

Chapter 7

“Pause”

There he was adrift above the clouds making sweet passionate love to Addie. He wasn't sure how long he had indulged in this fantasy before he collected control of his senses and allowed himself to face the proper reality right in front of him. His primitive thoughts stopped abruptly and he immediately let go of the carnal image of Addie naked and re-evaluated the scenario he was currently placed in; a combative position in the Kurluran Woods of Okura.

There was still no sign of Addie, nor Brel. He drew in his breath and slowly let it out, as he concentrated on listening while focusing his vision in front of him where the two were last seen. Patience Sarantos, he thought.



If he moved forward he could possibly compromise two of his best soldiers. He had to trust them and as Captain, that was a crucial personality trait to demonstrate even in the most trying times. If he allowed mistrust to enter all situations, he would run the risk of becoming paranoid and throughout war history, those type of leaders always proved fatal to their armies.

The rain was relentless causing his hearing to be less meticulous than normal. Quickly looking behind him, he realized the crew possessed the fortitude of skilled warriors. Those he could see were muted yet combat ready, but the downpour prevented him from expanding his field of vision to the last four members of his group. He'd chosen these people wisely.

When he turned back, he could see Addie, but not Brel. She signaled him. He didn't like what he was seeing. We would definitely be in tangible combat in less than ten minutes. The message was passed down the line.

Following Addie's lead, they all moved swiftly forward about 20 feet until they reached an outcrop of Molder trees. They took up residence behind the wide trees to the west, meaning the army was approaching from the east. Addie motioned to Private Bonnie Day and she immediately climbed a tall tree and positioned herself at the top. Sarantos lost sight of her entirely. He smiled. Addie had chosen the spot perfectly.

The group was out of site when Brel returned and signaled to Addie. He moved next to her behind the tree.

The next few moments were surreal and dream-like. His heart was pounding uncontrollably like water jumping over a waterfall and it certainly sounded loud enough to be heard by the enemy even over the pounding rain. It was the silence though, along with the stillness of his entire being while his senses raged like an inferno that made every small thing become magnified. Everything seemed like it was happening in super slow motion.

The enemy was noisy. Every step was audible. As they got closer, they caused a chill to go down his spine because it sounded like there were at least 30 of them. He looked at Addie nervously. She signaled that there were only ten approaching. He knew by the sound they were making, that none of them expected to be ambushed out here in the dark and rainy woods. They waited, because to attack without cause would be against the federation code of honor.

He felt as though he was drained and panting by the time they finally came into view.

Damn, Kitara had been right! The race that had killed her mother and father many years ago were the ones involved in this take-over scheme. There were four Belocks moving within the group of Bendarians. All of them were male. He was glad there were no Satorians within the group as they were just too alluring.



He'd recognize the Belocks anywhere with their green skin - the color of a sickly slime with pointed heads and extremely large noses. He couldn't see if they had six

fingers on each hand to verify it was them but there was no mistaking what race they were by their obvious physical appearance plus their rancid odor. Somehow, they smelled even worse in the rain.

The Bendarian, on the other hand were short and stocky with bug eyes and tiny little mouths. All of them were hairless, including the women. They were to be feared. They were fierce warriors with mean giant tempers.

They were chatting about the weather and complaining about rations. Their uniforms, armor, weapons and discussion warned him that everything they'd heard about them infiltrating the Okura were true. We were truly at war! He could only make out the Bendarian conversation, because he didn't speak Belock, but Addie could speak all three languages of the enemy. So too could Sam Toner and Sally Mann, both Okurians and the Okurian were always well schooled.

He felt a nudge inside his mind and knew someone was knocking to be allowed in. He opened his mind. "Sorry to interrupt you, Captain, but do you want me to take one of them alive for questioning?"

The Okurian could insinuate their thoughts deep inside your mind whenever they wanted but because they were so disciplined and kind, they always knocked first. "Thanks, Sargent Toner. Yes, it doesn't matter which race. Take one alive." He knew that his thoughts could be immediately read.

Suddenly, he missed his music. He promptly decided to turn this scene into a party and never stop from this moment on until everyone went home. He had to trick his mind somehow, so as to not think about this as war. War was ugly.

His voice was loud and rang through the woods, like when he was a kid singing above the rain. "It's party time maggots!"



His laser took out the Belock closest to him. They caught the group completely off guard. Their weapons weren't out in time and their faces were fully shocked by his loud bold and confident voice that shattered the silent stillness of the night reaching high above the rowdy sound of thunder.

“Let's get down, you controlling freaks.” He stepped forward just as he saw three more go down. The sound of the screams from the enemy was explosive and frenzied, and he was making up lyrics in the thick of the moment. Let's relive it; reload that last beat as he shot another one. Random lyrics came to him as he tried to trick his mind pretending he was not in a deadly battle. The moon was howling

loud. To him, a rewind sound was echoing in the dark hissing trees. Then he hit play again and again, as his laser blaster put a hole in the Belock that was next to the one he'd just shot. Lucky too, as this Belock had just lifted his weapon.

