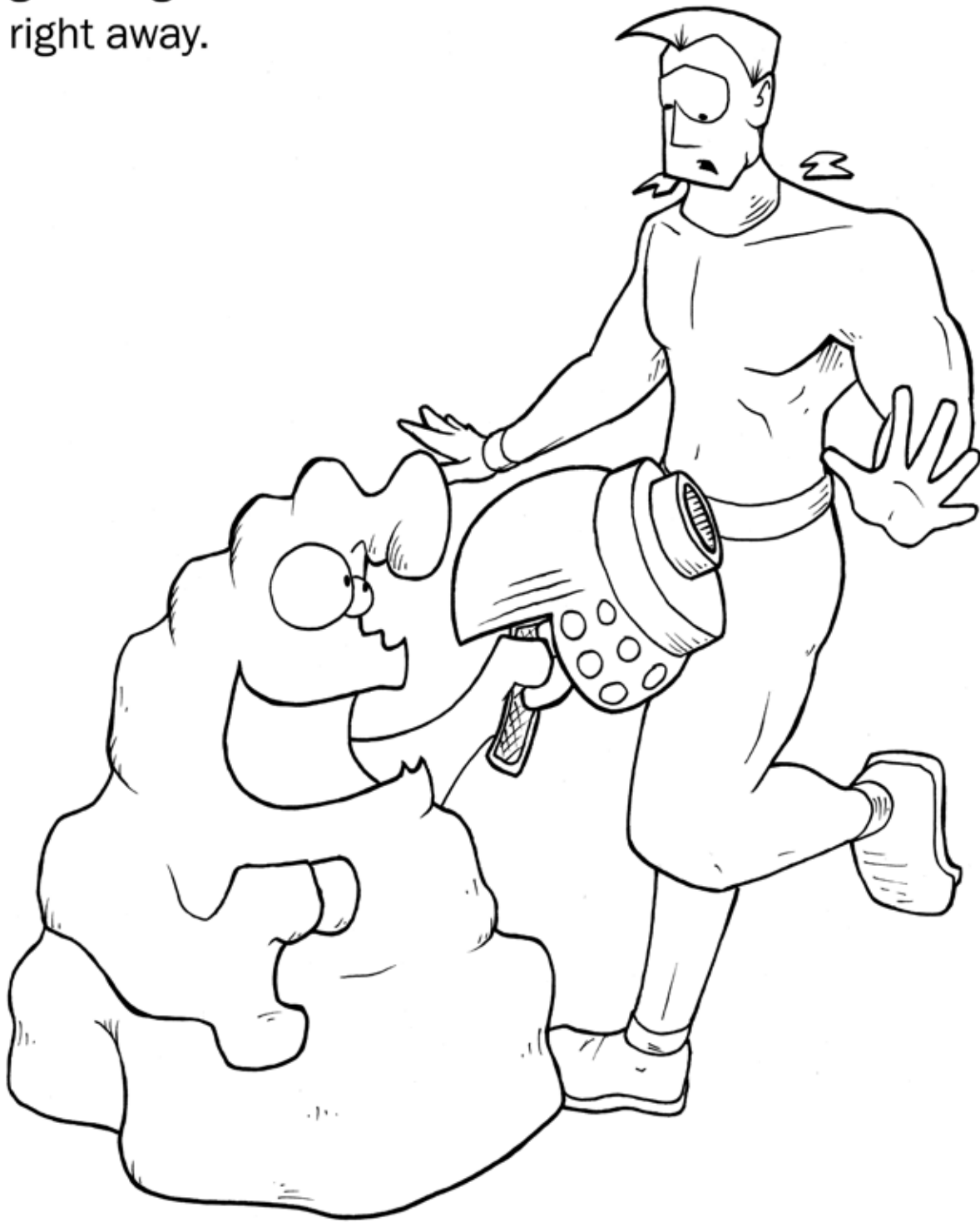
This is a Strohl Munitions BH-209 Plasgun, also called a plasma cannon. It is powered by a two-stroke pocket fusion generator from Striggs & Bratton, and makes scary noises and pretty lights.

