



#3

\$2.99 US

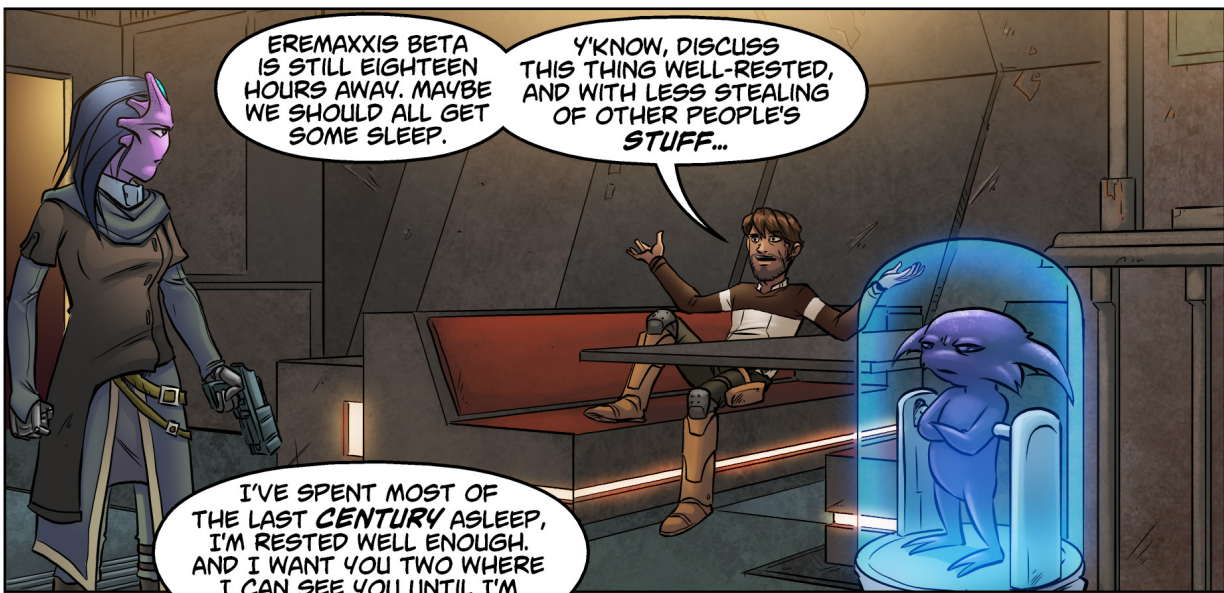
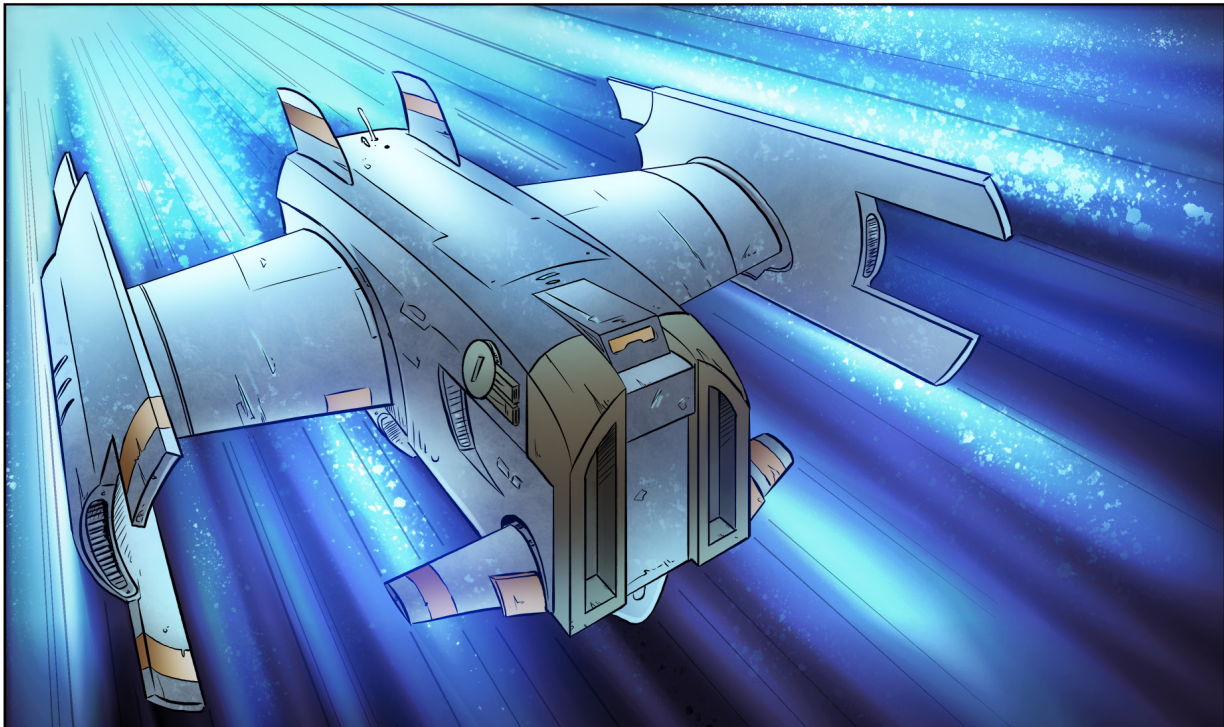
\$3.75 CAN

# THE STARCASTER CHRONICLES



BUCKLEY ■ CORREIA





EREMAXIS BETA IS STILL EIGHTEEN HOURS AWAY. MAYBE WE SHOULD ALL GET SOME SLEEP.

Y'KNOW, DISCUSS THIS THING WELL-RESTED, AND WITH LESS STEALING OF OTHER PEOPLE'S STUFF...

I'VE SPENT MOST OF THE LAST CENTURY ASLEEP, I'M RESTED WELL ENOUGH. AND I WANT YOU TWO WHERE I CAN SEE YOU UNTIL I'M SAFELY OFF THIS SHIP.



PFFT. THANKS TO US, YOU'RE SAFELY ON THIS SHIP RIGHT NOW.

AND IN MATTERS INVOLVING SAVING YOUR OWN SKIN, I TRUST YOU IMPLICITLY. IT'S EVERYTHING ELSE WHERE WE HAVE AN ISSUE.





