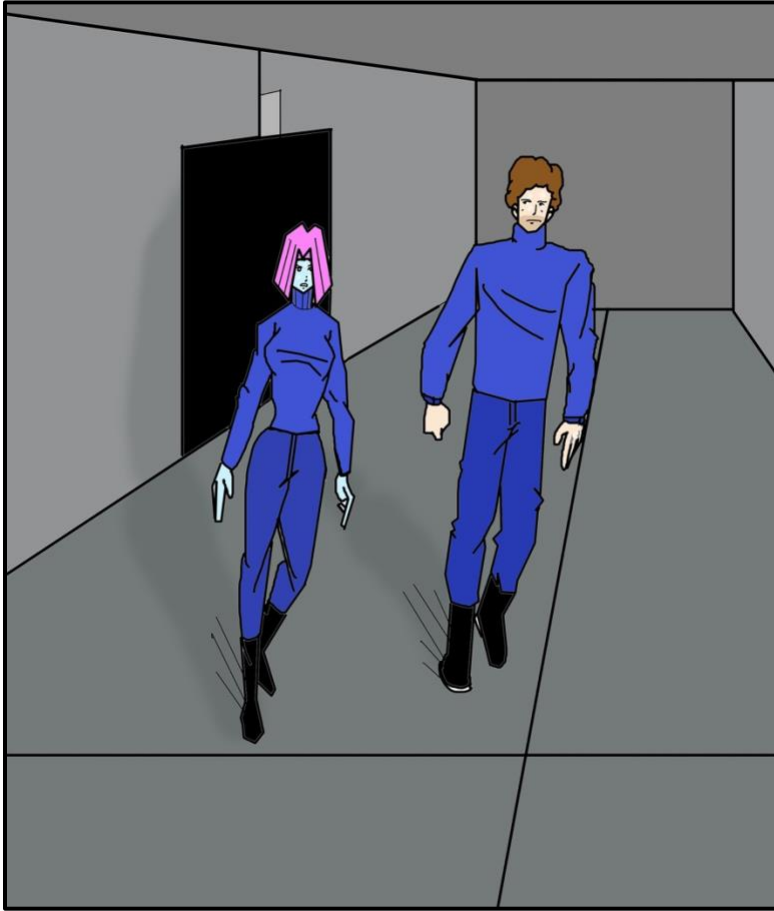


## Chapter 10

### “DRugs”



Brel sent a message. Forever didn't last too long these days. Sarantos stomach was churning while he and Lieutenant Addie Stuart walked down the corridor to the deck. John said nothing except they should get up to the Captain's station as soon as possible. They both still wore their ski clothes. Neither took the time to change. It was moments like this that made him feel bored with the high, the high of being Captain.

His head reeled. What if something happened to Brel? What was he thinking all those many years ago when he wanted this title, and the fame of being a Captain? He knew the girls would be thrilled with a man in uniform and he had fantasized how cool it'd be when he was introduced as Captain of a star-fleet with the Federation. He was proud of his title, but the fame came with a nasty price...insanity.

There were too many decisions to make with real consequences. The security of families, countless lives, and a hopeful future presented a daily challenge, and these decisions a Captain had to make were far from fame. It was stressful. He had to always be on top of things. Any momentary lapse in judgment could lead to dire ramifications for many. The times he felt weak made him feel less deserving of his rank. How can you do something and enjoy it when the pressure builds up inside

like an aging sun ready to go supernova, eager to explode. The thought lingered briefly and then slipped away.

“Captain?”

“Yes, Addie.” He stepped into the transporter and she followed.

“What do you think happened?”

“I can’t be sure, but it worries me that we were told just to come with no information about what happened.”