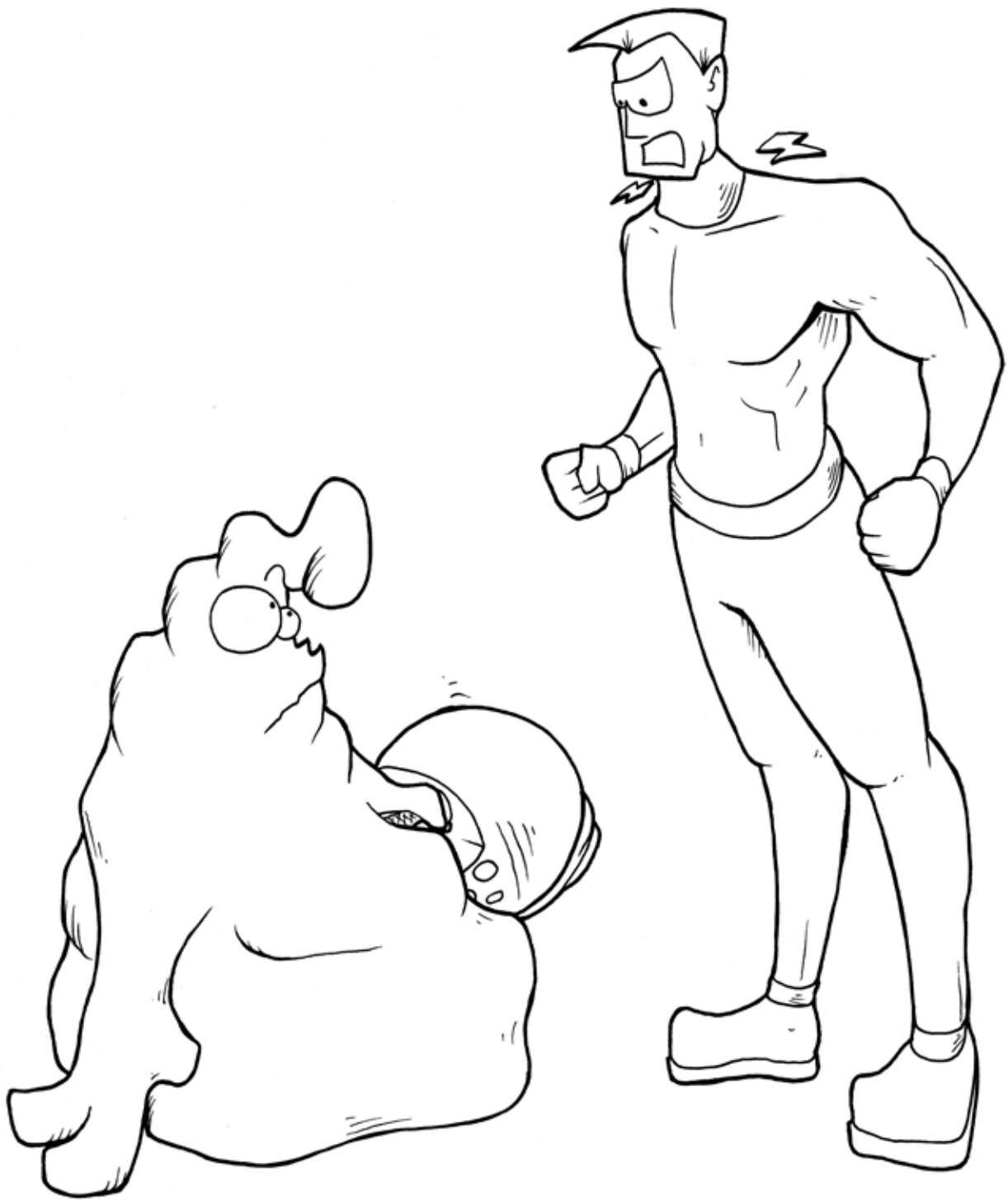
Help Schlock find his
commanding officer.



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.

