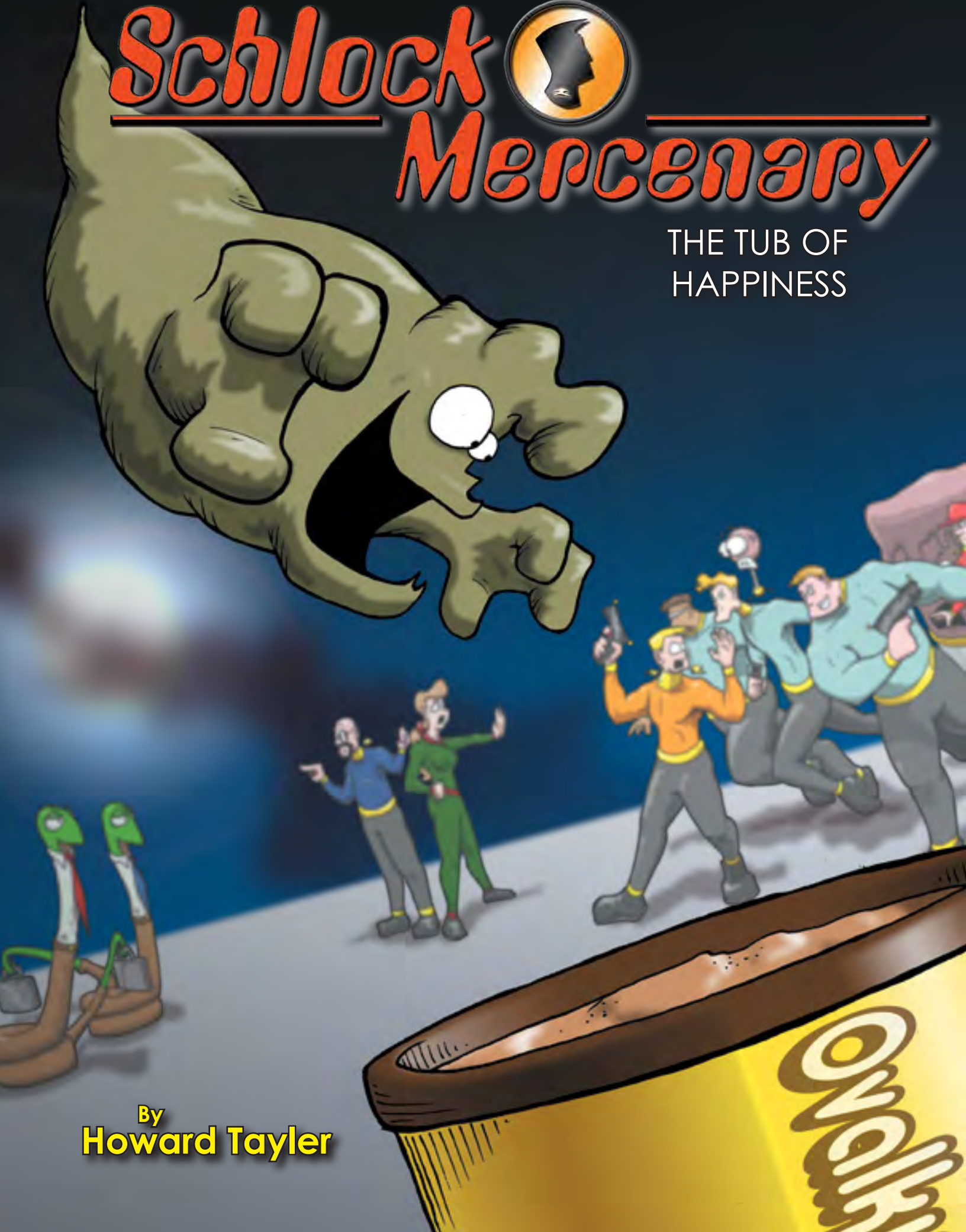


# Schlock Mercenary



THE TUB OF  
HAPPINESS



By  
**Howard Tayler**

# Schlock Mercenary books

(in Chronological Order):

*Schlock Mercenary: The Tub of Happiness*

*Schlock Mercenary: The Teraport Wars*

*Schlock Mercenary: Under New Management*

*Schlock Mercenary: The Blackness Between*

*Schlock Mercenary: The Scrapyard of Insufferable Arrogance*

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The principal story in this book originally appeared on the web between June 12, 2000 and November 11, 2001.

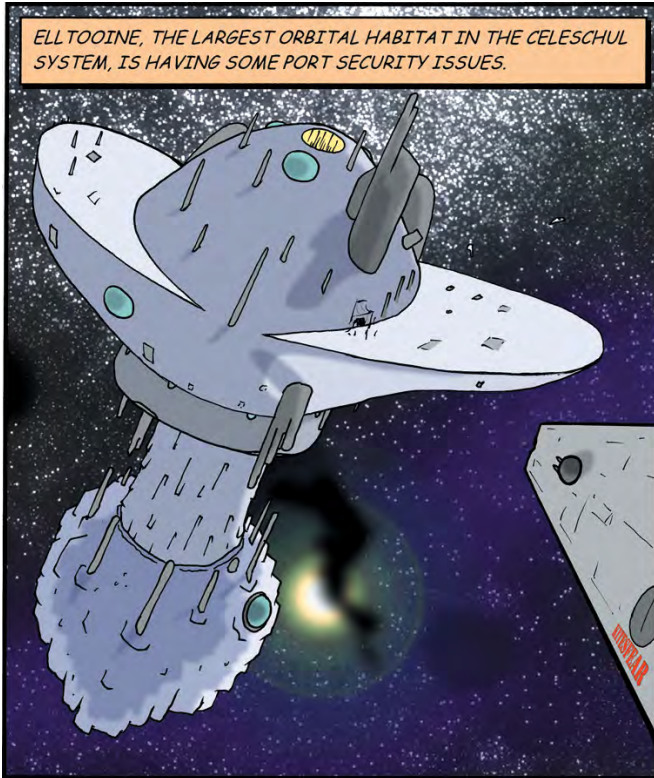
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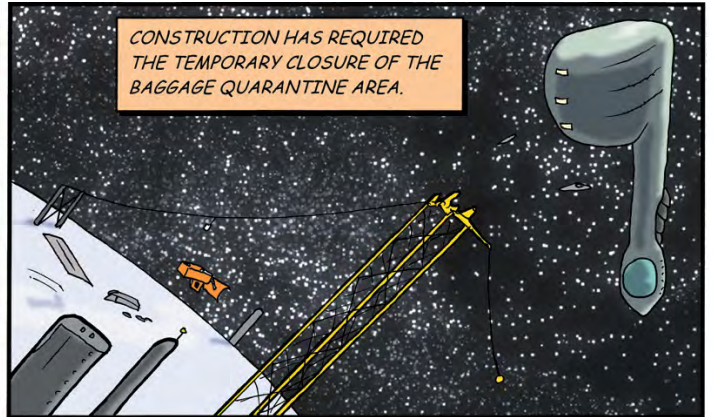
# Schlock Mercenary:

## BAGGAGE CLAIM

ELL TOOINE, THE LARGEST ORBITAL HABITAT IN THE CELESCHUL SYSTEM, IS HAVING SOME PORT SECURITY ISSUES.



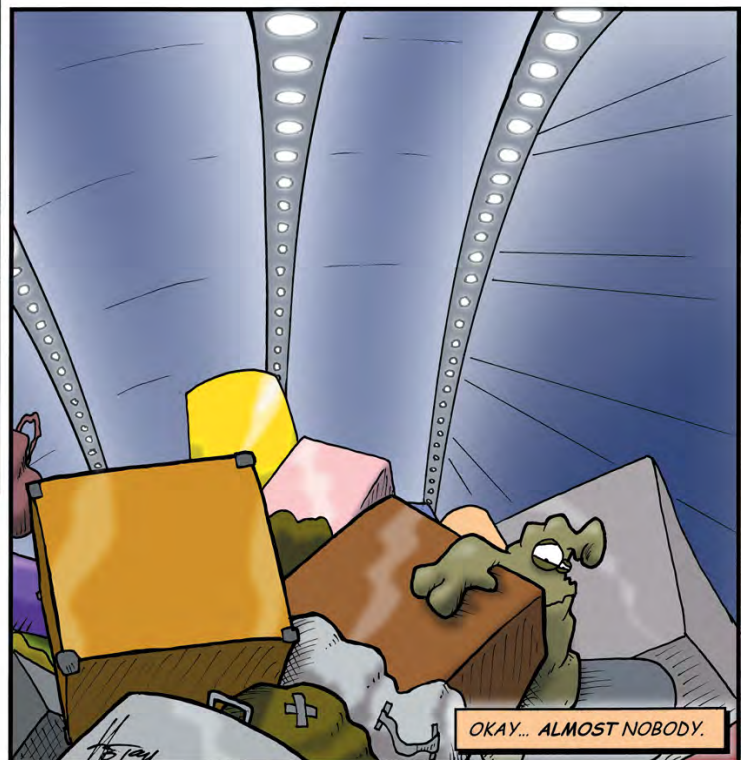
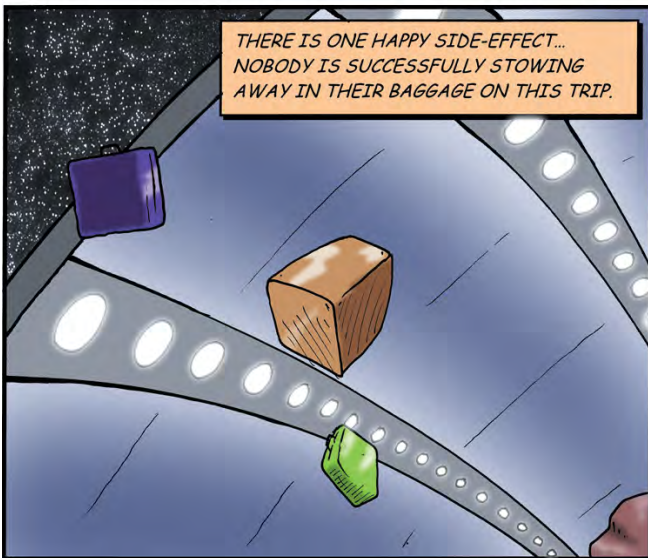
CONSTRUCTION HAS REQUIRED THE TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF THE BAGGAGE QUARANTINE AREA.



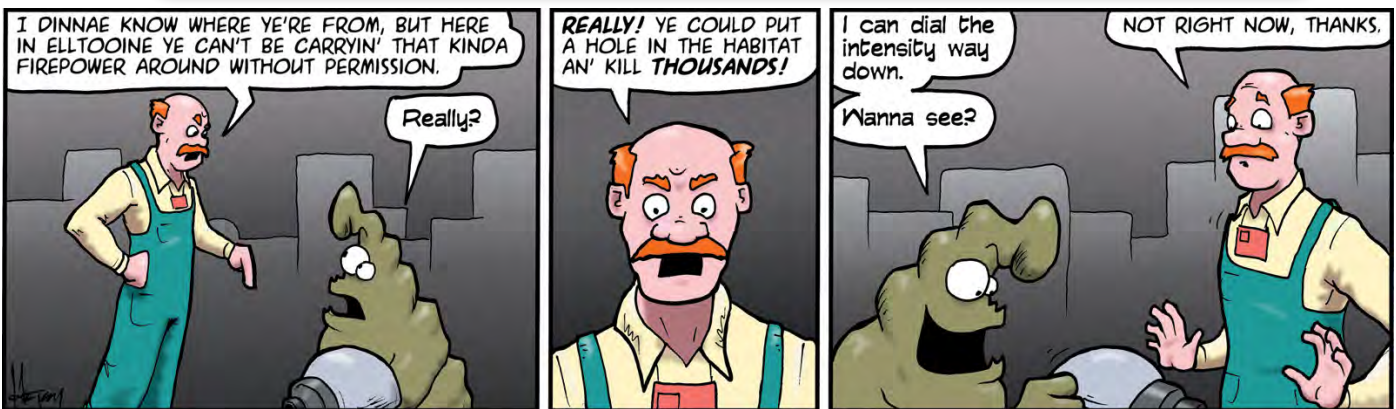
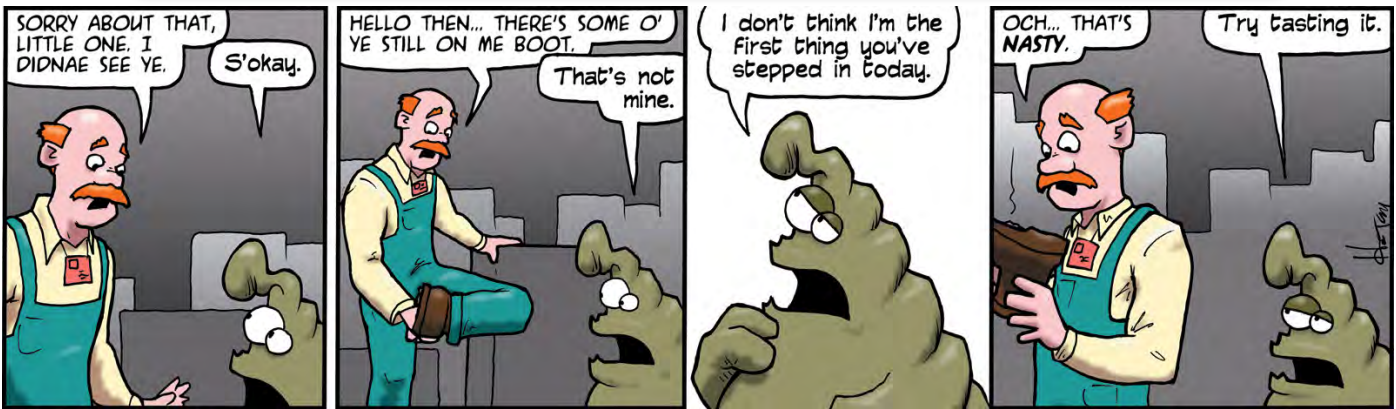
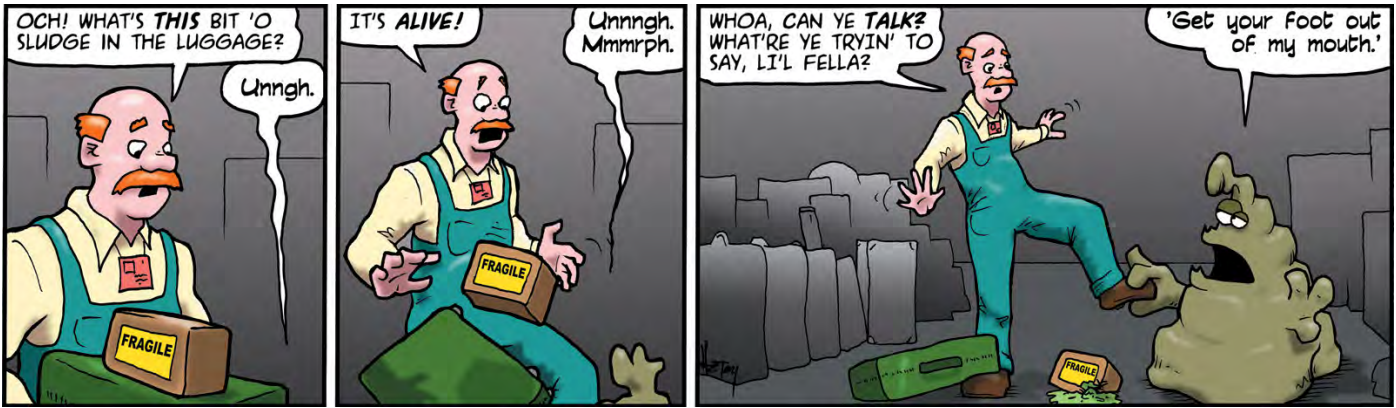
IF YOU HAPPEN TO BE VISITING THIS WEEK, LET US HOPE THAT THERE IS NOTHING IN YOUR LUGGAGE THAT WILL BE HARMED BY A FEW HOURS OF HARD VACUUM.

