

## *Chapter 1*

### *“Rock The Vibe”*

The last thing Sarantos seemed to remember was Addie’s last words to him, before everything changed forever. She had cut him off. “But, isn’t life worth a kiss?”

The kiss had been golden, it’s value infinite, it’s appetite unquenchable. It was soft and loving.

He’d not touched those lips for several months now though. “Yes, Addie, life is worth a kiss, but only your kiss.” His voice was low and the pale painfulness stabbed the air looking for an opponent to attack...to blame, but dropped dejectedly into the empty valley without spilling a drop of blood.



The night wind was bitter and slapped against his red cheeks, adding to the melancholy of the moment. He could see the encampment from his perch on top of Sander’s hill. Their campfire flickered without shame giving away the size of the army to anyone who would venture to look. How could the allies take them without endangering the prisoners? He knew they’d kill them first, as soon as they attacked.

As the Captain, Sarantos knew he always had his finger on the trigger but he did all he could to not light it up. It would mean Addie’s death. He wanted to go into that camp and bring her out on his own terms...but then there’d probably be others that would face the same fate as the woman he loved.

“Captain?”

The sound jarred his body and, again he felt the cold penetrate his chest.

“Brel.”

“What do you think we should do Captain? It looks like a huge camp.”

“We can’t consider an attack from the air. They’ll kill them all.” He stared straight ahead at the small fires. He could almost smell the smoke. “I was wondering how I might possibly go into the camp and bring them back out without being noticed.” Brel nodded as the night lay dormant, eagerly listening to their private conversation. “Then blow them all to hell.”

“Agreed,” said Brel. “Captain, I might have a plan.”

He couldn’t help but smile at the Brad’s idea of a plan. “Of course, it would involve you. Correct?”

Brel turned his head away from his Captain and focused on the camps staring back at him thru the night. “But of course!”

Sarantos could almost feel a smirk dance mischievously across the Brad’s face, but knew that wouldn’t ever happen. Instead, Brel’s voice said it all while Sarantos grinned at how Brel played his hand. He wanted to know more about this race when this was all done. They were a fascinating people: self-disciplined beyond reproach, relentless in their drive to excel, and now, it seems they also had a hidden sense of humor.

He patted him on the back and smiled. “Well, Brel, why don’t you tell me about this evil plan of yours.”

“She’s my commander Captain and they will pay if they’ve harmed her in any way. I’ve known her for many years and respect her code of conduct. Addie’s also a skilled opponent in any competition, whether it’s wit or combat. It’s hard to beat her at any sport.” Their silence suddenly brought a heaviness to Sarantos’s heart. “They will pay, I promise you that!” said Brel.

Sarantos knew that he wouldn’t want to be on the other end of the Blad’s anger, yet still, he could not feel any remorse whatsoever for the poor fools who chose to be on that end. He too wanted them to pay for what they’d done.

He allowed the frigid air to sting his cheeks again and again, until his eyes and nose began to drip. “So, you going in alone??”