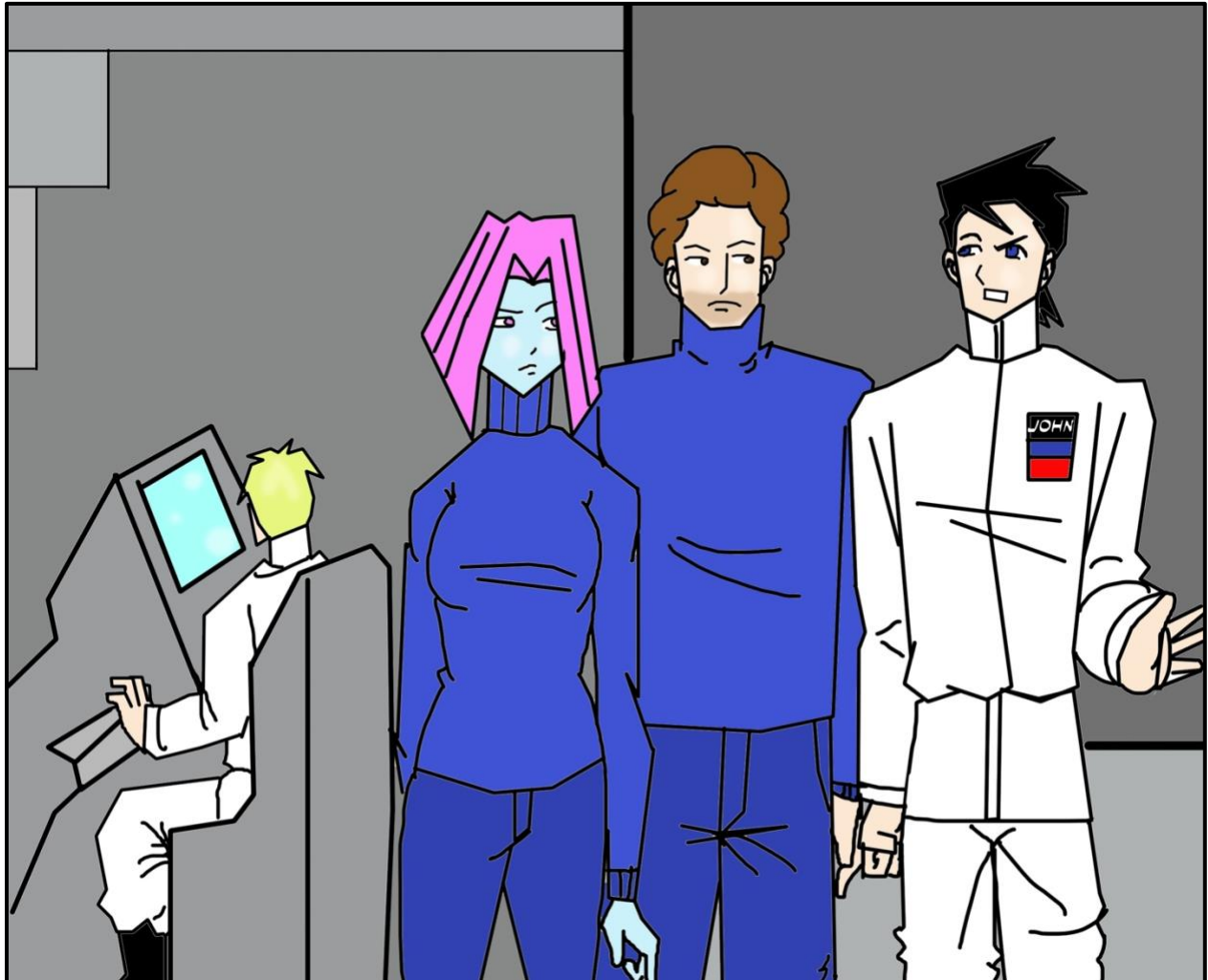
“Sarantos, maybe they didn’t want to give any information over the IC. It is a little more secure to meet in person.”

He felt his lungs relax allowing his chest to deflate. They’d been tight and restricted since they left the creative deck. Hopefully, Addie was right. He said nothing but imagined all the worst-case scenarios because they were racing through his mind like an endless carousel. They wouldn’t stop.

He always did this. Sarantos would think about all scenarios and how he would react to each including the most horrible situation before he found out the truth. He was like a drug addict, but instead of sprinkled skittles spread out over a table and reeling from the colors and the high they would induce. He was addicted to the fear of failure. That supplied him with enough of an addiction that he never needed to use actual drugs. This is the game of life!

He was successful but was never sure of himself, or who he was, or where he was going, but he strongly believed many others were just like him. Sarantos thought this was normal. It was okay to him. Understanding that his human mind needed no

painkilling pampering from a boatload of drugs seemed like a strength to him. Pharmaceutical poisons and potions would just seduce the body until the mind was gone. It's like a pebble smashing glass, shattering all fixed routines. He preferred to keep his mind out of that gutter. That dance was not for him. He was not that great at dancing, anyway.



The elevator opened. He stepped off. The helm was quiet, only Ensign Harry Born and Chief Petty were at their posts. They both appeared busy even though they were captured in the black soul and there wasn't much to see.

John came out of his Captain's room quickly approaching them. "Captain, Lieutenant, this way, please."

They both followed him into the chambers, and the door swished shut behind them with a note of finality.

John said, “Captain, over here.”

John moved around his desk and Sarantos followed with Addie on his heels. He sat in his chair and saw the screen was live with Brel’s puzzled face looking back at them.

“Captain, good,” said Brel.

“Brel, what’s going on?”

Brel said, “Great, I see the Lieutenant also came. I needed to let you know, I’ve encountered nothing unusual. In fact, the display shows no life anywhere close to my ship except for the Chicago. It’s weird. The closer I get to the station, the quieter it seems.”

“Brel, how far away are you? Can you tell?”

“Yes, Captain, I might be about 2 hours away at this point. I’m not sure. I can’t read live so I’m not sure if the equipment works properly or not. You know what I mean? It is strange. I feel some kind of presence over my shoulder though.”

“I hear you, Brel. Maybe, I should send out another ship behind you. I know yours is more equipped for non-detection, but I think we should follow behind you in another ship just in case you need help. I don’t like this at all.”