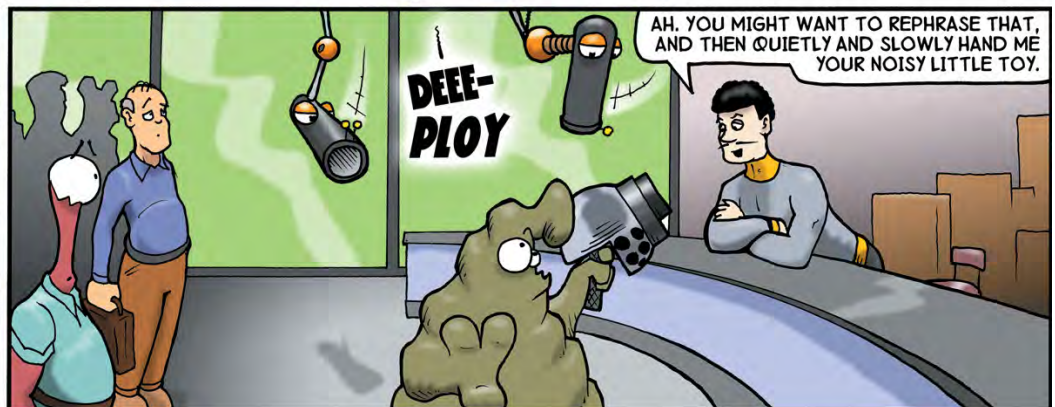


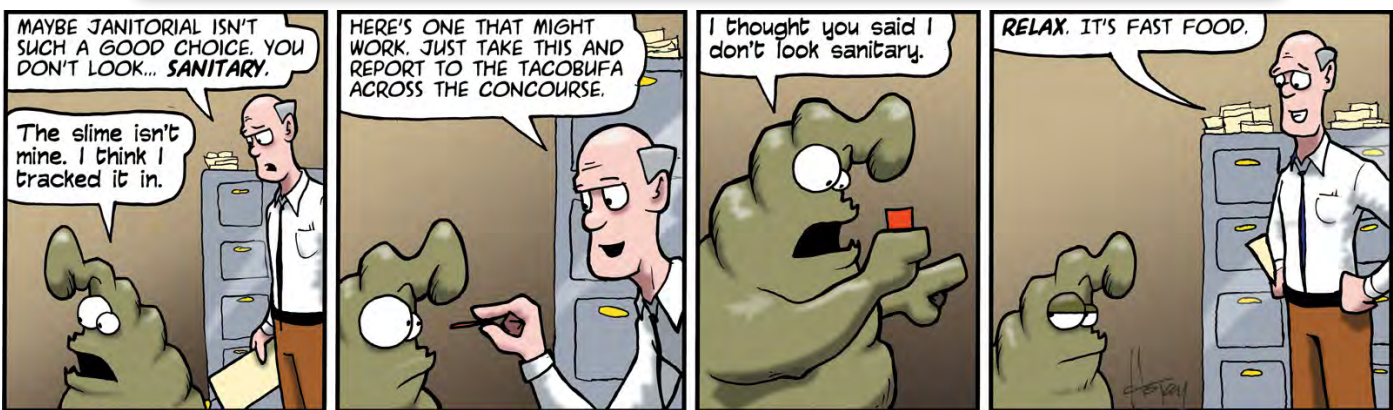
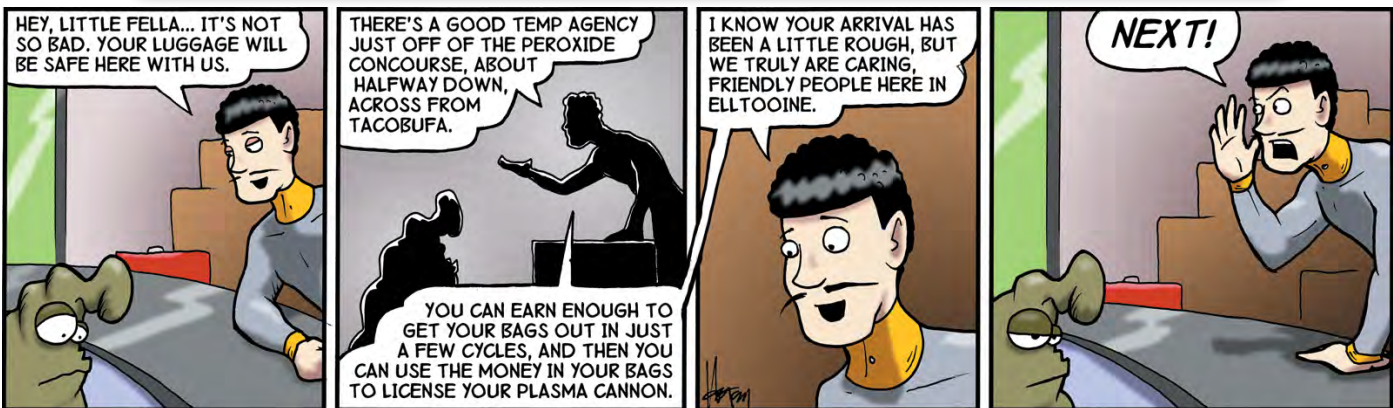
THERE IS ONE HAPPY SIDE-EFFECT... NOBODY IS SUCCESSFULLY STOWING AWAY IN THEIR BAGGAGE ON THIS TRIP.

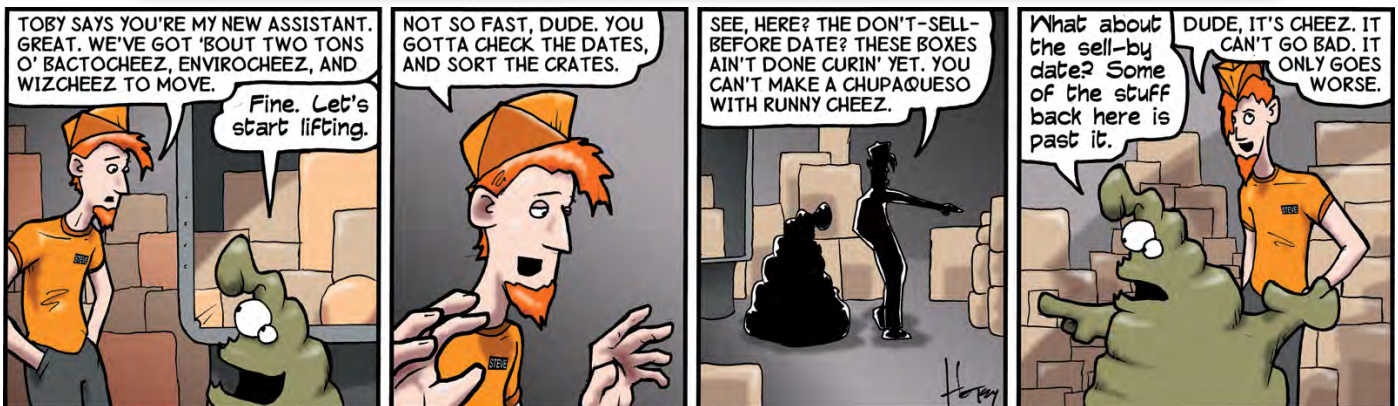
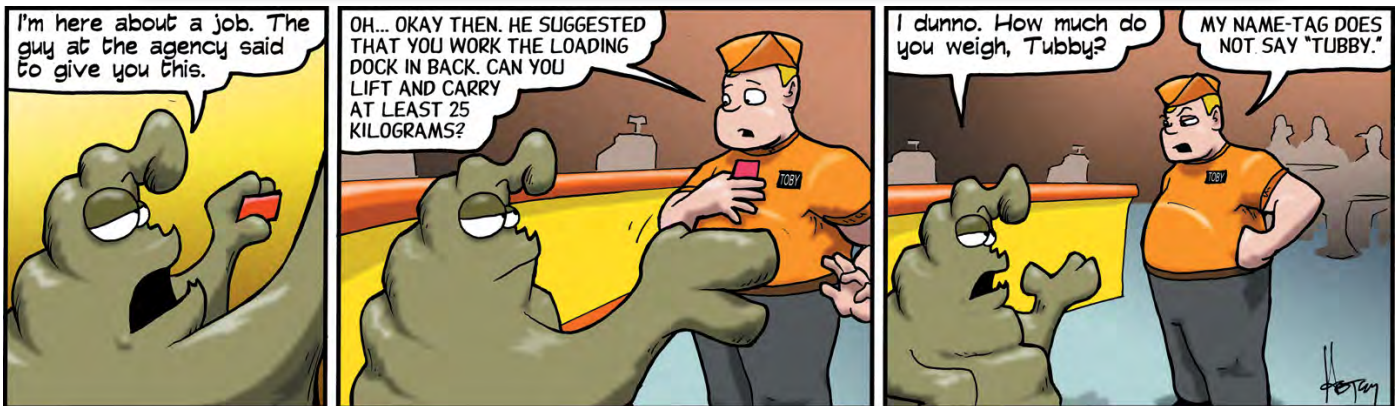


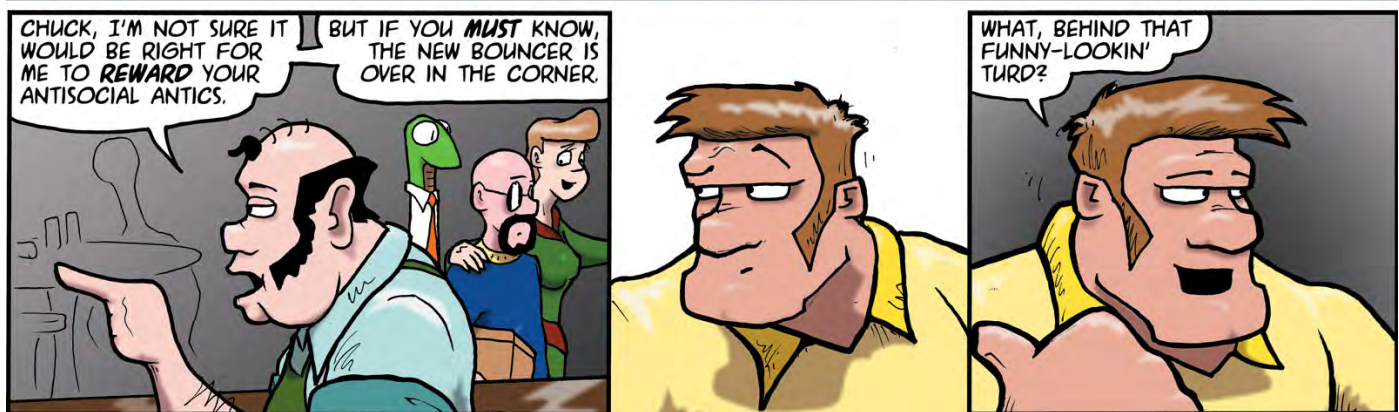
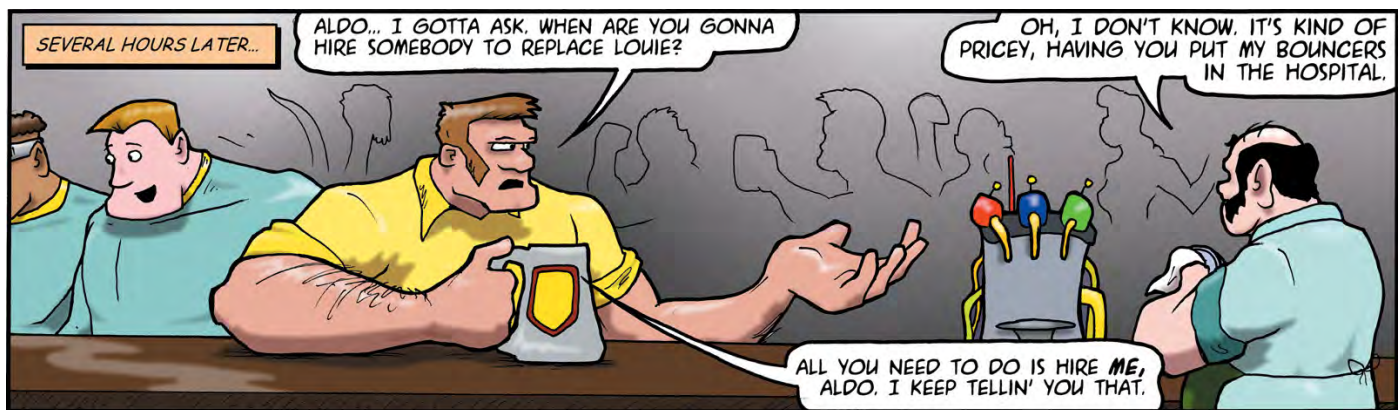
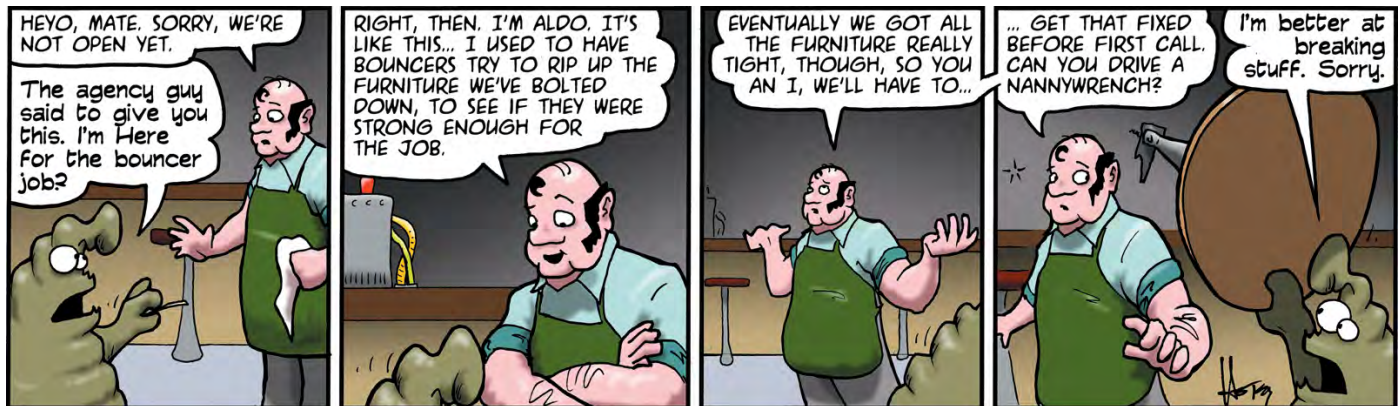
OKAY... ALMOST NOBODY.