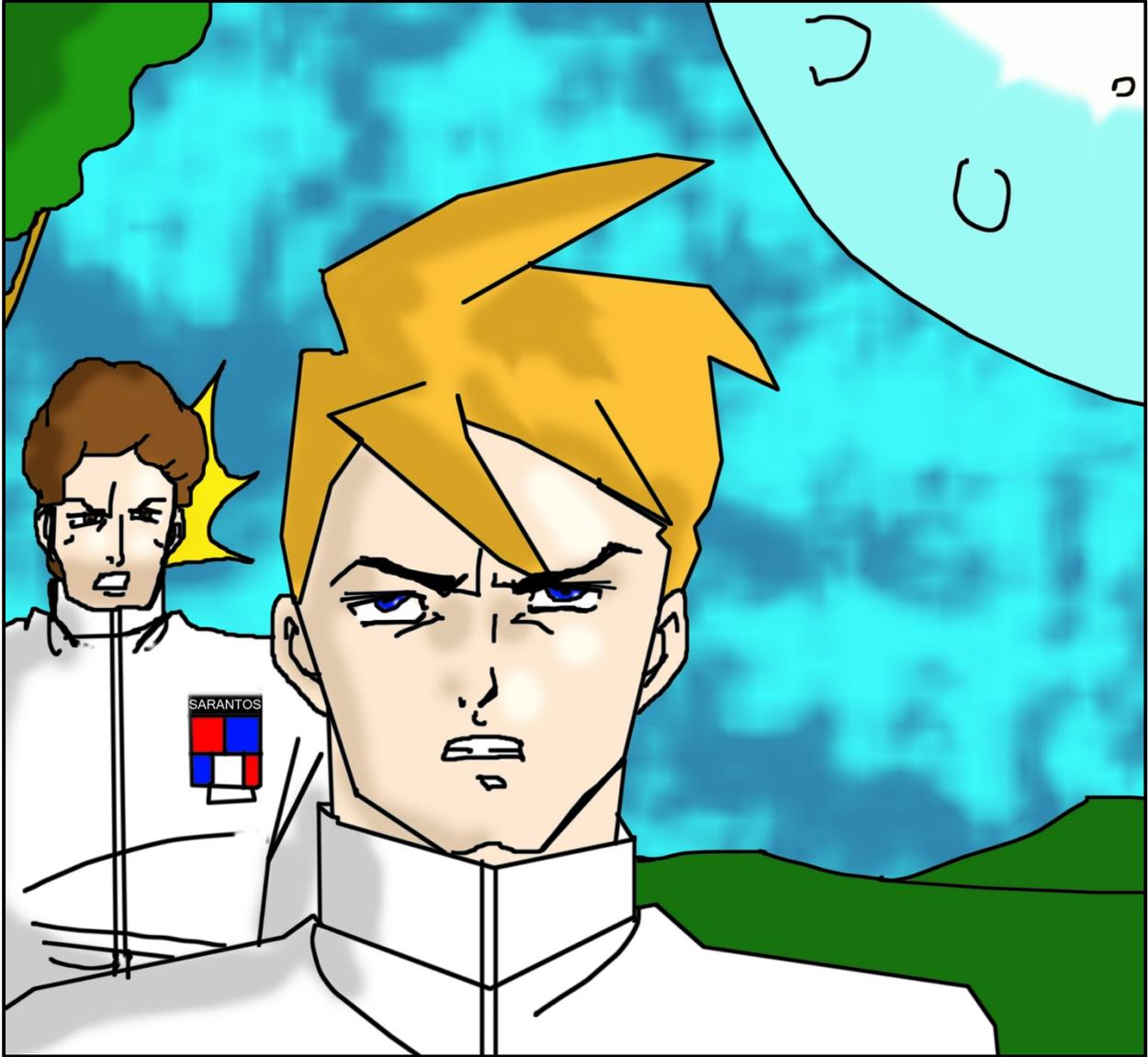
“Yes.”

“Do you think that’s wise? What if something happens to you and we have no alternative, but to then go in with guns a blazing?”

“It won’t come to that.”

Somehow, when Brel said those words, it was with more conviction than anything he’d ever heard uttered in his entire life. All he could do was nod, because he believed him. There was not even a trace of doubt in his mind. He believed Brel.

He watched as Brel scanned the horizon then looked skyward. His eyes were shifting. Sarantos could almost feel his mind calculating each move he might make.



He shivered at the thought of what the Brad would do to retrieve Addie, Chief Stone Drake and Private Sally Mann.

“When will you leave?”

“Tomorrow, morning. I want to be at the camp at dusk, the following evening.”

How could he get there in two days? That was stunning. Most of his army wouldn't arrive until the fourth day on such a trek. It was quite a distance and not easy terrain.

“Sure. We’ll leave at the same time, but you know we’ll be about two days behind you?”

“Yes, I know.”

He cracked up because he was sure the Blad was happy about that. He usually liked working alone. It would’ve been simpler to teleport there, but this large of an army would take some time to do that. The woods and fields across his homeland, Okura, still needed to be cleared of all enemy infiltration so a hike was the best move. He knew they had to finish this mission, but he’d rather be on his starship flying around the galaxy. He couldn’t wait to get back to exploring the unknown depths of space.

He was angry now once again at the races that decided they wanted it all, and war was typically their first choice to achieve that selfish goal. He didn’t understand why throughout history, why leaders couldn’t work things out with open communication and mutual cooperation. He certainly couldn’t wrap his head around this right now. We were supposed to learn from our mistakes, to learn from history but that never happens. Arrogance, excessive self-worth, greed, and obsessive control hadn’t changed as dark desires since the beginning of time. Mankind just perfected their lust over time, by making motives and ambitions massively more destructive. The toys got bigger.