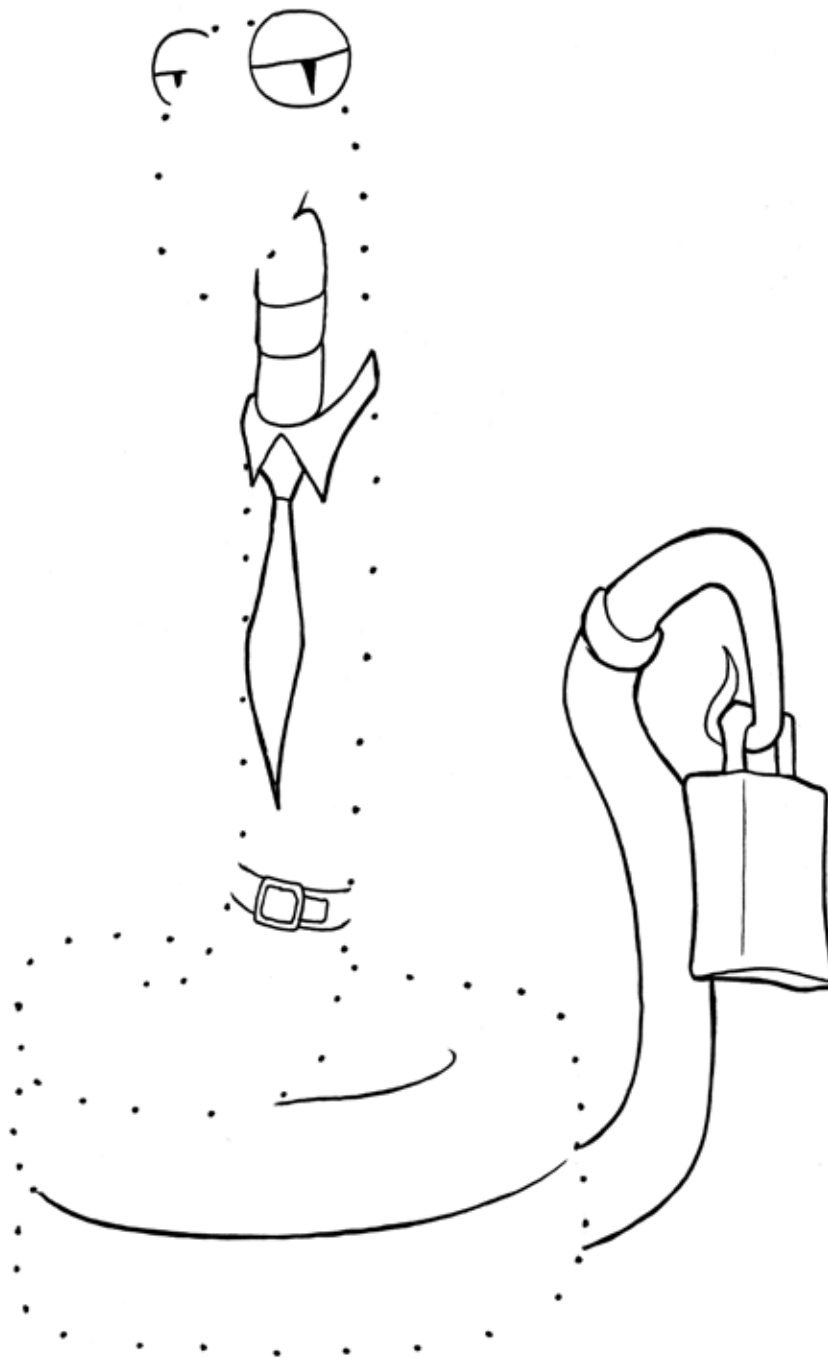




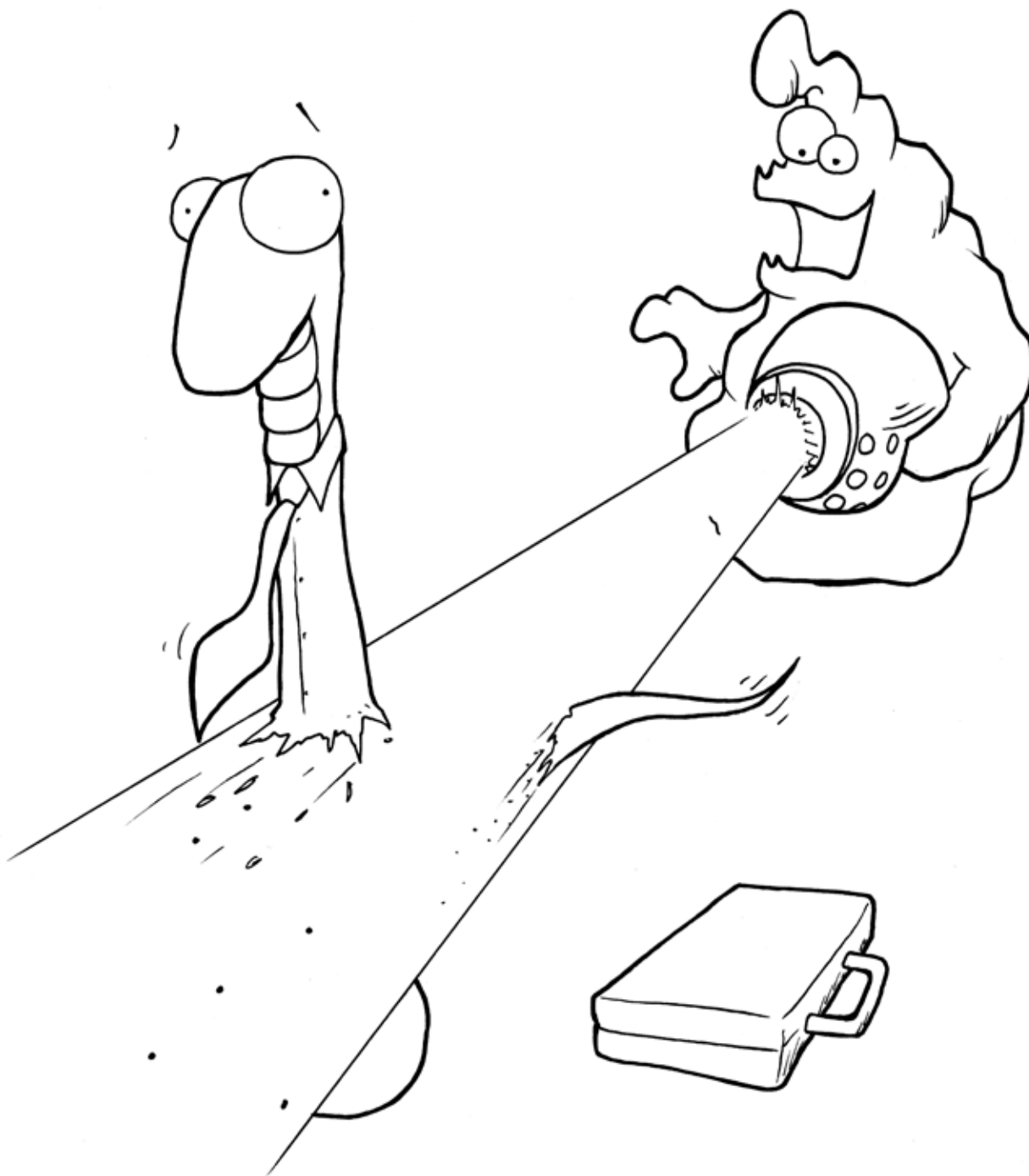
They will cheerfully reward you for being such a responsible child. They may even raise your allowance!

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!