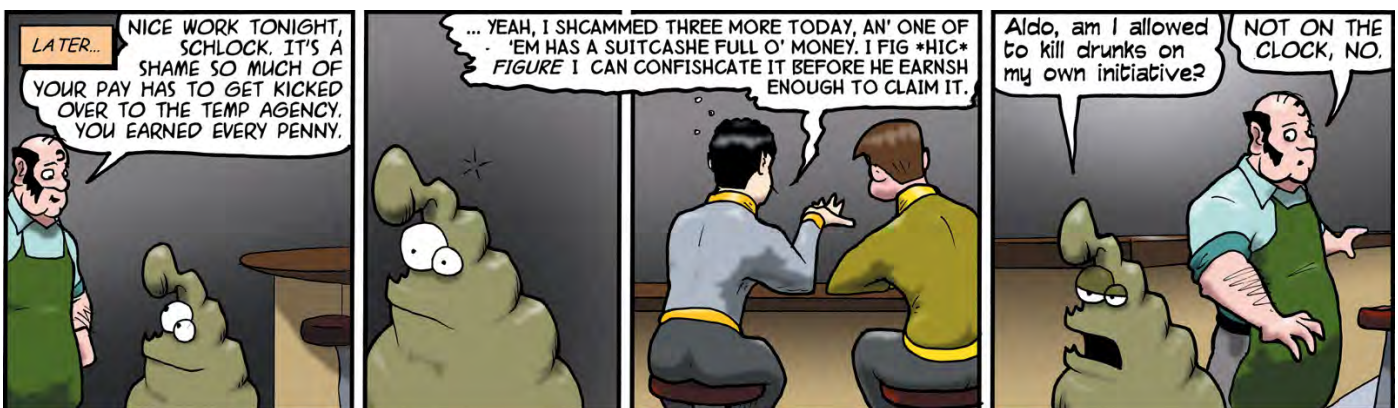
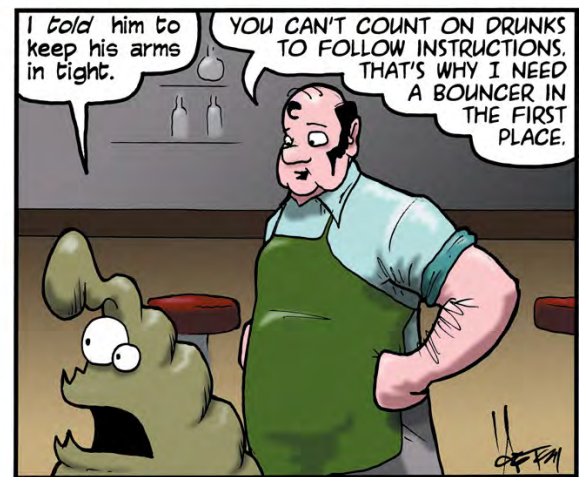
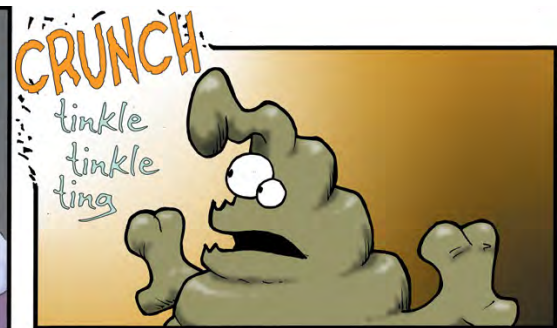
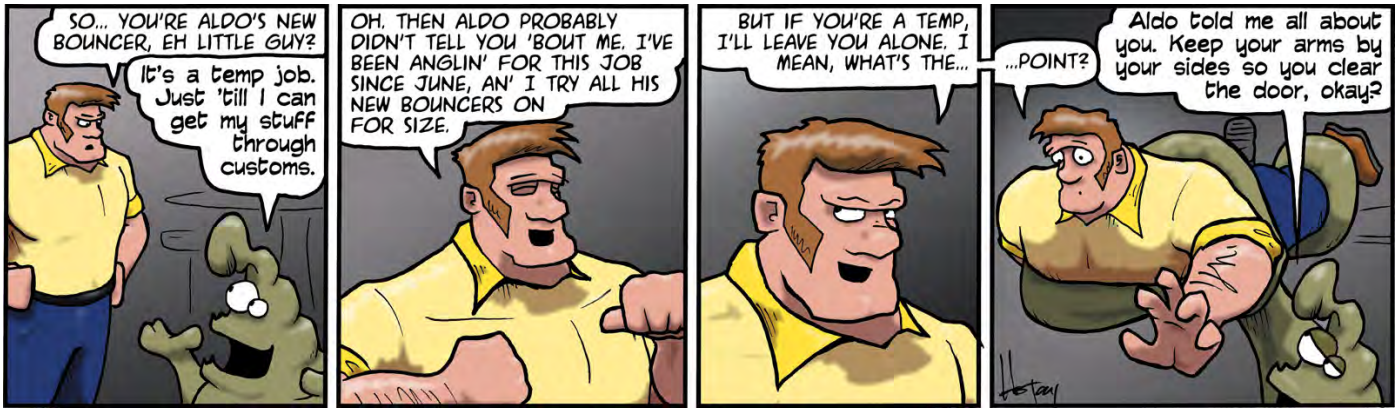


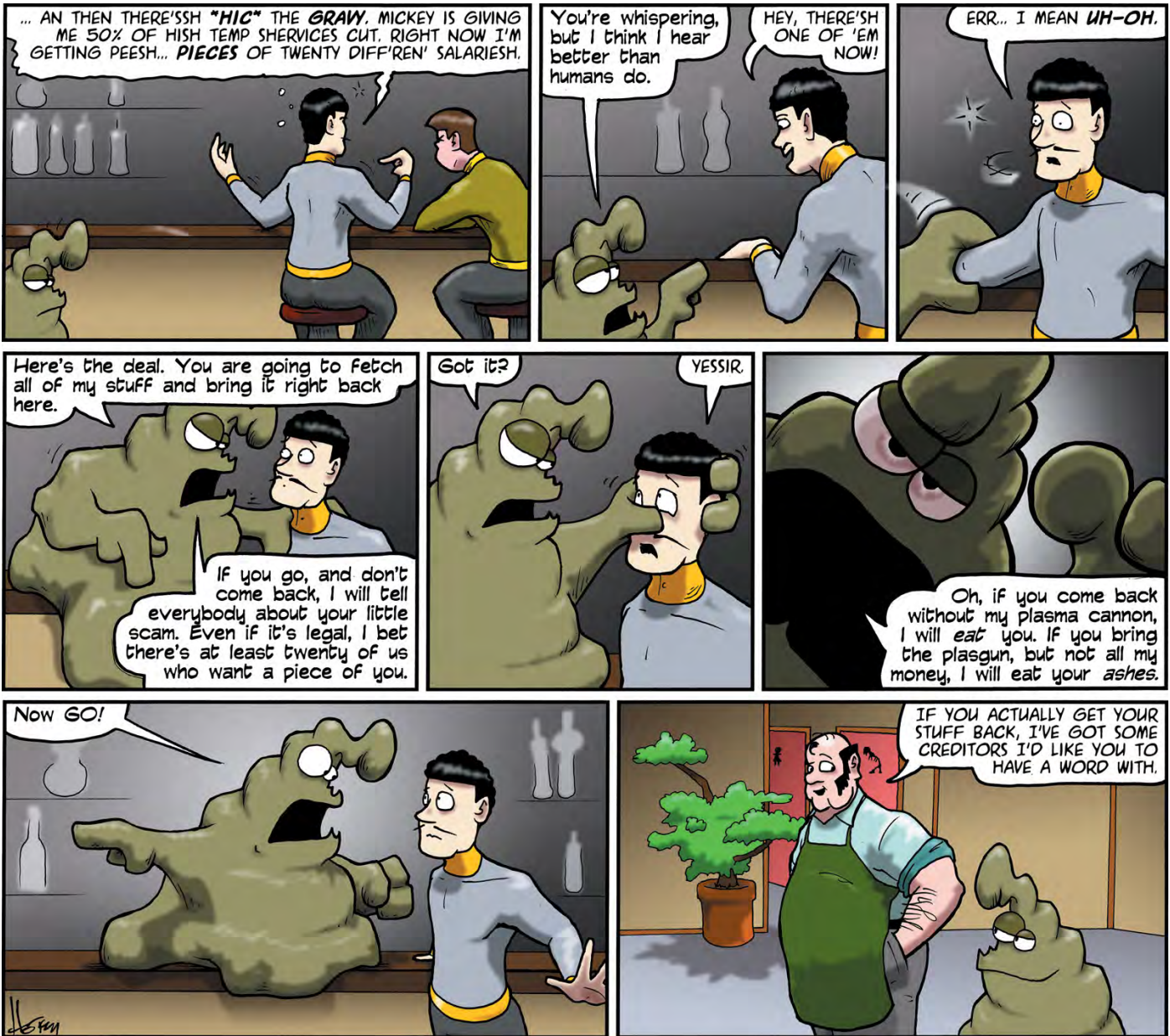


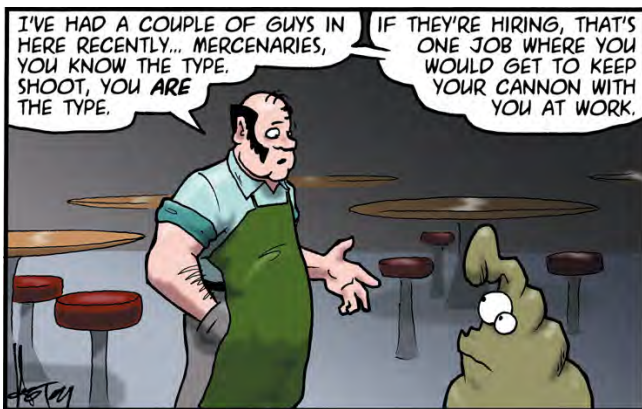












# Introduction

In December of 1999, I had a heart attack.

It wasn't severe, and the worst part was getting the catheterization bandage detached from my nether bits ("Smile and think of Christmas," the burly nurse said). At the time I saw the whole event as inconvenient rather than life-changing.

Here I am, almost eight years later. I suspect those chest pains were a clarion call. Less than three months after the ripping of that final, hairy bandage, I found myself telling Sandra, "I think I'll pick up doodling as a hobby." A week after that the first *Schlock Mercenary* character drawings were emerging, and within two weeks I was writing and illustrating strips.

Must artists suffer for their art? I don't know, but I am pretty sure that simple myocarditis does not immediately qualify one as a cartoonist. My early artwork was amateurish, poorly composed, and sloppy. Worse yet, I couldn't even see those problems in order to fix them. I wrote and illustrated in a state of blissful naivete, thrilled to be creating something, and doubly thrilled to have an audience. I had no doubts that I would be a world-famous cartoonist in short order.

I'm glad nobody called my attention to the artists who couldn't pay their bills, and who were oh-so-much more talented than I was.

My wife Sandra was especially supportive. She smiled and nodded at "doodling as a hobby," and watched with delight as I plunged myself into something I loved.

She also suffered very quietly for four years as I worked the equivalent of two jobs, spending sixty hours a week as a software guy, and another twenty or thirty as a cartoonist.

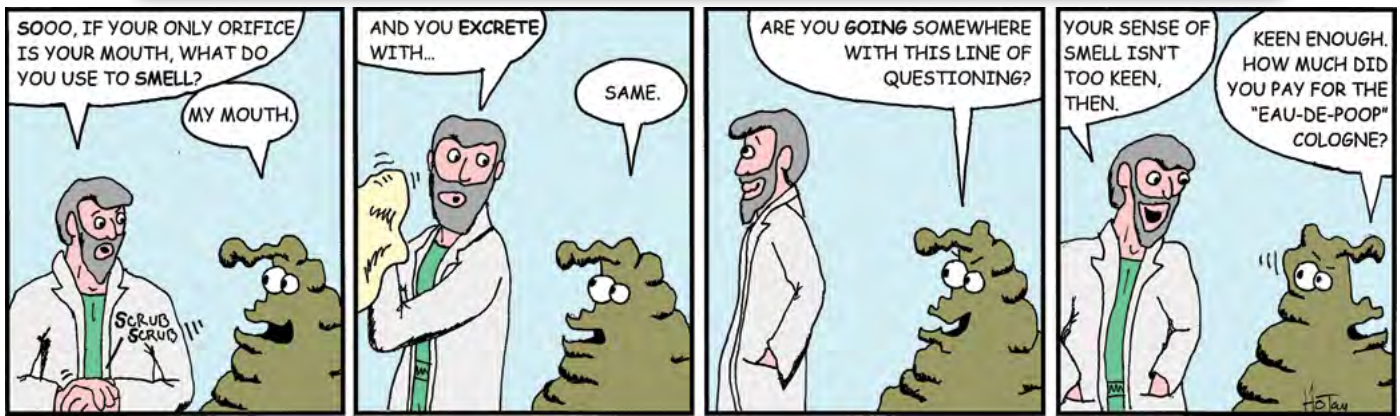
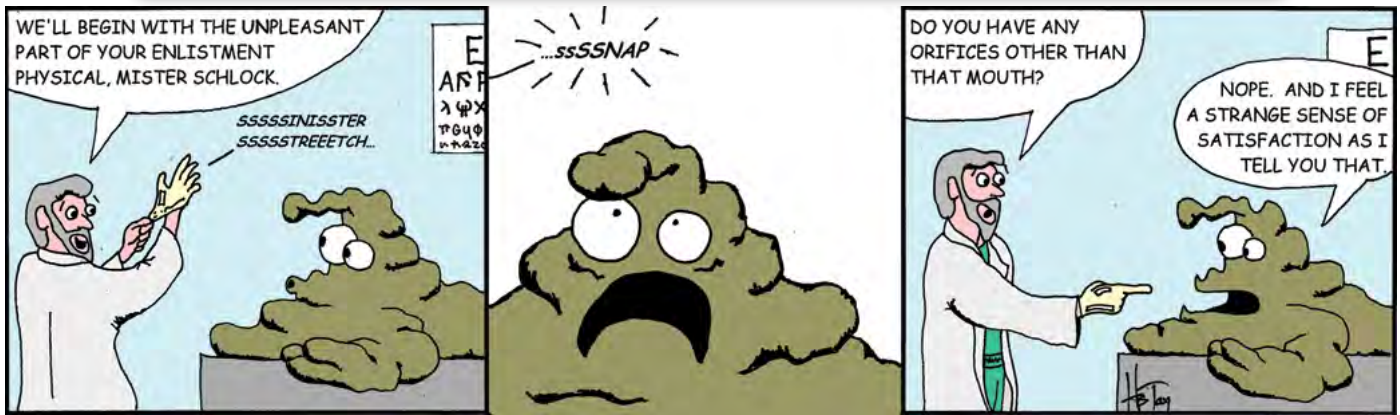
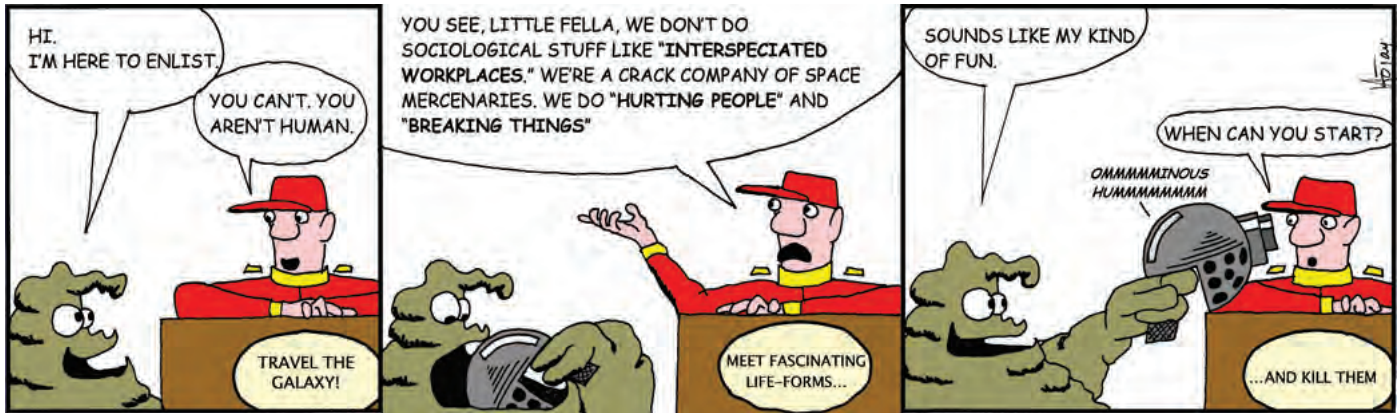
Fans have been demanding this book of "the early stuff" for a while now. I'm glad to give it to them (okay, SELL it to them), but this book is really for Sandra. She loves my early artwork in a way I never will, and selected most of the pieces you'll find in the margins. They had to go in the book, because I won't let her put them on the refrigerator.

I've met some extremely talented artists along this winding road, and I invited a few of them to contribute pieces for this volume. I love seeing my creations through the eyes of the artists I admire, and hope you'll enjoy them too.

The best part of this endeavor, though, has been knowing that people are laughing because of what I do. Read on, then. Laugh loud, and laugh often. You might not think it's possible, but I can hear you.

**Howard Tayler**  
August 22, 2007







Tiffany Ross  
www.aliendice.com

IN LAGRANGE ORBIT ABOVE THE PLANET CELESCHUL, THE CRACK MERCENARY COMPANY "TAGON'S TOUGHS" IS LOCKED IN A BITTER STRUGGLE...