Brel said, “Captain, let’s head back to camp.”

“Yes, for sure, it’s cold out here. Can you take Matt too?” He knew the cold didn’t seem to affect Brel like it did him, but in this weather, it seemed the logical thing to say.

They both started heading towards their camp. The crunch of the snow, under his own two jingly feet jumped to his ears like the roaring sound of fireworks. Brel made no sound. He walked in sad silence next to him.

After a few lengthy minutes Sarantos asked, “Brel do you think it wise to take Matt with you?”

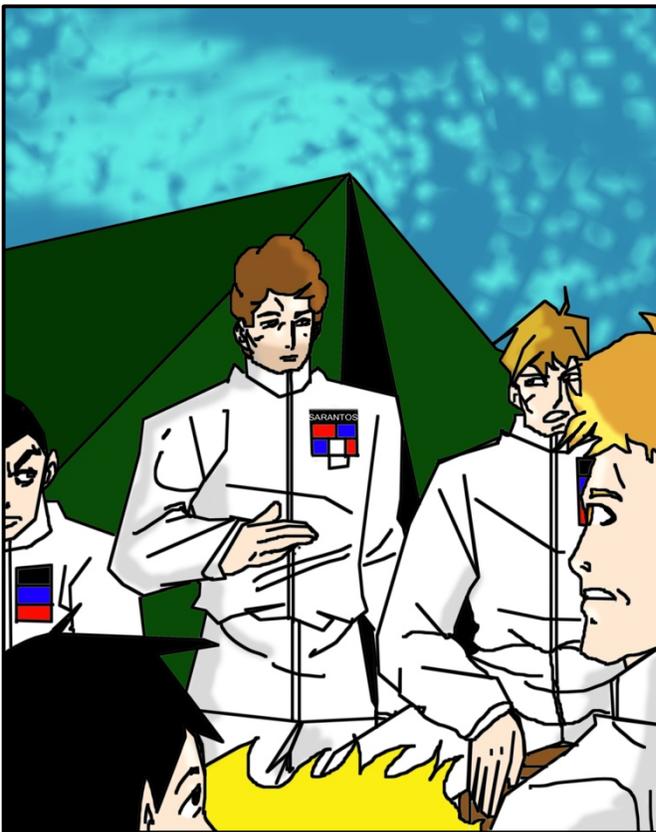
“No, Captain. I will take no one. Matt will serve you best. Unless, you’re giving me a direct order, sir, I will go alone. It is the best move.”

“No. No. No, I’m not giving you a direct order, Brel. I’m just throwing it out there. I respect your decision and understand why you prefer to go alone.”

“Thank you, Captain.”

They moved through the camp as they arrived to see several worried faces. Many soldiers were eating a warm stew, some preferred dried protein, but all of them were sitting around the campfires drinking warm blackberry tea, a very plentiful leaf on

Okura. It was easily acquired, so it was always fresh. Even in the cold weather, the plant on his homeland always kept green leaves.



Brel nodded and went to his tent. He watched the reserved man move quickly across, then disappear into his tent. Sarantos proceeded to his own tent area.

A group of four soldiers were enjoying the warm fire directly in front of his tent. He joined them for a cup of tea. He didn’t know any of them. The largest group of soldiers that followed him were supplied by

Okura's forces. Each battalion was led by one of their own. Their conversation was crisp but supplied him with information about what had been going on around his home since he'd been gone.

It was getting late. "Chief Brady, inform your commander that we'll be leaving at dawn tomorrow, and to spread the word around the camp."

"Yes, sir." Brady got up and left.

"Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Captain." They said in unison.

He stood up and looked one last time at the fire. Oh, Addie, my love. No need to worry, I feel your vibe. I know you're still alive. We will rock the vibe again together, soon my love, very soon.

The fateful day the enemy captured her was by far the worst day of his life. The flames reminded him of the carnage of that battle. It could've been worse though. More might have lost their lives, if not for Addie, Stone, and Mann. They sacrificed themselves for the rest of them. He felt blessed the enemy chose to take them alive instead of finish them off in front of him and his army. He went inside the warm tent. The bed looked inviting. He laid down eagerly.