BUT PERHAPS THAT'S WHY YOU ARE NO LONGER COUNTED AMONG THE OFFICERS OF THE UNITED FEDERATION? YOU COULD NOT MEET THE STANDARDS OF HONESTY AND INTEGRITY THE POSITION DEMANDED?



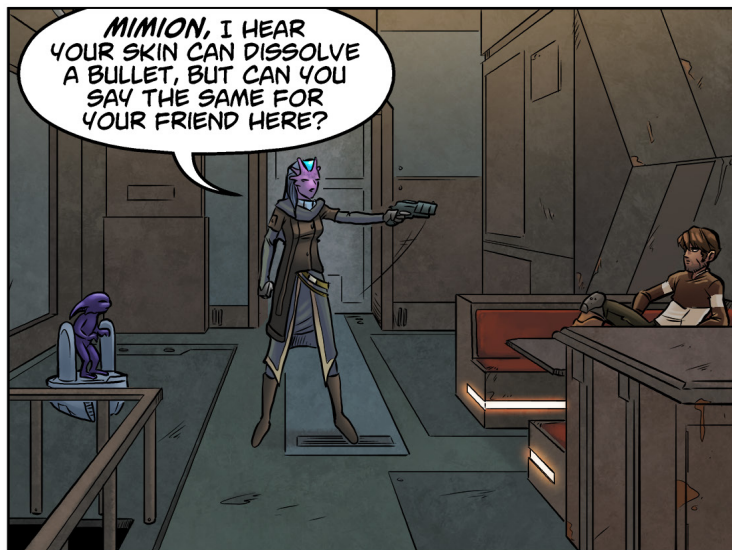
'STANDARDS OF...' SORRY, ARE WE TALKING ABOUT THE SAME FEDERATION, HERE?

AND LET'S BE PERFECTLY CLEAR, I LEFT THE MARSHALL SERVICE.

YOUR PRECIOUS BEACON OF "INTEGRITY AND HONESTY" ISN'T AS PRISTINE AS YOU SEEM TO THINK, AND WHEN I WOULDN'T PLAY BALL, THEY FRAMED ME FOR BEING ON THE TAKE.



AN INTERESTING TALE. BUT SPUN FROM THE LIPS OF A LIAR.

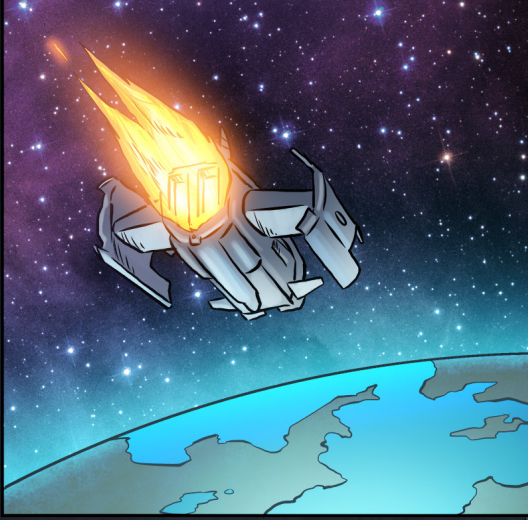


MIMION, I HEAR YOUR SKIN CAN DISSOLVE A BULLET, BUT CAN YOU SAY THE SAME FOR YOUR FRIEND HERE?



SHOULDA LET ME HUG HER BEFORE.





OK, ORBITAL  
APPROACH LOCKED  
IN.

THE U-FED  
STATION IS IN THE CAPITAL. WE  
CAN DOCK AT A LITTLE SKID PORT ON  
THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN WITHOUT  
ATTRACTING TOO MUCH  
ATTENTION.

FROM THERE,  
A STREET SKIFF  
SHOULD BE ABLE TO  
TAKE YOU--

REQUEST  
CLEARANCE TO  
DOCK AT THE  
FEDERATION  
OUTPOST.



WHOA,  
HOLD ON  
A SECOND--

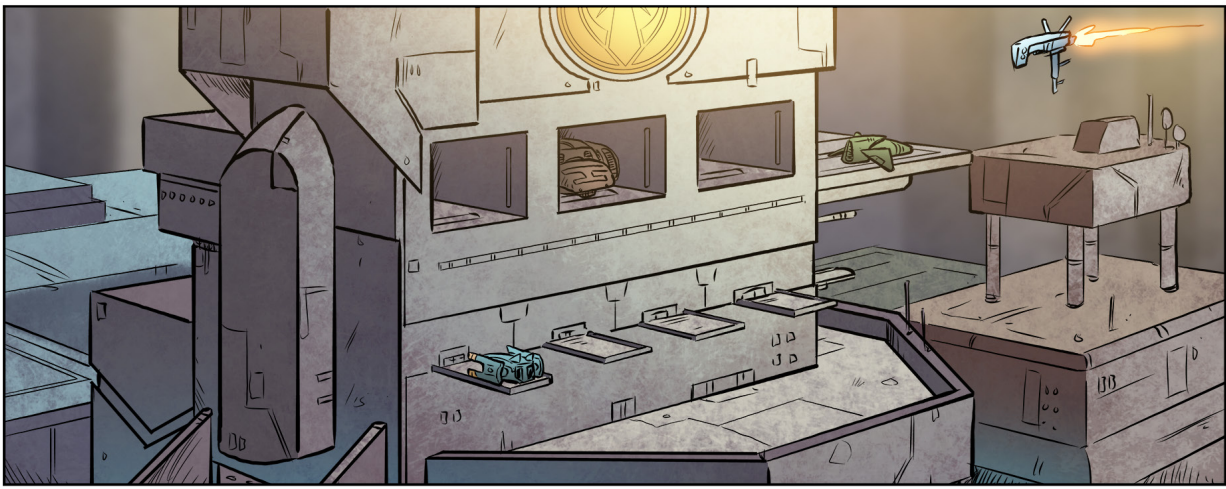
I WILL NOT.  
WE GO DIRECTLY  
TO THE FEDERATION  
OUTPOST.

YOU ARE  
THROUGH WASTING  
MY TIME, CORT  
RYDER.