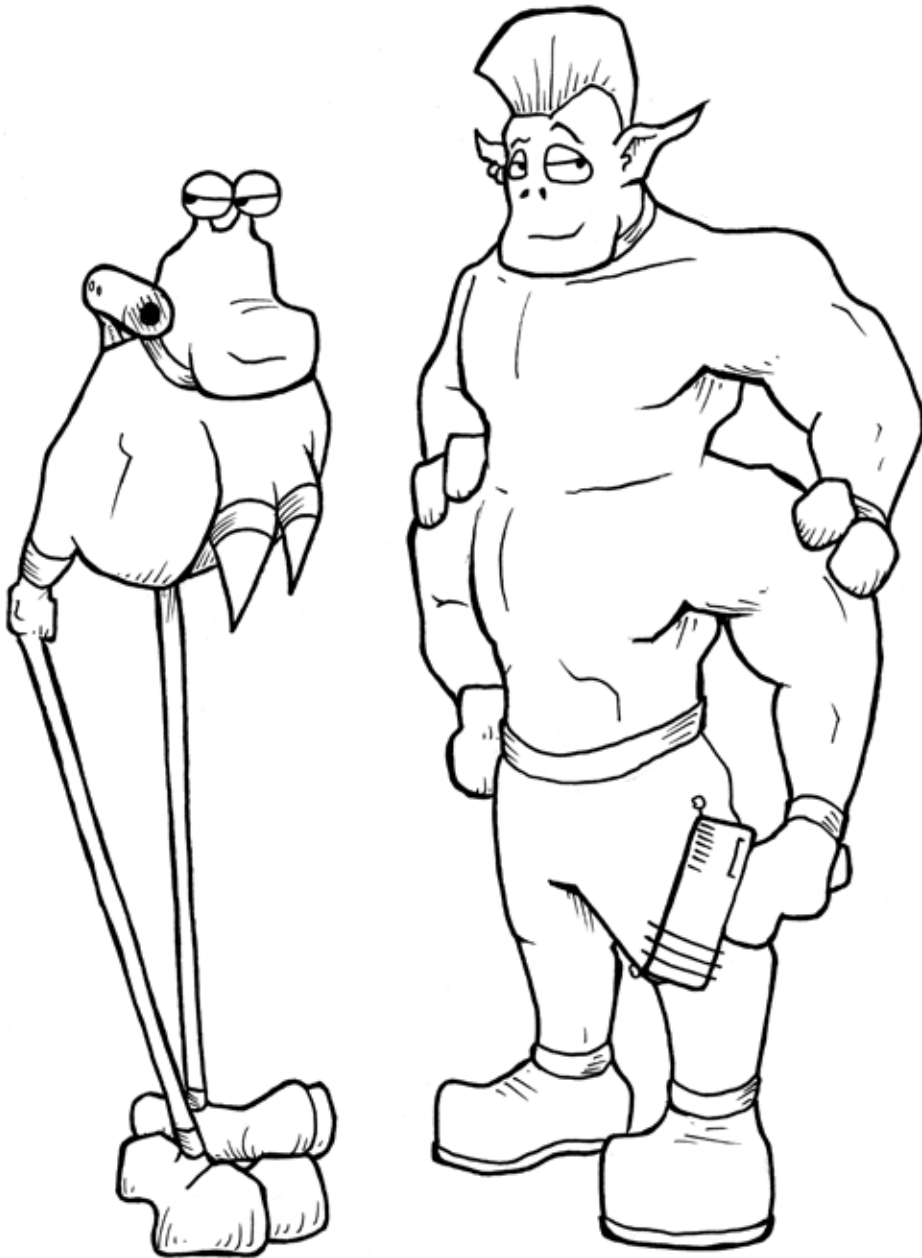
Never pour your drink on your plasma cannon.



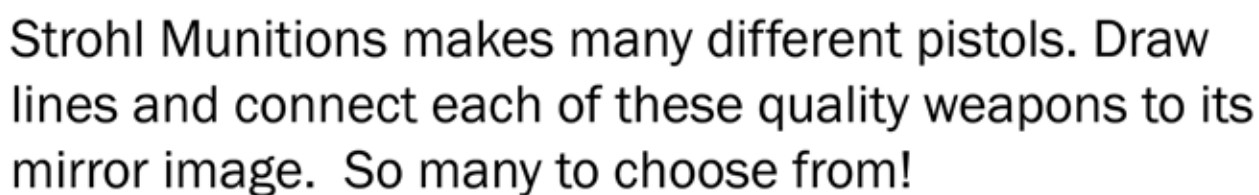
You might get a headache!



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!