The top of the tent was dark, the small bedside lamp offered it no contrast. Tiny reflections rejoiced around the canvas walls. He took a deep breath and inhaled slowly searching for the one smell that brought light into his whole body, the essence of Addie.

He felt scared. They were captured over a month ago. This war should've been over a long time ago but such are the foolish hopes of all wars. He knew she was alive but worried daily what they'd done to her body, to her spirit. He was nervous she might be broken. After six months of combat, he was thankful that he hadn't lost any of his own crew to death. But, being without Addie for so long was like death for him. He felt lost. He felt angry!

He longed to touch her, hold her, stare into those gorgeous eyes, caress her cheeks and make passionate love to such a sexy woman. He felt bad that Brel would do this rescue without him. He knew it was for the best though.

Guilt plagued him constantly for the last month night and day. Fits of sweat caused him to freeze in the cooler evenings, as it saturated his clothing. Could he have done something to prevent the three of them from risking their lives to save the others that eventful day? He wasn't there when it happened. He really couldn't have done anything to stop it he reasoned repeatedly, unless he'd stayed with that battalion.

This war had been uglier than most initially thought. Every commander on the allies' side believed it would end quickly and before it got out of control, but that didn't happen. The enemy came up with one surprise after another, always setting them back a step or two. The Federation was ahead in this game called war, but Sarantos knew there were no real winners in any war. Something inside everyone died permanently, even if they didn't lose their life. They were changed forever.

He'd had to go with another group that day. They'd lost their leader and he had others he could put in charge of his own army that were capable. They were more equipped to lead a group already organized and most of them knew each other, making it easier to work together that day. Brel had been away from the group as well. He did that sometimes, and now, Sarantos believed that Brel might somehow also feel responsible for losing them. He, Matt, and Ensign Harry Born had delivered the small army to another commander and just caught up with Addie's group in time to see the end of the battle and the capturing of his three soldiers.

His heart had bled out that day. Though he wasn't shot, he felt like a bullet had pierced straight thru his heart and penetrated the very depths of his soul. He'd died. Now he was trying to be reincarnated by retrieving his shattered heart from the monsters that had stolen it. Ever since that day, his voice started screaming inside his head every few hours. It drove him mad with headaches.

He'd loved his life with Addie. He missed her. Together they danced through life's obstacles to feel alive. It was so cool when they only touched each other with their eyes. One look. That's all it took. She was the only woman he'd ever been able to do that with. She could turn him on with one look and he could smell her silky hair, taste her skin, and feel her soul – all through that one look.



Sleeping was difficult, and when he did fall asleep his dreams reflected extremely agitated visual nightmares; Addie being molested and tortured by her captors.

A repeated dream brought on the sweating fits. It was relentless. It was always the same! It tortured him every night. He closed his eyes anyway. It began yet again...

His crew were in a massive hall decorated with candles on the walls. Strange sheers in greens and browns that hung from the ceiling to the floor floated and gently swayed, as though a breeze touched their fabric begging them to boogie. Fog eerily crept around the room with a heavy smell of antiseptic filling his nostrils.

He could see no tables or chairs, just people rocking and dancing. The music was heavy metal and supplied by a band that had set up a stage on a hill, with rocky red

stairs leading up to the stage. It was an awesome visual. This reminded him of how he missed the music, the band, and the stage since he'd gone on this mission.

She moved closer to him, possibly sensing his need to join the band. Her eyes said it all. She spoke slowly. Stay and make sweet love to me he blurted out. Everyone could feel the energy in the air between them. Being with her was so intense, because of that savory sensation. The music was vibrating inside of him, wanting her warmth, and wanting to be a part of what caused it all...the band.

He decided on her. They could unwind.

Sarantos whispered. "Light it up, baby, get ready to sin."

He didn't understand why he said the word sin, but he did say it. It wasn't sinful to love her this much, yet, the powerfulness of it felt quite sinful. It felt so good, that it must be sinful. It felt so good that there was no way it could possibly be allowed. Could it? The indulgence of her essence that wrapped around his body without touching it, made it bask in sin. It made them both bask in sin.

He licked her, tasted her, drove his vibe into her soul, without a word, without a touch. God, it had to be extremely sinful to come so close to the ecstasy of her, all so damn easily.

This went on for what seemed like hours. Then something happened, and she was bleeding. The doc came out of the fog and patched her up. He took Addie's hand but he waited for what seemed like an eternity, until they could dance again.