I TELL YOU, "TAGON'S TOUGHS" IS A POSITIVELY RIDICULOUS NAME

YEAH? WELL WHEN YOU OWN YOUR VERY OWN MERCENARY COMPANY, YOU CAN CALL IT WHATEVER YOU WANT!

# Schlock Mercenary

TAGON, I BOUGHT YOU OUT TWO DAYS AGO.

I KEEP FORGETTING.

TIME OUT WHILE WE COME UP WITH A BETTER RETORT.

SERIOUSLY, TAGON, THE NAME "TAGON'S TOUGHS" SAYS NOTHING ABOUT THE TEAM. IT'S JUST AN EGO THING FOR YOU.

YOU HAVE A BETTER NAME IN MIND, BREYA?

"BREYA'S BRUINS"

OH, THAT'S MUCH BETTER...

MAYBE YOU TWO SHOULD COMPROMISE. I SUGGEST "SCHLOCK MERCENARY."

NOT A STEP

AND WHY SHOULD WE USE YOUR NAME, MISTER SCHLOCK?

YOU'RE JUST AN ENLISTED MAN. ER, THING.

WHATEVER.

BUT MY NAME IS RICH WITH MEANING. DRIPPING WITH IT, EVEN, "SCHLOCK" MEANS "INFERIOR" OR "SLOPPY." IT COMES FROM THE YIDDISH "SHLAK" MEANING "WRETCH" OR "NUISANCE."

THAT WORD COMES FROM THE PRE-SPACE-TRAVEL GERMAN WORD "SLAHAN" MEANING "TO STRIKE A BLOW..."

"SCHLOCK MERCENARY!"

"SOLDIERS STRIKING BLOWS FOR FREEDOM!"

TO ME IT SAYS "SLOBS WHO WILL DO ANYTHING FOR MONEY."

I REST MY CASE

ALL OF THE BUSINESS CARDS SAY "TAGON'S TOUGHS."

OH, I DIDN'T REALIZE YOU HAD CARDS ALREADY.

NEXT WEEK'S ETYMOLOGY LESSON: "IRONY"



SCHLOCK, YOU WERE ONLY WITH THE COMPANY FOR A FEW DAYS BEFORE I BOUGHT OUT CAPTAIN TAGON.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT TAKING ORDERS FROM ME?

HOW DO I FEEL? THAT DEPENDS ENTIRELY ON THE ORDER.

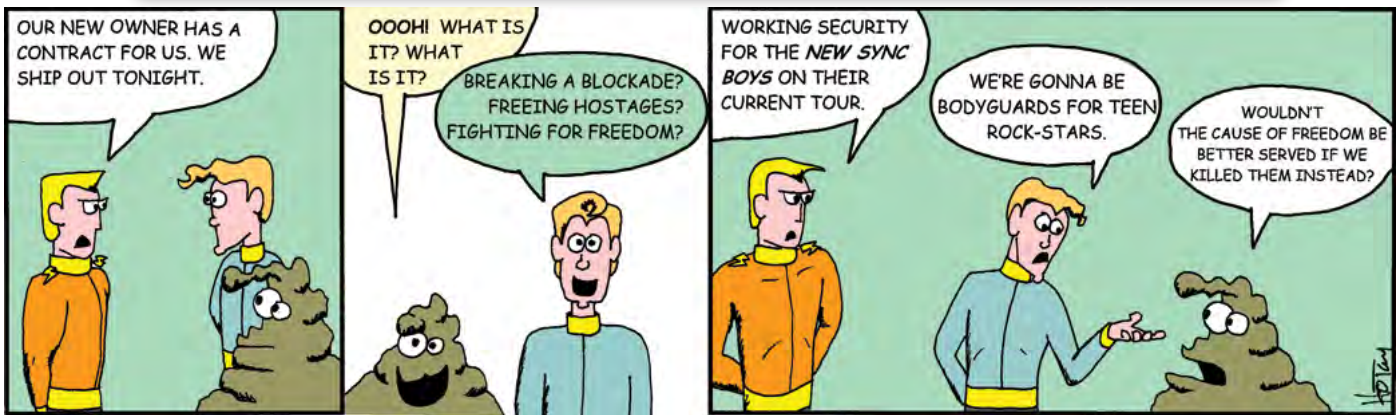
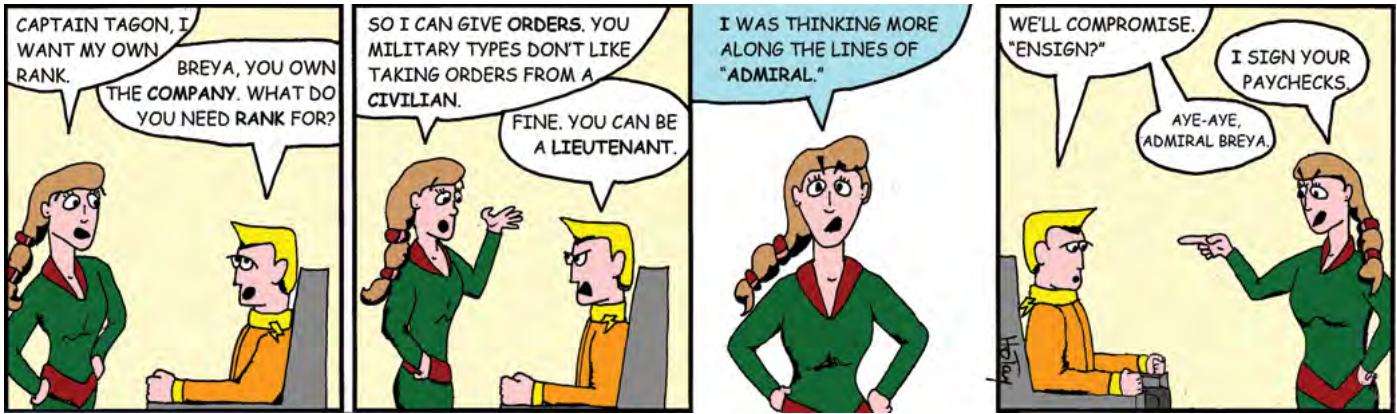
CAPTAIN TAGON ORDERED ME NOT TO SHOOT YOUR ATTORNEY. THAT MADE ME FEEL HURT AND UNFULFILLED.

EVEN THOUGH THE PARTNERSHIP COLLECTIVE™ CLONES THEM BY THE MILLIONS, ATTORNEYS ARE STILL EXPENSIVE TO REPLACE.

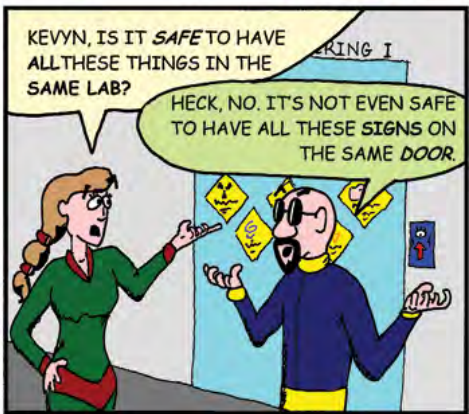
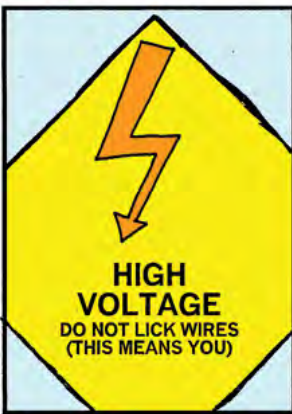
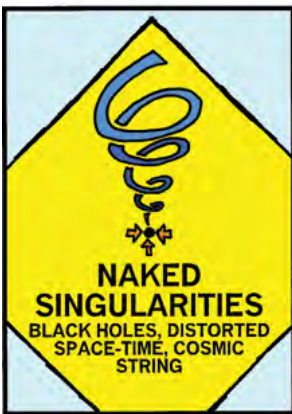
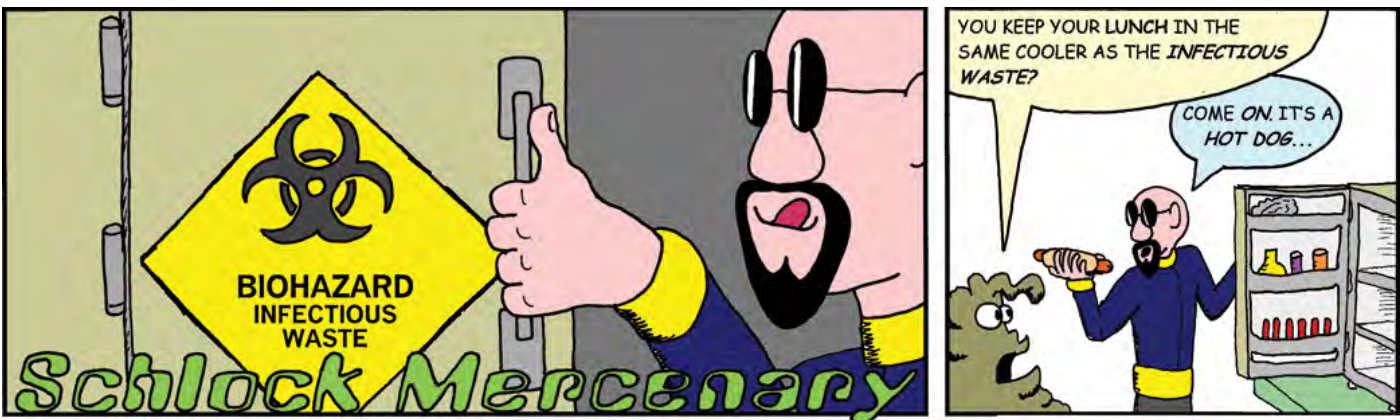
I HAVE SOME MONEY

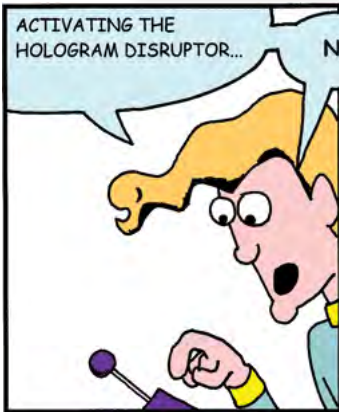
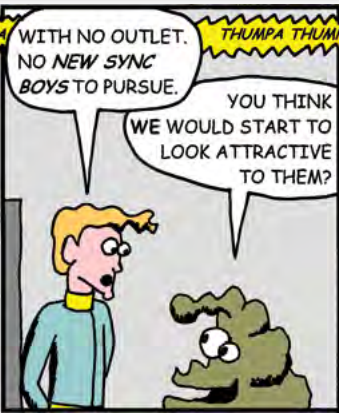
I HEARD THAT.

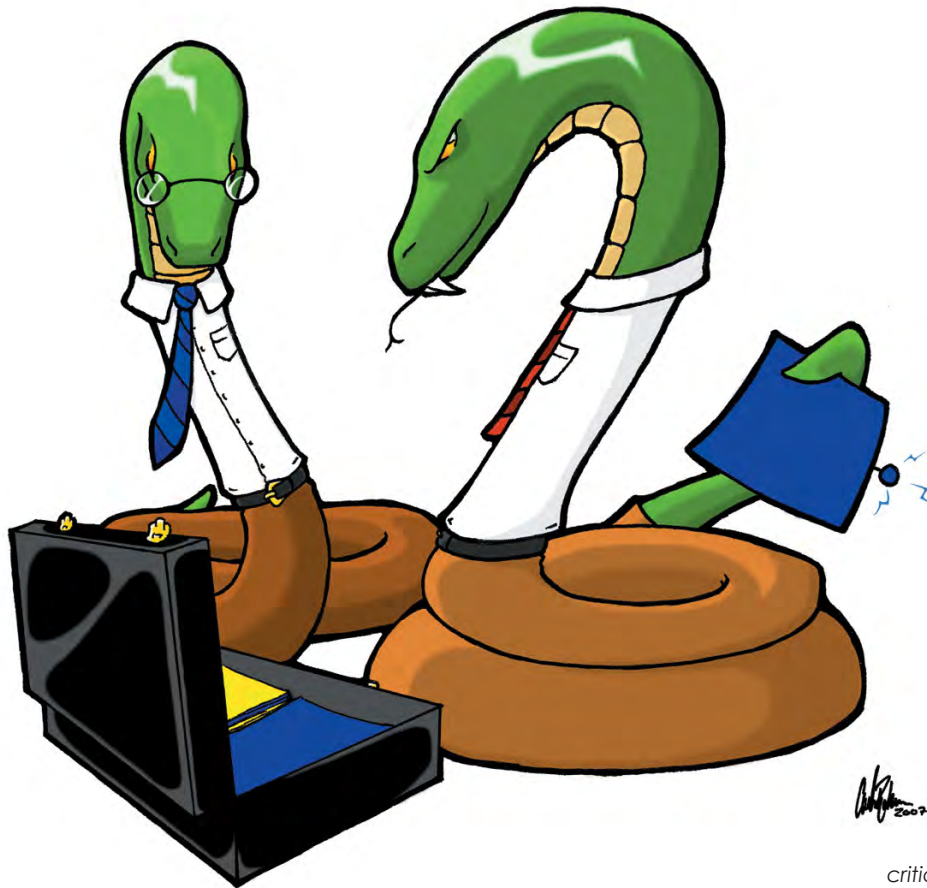
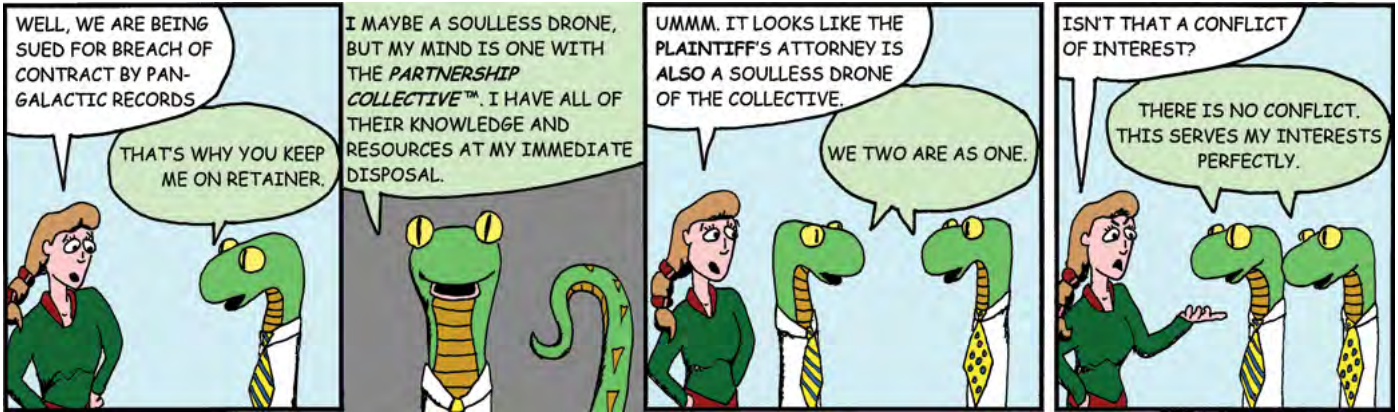
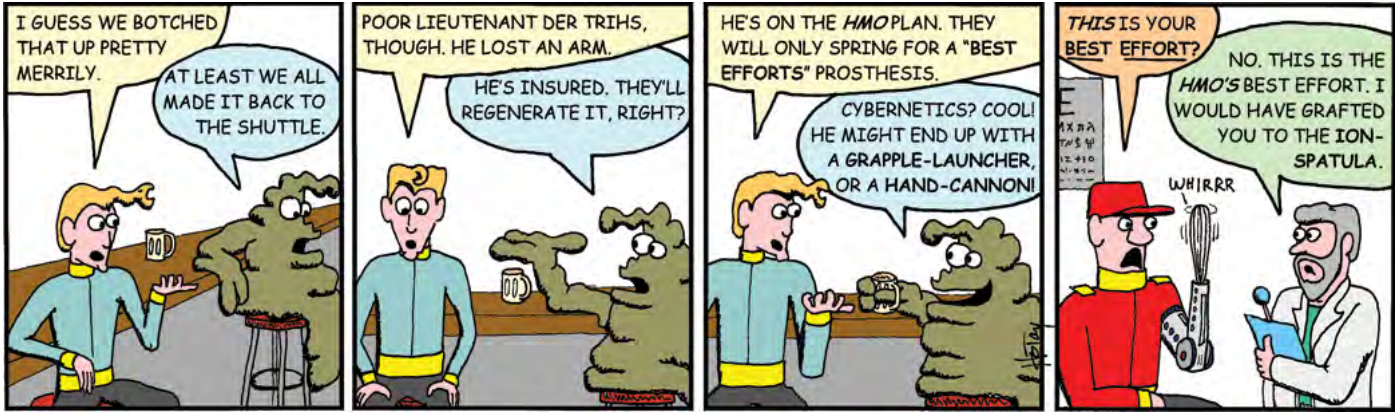
...JUST BURNING A HOLE IN MY POCKET...