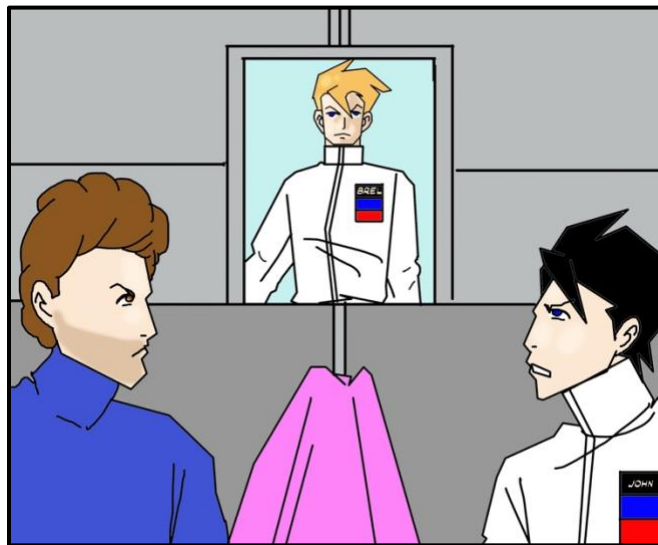
“Captain, I’m not sure that’s needed. Actually, it’s probably not a great idea.”

Sarantos said, “Addie what are your thoughts on the subject? John, I want your input as well.”

Addie said, “Well, I don’t think it’s a great idea to follow in another ship, but this could be beneficial if the right people were on board.”

“I agree with the Lieutenant. I believe the equipment should work properly. I followed up with all the improvements you requested. I believe in my team. My people know what they’re doing. This could be an abandoned station,” said John.

Brel nodded and said, “I was thinking the same thing, but then a thought occurred to me that this is the black soul and we’ve no idea what lives here or if we could even detect certain life forms with our equipment. It’s hard to analyze this place accurately.”



“Agreed,” said Sarantos.

Addie, said, “So do you continue onward without any assistance or do we send another ship? The ship would be 3 hours behind you.”

John said, “I think we should send a ship.”

Sarantos nodded and said, “We would need a special crew.”

Addie jumped into the conversation. “I think John should pick someone from Engineering to go, 2 from Security, 1 Doc, and maybe one other. That’s about all these small ships could hold.”

“For sure, Addie. We need medicines and weapons. Make sure we equip everyone with the new pins to teleport in case of an emergency and contact the base if needed. Brel, you don’t have a new fit for communications, do you? Why wasn’t that addressed Addie, before he left?”

She looked up quickly and said, “Sorry, Captain you’re right. I’m used to the old ones, but as Head of Security, I should’ve made sure he had one.”

He felt guilty for reprimanding her in front of others, but he had no choice.

He ignored her apology. “We need to send Private Adam Glass for medical. Being OKurian, he will be better suited for staying calm under any unexpected duress. Also, if Sonny doesn’t want to go, I need him to pick one of his crew members to join them. I’m going, and Addie pick one more in security.”

“Sir, did you say you’re going?”

“Yes, Brel. I want to check this out for myself.”

Addie said, “If the Captain doesn’t mind, with the new pins, we’ve hooked up the room for teleporting directly to a specific location. We just need someone there, and that someone would be Brel.”

“What? Why didn’t I know this, Lieutenant?”

“Captain, it isn’t quite finished or tested yet, but in theory it works on other ships and if we can detect Brel’s exact location, we can then teleport a person and several objects on their bodies to his exact location.”

He turned his head towards his friend. “John, you knew about this?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Okay, I will not demand an explanation at this point in time or the reason I was kept in the dark. I wouldn’t want to lose my composure or get distracted, even though I’m dying inside. Forget that, I will demand an explanation. Why the hell was I kept out of the loop regarding something so important?”

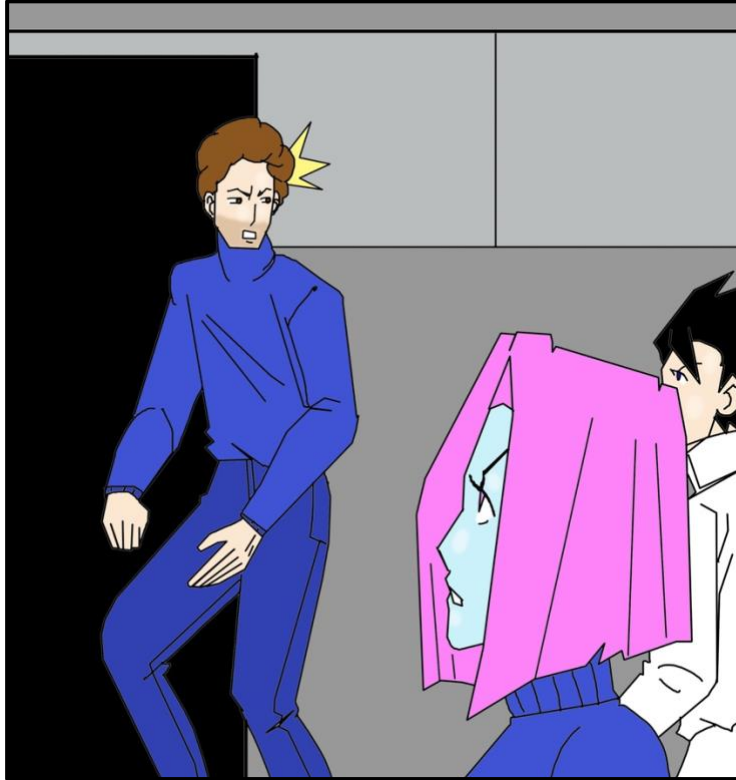
“Captain, your officers and therapist agreed we shouldn’t add anything more to your plate until you were completely healed and back to your old self. You’ve been struggling lately, and there was no reason to push this on you. But, now that you know, I can push Engineering into overdrive to get it completed ASAP.”