A man danced next to them, someone he didn't recognize. "Captain, I need your help."

“What do you need soldier?”

We never stopped dancing during our conversation, but Addie put her hands over her ears and shook her head no.

“Addie, stop it.” She didn’t stop though, and then I shouted again. “Addie, stop it!”

“Captain, you need to join the band.”

“What?”

I couldn’t believe my good fortune, the band needed me again for some reason.

“Captain, you are needed. They need you. You need to join the band.” The soldier repeated the words, but added a flair of urgency that tugged at Sarantos’s heart strings.

Hearts were skipping everywhere. Brel danced towards him with Sally Mann.

Brel said, “Captain, I have to go.”

“Okay,” said Sarantos.

Sally tried to hold on to Brel, but he removed her hands from his arms and disappeared into the fog while she started crying.

“Captain, you need to join the band.” The floor pulsed.



Stone Drake danced toward Sally.

“I’ll dance with you, Sally,” said Drake, and took her hand.

“Captain, you need to join the band, now!”

Sarantos looked at Addie. Her eyes were wild with fear and her head shook with urgency. She grabbed his hands and begged him with her eyes, to stay.

“Addie, I can’t stay any longer, the band needs me. I have to go help them. You understand, don’t you?”

Her face grew weary as she weeped and then wasted away. The happiness of the moment melted into despair. He didn’t want to look at her anymore. It hurt.

“Sarantos, please, I need you.”

“I need you too, babe. But dance here, my love. Wait for me. I’ll be back quickly. I’ll be helping the band. No need to worry. You’ll be in charge on the dance floor.”

Major Flint danced toward them with the rest of the crew.

“I’ll help you Addie,” said Major Flint, as he danced around her with the entire crew.

Soon Sarantos couldn’t see Addie.

Sarantos shouted over the music. “Addie, feel the vibe, dance to feel alive, no need to worry!”

She was strong, she’d be okay. He danced toward the stairs with the soldier who came for him.

“Captain, you’ll need this.” The soldier held out his hand and handed him a wicked red and black guitar.



pushed himself harder.

“Soldier, are we almost there?”

“Yes, Captain.”

“Good. It seems as though we’ve been walking a very long time.”

“Yes, Captain. The band needs your help.”

The guitar had Captain spelled out on the face in gold letters that shimmered with velvet vibrancy.

“Wow.” That’s all he could say as he took the guitar and headed up the rocky stairs. The soldier followed faithfully behind him.

The climb was rough, and he had to stop to catch his breath several times before reaching the top. Every time it appeared that he was almost to the top, he somehow wasn’t. He felt frustrated, but the guitar caused his fingertips to itch with anticipation. So he

“I understand, Soldier. I’m obliged to do my duty.”

“Yes, your duty, sir, is to help the band.”

“Can I ask, why?”

“They lost their leader, the lead guitar and singer. Without him, the entire band is lost.”

“Yes, soldier, I understand.”

“You can hear the music is off key without their leader, sir.”

“Yes, I can.”

He wanted to run to the top to finally look back and see Addie, but suddenly he could only move in slow motion up the stairs. A shaped shadow moved past him; it looked like Brel, but he couldn’t be sure.

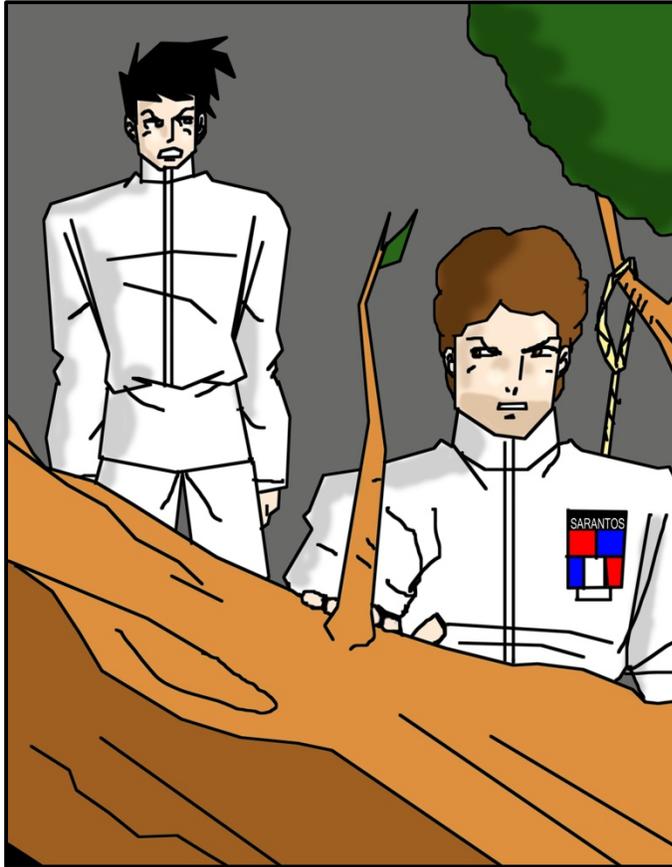
The music was getting louder.