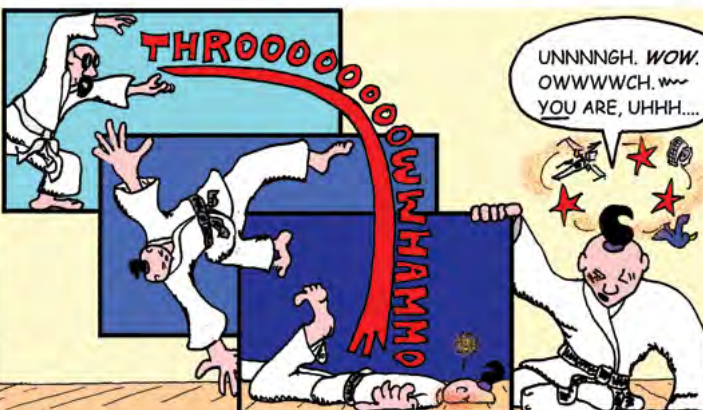
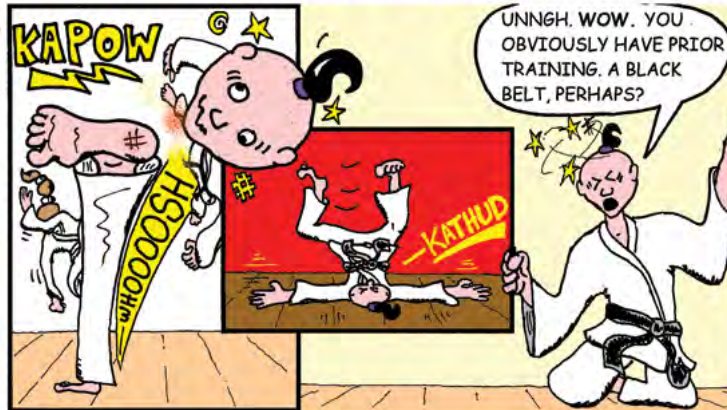
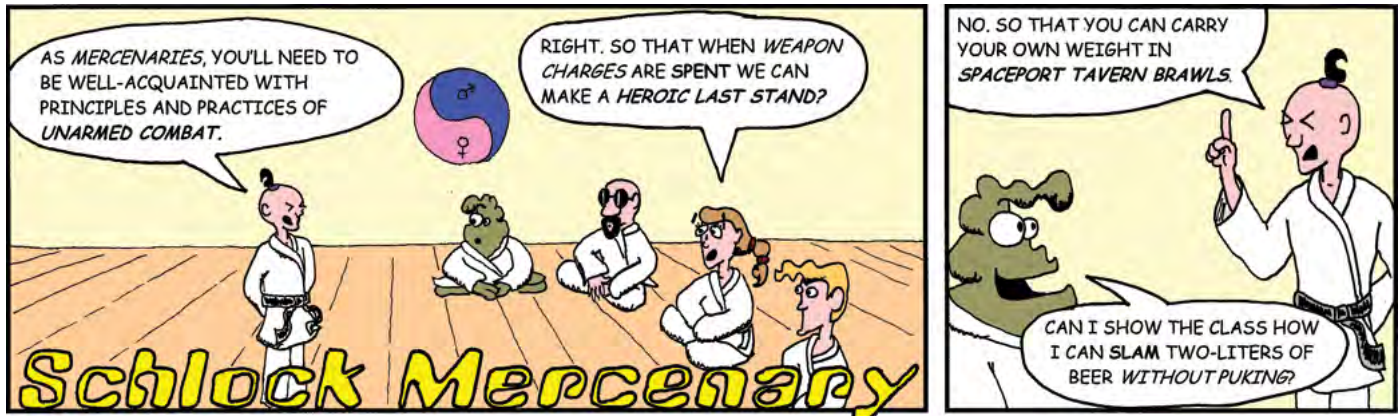


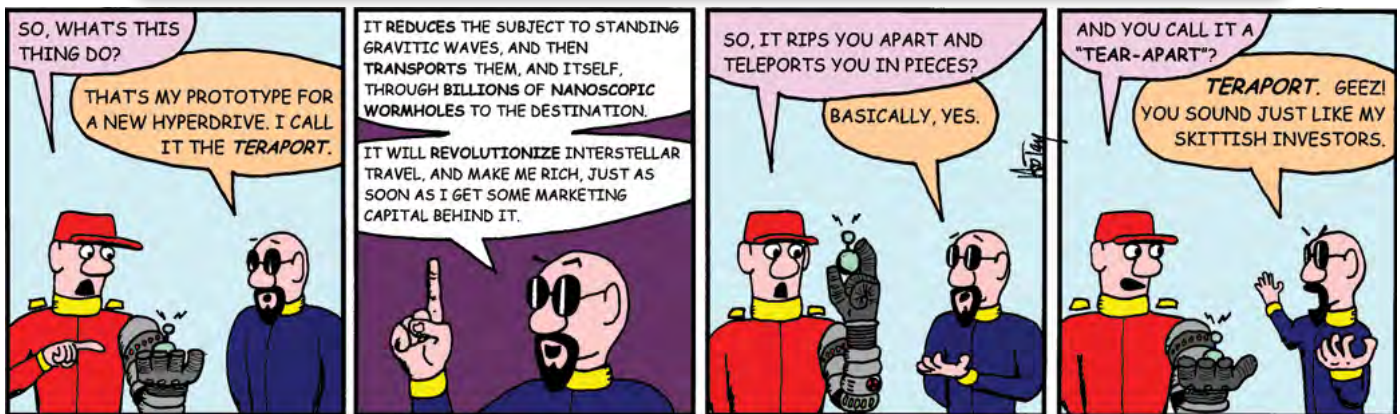
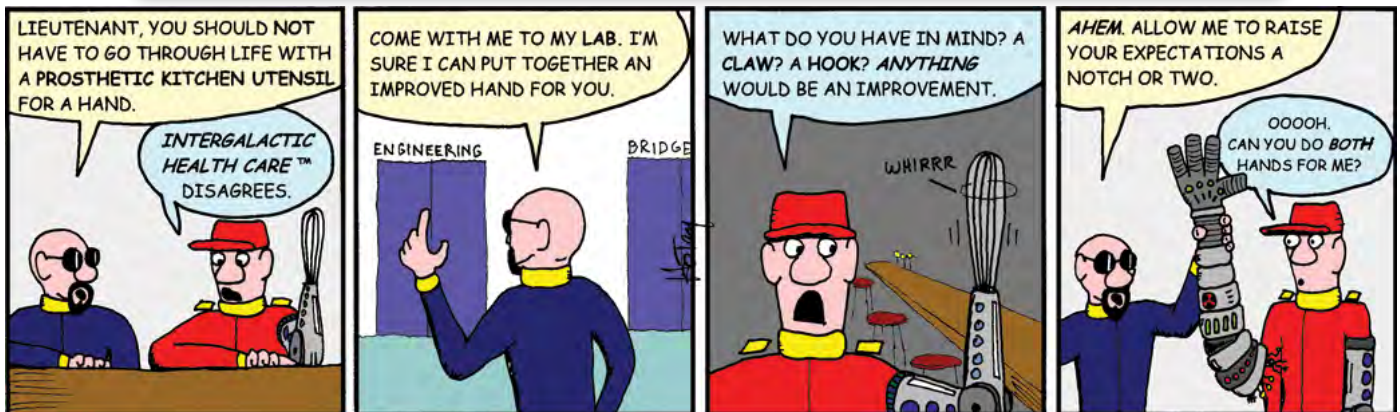
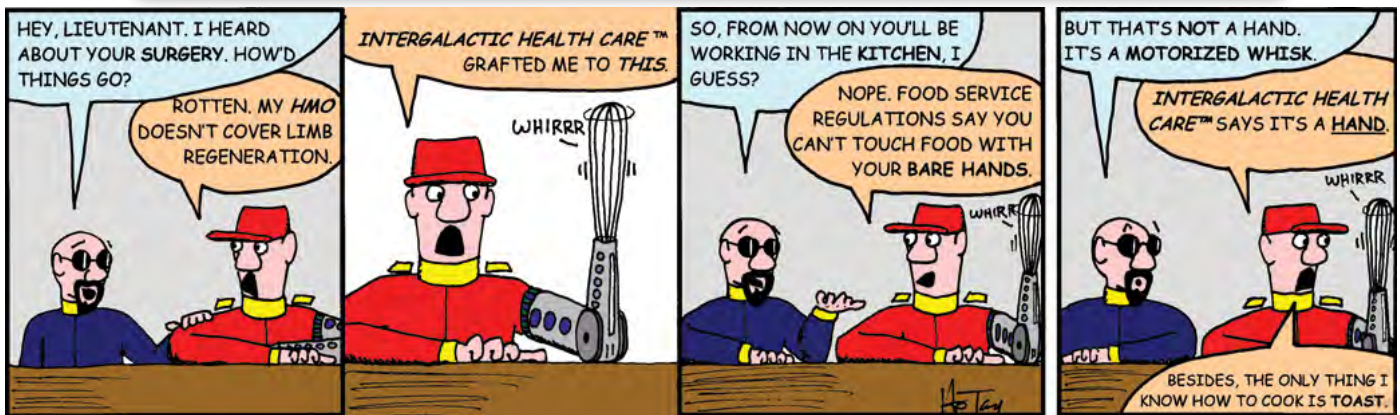


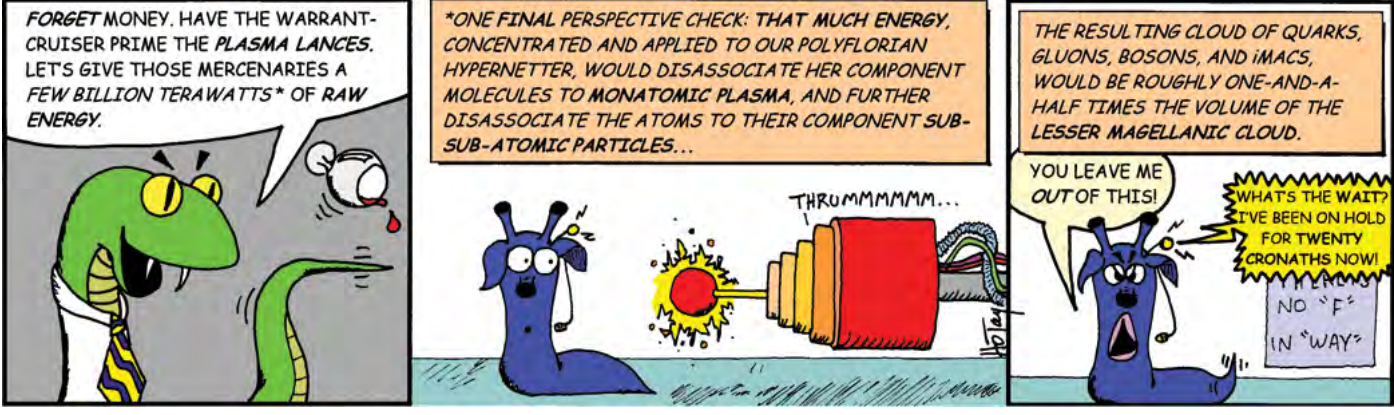
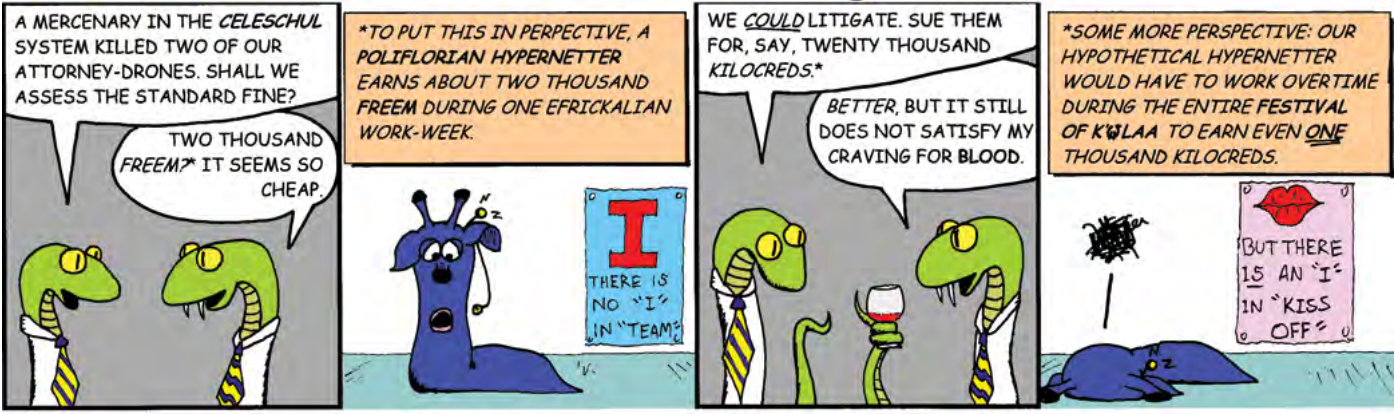
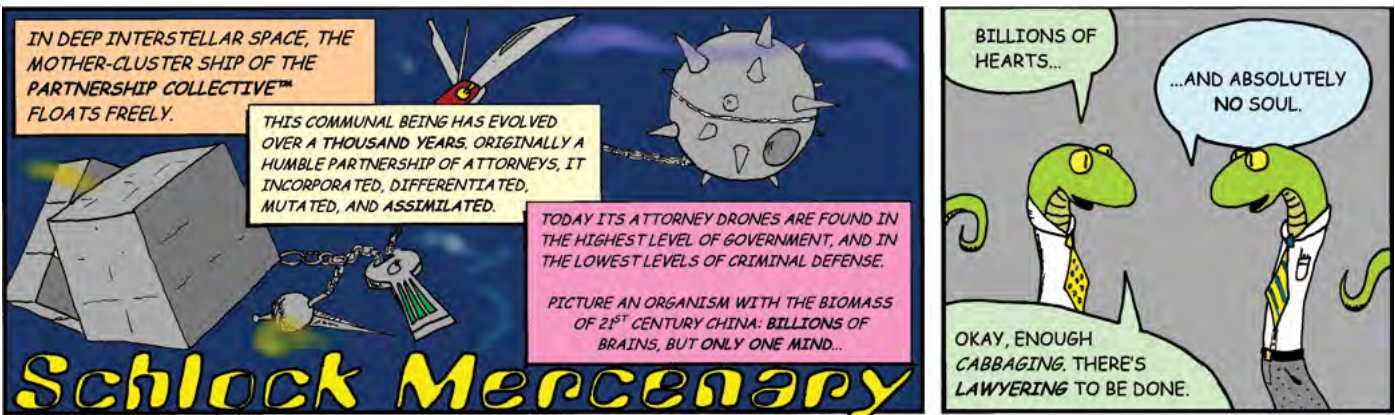
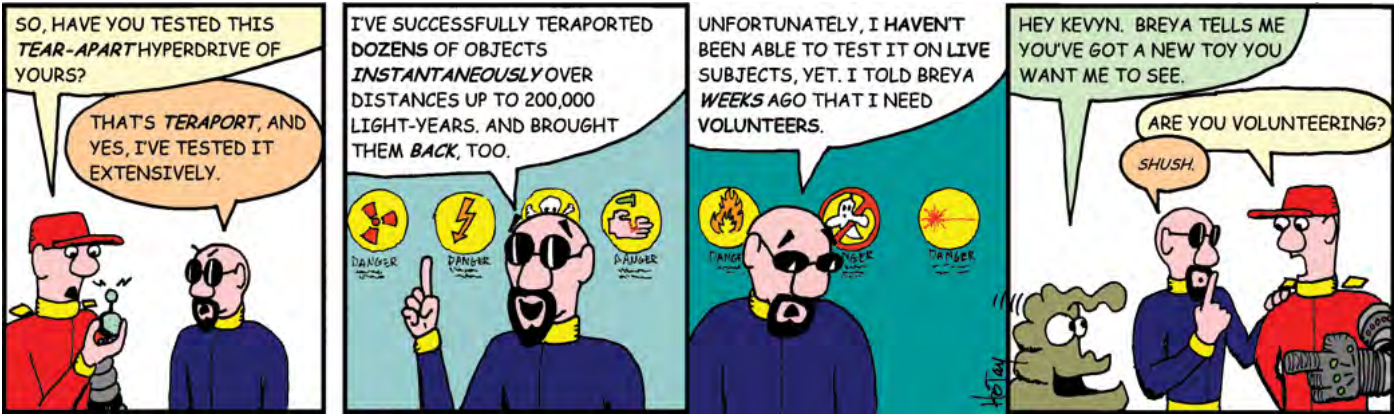