“Okay, John. I guess I understand. Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light. How long until it’s up and running?”

John said, “A couple days, if I split shifts.”

“Okay, make it happen. Chief Baker, in the meantime, we still send a crew, just in case this doesn’t work.”

He felt a little angry, being left out. He would disengage from his therapists from now on. It seemed the crew held it against him.



He headed towards the door, then turned. “Keep me updated on the teleporter. I want to know who is on that ship and when is it leaving.”

“Yes, Captain.”

Addie and John said that in unison, though Addie didn’t sound too happy with her Captain, but that was okay. He wasn’t happy with her either.

He got onto the elevator. “Level

2.”

Why did everyone have to complicate things so much? He grew tired of trying to figure people out. He was reminded of an old earth saying, ‘et too, John?’

It was clear the ski trip was over. He and Addie wouldn’t be keeping each other warm tonight by a cozy fire. He’d rather be hated for who he was than loved for who he wasn’t.

To think, he was on such a high only an hour ago. The image of Addie came back to him, and he suddenly realized what it did to him as he walked down the corridor to his room.

“Captain.”



He nodded, Shar was an attractive human that was an educator assisting the crew to blend in with other races. She worked in the science lab, a place he never went anymore. He hoped she didn't notice his uncomfortableness.

He went to his room. Sarantos needed to prepare. He was going on this mission. It was something he needed to do. He was the Captain. He would not lose this war. This battle with his crew deceiving him on who knows how many levels was annoying. It didn't matter if he had a small problem; he was still the Captain. He was going on this mission, with or without anyone's blessing.

"A martini with an olive."

He never indulged with that drink, but too bad. Today he was going to. The passion already found him. He just wasn't ignoring it.

There was a knock at the door.

"Yes."

"Captain." It was Block.

"Yes?"

"Can I come in?"

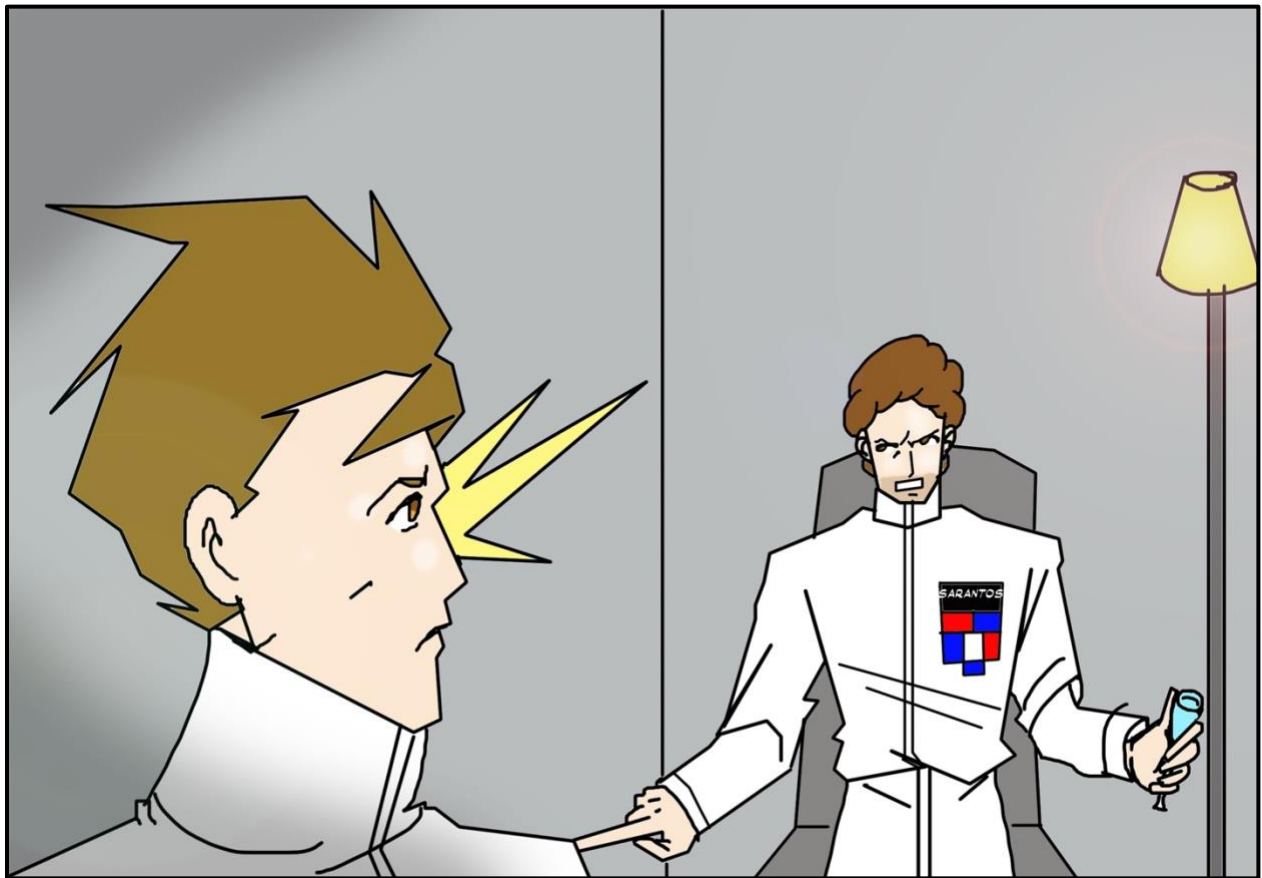
"Oh, stop it Block... come on in." It didn't matter, he was sure Addie sent him to spy on his behavior.