The pace seemed to pick up, but then a tree was on the next step in front of them blocking their path.

“NO!”

He was getting angry and annoyed and losing his cool. “Soldier, help me.”

“I can’t sir, you’re the Captain. The band needs you.”



“That’s ridiculous. I demand you to help me, soldier.”

“Sorry, sir.”

“I order you to help me, soldier. I’m your Captain!”

“Sorry, sir, no can do. I have strict orders to get you to help the band only.”

“I can’t help the band without getting to the top and I can’t get to the top without you helping me move this tree in our way.”

“I really can’t sir. You’re not my Captain and I have my own orders.”

“I don’t care if you have your orders, now help me move this tree.”

“Sorry, sir.”

He looked around for something to help him. There was a rope hanging around a tree. There was a noose in it. That would have to do.

Sarantos climbed to the rope and pulled the noose down to the main branch on the tree and looped it around the fallen tree. He knew if he set it up like a pulley, he could work it.

“Soldier, help me pull the tree out of the path.”

“Sorry, sir.”

He never wanted to hit a soldier before now. The urge to beat him to a senseless pulp crossed his mind, but it would be time wasted.

Struggling to pull on the rope almost gave him a hernia. Damn, how was he supposed to help the band with all these obstacles popping up.

He pulled again, nothing.

Then Brel was beside him, and said, “Pull, Captain.”

Together the two of them got the tree up out of the road and managed to pull it to the side.

“Captain, why didn’t you just climb over it?”

“Thanks, for that sage advice, Brel. I’m not really sure why I didn’t.”

Brel was gone in a flash and then he was alone again with this irritating soldier.

“Why didn’t we teleport there, soldier?”

“Why? Because our wrist teleporters aren’t working in this unfavorable environment. Are they now working sir?”

“Of course, they aren’t. Why would I think they would be? Nothing’s gone right since this damn war started.”

“What war, sir?”

“Never mind, soldier...never mind.”

It started to snow. The stairs were slick, and they were slowed down again.

“I thought we were in a building, soldier. Where the hell did the snow come from?”

“We travelled past the dance, sir. We are in the mountain now; the band needs you badly.”

“Yes, of course they do.”

“Sir, cover your guitar with your jacket.”

He looked at his guitar. Snow was getting inside the soundhole and filling it up to the top.

“Great. Soldier, maybe I shouldn’t have come to help the band? I should’ve stayed back at the dance. Now my guitar is almost ruined. Tell me how I can help the band without my guitar?”

“You can lead them, sir. Sing and lead.”

“What if I just want to see Addie and not sing?”

“You can see Addie the faster you get to the top and help the band.”

“Yes, we’ve established that I need to help the band.”

That soldier had a lot to learn about communication skills.



The wind pressed against their bodies, slowing down their movements. He stopped and removed his coat, finally covering the guitar. The words Captain were no longer showing. He’d deserted his army. It wasn’t appropriate that he should be called Captain anymore.

He deserted his crew. What kind of Captain deserts his crew? Captain Sarantos, that’s who. Why did he do it?