YOU KNOW, YOU KEEP  
POINTING THAT GUN AT ME LIKE  
THAT, AND I MAY JUST DECIDE  
WE'RE NOT GOING TO BE  
FRIENDS ANYMORE.











IN YOU GO, SPACE MAGGOT.

HEY!



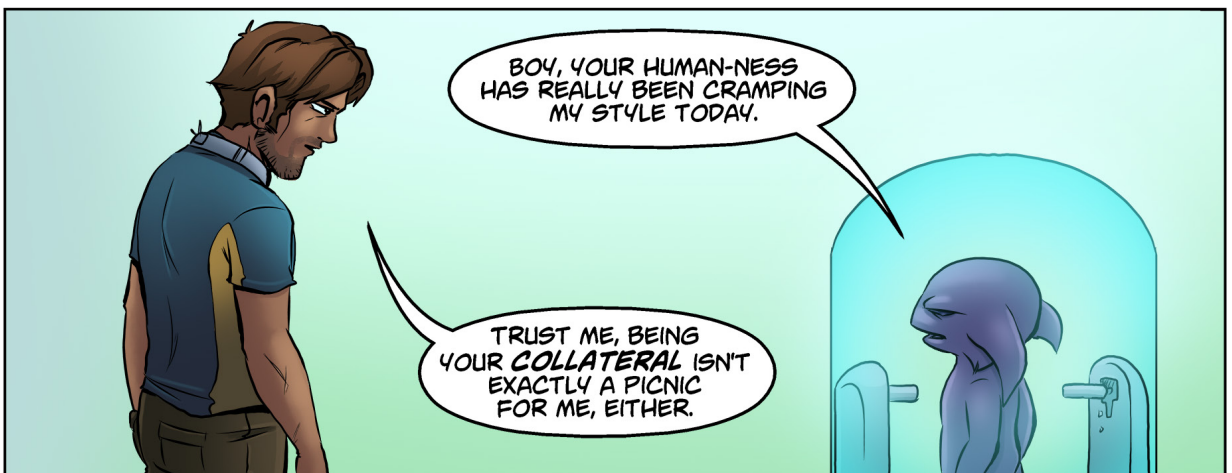
WE DON'T HAVE A NIVILUM-LINED CELL HERE, SO YOU'RE ON THE HONOR SYSTEM.



TRY TO ESCAPE AND YOUR BOYFRIEND HERE GETS A PLASMA SHOCK TO HIS SPINAL CORD.




YEP, THERE'S THE WELCOME I WAS EXPECTING.



BOY, YOUR HUMAN-NESS HAS REALLY BEEN CRAMPING MY STYLE TODAY.

TRUST ME, BEING YOUR COLLATERAL ISN'T EXACTLY A PICNIC FOR ME, EITHER.





...AND WHEN I WAS WOKEN, I FOUND MYSELF ON A DIFFERENT SHIP, WITH THOSE TWO... CHARACTERS.


A STARCASTER... UNBELIEVABLE...



I AM AWARE, COMMANDER...

HOWEVER, AS I UNDERSTAND IT, MY VERY PRESENCE SHOULD LEND MY STORY SOME CREDIBILITY.

THE DETAILS OF THE LAST FEW DAYS ARE OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE, SAVE TO MENTION THAT I MADE GREAT EFFORTS TO REACH YOU.

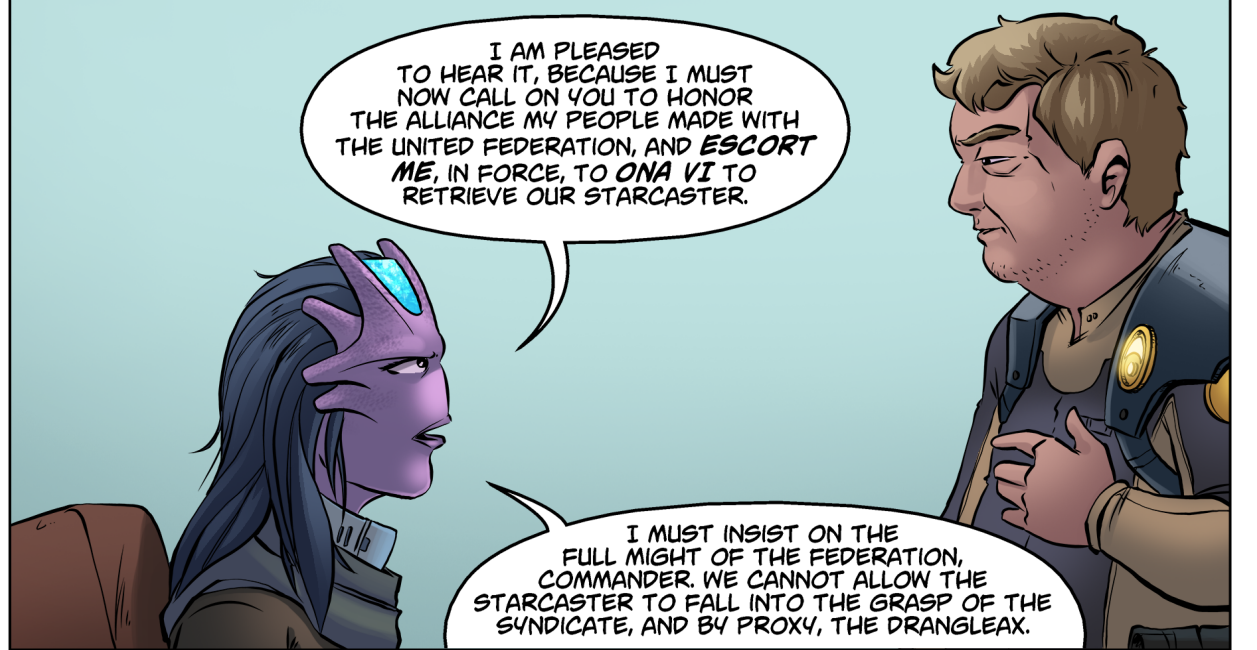


NO, OF COURSE, OF COURSE. MY DEAR, YOUR CONVICTION ALONE HAS CONVINCED ME.

IT'S JUST, WHAT YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH, I SIMPLY CANNOT...


I THANK THE STARS THAT YOU'VE MADE IT HERE TO ME. TO THE FEDERATION.