Three more dropped. Two Belocks were left and both had their weapons ready to retaliate. For a moment, it was a stare down. "Drop your weapons," said Sarantos, "you're surrounded and you know it."

One of them attempted to run and was quickly eliminated by Addie. The other one dropped his weapon and was mercifully taken into custody, as far as Sarantos knew he was the first prisoner of war.

They'd spent the better part of an hour interrogating their captive. They learned very little, except that this war was being prepared for long before the Federation ever caught on. Admiral Bock had been directly involved in the preparation of this rebellion, of that he was sure. Maybe he'd misjudged Kitara. She had been right on about who was involved, that was for sure.

It wouldn't have been the first time he'd misjudged women. After all, women were an unusual race unto themselves. What was he going to do with this Belock?

Addie moved next to him giving him cause to worry about his reaction. She smiled. Okay, that wasn't very smooth he thought. He tried to move away from her but she grabbed his arm.

"Captain, I know you're excited to see me again but I would strongly suggest that we tie up and gag this Belock, taking him with us. If we return him to our ship and

throw him in a cell, the person who is a traitor might try to release him giving them more assistance to infiltrating our ship while we're away."

He blushed, because she noticed his uncomfortableness, but of course she would notice his unhinging. Addie noticed everything. "Brilliant thought, Lieutenant. I agree. Do it."

He quickly returned to normal after concentrating on the idea that this Belock could be causing havoc on his ship whenever they wanted.

"Thanks, Captain. I'll secure the prisoner, and we can be on our way."

He gathered up his crew and noticed Private Bonnie Day had returned to ground movement. He nodded her way and she acknowledged in return.

Ensign Harry Born had gone through the bodies for papers or information, taking all weapons, water and items that might be helpful to the mission and crew. Sarantos patted him on the back, just as Ensign Born handed him a map. It seemed that they were in the process of taking over several cities within the next week. Olive had not yet been taken. That was a welcome relief.

They continued marching in the same order until dawn started creeping into the woods teasing the promise of a new day. The delay had cost them valuable time and they didn't arrive at the outpost before sunrise as planned. Instead, they reached the valley just after 08:00 hours.

It appeared deserted, but that didn't mean anything. The clouds waited in breathless anticipation overhead. Brel carefully moved forward on his own. Sarantos watched him go and then he just seemed to disappear.

He motioned for everyone to take five, grab a bite to eat and get refreshed in case they needed to move in and take over the outpost. He and Addie stayed on guard, but not before they both pulled out some rations of protein and ate to replenish their bodies. He wished she'd quit grinning at him, because it always set him off. The two of them separated; she watched guard behind them and he waited for any movement on the front line ahead of him.



He was becoming anxious after about 30 minutes of waiting when Brel suddenly appeared next to him causing Sarantos to almost accidentally send a laser bolt through Brel in a rush of panic.

“Sorry, Captain. I didn't mean to startle you. It's what I do.”

“That's okay, but be careful. Humans aren't as graceful and skilled in many areas of movement

like the Saturnians. We shoot first and ask questions later.”

“Yes, sir, I'll keep that in mind.”

“Well, did you learn anything useful?”

“Yes, Captain. The outpost only has several guards on the premise. It seems we encountered one of the 15 groups of ten that were sent out last evening to do some scavenging and pre-emptive war scouting. One of the Satorians mentioned that she was concerned as to when the 15 parties were going to return. The other one assured her that they weren’t due back until late in the evening. However, she did show some enthusiasm about an army that would be arriving by tomorrow morning. I don’t know how many, but we can certainly find out.”

“Great, I’ll send in a few to dispatch them. Then we can take over this outpost.”

“Oh, Captain, sorry, it’s already done. The outpost awaits your command.”

He was so thrilled with Brel and tried to contain his excitement for the way this was handled by him but he slapped him on the back and smiled. “Great job, Chief Doran. Please let Lieutenant Stuart know so we can move out.”

“Yes, Captain.”