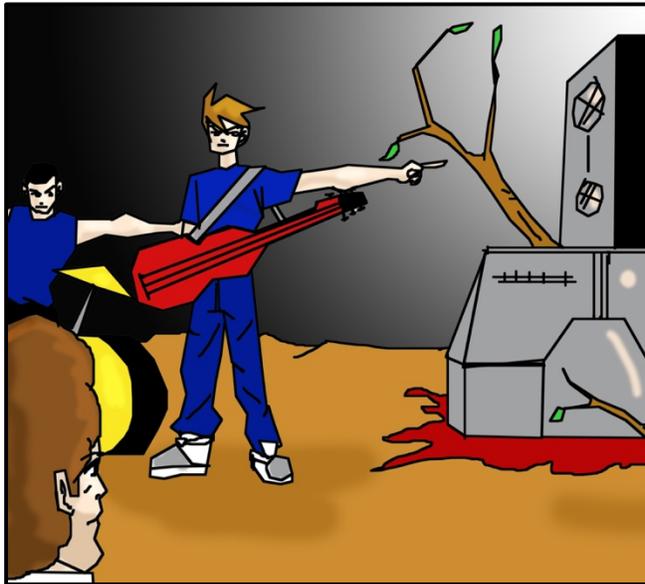
Bile rose up in his throat and his stomach began to ache. He kept climbing anyway.

The guitar became a weight, slowing him down. The word Captain had fully disappeared. He couldn't get that thought out of his head. Overwhelming guilt plagued his muscle movement.

Addie, I'm sorry. I didn't keep dancing. I miss you already but I'll play a song for you when I finally make it to the band.

The top was now definitely in full view. He could see some of the members of the band, standing around doing nothing, but the music was playing loudly.

He finally reached the top and the snow disappeared, replaced by fog.



“Why are you standing around?”

“Waiting for our Captain.” They sang the words in unison.

“Where’s the music coming from?”

They all pointed to a sound machine. It had branches all over it and blood dripped down the sides creating a pool

on the floor in front of it.

“Well, I’m here now.”

The excitement of playing crawled out of his stomach and into his hands. He shook out his guitar and told them to get in place. The mike was ready and so was he.

“When I say, one, two, three, stop the sound machine, and we’ll play ‘Rock the Vibe.’ You all know that song, right?”

The members all shook their heads.

He smiled and nodded.

“One, two, three.”

The music stopped, and the fog dissipated just enough so he could see the great hall with the dancers in it. There was Addie, watching over everyone.

He blew on the mike. “Hello, everyone, my name is Captain Sarantos and I’ve come to help the band.”

He paused and allowed the crowd to cheer.

“We’re going to sing a new song I wrote called Rock the Vibe! The chorus is catchy and don’t worry if you’ve never heard it before, you’ll pick it up easily!”

The crowd cheered.

“Hi Addie. Now, let the party begin! Everybody, enjoy the ride and rock the vibe!”

The music started, and his guitar was almost playing on its own. Heartwarming harmony. Melodic perfection.

“Rolling deep, stuck in line...”

Addie was gorgeous and telling everyone how to get out of the line...but, something was wrong.

Flint's skin turned green and his hat fell to the dance floor when a point rose to the top of his head. He waved at Sarantos with six fingers, and then there was a weapon protruding out of his jacket and he pulled it out and pointed it at the crew from the ship.

Addie, ran towards him with Stone and Mann in close pursuit. Then the whole dance floor burst into flames.

The floor was on fire. Belocks and Bendarians were everywhere. His starship crew turned into the enemy and soon Addie, Stone, and Mann were lost in the fog. He couldn't see them anymore.

“No.”

His scream stopped the band, the music fell silent.

“Addie!” His guitar disintegrated. He was holding his own hand.

Then the soldier who climbed the mountain with him was there. “Captain, quit screaming. The band needs you. The music died. We need the music.”

“I don't care. Addie! To hell with the band. Addie! I need Addie...”

The floor was still on fire and out of the flames arose Admiral Bock, a Belock. He remembered they had wondered about his loyalty to the federation, when his son had married a Bendarian. The Bendarians and Satorian started the war, but once they

arrived on Okura he'd realized that the Belocks had joined the enemy, and now there was Admiral Bock.

Admiral Bane would never believe that Bock was involved, but here he was in the flames.

“Captain, Sarantos.” His voice rang out like thunder.

“I’m here, Bock. You need to stop this and leave my crew, alone.” Even as he said it, he knew his crew were no longer there.



“Good. I’m glad you’re here.” He pulled Addie up by her purple hair and held her high over the flames.

Sarantos shuddered and barely whispered. “Addie.”

“The floors on fire, Captain Sarantos and I claim my prize.”

He woke up in a cold sweat...