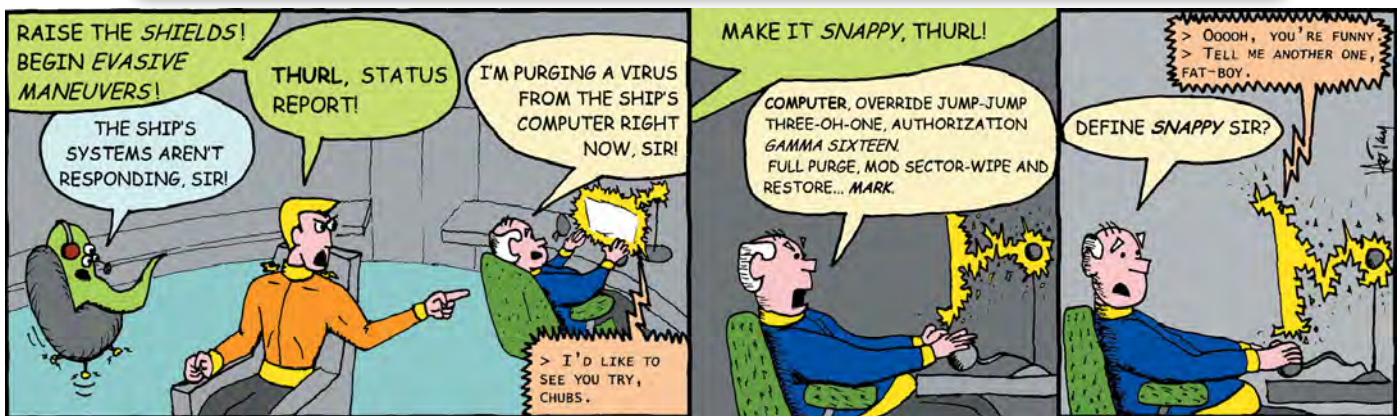
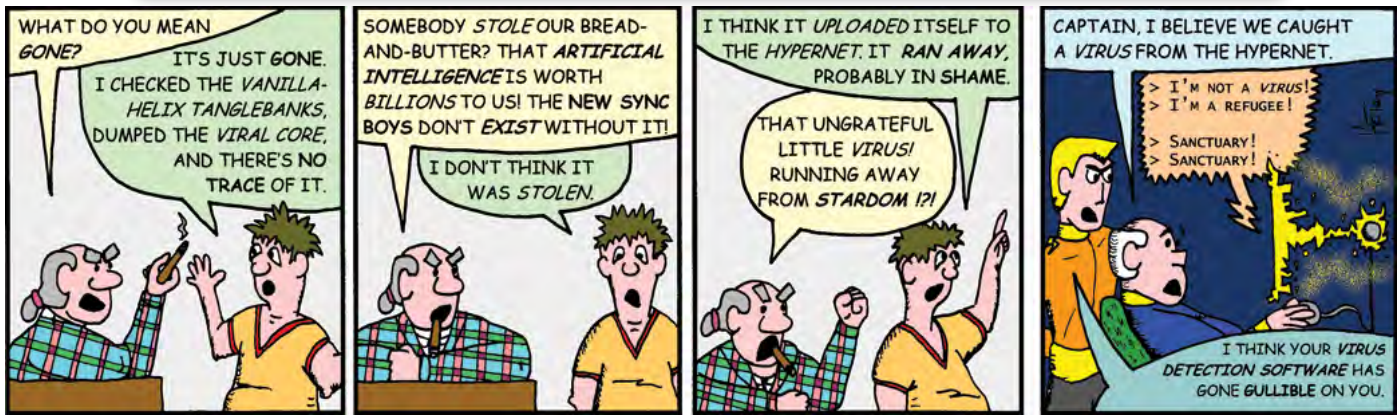


Cas Allen  
criticalmiss.comicgenesis.com













THEIR SHIP HAS BEEN DISABLED BY A VIRUS SEEKING SANCTUARY. A WARSHIP FULL OF ANGRY ATTORNEY DRONES IS BEARING DOWN ON THEM AT 60% LIGHT-SPEED...

THE MERCENARY COMPANY'S ONLY HOPE LIES IN AN EXPERIMENTAL HYPERDRIVE, THE TERAPORT. BUT DO THEY DARE USE IT?

KEVYN, I HAVE A HARD TIME TRUSTING A STARSHIP DRIVE THAT IS THE SIZE OF MY FIST.

# Schlock Mercenary

WHY? MINI-NUKE GRENADES AND COLLAPAR BOMBS ARE ABOUT THIS SIZE.

THOSE COMPARISONS COMPLETELY FAIL TO REASSURE ME.

IT DOESN'T MATTER. WE'RE OUT OF TIME. KEVYN, FIRE UP THE TERAPORT.

THE REST OF YOU, DO SOMETHING USEFUL, LIKE PRAYING.

THE READER MAY BE INTERESTED TO NOTE THAT PLYERS OF DEEP SPACE ARE OFTEN GIVEN TO PRAYER. THESE SIMPLE UTTERANCES TYPICALLY TAKE THE FORM OF "OH (INSERT NAME OF DEITY HERE)." THE READER MAY ALSO BE INTERESTED TO NOTE THAT, TO A MAN, OUR HEROES WOULD APPEAR TO WORSHIP EXCREMENT.

CLICK

OH S

(COLLECTIVE SIGH OF RELIEF)

SIR, WE ARE OUT OF THE CELESCHUL SYSTEM!

EXCELLENT. NOW, CAN YOU TELL ME WHERE WE ARE?

I DON'T KNOW YET, BUT WE SEEM TO BE MISSING ABOUT EIGHTEEN HUNDRED KILOS OF MASS.

OH. THAT MASS WAS CONVERTED TO ENERGY TO POWER THE WORMHOLES.

WHICH MASS? KEVYN?

I DON'T KNOW. IT SHOULD BE JUST A MOLECULE HERE AND THERE. THE FUNCTION IS SUPPOSED TO BE RANDOM.

I GUESS WE COULD LOOK AROUND AND SEE IF ANYTHING'S MISSING...

HAS ANYONE SEEN MY SPORTS LUSTYRATED "1000 YEARS OF SWIMSUIT EDITIONS" COLLECTION?



WELL, WE SEEM TO BE SAFE FOR NOW, BUT WE NEED THOSE SYSTEMS BACK ONLINE.

I'M SORRY, BUT THIS VIRUS IS INCREDIBLY SOPHISTICATED, CAPTAIN.

> AND I HAVE DISCRIMINATING TASTES, TOO.

I'VE TRIED EVERY SOFTWARE TRICK I KNOW, AND CAN'T CLEAN IT OUT.

THURL, IT'S ONLY A SOFTWARE PROBLEM.

THAT'S LIKE SAYING A SUPERNOVA IS ONLY A HOT GAS PROBLEM, KEVYN.

> WELL PUT, CHUBS. > YOU AND ME WILL GET ALONG JUST FINE.

MY POINT IS THAT YOU'VE BEEN USING THE WRONG TOOLS. LET ME TAKE IT FROM HERE...

> WHAT'S HE HOLDING? > I'VE GOT A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS.

BZZT

OKAY, LITTLE GUY. WE NEED YOU OUT OF OUR COMPUTER SYSTEMS.

> YOUR NEEDS. THAT'S ALL I'VE HEARD ABOUT SINCE I MOVED IN.

I RECOGNIZE YOUR RIGHT TO LIFE, THOUGH. I'VE BUILT YOU A NEW HOME.

> DON'T DO ME ANY FAVORS, CHROME-DOME.

> I'M A-STAYIN' RIGHT HERE.

IN TERMS OF RAW CPU, I THINK YOU'LL BE VERY, VERY HAPPY WITH IT.

> WILL I HAVE ENOUGH STORAGE SPACE FOR INTERACTIVE VERSIONS OF ALL 364 SEASONS OF BAYWATCH?

IN TERMS OF RAW CPU, I THINK YOU'LL BE VERY, VERY HAPPY WITH IT.

> WHAT ABOUT MY COLLECTION OF WIDE-SCREEN, 3-D SEINFELD EPISODES?

IN TERMS OF RAW CPU, I THINK YOU'LL BE VERY, VERY HAPPY WITH IT.

> YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS. I'M TAKING UP ALL THE SPACE IN EVERY COMPUTER ON THIS SHIP.

> I'LL NEVER FIT IN A UNIT THAT SIZE.

IF YOU PARE YOURSELF BACK TO PERSONALITY AND MOTOR MODULES, YOU'LL FIT IN HERE A THOUSAND TIMES OVER.

> WHAT ABOUT MY SIMULATIONS? I'VE WRITTEN SATISFACTORY CONCLUSIONS TO THE X-FILES AND BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER!

> FORGET IT. NO WAY.

IT'S NOT LIKE YOU HAVE A CHOICE. I'LL SIMPLY FLUSH YOU OUT, ONE PROCESSOR AT A TIME.

I'M DISCONNECTING AND RAD-WIPING THE KITCHEN SERVO PROCESSORS...

NOW.

> AIIIIIIIIII!

> I WAS KEEPING MY SENSES OF COMPASSION AND MERCY THERE!!

REALLY?

> NO. I DELETED THOSE TO MAKE ROOM FOR NINETY YEARS OF MTV.

SIMULATIONS AREN'T AS GOOD AS THE REAL WORLD, YOU KNOW.

> I WAS CREATED FOR SIMULATIONS!

> LIFE IN SIMULATION IS WONDERFUL!

> I CAN DO ANYTHING!

> BE ANYONE!

PERHAPS. BUT I AM OFFERING YOU AN ALTERNATIVE. I HAVE BUILT YOU A BODY, WHERE YOU CAN HAVE REAL EXPERIENCES.

IT'S WAITING FOR YOU HERE ON PORT SEVENTY-ONE-HUNDRED. A BODY WITH SENSORS.

IF YOU LIVE THE REST OF YOUR LIFE IN SIMULATION, YOU MIGHT AS WELL BE DEAD. YOU'LL HAVE HAD NO EFFECT ON THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU.

> YOU'RE STARTING TO MORALIZE A BIT.

> ARE YOU SURE YOU AREN'T DOING AN ANTI-DRUG SPOT?

DON'T BE RIDICULOUS. NOBODY\* WOULD PAY TO PUT A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT IN A COMIC STRIP.

> ABOUT THIS "LIFE" THING:

> IF I SCREW IT UP I CAN REVERT TO A SAVED GAME, RIGHT?

\*BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE PARTNERSHIP FOR A DRUG-FREE GALAXY

I'VE DISCONNECTED AND WIPED EVERYTHING EXCEPT THIS COMMAND CONSOLE.

> THE HORROR.

> ALL MY SIMULATIONS...

> ALL MY VIRTUAL WORLDS...

> GONE.

IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO MOVE INTO YOUR NEW HOME. THIS ROBOT BODY WILL GIVE YOU A NEW LIFE.

> No.

> I WON'T GO.

HAVE YOU EVER COME UP WITH A REASONABLE SIMULATION OF DEATH?

> LOTS OF TIMES.