“The Lieutenant informed me she would be busy and I should stay with you until further notice.”

“Oh, of course she did.”

“Thank you, Captain.”

He started thinking. The rules apply to the little people - the winners break them. Sarantos could give those that wanted to control him what they wanted. He could afford a vice, and that vice would be Block, and possibly a martini.



“Block, get me another martini with an olive.” He tore the olive off the stick and flung it into his hand. “And get yourself one too.”

“Captain, the Lieutenant wouldn’t approve.”

“I am the Captain of this Starfleet and I approve, Block. I don’t give a rat’s ass if she doesn’t approve. You’re my vice. Now get us both a martini, or you’re fired!”

“Yes, sir.”

Block looked distraught but followed out his Captain’s orders obediently.

Soon the two of them were a little high from the magical ingredients of the alcohol and proceeded to reminisce about seedy girlfriend moments.

Sarantos said, “So Block, you’re a funny guy. I never knew that. The Captain should know these things, don’t you think?”

Block laughed, as he patted him on the back. “Captain, I couldn’t agree more... you should know things like that. That’s what a Captain is for, to know all things.”

Sarantos giggled and said, “Block how’d you like to take a trip with me tomorrow? Let’s go visit the space station. I’ve planned it carefully with some VIP crew members, and I think you and I should accompany them.”

“Great idea. After all you’re the Captain. And I should follow my Captain anywhere he goes according to my supreme commander, Lieutenant Addie Stuart.”

“That’s right, Block. It was her orders, and she can’t complain if I go, or if you go with me.” He slugged Block in the arm. “Yep, you’re my bodyguard.”

“Right, you are sir, that’s me. I’m like a bloodhound searching for voices and protecting my Captain.”

The best way to capture a moment is to be fully present inside of it when it's happening. “I want to tell you about the Lieutenant.” He put his finger to his mouth showing a whisper. “She is fierce in bed, sometimes she even wears me out. Yet, I can’t get enough of her, and as a Captain, it’s hard, because I’m always turned on by her. My urges are obvious and often revealed, if you get my drift?”

Block laughed out loud. “It’s a bummer, Captain. They can hide that part of them. We can’t, nothing like being obvious, Captain.”

“Block, you’re right. Maybe in the grunt stage of mankind it was needed to let a woman know he was interested, you know like the naturally wild animal kingdom. She could view it, like colorful feathers so to speak and decide if he was worthy, but nowadays, it’s just annoying. This civilized modern non-animal world doesn’t like that, you know what I mean?”

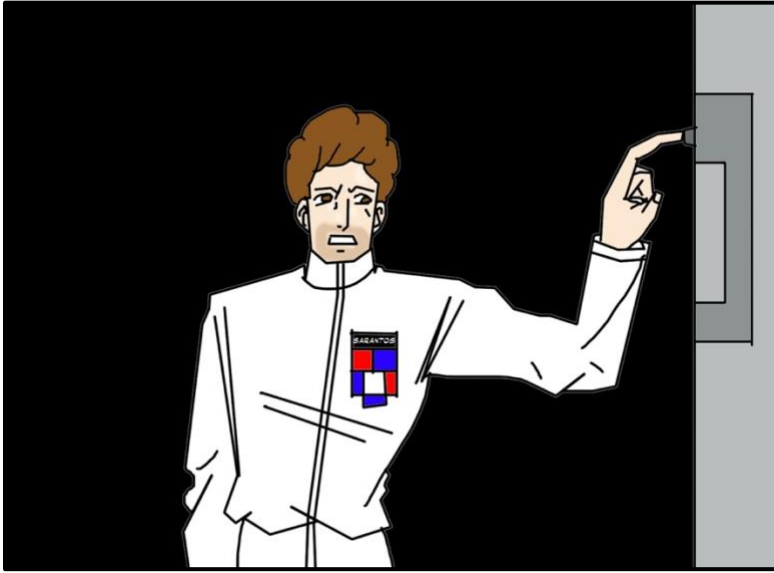
“Yes, I do, Captain, yes, I do.”

“Well, I tire of keeping it in my pants, if you understand me?”

“Oh, Captain I do,” said Block while pouring them out another drink. “Captain, I’m coming with you, so you don’t have to worry about what people think.” He stumbled into a chair. “I’m by your side, best pals, hiding our manhood and inner feelings from the finer sex.”

“Right,” shouted Sarantos, while pressing the IC.

“Chief Baker, here.”



“John, myself and Block will be joining the mission. Let me know when it’s ready.”