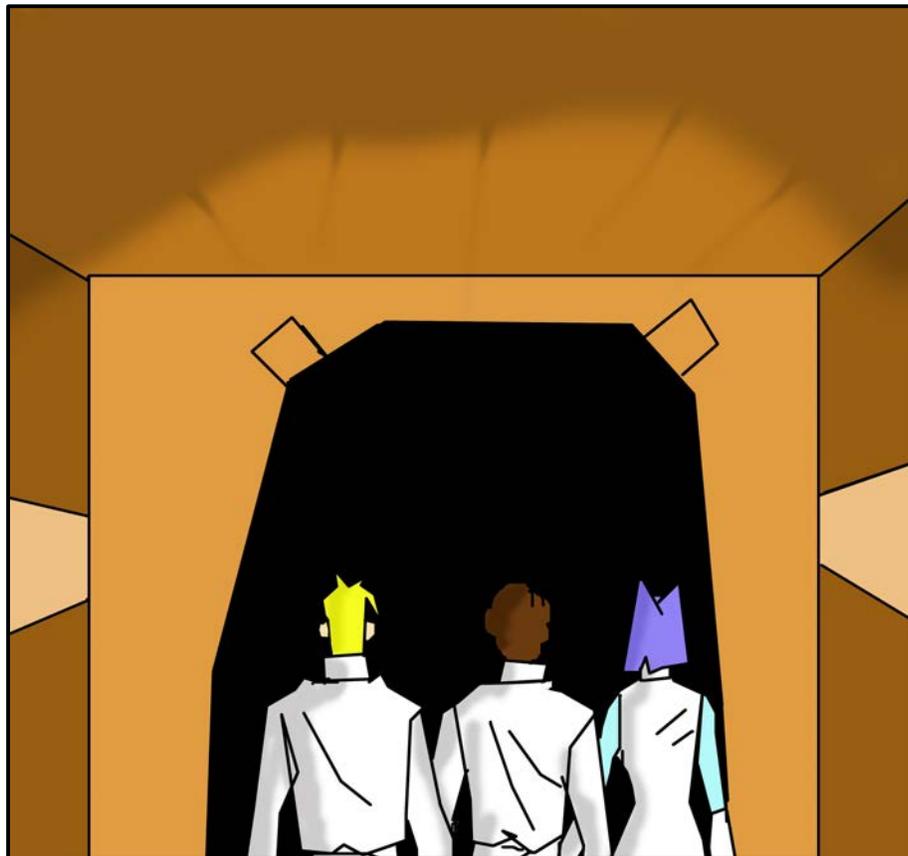
He watched the Blad move quickly to Addie’s side and appeared to be speaking to her, until she looked his way, grinned and gave him a thumb up. They had only a few hours before the other groups would return to their outpost, which was of course now occupied by its rightful owner.

The crew were glad to be in a building. There was a twelve-foot chain-link fence around it with barbed wire running haphazardly across the top that made it quite secure against most attacks. He wondered how Brel had penetrated the fence to dispose of his prey without any injury? He loved learning about different races. They

all had certain talents that distinguished them from others, not to mention that like humans, their personalities were also pretty unique.

There were several quaint bedrooms in the meager brown building, a simple kitchen, eating room, small bathroom, a spacious storage basement which also included a long underground tunnel that had been hidden and was only detectable by the eyes of Okurians and, of course the eyes of Blads.

This gave them a strategic advantage, especially when Brel said he followed it out to the forest and it came out just past the hill they initially arrived on. It even had a separate tunnel that went straight to the town of Olive. That was outstanding news!



Sam Turner explained that this had been used centuries ago when the wars were going on giving those inside the building an escape route if needed. Sarantos knew the Okurians were very fond of underground tunnels and could hole up there for months at a time without any undue stress. Sam, nor Sally Mann had ever seen one in person that was so

nice done though. They'd only heard the rumors about them.

While the rest of the crew kept watch and slept in regular intervals, Sam, Brel, and Addie went exploring.

The tunnels ended up having an underwater lake, ample food storage, colorful clothing, crucial medicine, and plenty of stashes of ammo and weapons. There were dining rooms, living quarters and even food replicators. Sarantos asked for coffee, black of course, and sure enough they still worked. He sat down in the dining room for a brief moment and enjoyed it. Addie joined him.

Brel said, “When I went to the city of Olive, it appeared that there was nothing suspicious going on. I saw no acts of war nor sensed any fear there. People were carrying on as normally as you’d imagine.”

Sam said, “I can’t get over this tunnel, it’s amazing.”

“I expected that, Brel. It’d appear we got here just in time because they haven’t started the war yet. Their preparations have just now taken off and the war is imminent.”

“Yes, sir, it would appear they’re definitely ready for war. That’s a large army coming in tomorrow.”

“We can’t warn the Admiral, unless we send someone back to the ship, but right now I want you and Sargent Toner to get to the town of Olive and talk to 1st Lieutenant Downy. He’ll know what they need to do. I know you’re faster alone, Chief Doran, but Toner is Okurian. See if they can get you back to the ship Toner and speak only to Lieutenant Baker. Act like all is good down here, that we see nothing out of the ordinary, until you’re alone with Baker. Am I understood?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Now, both of your go. Try to get some rest and a good meal in you both tonight.”

“Captain.” They both spoke in unison and headed down the tunnel that would lead them to the city of Olive.

He was thankful they might be able to do some good and hoped they’d be in time to stop the planet from all-out war.