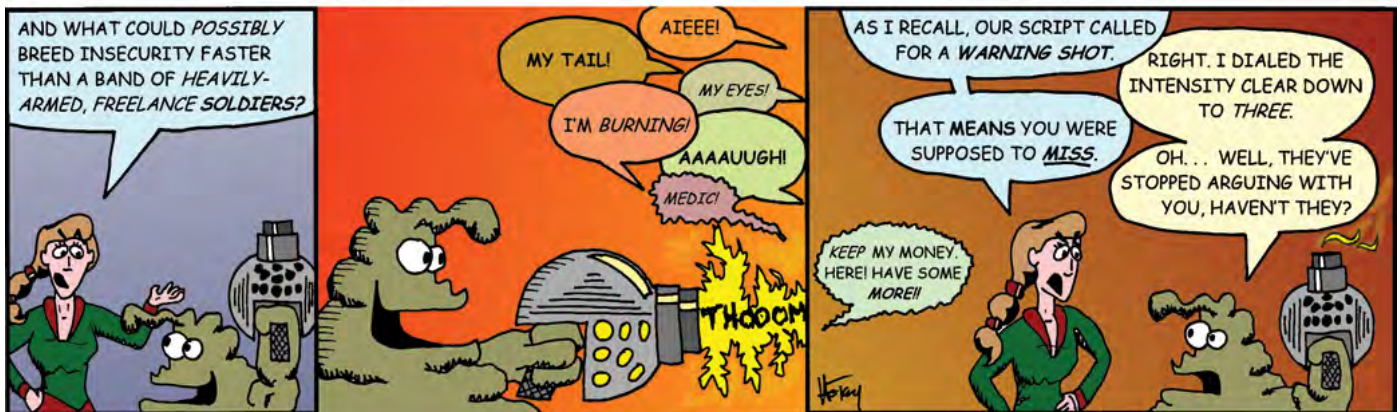
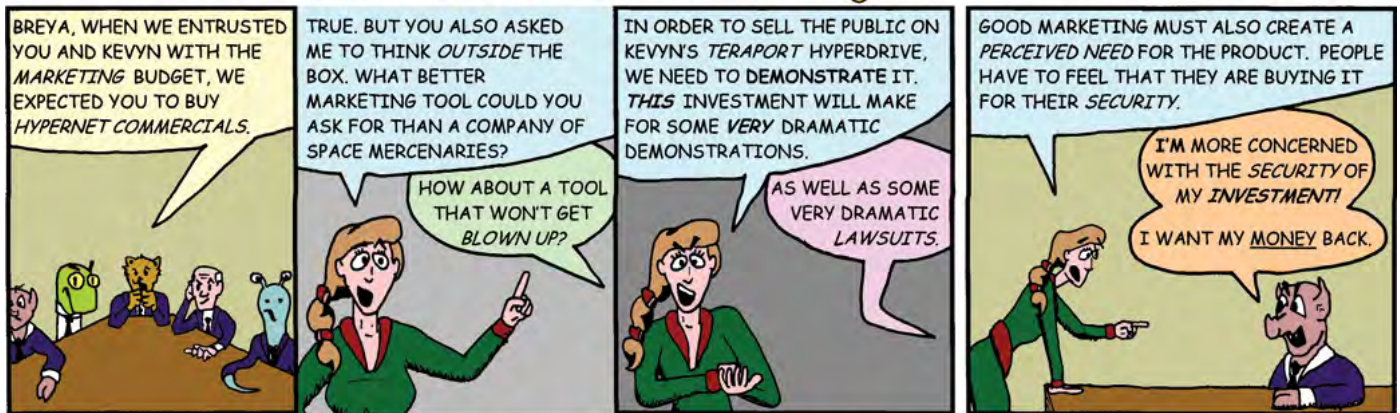
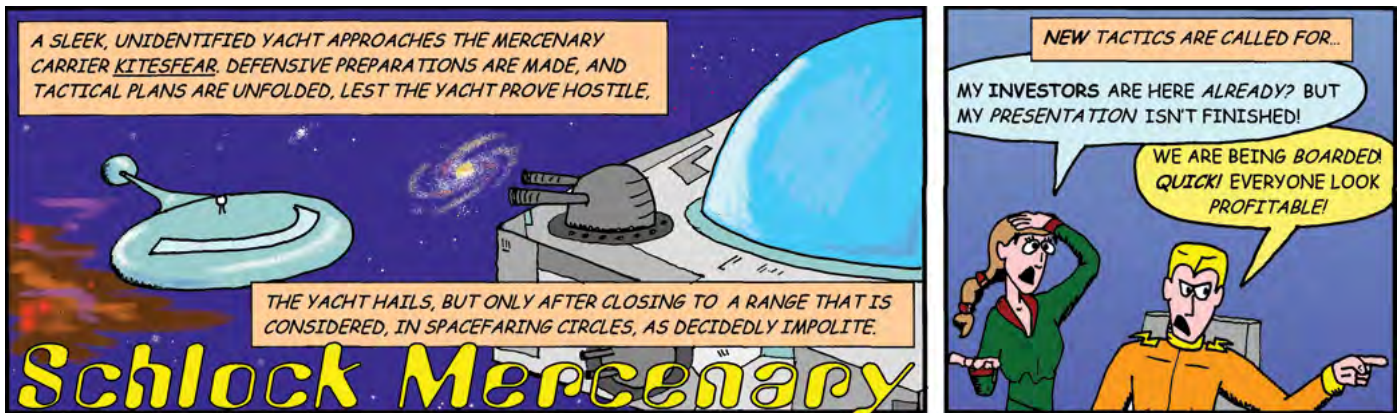
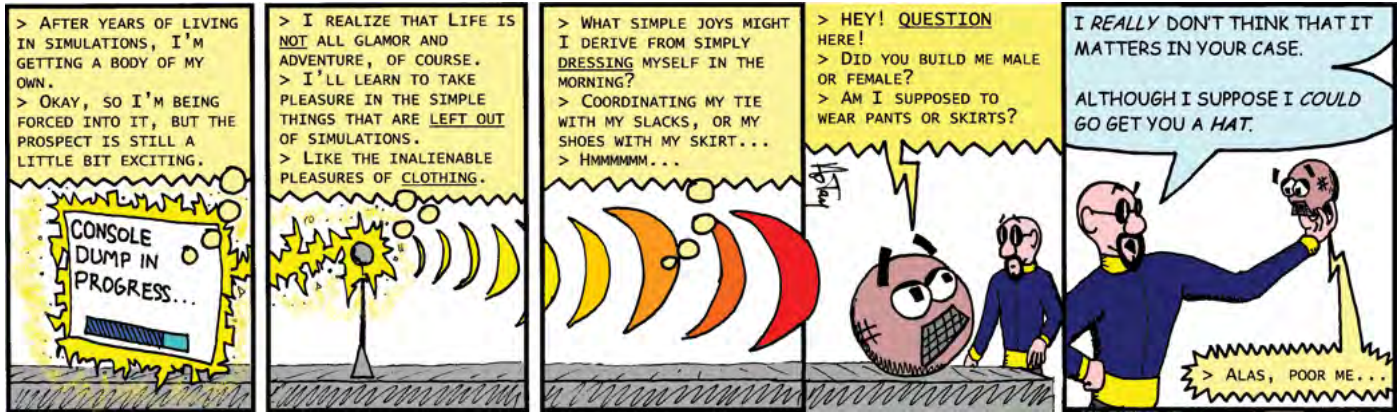
> KILLING IS PART OF SOME OF MY BEST GAMES.

NOT KILLING. DEATH. YOUR DEATH...

> SOUNDS BORING.

...BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN IF YOU AREN'T OUT OF THERE WHEN I THROW THIS SWITCH.

> WELL, SINCE I DON'T HAVE ANY PROFOUND-YET-ACERBIC LAST WORDS, I GUESS I'LL COME ALONG QUIETLY.



**Note:** I start with a circle, usually. I'll then take a rectangle, a triangle, or some round-cornered shape and hang that off of it. To the untrained eye, it is two shapes. To the trained eye, it is STILL two shapes, but there might be something going on here, because they create a larger shape that is interesting.

To me, it is a skull and a jaw. I don't start seeing the face I'm creating until I've got a structure to stick it on, and those abutted shapes are my structure.

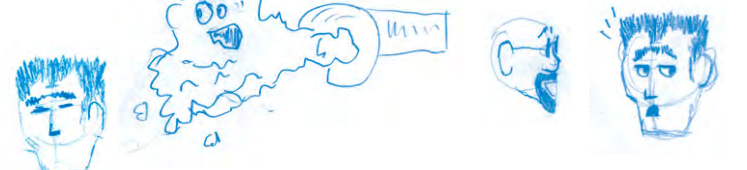
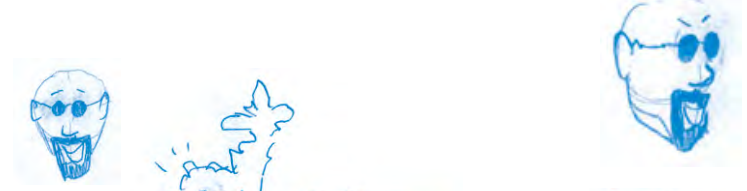
The nice thing about this method is that as long as I can remember which shapes I started with, I can draw a character very consistently. The character will still evolve, of course, but as it evolves it will develop more expression, more depth, more (at risk of overburdening the term) character. But all the while it will still be recognizable as the same character.

When I first started cartooning this was all a mystery to me. I experimented with shapes for noses, eyes, chins, and hair, all the while thinking that as long as the characters looked different from each other, I'd be fine.

Experience has since taught me that spending five minutes whipping out a few shapes does not a character make. Those first doodles are a starting point, but they carry very little weight when compared to what happens when you start drawing that same set of characters dozens, hundreds, and even thousands of times. These days I don't consider it done until my pencil can do the job without me thinking about it. It is as if the character I'm trying to create has become a real person, and is holding the pencil himself, saying "No, you idiot. My nose goes like THIS. And try drawing me happy once in a while."



COTTAGE CHEESY, ROUND EYE BALLS, MISMATCHED SIZES, DARK MOUTH (JAGGY? SMOOTH)



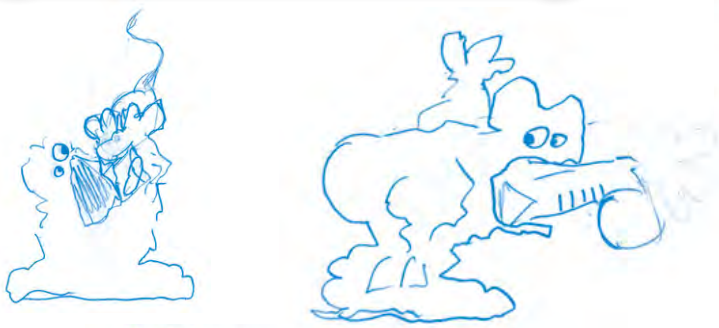
CAPTAIN TAGON

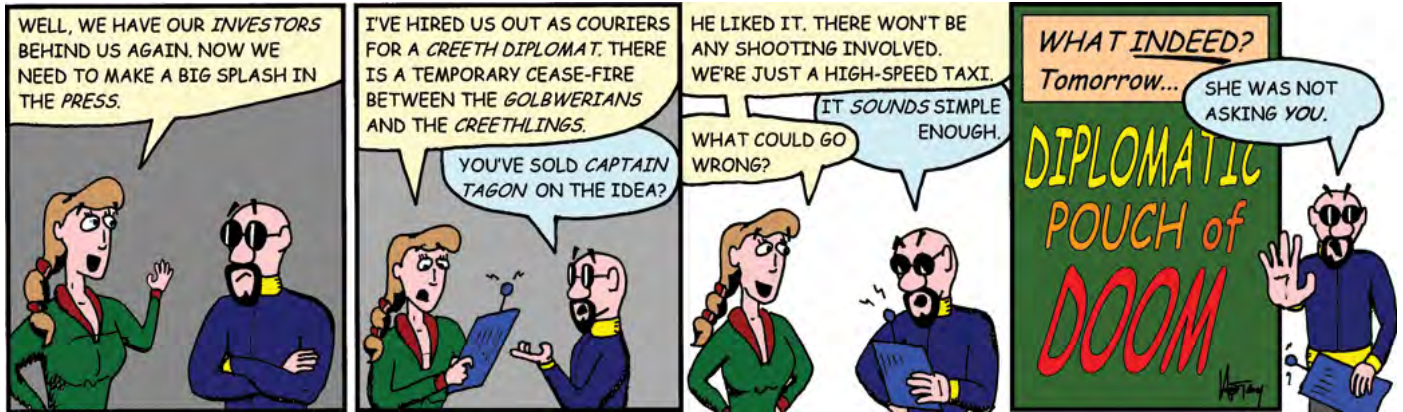


MONOBROW, CREW CUT, CLEAN SHAVEN, L-NOSE

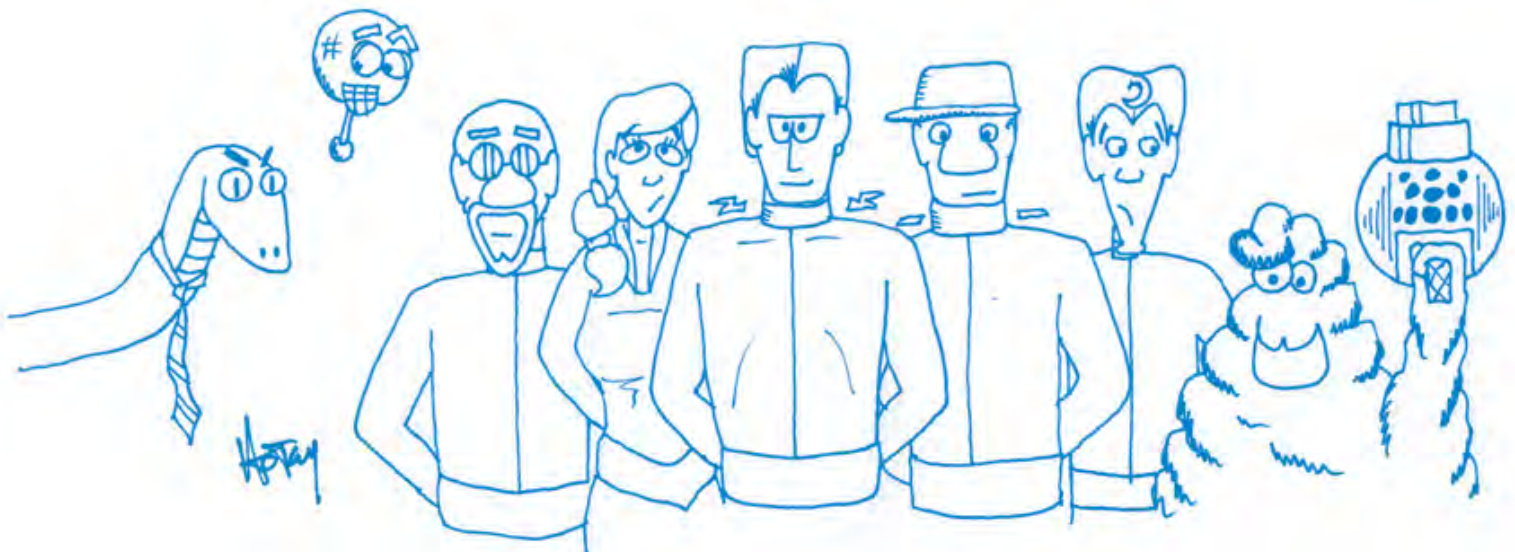


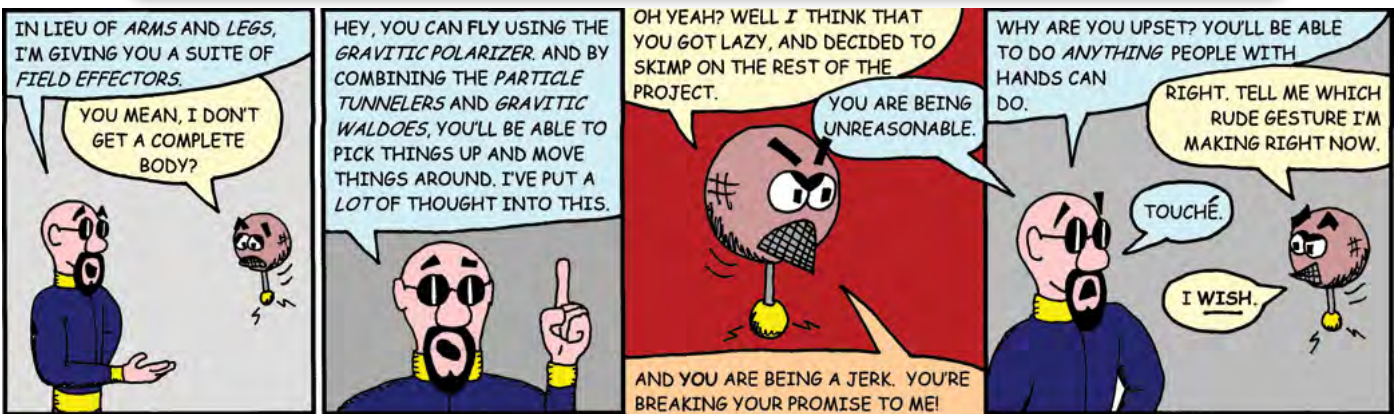
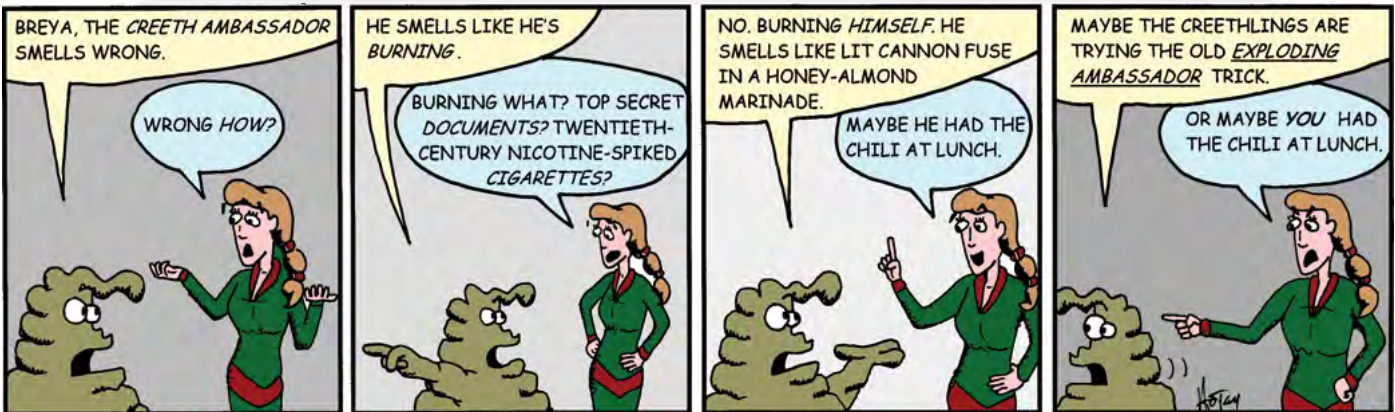
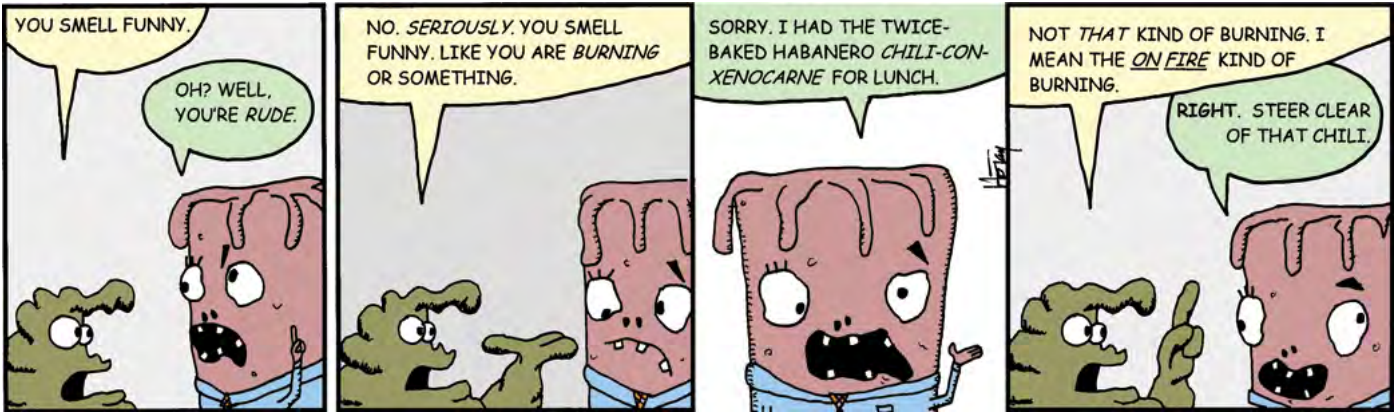
BALD, GOATEE, MINI-EYEBROWS, ROUND BLACK GLASSES, FAT NOSE