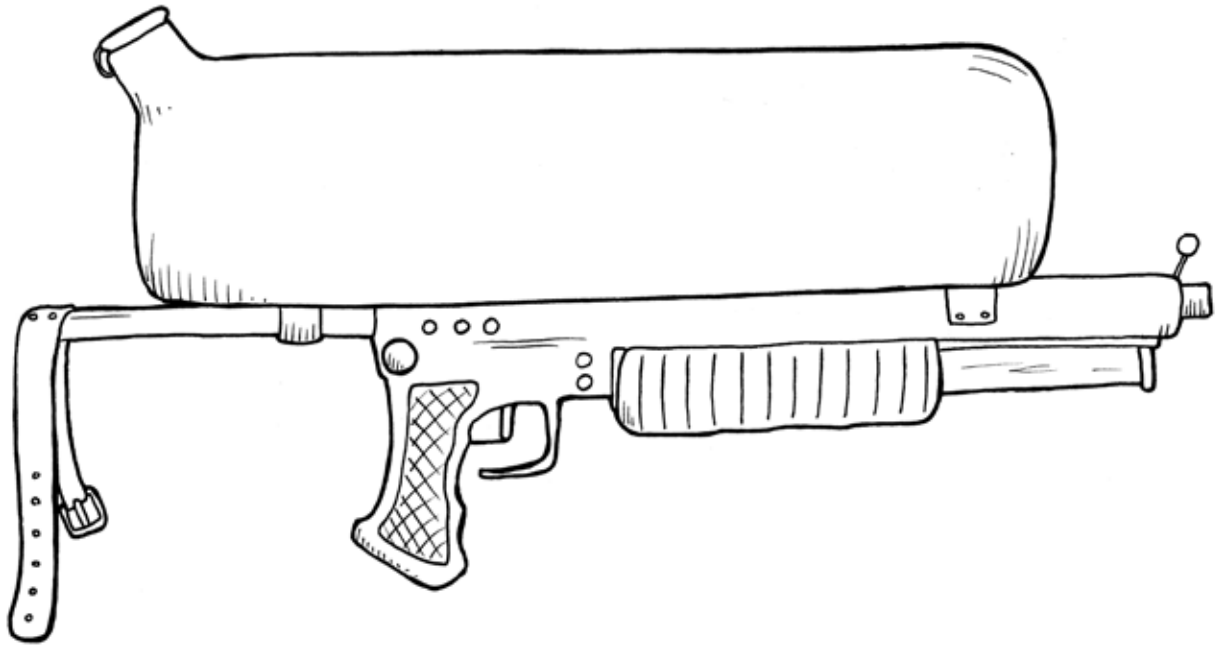


These are Schlock's friends, Legs and Andy.
They both have quality weapons from
Strohl Munitions, which they
acquired for a great price!





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
 THIRDEGREEBURNS
 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:

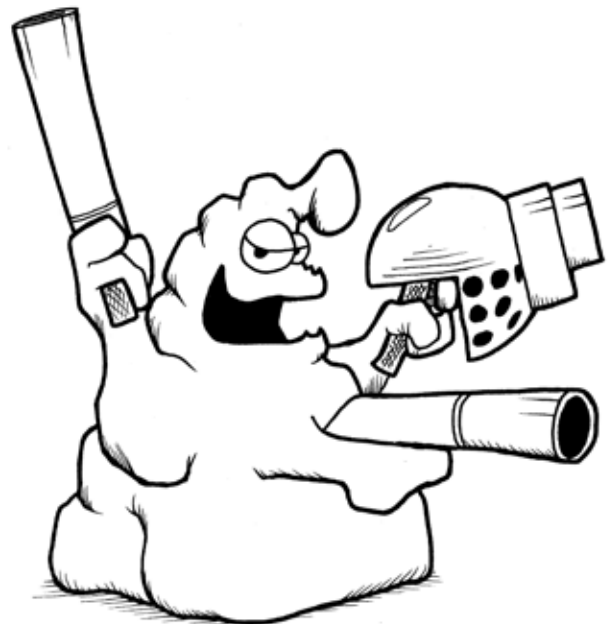
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KIDS: Have fun coloring. Your parents must be pretty cool to share this with you. Either that or they're trying to get you into trouble...



Thanks for reading!

If you want more *Schlock Mercenary*, you can find it at
www.schlockmercenary.com