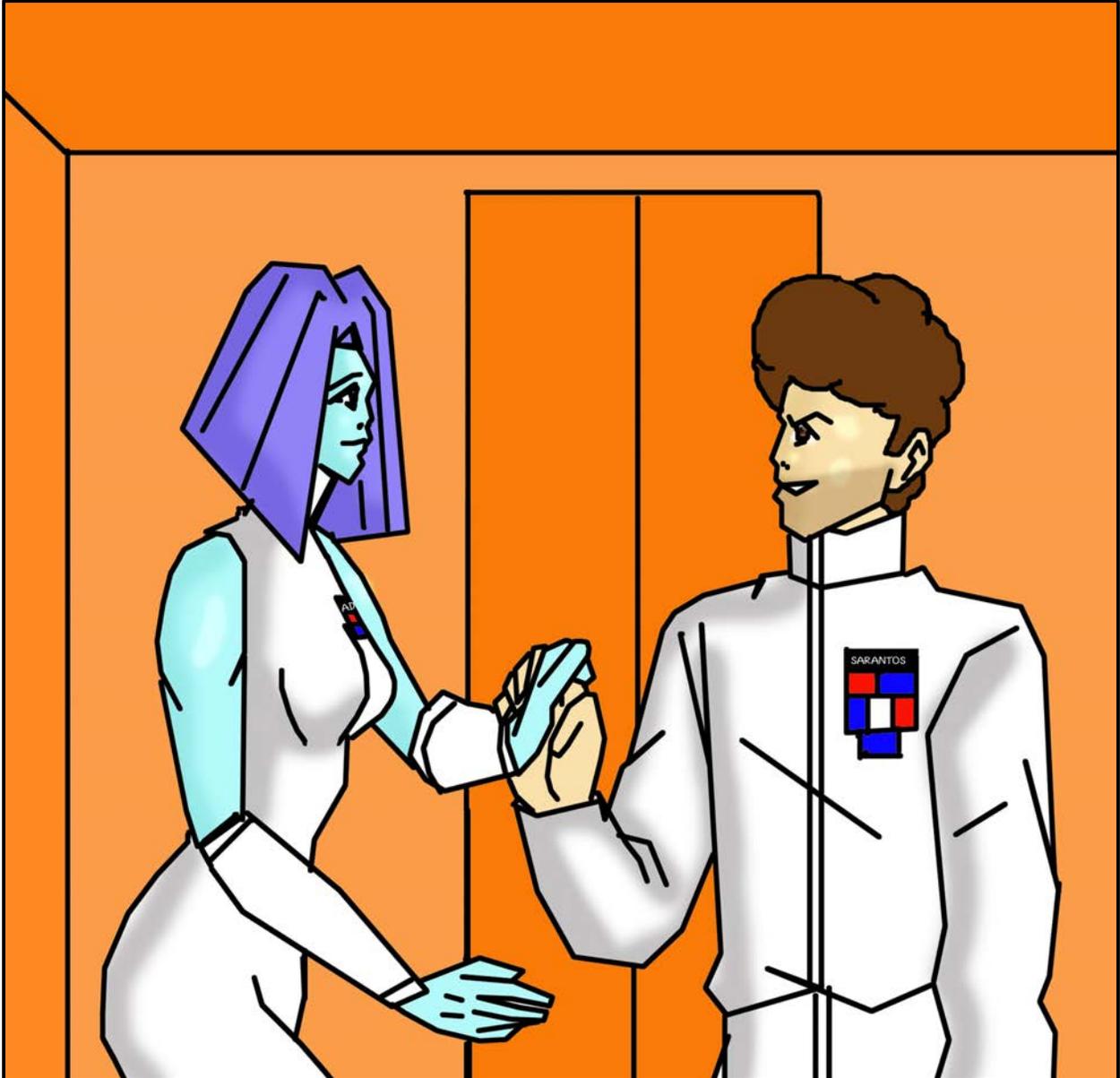
“Well, Addie, I believe we can assume that they’ve secured outposts across the planet of Okura and will have armies scattered by tomorrow evening throughout this world.” He wanted to throw up.

“I know.” Addie’s voice was quiet but thoughtful. “I think I might have some ideas that’ll prove beneficial, Captain.”

Oh, he couldn’t take it anymore. “Addie when we’re alone, please call me Sarantos. We’re lovers and I strongly believe I’m hopelessly in love with you and no other woman will do, ever. Do you understand me? So please don’t act so formal. To hell with everything else right now. We’re alone and might not live to see many more days anyway.”

“But, sir we’re at war and I think we must keep this professional.”

“Damn it, Addie. I’m your Captain and I have the motion of your melody stuck in my heart and my head. Let’s get toasted – I mean, you know, warm things up a bit. You know I’m rockin hard all the time around you, so dance with me tonight, Addie. Please? Just please dance with me. I beg of you.”



“But we have no music, Captain, I mean Sir.” Her smile was sweet with a naughty innocence, but she didn’t possess an ounce of sinlessness and that’s what he loved most about her. She was indeed a woman of both talent and beauty.

“We’ll make our own,” he said, smirking.