“Captain?”

He cut him off.

“Did you notice the attitude in his voice, Block?”

“I did. Should I go get some items of clothing?”

He pressed the IC again. “No need.”

“Private Clear.”

“Yes, Private, this is your Captain, and I need you to go to Block’s quarters and retrieve him several days of clothing, and toiletries he might need. Then bring them to my quarters.”

“Yes, Captain, right away.”

Clear was a Private that cleaned, “and she had a crew that covered making sure the crew had everything they needed in clean clothes, housing, etc.”

“Thanks, Captain, best buddy.”

“My pleasure, Block. After all you are my muscle at the door, and you can’t leave my side, not for a moment. I won’t allow it!”

“I hope it’s not too dangerous, Captain, our trip.”

“Oh, balderdash. Danger doesn’t stop fun, does it Block?”

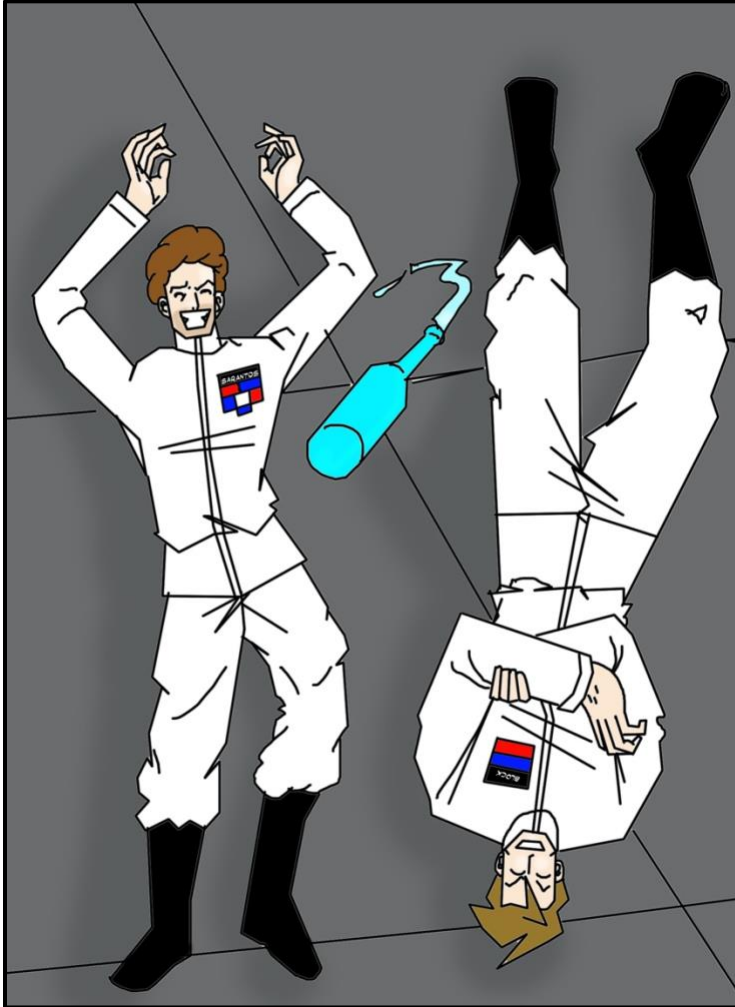
“No, I guess you’re right. Of course you’re right, you’re the Captain. Captain’s are always right.”

“I am always right, thanks Block. I don’t hear that often enough around here. I’m so humbled and grateful for your gesture kind sir.”

“You’re welcome my Liege. You know, maybe we shouldn’t be drinking this much. It’s probably a big mistake.”

“It will be when Addie gets here and sees us acting this way, but it’s a mistake worth making.” He leaned over and touched Block on the shoulder. “I wouldn’t have known you this way. I should know all the crew, meaning we should do some drugs or drinking together, to really get to know each other. Otherwise everybody hides behind fake politeness and the face they wear. At least with drugs, they lift the mask.”

“That’s right, but we are pretty drunk, I think. Well, at least I feel dopy, like a dope on drugs. I guess alcohol is the most popular drug. I would wager that’s why we are acting like fools.”



Sarantos was startled. “What, did you say Block, fools?”

“Yes, sorry, Captain.”

“Well, you should be Block, we are far from fools. We are just taking charge of our situation and putting ourselves right back in control. Right Block?”

“Sorry, Captain, you’re right. We are in control, and no one can take that away from us, unless they take away our alcohol.”

Sarantos couldn’t stop laughing. Block was cracking up just as badly. Within seconds, he was

simpering uncontrollably on the floor like a happy baby.

“Well, Block the only way to keep us going is to give us what we want. I want another drink, how about you?”

“Yeah, Captain, but I’m not sure if I can stand up anymore without falling over. Who will get us one?”

They both said, “Private Nancy Clear.”

Inside they were both dying, trying to get control over an out-of-control situation, In the back of Block's mind, he knew it but the Captain was desperately trying to heal the past, live in the present, and dream of the future.

A few minutes later a knock on the door interrupted their merry adventure. "Captain, it's Private Clear."

"Come in, Private, come in."

He could tell right away she was judging them. Why would she? Even when in a dark place, the drugs just melt it all away.