I AM PLEASED TO HEAR IT, BECAUSE I MUST NOW CALL ON YOU TO HONOR THE ALLIANCE MY PEOPLE MADE WITH THE UNITED FEDERATION, AND *ESCORT ME*, IN FORCE, TO *ONA VI* TO RETRIEVE OUR STARCASTER.

I MUST INSIST ON THE FULL MIGHT OF THE FEDERATION, COMMANDER. WE CANNOT ALLOW THE STARCASTER TO FALL INTO THE GRASP OF THE SYNDICATE, AND BY PROXY, THE DRANGLEAX.



ONCE THE STARCASTER HAS BEEN SECURED, AND WE HAVE MADE OUR WAY TO THE CORE, I WILL FULFILL MY MISSION AND PERSONALLY SURRENDER IT TO THE FEDERATION VAULT FOR SAFEKEEPING, AS WAS THE LAST WISH OF OUR ROYAL FAMILY.



THE UNITED FEDERATION WILL BE *PRIVILEGED* TO ENSURE THE SUCCESS OF THIS MOST IMPORTANT AND URGENT MISSION, MY DEAR NYRAH.

EREMAXXIS IS A SMALL FRINGE SYSTEM, AND OUR OUTPOST HERE LIGHTLY MANNED, BUT I WILL CONTACT THE CORE *IMMEDIATELY* TO SUMMON A FLEET BEFITTING THIS MISSION'S CRITICAL NATURE.

IN THE MEANTIME, PLEASE, MY OFFICE IS YOURS. MAKE YOURSELF COMFORTABLE, AND I WILL RETURN AS SOON AS I HAVE THINGS UNDERWAY.





OF COURSE IT WAS ABOUT THE MONEY. A LOT OF MONEY.

OR IS THAT JUST WHAT YOU TOLD ME SO I'D GO ALONG WITH IT?



WHAT IS *THAT* SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

THAT YOU SAW SOMEONE WHO NEEDED HELP AND COULDN'T RESIST GETTING INVOLVED? *AGAIN?*

THAT DESPITE BEING AN OUTLAW NOW, DEEP DOWN YOU STILL WANT TO BE THE GOOD GUY?



THAT'S RIDICULOUS. WHAT ABOUT THE INCIDENT WITH THOSE SKIN MINERS ON GETHALINE? WOULD A GOOD GUY HAVE DONE *THAT?*

WELL I DIDN'T SAY YOU WERE ANY *GOOD* AT BEING A GOOD--



YOUR SHIP'S HULLCAM VERIFIED THAT YOU DIDN'T FIRE UPON THE FEDERATION PATROL IN SECTOR ELSIH, SO THE WARRANT HAS BEEN AMENDED.

LET'S GO, YOU'RE BEING RELEASED. THE COMMANDER WANTS YOU DRESS OUT OF HIS SECTOR.





WE DIDN'T FIND ANY CONTRABAND, SO YOUR SHIP HAS BEEN RELEASED FROM IMPOUND.

YOU'VE BEEN FINED FOUR-HUNDRED CREDITS FOR... LET'S CALL IT AN "IMPROPERLY FILED" REGISTRATION,



WE HAD FOUR-HUNDRED CREDITS?!

NOT TO SPARE. WE'LL HAVE TO STOP SOMEWHERE SO I CAN SELL SOME MUCK...



SIR.

THOSE SCRAPERS ARE ALWAYS SO COLD...

-- JUST ARRIVED. YES. PERSONALLY, YOU HAVE MY WORD.



WE COULD SEE THAT GUY IN ECSSIS. IT'S A BIT OF A HIKE, BUT HE ALWAYS GIVES YOU A GOOD PRICE.

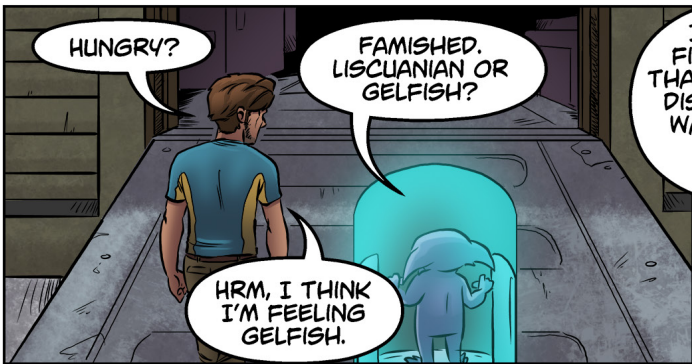
EH, I KNOW, BUT HIS THIRD EYE REALLY CREEPS ME OUT, MAN. WHO PUTS AN EYE THERE, OF ALL PLACES...





ALRIGHT, FELLAS. WISH I COULD SAY IT'S BEEN A PLEASURE, BUT OUR CELL DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TURNDOWN SERVICE? HOW DO YOU EXPECT TO DRAW REPEAT BUSINESS?

ZERO OUT OF TEN, WOULD NOT BE INCARCERATED HERE AGAIN.



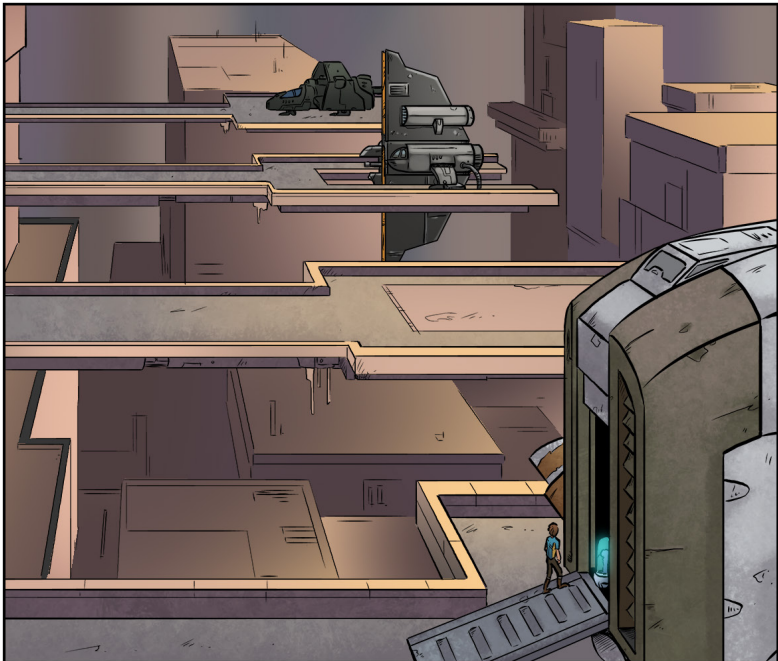
HUNGRY?