He took her hand and fell in against her tunefulness - her body’s melody. They danced, slowly, at first and then with a super fierce fervor. Their movements, as they

romped carefree around the dining hall, were silly but methodical. “We could dance all night in the dark, Addie,” he whispered enthusiastically in her ear.

He could barely breathe. He wanted this tango to go on forever.

Even after the day’s combat and hours of walking, he found her alluring and fragrant; it drove him wild.

She removed his clothes with her teeth. He could hardly move without exploding.

Dropping her own clothes, she pushed him down on the table. “So, Captain, who’s giving the orders now? Certainly, not the fierce Captain Sarantos.” She licked his lips.

He gasped, “Owww, let’s get down! Let’s relive it. I’m all yours Addie Stuart.”

“I think you are, sir.” She deliberately exhaled warmly and seductively into his ear when she spoke, just to put him a bit over the edge. This she’d done on numerous occasions before, but oh, how she worked him into a hot mess once again tonight so easily.

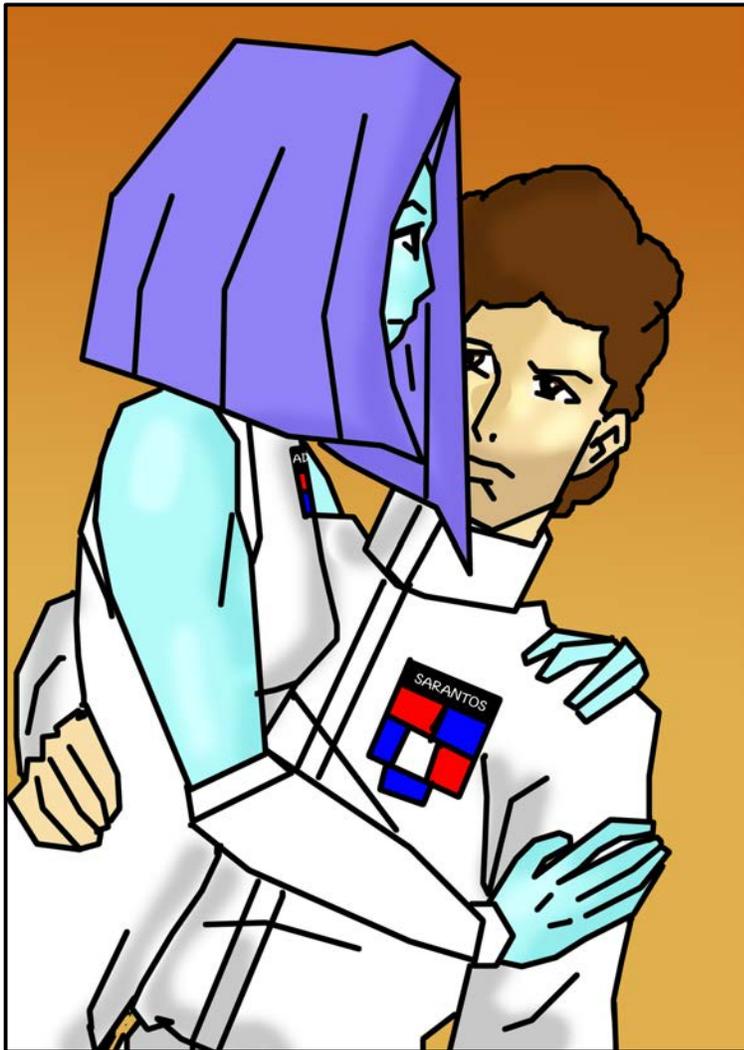
He crumpled under the weight of her womanly ways as she made him hold on longer than he wanted to, so as to not miss her next trick.

“Addie?”

“Yes, Captain.”

She always toyed with him when she said his title, but somehow it turned him on. They had both just finished getting dressed.

“Babe, we may never have another chance like this for a very long time, let’s not let this party end. You stopped to rest, but after a slight pause to gather your senses, let’s rewind it and play again. I need more to get me through the upcoming war and besides, it’s good for our health, right?”



He wanted her to say yes, not just yes, but beg for more. He needed her to want him, the way he wanted her so desperately, especially now with a war knocking on their front door. He could lose those he loved at any second, including her, hell, he could even lose his own life and life wouldn't be worth anything without her.

She nudged over slowly and lifted herself a tad over him. Her hair hung down onto his chest. Taking it in his hands, he raised it to his nose and deeply inhaled her beautiful essence. He'd never felt this way before! He wanted to protect her, to tell her she had to hide, but if what was being said was true, even

his ship was in danger. There was nowhere safe. There was danger everywhere.

She never pulled away but allowed him to smell her hair, as he ran his fingers through its soft and luxurious texture. Tears of love fell down his cheeks. He couldn't lose her, ever. He just found her. How could he ever forget these perfect moments, her laugh, her smile, her perfection? "No."

"Sarantos, are you alright? No?"