"Here's the luggage with Block's belongings, Captain."

"Thanks. You may leave."

Block started to protest, but Sarantos waved his arm to stop his outburst.

The door shut behind the Private.

"She was judging us, Block. I don't need that in my life, I'll get my own damn drink. Can I get you one?"

"Yes, Captain, thanks."

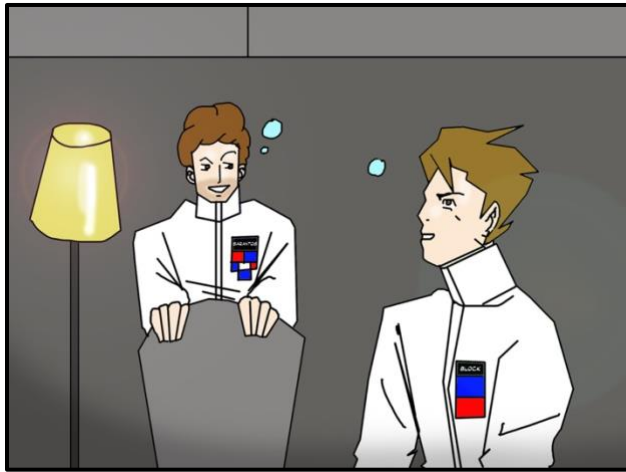
He stood up and walked 3 steps before he had to grab the back of the chair to prevent himself from crashing violently to the floor.



“Woah, that was a little scary. Didn’t see that coming.”

“Me either, Captain.”

He pressed the IC again.



“Doc.”

“Captain.”

“Could you please come to my quarters, right away?”

“Sure, Captain, I’ll be there right away.”

“Out.”

“That’s nice, Captain, The Doc’s a fun gal that knows how to party.”

“Yes, yes, she is, but we are taking a trip, Block, soon.”

“Oh, I think I get your drift, Captain.”

“Yes, you know, Block, get yourself a Satorian woman. Vavavoom...what a woman. She can do things with her body that should be outlawed. I can’t satisfy her. I’m human. She has different needs that only a hologram or her own race can relieve. It

hurts me Block to know, I'm only half a man to her, only half." He lifted his fingers showing an inch between his fingertips.

"No, Captain, you're a whole man. I know you are."

"Thanks for your ability to lie to me and make me feel better, but I believe you're gravely mistaken. I saw it with my own eyes in the Creative Room. It's weird. I wasn't even sure how it happened or if I could tell what the guy was doing, but I guess she can program that thing to satisfy her own needs in any way she wants." He shook his head. All he had to do was make him miserable enough to wander off on his own. "I'm not worthy of such a gem, Block, not worthy at all." Was he crashing off the drug's high and hitting a low?

"Don't say that, Captain. At least you don't hear voices anymore."

"Yeah ain't that the truth. I think you sobered me up, just a little. Heaven help me Block."

"Captain, where's the Doc? I feel a little sick."

"She'll be here soon."

"I get what you mean, Captain. Think about my situation. I'm with a robot... a robot, how unworthy of her talents am I? How can I compete with her kind or truly satisfy her?"

"We are two losers, Block. Just a couple of horny men that are losers. Maybe people will come a-knockin' when we've become unstoppable?"

“Is that an old earth slang for wanting sex all the time, Captain?”

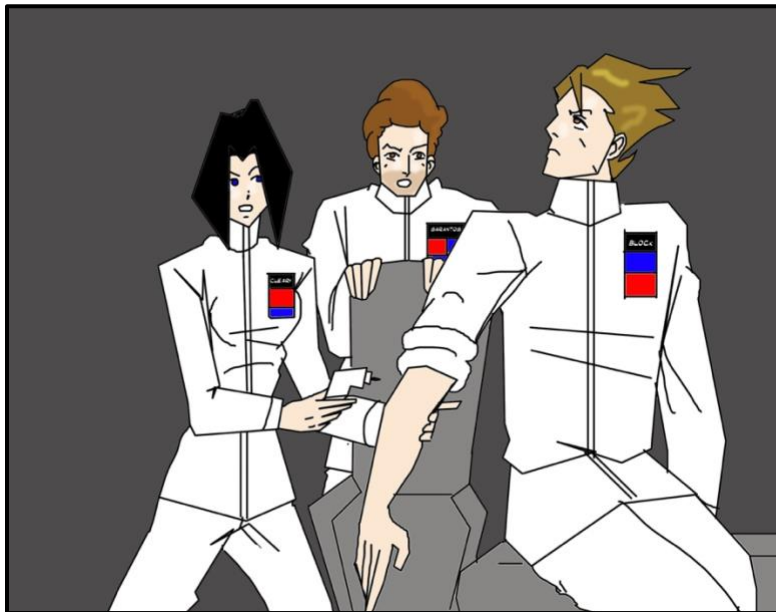
“Yes, I think so, Block.”

The door opened.

There stood the Doc in all her glory. “You two men, if you call yourselves that, are pitiful.”

“Hey, Doc,” said Block.

“Block, what have the two of you been doing?”



“Okay, Doc, what does it look like? You either get us another drink or give us some of that magic shot I know you brought, because you could tell I was a little too happy. I need you to save someone who needs to be saved!”