FAMISHED. LISCUANIAN OR GELFISH?

HRM, I THINK I'M FEELING GELFISH.



IF WE CAN FIND A PLACE THAT DOES THAT DISH WITH THE WALNUTS AND THULM SAUCE--



FIERY NEBULA...



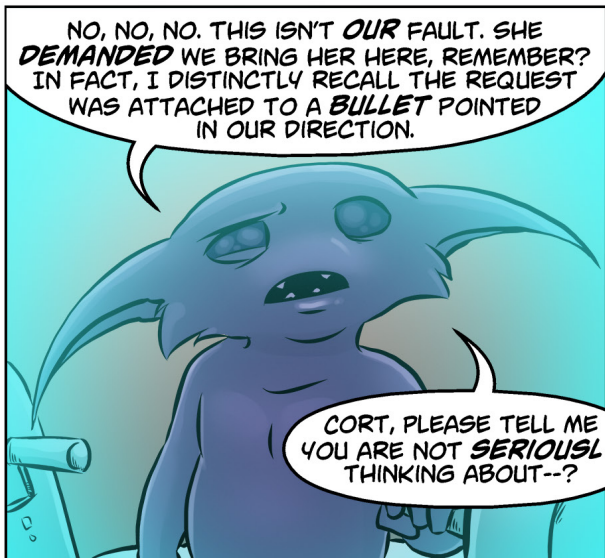


WHAT-- OH.  
WELL, THAT'S SIX SHADES OF UNFORTUNATE.



SO, YOU WERE SAYING ABOUT THE DISH WITH THE WALNUTS...?

SPECK...

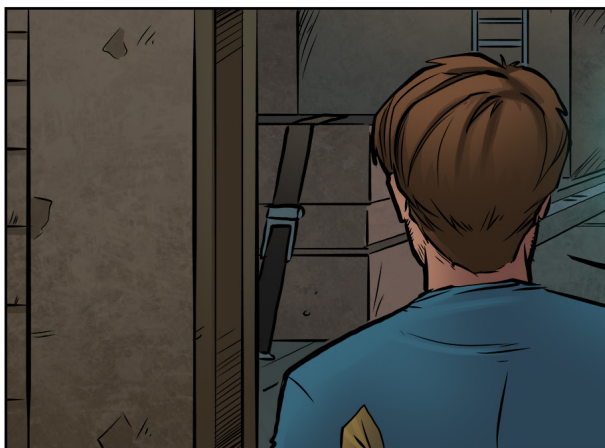


NO, NO, NO. THIS ISN'T *OUR* FAULT. SHE DEMANDED WE BRING HER HERE, REMEMBER? IN FACT, I DISTINCTLY RECALL THE REQUEST WAS ATTACHED TO A **BULLET** POINTED IN OUR DIRECTION.

CORT, PLEASE TELL ME YOU ARE NOT **SERIOUSLY** THINKING ABOUT--?



UGH.



I *GUESS* I'LL GO GET THE SHIP PREPPED FOR A HASTY DEPARTURE.

HEY, WHAT WE TALKED ABOUT EARLIER... THIS DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE RIGHT, YOU KNOW.

CLEARLY.





ALRIGHT, SPECK, YOU READ ME?

UNFORTUNATELY.



SHE DOESN'T DESERVE WHAT THEY'LL DO TO HER, NO MATTER WHAT. I'LL SHOUT WHEN WE'RE ON OUR WAY.

COULD YOU ALSO MAKE A GURLING SOUND IF YOU DIE, SO I KNOW I'VE INHERITED THE SHIP?



HA.  
LOOK ALIVE, OFFICER!  
STRAIGHTEN THAT FIREARM!

DEPUTY!  
WAIT... WEREN'T YOU JUST--



HRRKGGGLL-K-K!

KZ-ZRK



AWWRGH.  
I THINK HE THREW UP IN HIS HELMET A LITTLE.

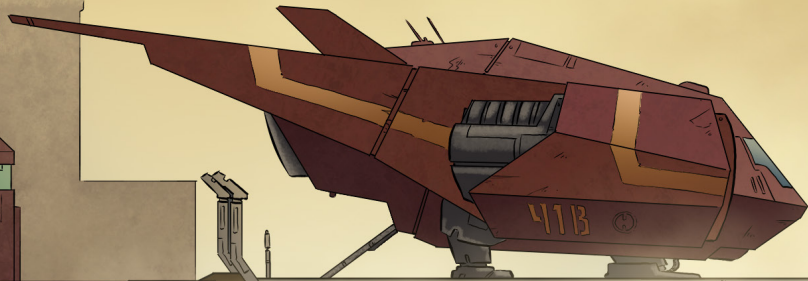
OK, WELL, NOW I'M IN A BETTER MOOD.



THE  
EREMAXXIS  
SYSTEM?

AN ARREST FLAG  
FOR CORT RYDER... HE WAS  
DETAINED AT A DISTRICT  
OUTPOST THERE.

I'VE ORDERED  
A HOLD, BUT BEEN  
UNABLE TO RAISE THE  
COMMANDER ON DUTY, I'LL  
CONTINUE TO TRY  
EN ROUTE.