"No, we can't do this."

"Do what?" She started to get up.

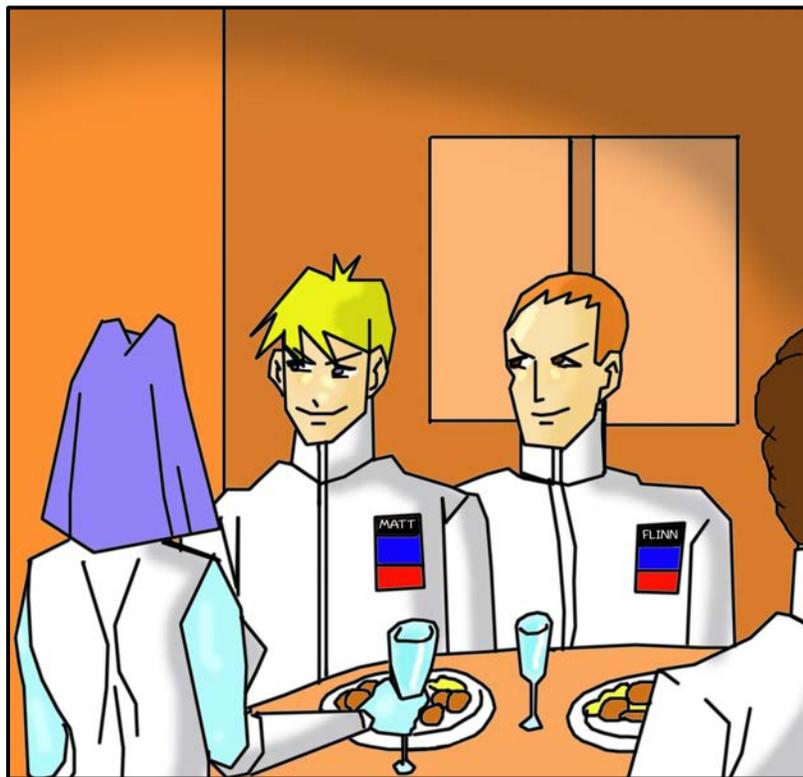
He grabbed her arm and pulled her down on him, while sobbing. "I can't go thru this war. I can't bear the thought of you not making it out. I can't bear the thought of our bodies never again dancing into the night pausing, rewinding and playing, again and again."

He felt like tearing his hair out of his head. It was almost too much to bear. He was squeezing her so hard, but she was so strong she barely felt it. She loved it; squeezing him back just as hard as they reloaded their heartbeat and played the game again.

They woke up in each other's arms several hours later.

She smiled that smile at him and he kissed her gently on the mouth for a full ten seconds.

He never spoke and neither did she. They knew their duty waited and got dressed again and sat at the table eating a spaghetti dinner produced by the replicator, with a side order of garlic bread and pink champagne.



They were almost done when Major Flint and Matt Blume found them dining. Both men sat down after getting their own plate of spaghetti and joined them. Addie poured them each a glass of champagne.

The four of them sat there locked into their own thoughts about the coming invasion and just enjoyed a quiet moment that may not be found again for a very long time. They all smiled at

each other politely and savored each bite of food and drink that entered their mouths.

Sarantos felt it was one of the most powerful meals he'd ever eaten. He thought of the world the way it was, the way it could be, and the way it might end up after this war. He decided he needed to focus on being a good captain, not just a good captain, but a great captain. It was his time and this was why he was here in this place with these people. This was why he had gone to the academy and not become a singer like his mom always wanted him to be. He now had the chance to save their world - the one he grew up on, the one he always loved. How sad he would feel if he was ever helpless to protect those he loved from such evil, such conceit, and such controlling entities. But he was not. He could help.

No, he was in the right place. This was his destiny. Now he must listen attentively to any plan that Addie had to offer. He looked over at the woman he loved and knew everyone around them had to know how he truly felt about her. It was the kind of stuff you couldn't really hide, because to be in this kind of love, it's plain to see. It showed in every movement, every reflex, every glance, could be felt in every breath, and seen with every smile. Touch wasn't necessary.

She was brilliant and beautiful.

“Lieutenant, Stuart, do you have any ideas on how we should proceed?”

She nodded and said, “Yes, Captain. We've alerted the town of Olive, and right now the enemy doesn't know we're wise to them. My sister may have informed them we are heading this way and that might account for the dispatching of 15 separate units. They might have been looking for intruders, but seeing how relaxed the group we surprised were, we can't be sure. I could interrogate our prisoner further. And now that Olive knows, they can get the information to the rest of this world and prepare the best they can for defending their home before tomorrow night.”

“All very good ideas. We could also have them send a message to the Admiral to let them know about your sister's ships or any other ships that might be heading this way under the guise of peace. Regardless of intent or outward appearance, they should be detained and checked to see if they're armed; however, it could just be the units that are armed. If they're smart that's what they'd do, in case they were stopped for inspection.”