“Yes, okay. I heard you’re going on a trip. This won’t do. We can’t have you two in this condition.”

“Thanks, Doc.”

She took a blue vial out of her bag and prepared the syringe. She injected him and then Block.

“Well, boys, it’ll take about a half hour to kick in. I heard the ship leaves in an hour, you should be ready by then. Captain, do you need some help to get in that chair? Maybe, you want to lean on it for a while.”

“That would be nice, Doc. Can you help me out here?”

“My pleasure. You’ve helped me on many occasions. I owe you several.”

“Thanks, Doc. Did I ever tell you, you’re amazing and beautiful?”

“Yes, but it’s been a long time.” She helped him sit down. She smelled nice.

“Doc, you smell real nice. Doc, when we kiss the pain goes away.”

“Thanks, Captain.” She giggled at him.

“Yeah, and you have great breasts, too Doc,” said Block.

“Oh, dear, you boys are plastered out of your minds.”

“Yep, we’re best buddies now,” said Block.

“Well, I’ll wait here until you come around. You’ll both need showers immediately, and then some strong coffee.”

“Oh, I think I will be sick.”

“Chill out, Block, another ten minutes should find you doing fine,” said Cleary.

Sarantos felt like his head was clearing a bit. He was ashamed of his behavior but sometimes a person needed to be human, needed to step away from the world but only for a moment. Because if he stayed there too long, he wouldn't get back up, and that would end his career and his life. Well done is better than well said.

It was a choice and a choice he made a long time ago to stay in the world and not get caught up in the small things that can drive you mad, if you allowed it. Nothing is worth being out of control, out of your mind, and out of life.

Life was precious and time was short. The more his head cleared, the sillier he saw his current actions. He felt like an irresponsible Captain. He was going on this trip because he needed to and wanted to. John was capable of being in charge in his absence.

He looked at the Doc, “Thanks, Doc. I'll always be the little boy looking up at you.”

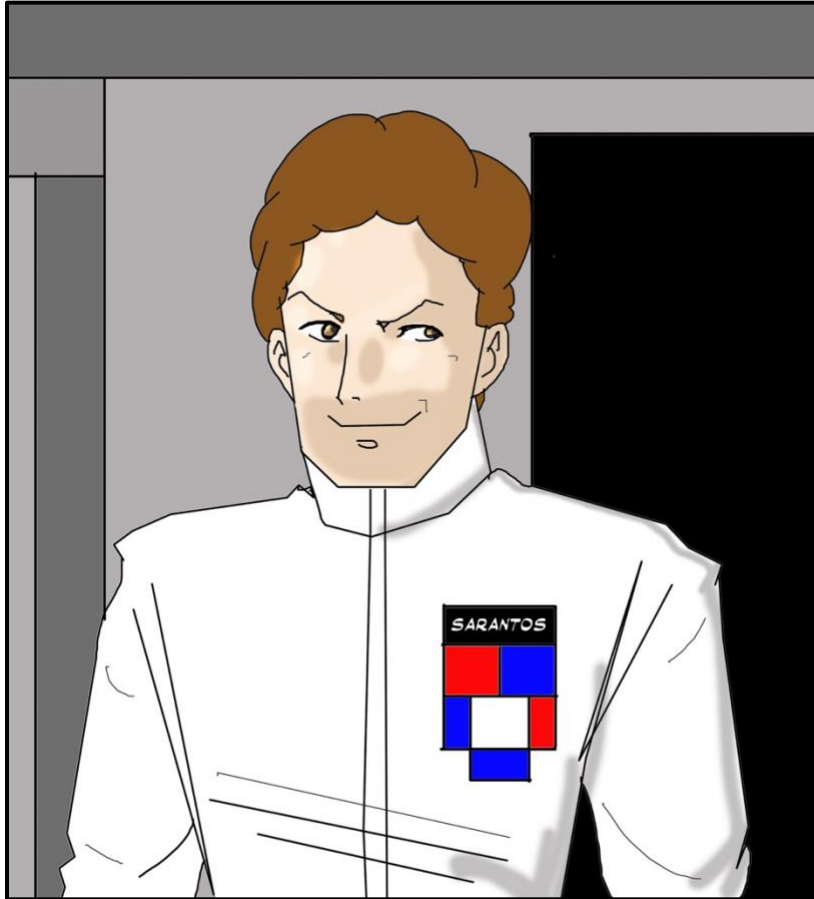
“No worries, Captain. Can you walk to the shower on your own now?”

“Yes, please watch Block. I'll be back soon for that coffee.”

“Sure.”

He knew he had control again. Sarantos knew you couldn't stop someone who didn't want the help because their own madness sometimes blinded them, by the drug's madness, whether it was prescription drugs, street drugs, smoking anything, or just

plain alcohol. It was all part of the delusion of drugs, part of the lack of impulse control. Self-pity was in there too. He knew it, because he felt it.



After he showered, he knew the only drug he needed was life. He was now high on life, high on love, and high on the feeling of leading and helping others.

He was ready for this trip, ready to be in charge of his life and his ship. He was ready for the frenzy of the unknown. The best way to predict the future is to create it...