SIR, YOU HAVE TWO  
COMMITTEE MEETINGS  
THIS AFTERNOON--

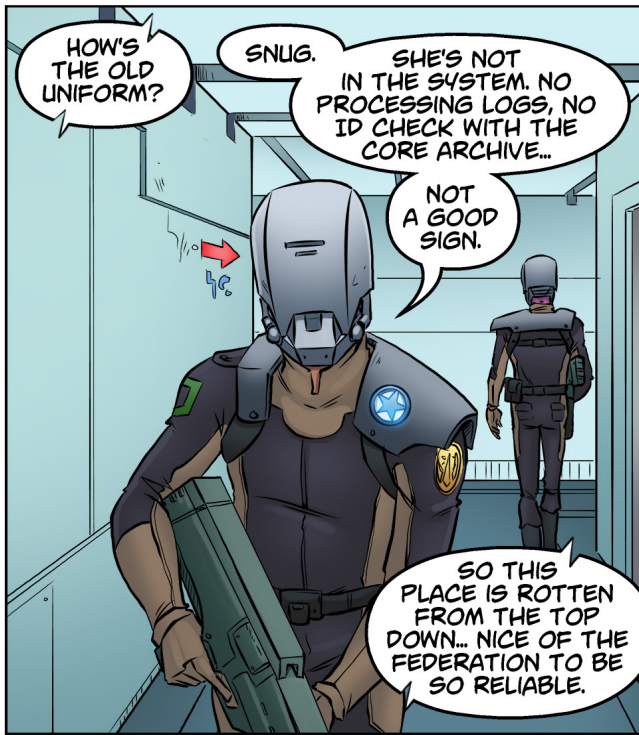
RESCHEDULE.

WHAT REASON  
SHALL I GIVE? CORT RYDER  
IS NOT A FEDERAL FUGITIVE.  
IS THIS MARSHAL  
BUSINESS...

...OR  
PERSONAL?

BOTH.





HOW'S THE OLD UNIFORM?

SNUG.

SHE'S NOT IN THE SYSTEM. NO PROCESSING LOGS, NO ID CHECK WITH THE CORE ARCHIVE...

NOT A GOOD SIGN.

SO THIS PLACE IS ROTTEN FROM THE TOP DOWN... NICE OF THE FEDERATION TO BE SO RELIABLE.



SHE'S NOT IN DETENTION.

I'M HEADING TOWARDS THE COMMANDER'S OFFICE.

OK. REMEMBER: GURGLE.



NYRAH!

WHERE IS THE COMMANDER? HAS HE RALLIED THE FLEET YET?

I AM BEGINNING TO GROW--



CORT?!

I KNOW, BUT I NEED YOU TO J--

AND AGAIN POSING AS A FEDERATION OFFICER? IF YOU'RE TRYING TO ECLIPSE YOUR LACK OF HONOR WITH A LACK OF COMMON SENSE, I MUST SAY, IT MAY BE WORKING...

HA!



WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME, WILL YOU JUST LISTEN TO ME, DAMMIT--!

I THOUGHT I'D ALREADY MADE IT CLEAR THAT LISTENING TO YOU IS NOT A MISTAKE I EVER PLAN TO--

--NO.

...AS I ASSURED YOUR EMPLOYER, I HOPE YOU WILL CONVEY TO HIM MY--

WHAT?!

RYDER.

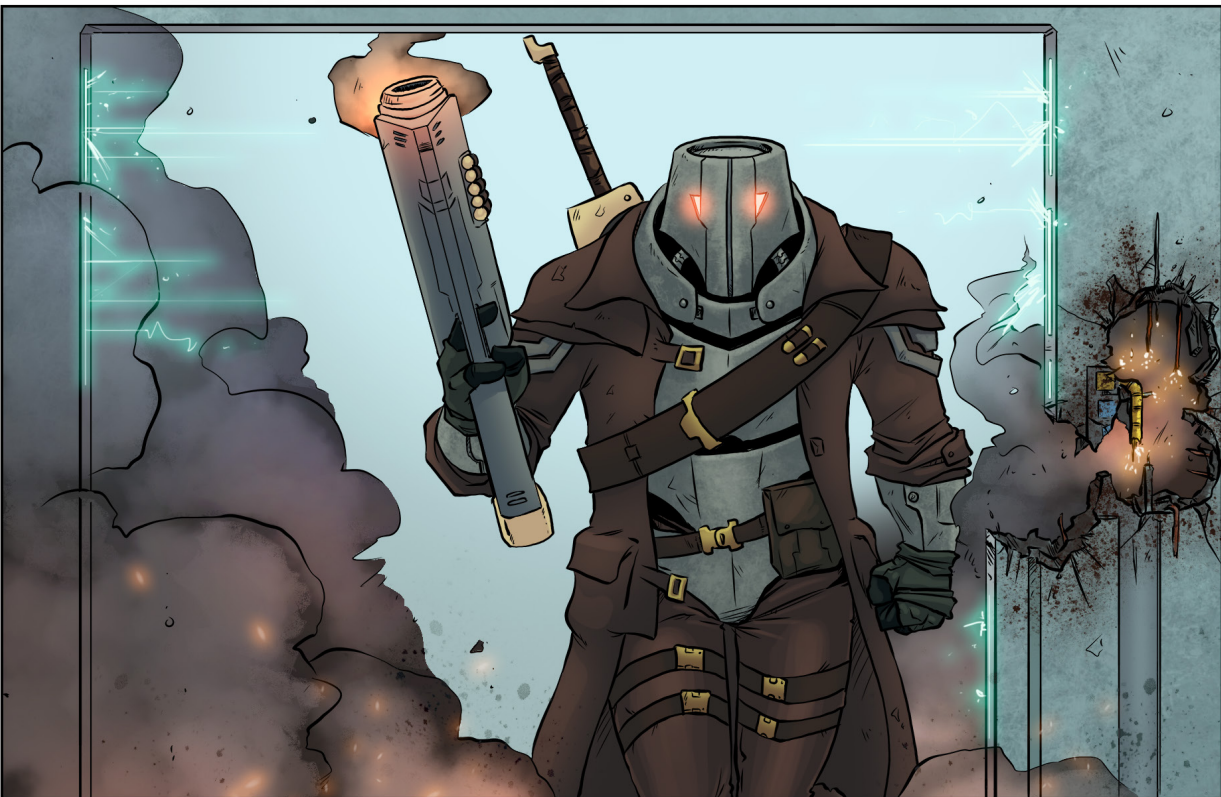
RIGHT, SO I THINK WE'RE ALL ON THE SAME PAGE HERE...