Brel came into the room alone but had heard the whole conversation because he had some input.

“Captain, we spoke with the Admiral and he's already notified all other outposts, towns, cities and capitals. I'm glad we were able to contact Admiral Bane

successfully and explain the situation. He has alerted the armies and dispatched ships to overtake any coming into this space. He's also recruited other worlds to assist in this effort. I mentioned Addie's sister's ship as well as the direction she was moving in. I can only hope they'll be in time."

"Great job and well done, Chief Doran. This will allow Okura to at least position themselves to handle the attack adequately with the ability to possibly even fight it off as they won't be taken totally by surprise. The worst-case scenario is if the message to the Admiral was intercepted, then they might change their plans slightly, but at the end of the day, they want to attack this planet and attack it they will."

"Admiral Bock told me to inform you that these tunnels are secret runs to each city and separate passages are blocked with fake walls known and detectable by only the Okurian race and my own. He said to inform you that their cities, especially the young and elderly will go to the tunnels to live, unless they are otherwise needed. They'll assist any soldiers from there that might have to move from one city to the other undetected."

"Good. I'm concerned about my ship. Did Sargent Toner make it to the ship?"

"As far as I can tell. We've had no further communication with them."

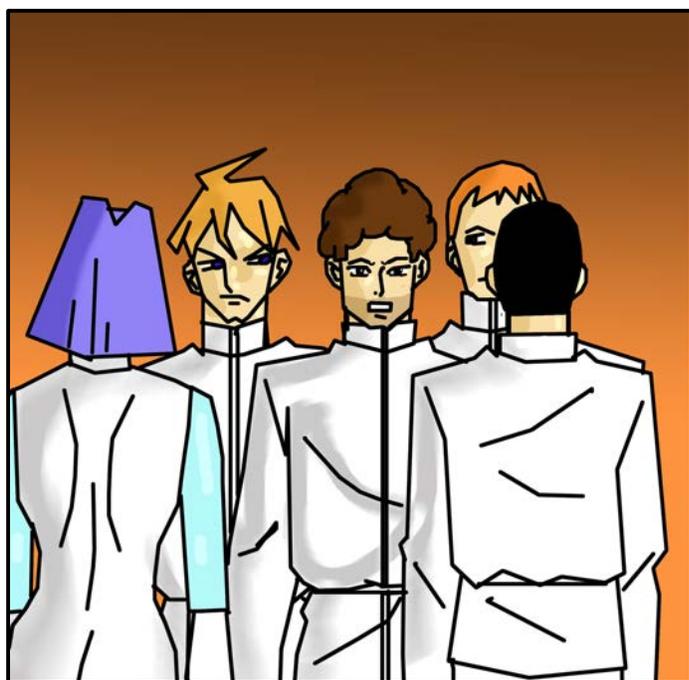
"Well, I have to trust John and the crew I've left in charge."

"Yes, Captain."

Let's get back on top and see if everyone's gotten the proper rest I suggested. Why don't some of you grab any ammo you might need. I see disintegration guns here as well. Grab a few. They might come in handy. I'm not fond of using them but in the direst need, I would not hesitate."

He grabbed one for himself, as did Addie, Flint, Brel and even Matt Blume who couldn't see the logic of not having one.

All was quiet on top when they returned and everyone looked relieved to see them.



He explained the situation, that it'd be up to them to dismiss the groups that returned tonight by any means possible.

He ended his speech by saying, "We can't let this outpost fall into the enemies' hands, no matter what the cost. This world needs our support as they prepare for war, as they prepare to defend their homes. We are their last line of security, at least on this outpost. They've dispatched small armies to skirmish with the

infiltrated outposts throughout the land. This world has dismissed most of the newer technology in-lieu of a gentler and simpler world; however, they still have many tricks up their sleeves. They have actually hidden their tech abilities quite well. Any who'd like a warm meal, may go down to the tunnel and eat, but I give you an hour at most. Stuart, Brel, Matt and myself will tend to some last minute details up here. Now go and enjoy."

He didn't have to tell them twice. They were gone in a flash.

“Captain, the Admiral also told me about a shed that is covered by several tall trees and bushes that has small ships we can use that are loaded with impressive fire power.”

“Okay, let’s go find it.