BZZAMM





















OKAY,  
LOOK--



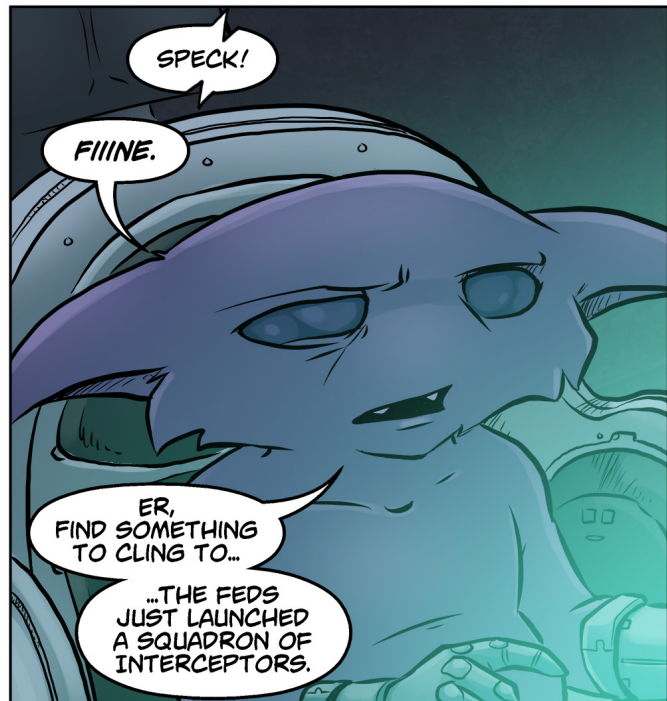
UNGH...

COMING?



SPECK,  
WE'RE HERE!  
LET'S GO!

HUH?  
WHAT'S THE  
RUSH?



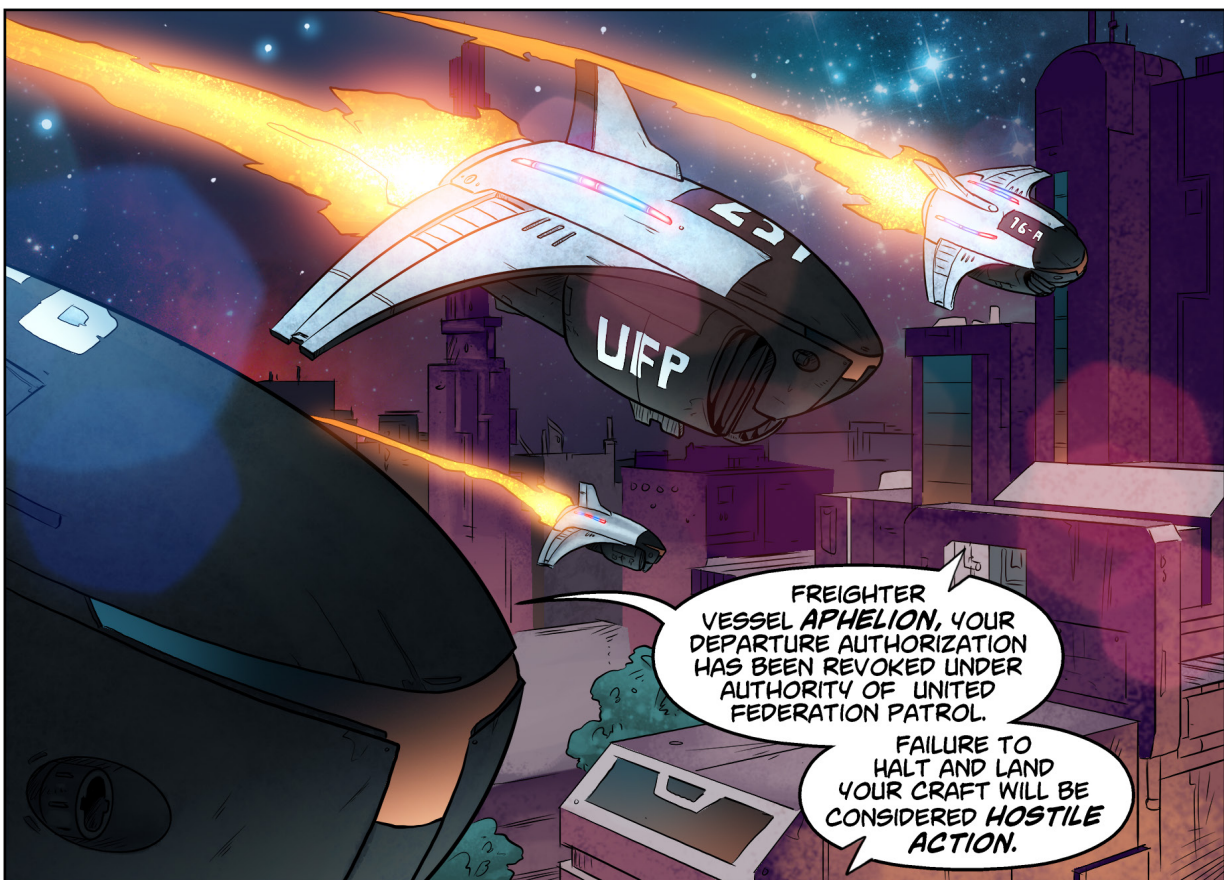
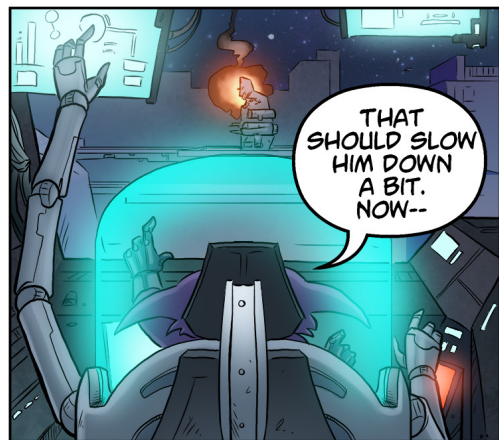
SPECK!

FIINE.

ER,  
FIND SOMETHING  
TO CLING TO...

...THE FEDS  
JUST LAUNCHED  
A SQUADRON OF  
INTERCEPTORS.









HOSTILE ACTION?

COME ON, THIS IS PLAYFULLY DISOBEDIENT, AT BEST.



SERGEANT, THE SHIP IS ACCELERATING. PERMISSION TO OPEN FIRE?

DO IT.



PHT PHT PHT

PHT PHT PHT

OKAY, NOW THAT'S HOSTILE ACTION.



FOOM  
FOOM

WARNING: REAR SHIELDS AT FORTY-FOUR PERCENT.

ANYTHING I SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT, SPECK?



DEPENDS... WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ON FIERY CRASHES?

WE'VE GOT TOO MUCH DRAG IN-ATMOSPHERE, WE'LL NEVER OUTFRAN THEM.

UNLESS...





BRACE YOURSELVES. I MAY HAVE ONLY BEEN PARTIALLY KIDDING ABOUT THE 'FIERY CRASH'...



WHAT--

SUPERLUMINAL DRIVE ENGAGED. JUMP IN FIVE... FOUR...

SPECK, A JUMP IN-ATMO COULD--!

THREETWOONE!



KRAKOOOM



BWEEE!  
BWEEE!  
BWEEE!

ALERT: POSSIBLE STRUCTURAL DAMAGE DETECTED.

STARBOARD SENSOR ARRAY OFFLINE.

STARBOARD FUEL PUMP OFFLINE.





SO, DO YOU WANT THE BAD NEWS, THE BAD NEWS, THE BAD NEWS OR THE GOOD NEWS?

THE... GOOD NEWS?

WE'RE NOT DEAD!

HOWEVER WE **DID** FRACTURE A WING SUPPORT. WE CAN LIMP TO A SHIPSMITH, BUT ZERO-GRAV ONLY.

PLANETARY ENTRY WOULD TEAR THE WING RIGHT OFF, SO OUR NEARBY OPTIONS ARE LIMITED.



WE'RE ALSO LOW ON FUEL.

AND **CREDITS**, ACTUALLY, WHICH ADDS AN INTERESTING TWIST TO OUR FIRST TWO PROBLEMS.

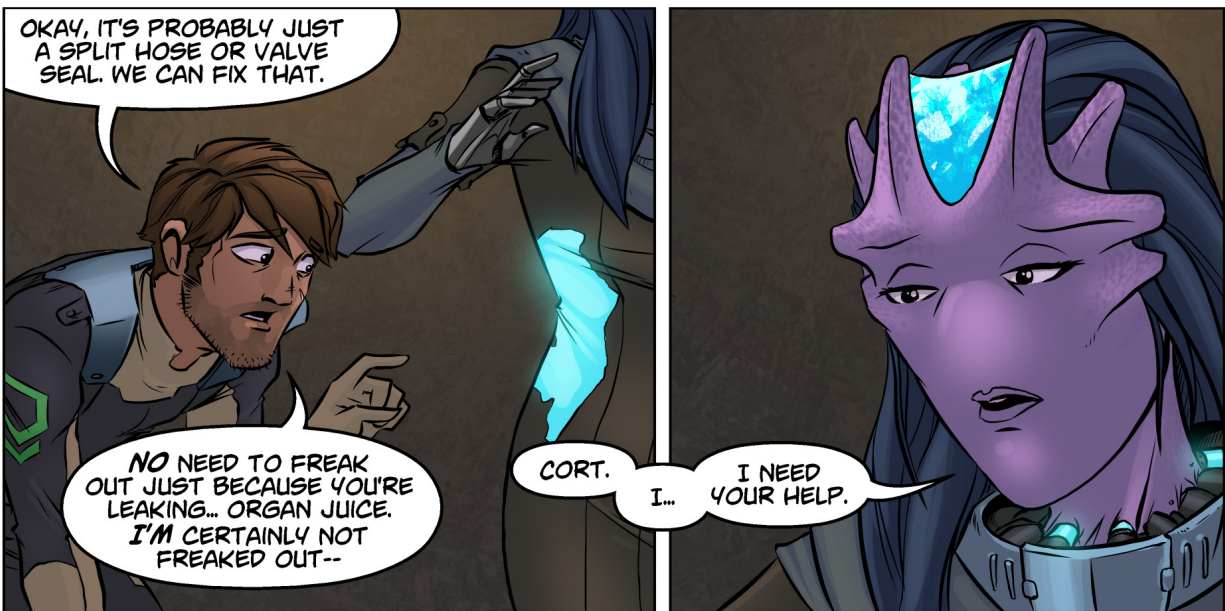
OH, AND **SHE** APPEARS TO BE LEAKING.



THAT'S A MEDICAL BODY, IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE TEMPORARY.

IT ISN'T DESIGNED TO HOLD UP TO STRENUOUS ACTIVITY, YOU'LL NEED TO BE CAREFUL.





OKAY, IT'S PROBABLY JUST A SPLIT HOSE OR VALVE SEAL. WE CAN FIX THAT.

NO NEED TO FREAK OUT JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE LEAKING... ORGAN JUICE. I'M CERTAINLY NOT FREAKED OUT--

CORT.

I... I NEED YOUR HELP.



NO PROBLEM! TELL YOU WHAT, I'LL PATCH UP YOUR LEAK AND YOU CAN BANDAGE WHAT'S LEFT OF MY EAR.

'CAUSE **SPECK** HAS ALL THE GENTLENESS OF A RABID SULDARK IN HEAT WHEN IT COMES TO--

NOT THAT, CORT. THEY **KNOW!**

THEY KNOW WHAT **PLANET** THE STARCASTER IS ON!

YOU **TOLD** THAT ROTTEN SNAKE?



ALL THESE YEARS, THE **ONE** THOUGHT I CLUNG TO WAS REACHING THE UNITED FEDERATION.

IT KEPT ME GOING... THIS IDEA THAT ALL OF MY SUFFERING... MY BROTHER'S SACRIFICE... WOULD BE **WORTH** IT IF I COULD JUST COMPLETE MY MISSION.



I WAS BLINDED BY THAT FOCUS, UNWILLING TO EVEN **CONSIDER** THAT THE FEDERATION I KNEW HAD BEEN POISONED BY CORRUPTION...

AND NOW I MAY HAVE SET IN MOTION EXACTLY WHAT I WAS CHARGED WITH PREVENTING.

BOY, YOU REALLY KNOW HOW TO SUCK THE JOY OUT OF A WELL-EARNED "I TOLD YOU SO."