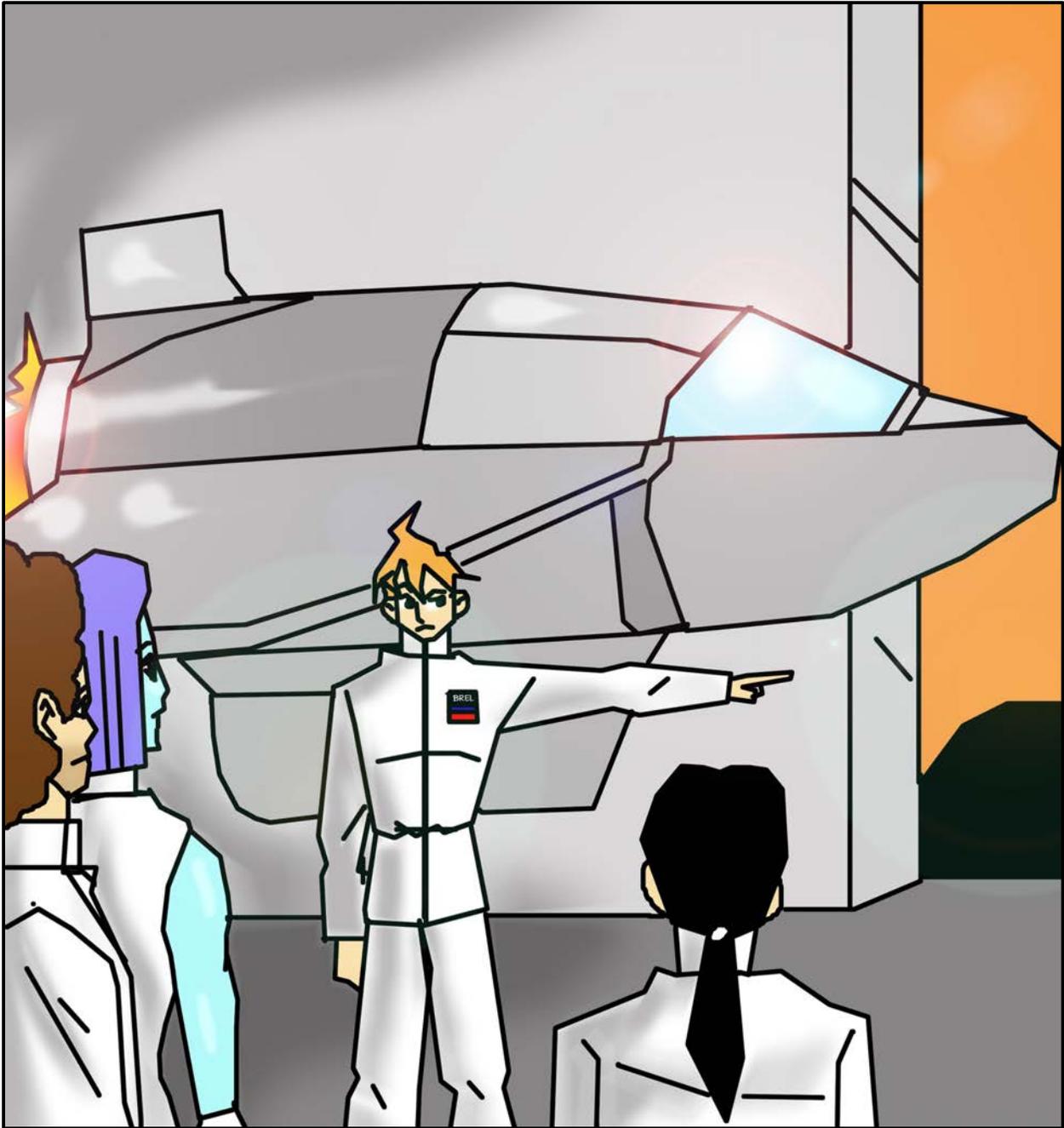
The shed was a rather large building, really more like a hanger and indeed there were 12 small war ships stored there specifically made for two previous commanders. They found an opening at the roof that slid back as a convenient exit. There were many explosives and old-fashioned machine guns. Fire throwers and a hand-held disc that were thrown into the air and sucked up anything it passed before returning back to its owner. A very handy modern boomerang.

The four of them quickly set up a booby trapped perimeter around the outpost that promised to be a great display of fireworks.

Brel said he could come in from the rear and quickly take out many of them before they knew they were being disengaged from the group. A nice way of saying slaughtered, without a chance of survival. Sarantos nodded his approval.

The rest of his crew joined them before long. Brel left to check the perimeters one final time.

Private Bonnie Day preferred ground duty over flight, so she climbed a sturdy tall tree and waited and watched. She wasn’t up in the tree for ten minutes before she noticed two small groups moving through the trees approaching the outpost. She informed Sally Mann.



Private Opal got into one ship with Chief Stone Drake. Another one was occupied by the very blue Sargent Todd Cam and Cadet Greg Petty, and yet another one housed Ensign Harry Born and Major Flint. Matt Blume, Addie, Dr. Major Cherrie Cleary and himself were ground building crew. They headed inside. Brel had pointed out a small tunnel leading from the hanger to the outpost to him and he showed all parties that needed to know its exact location.

They were as ready as they could be as two small groups headed their way.

He looked at Addie, and thought back to dancing all night long in the dark together, wishing the song of their lovemaking could go on and on forever and ever, but unfortunately all songs must end. There was no pause, rewind or play button here and now. A new song was ready to start.