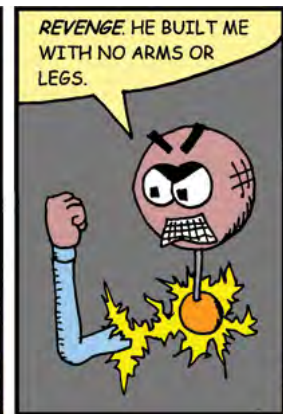
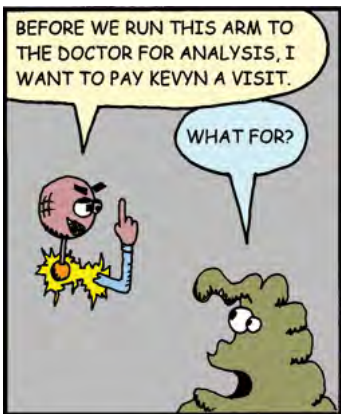
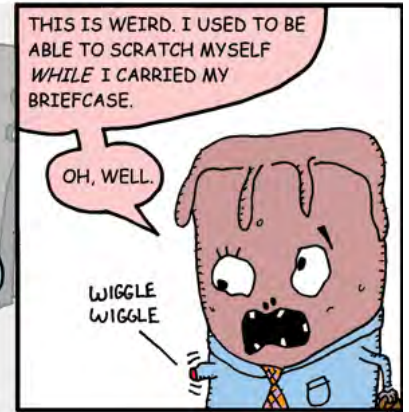
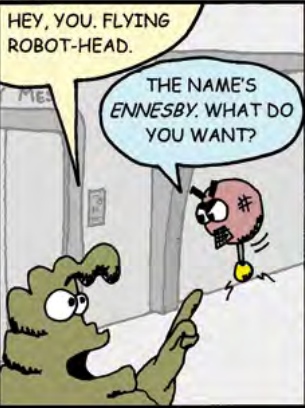
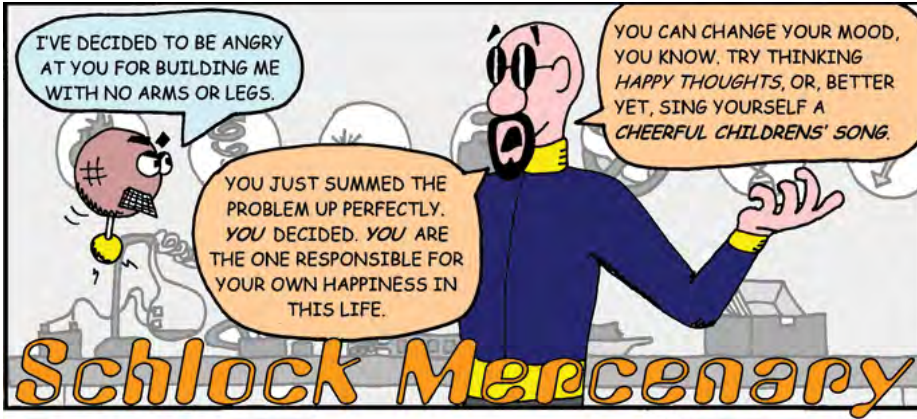


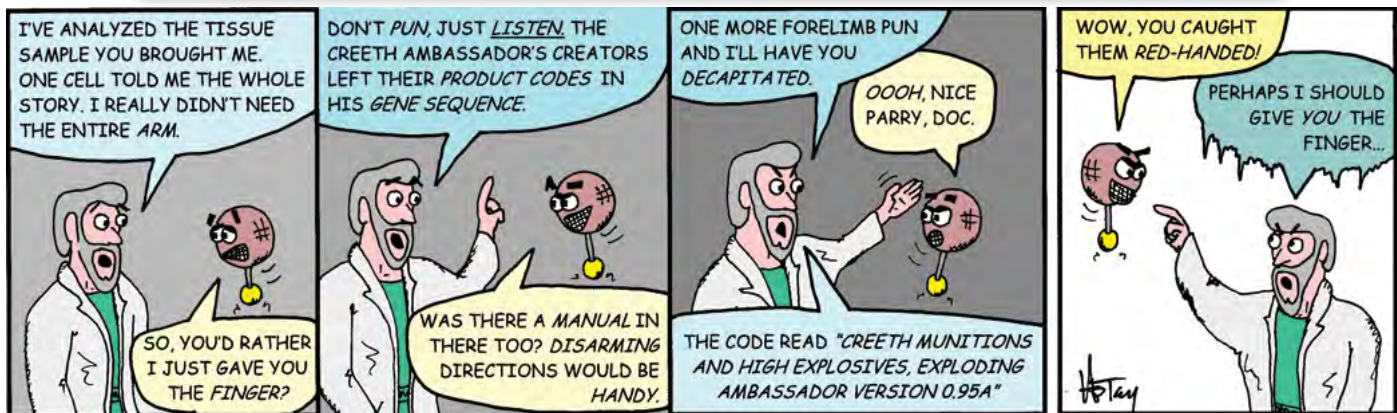


**Pronunciation note:** Ambassador Ch'vorthq's name is pronounced as follows: start with the hard "CH" as in "china," rather than the soft "CH" from "Chevrolet." Now make the sound of an expensive piece of china being struck by a moving Chevrolet — that noise is represented with the apostrophe. The rest is easy. Say "vorthq" with the soft "th" from the word "the" and a "q" like in "qetzlcouatl."

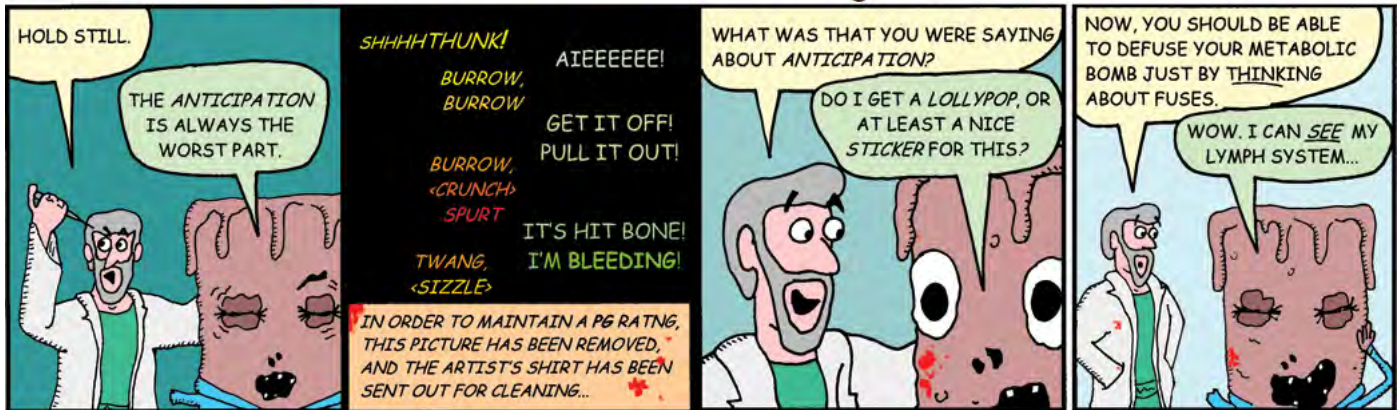
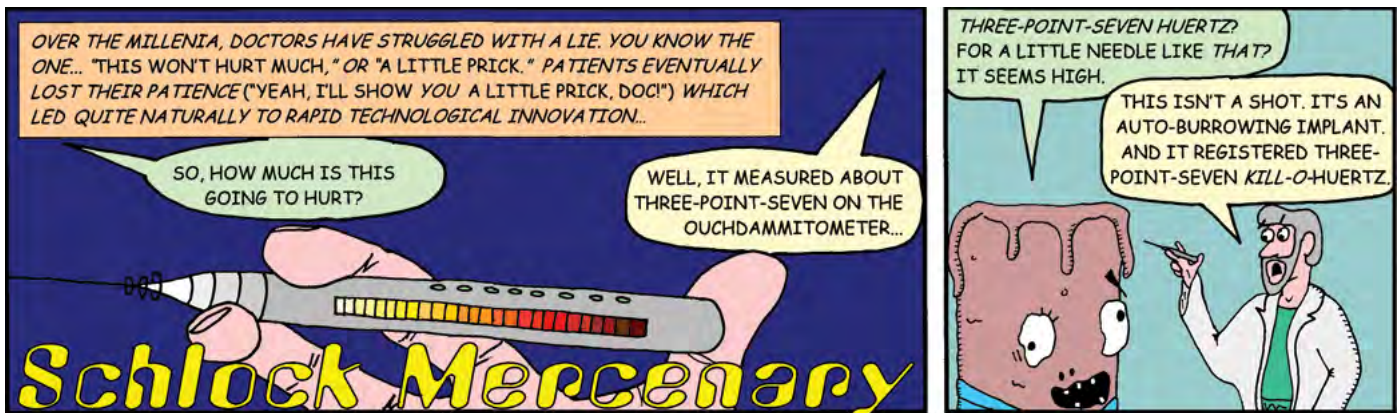
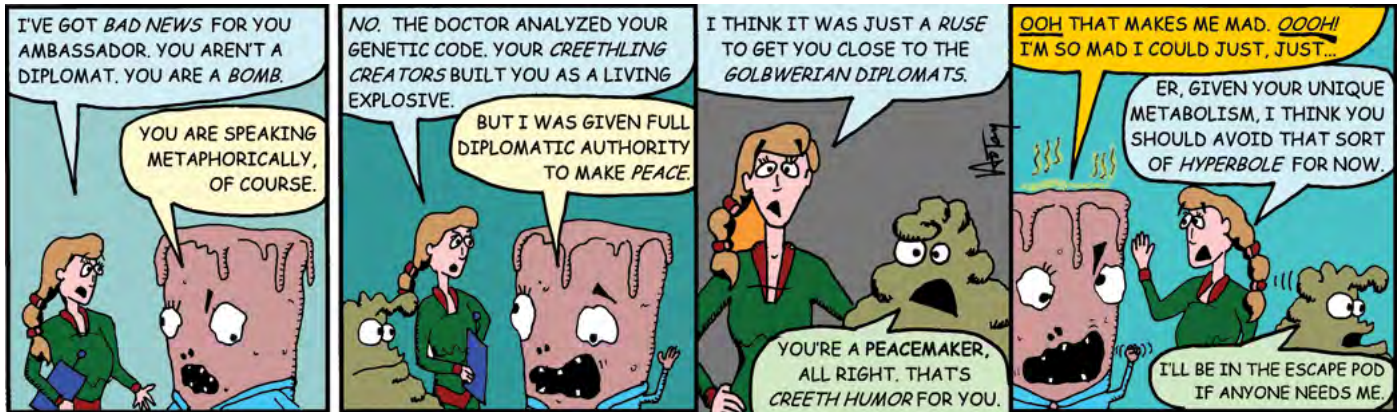






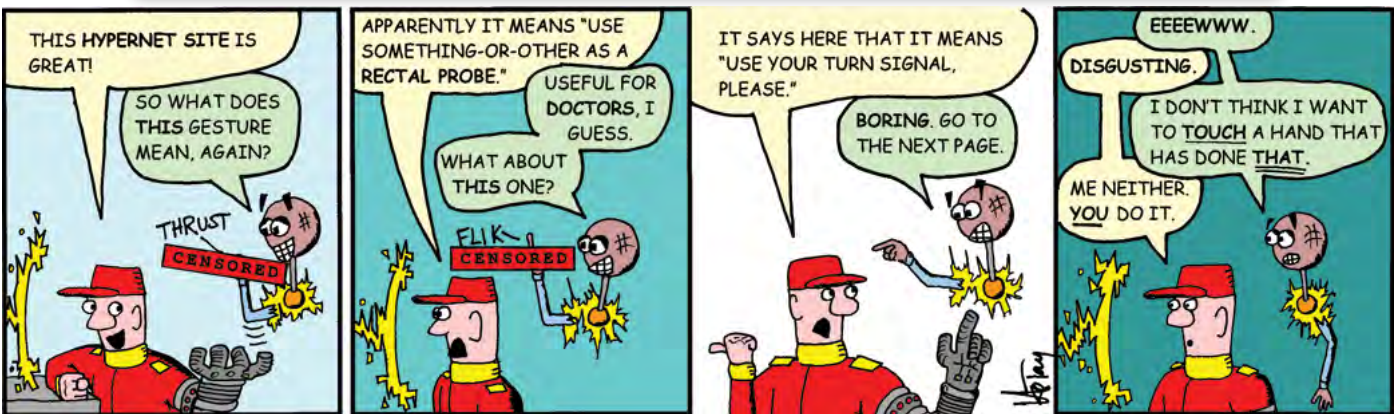
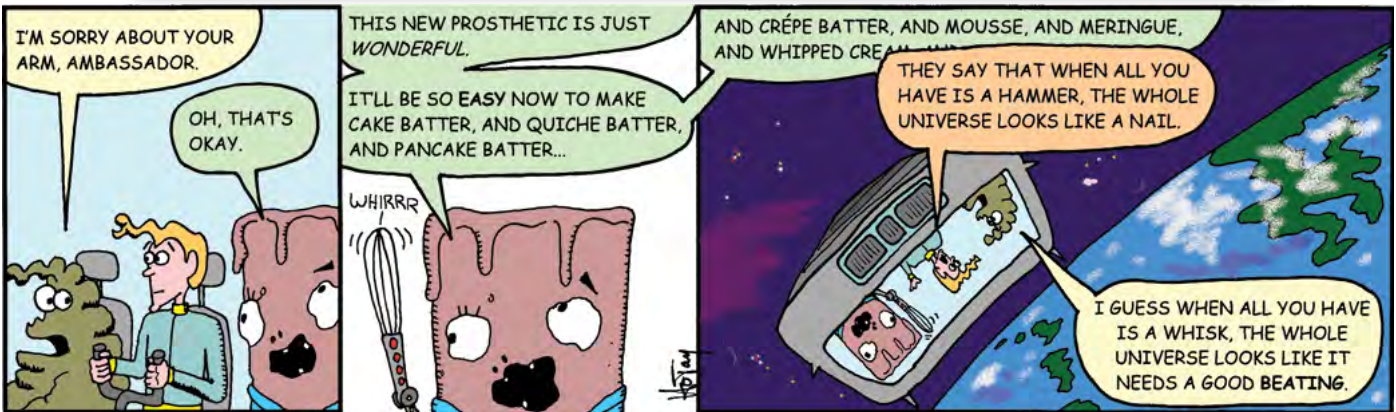
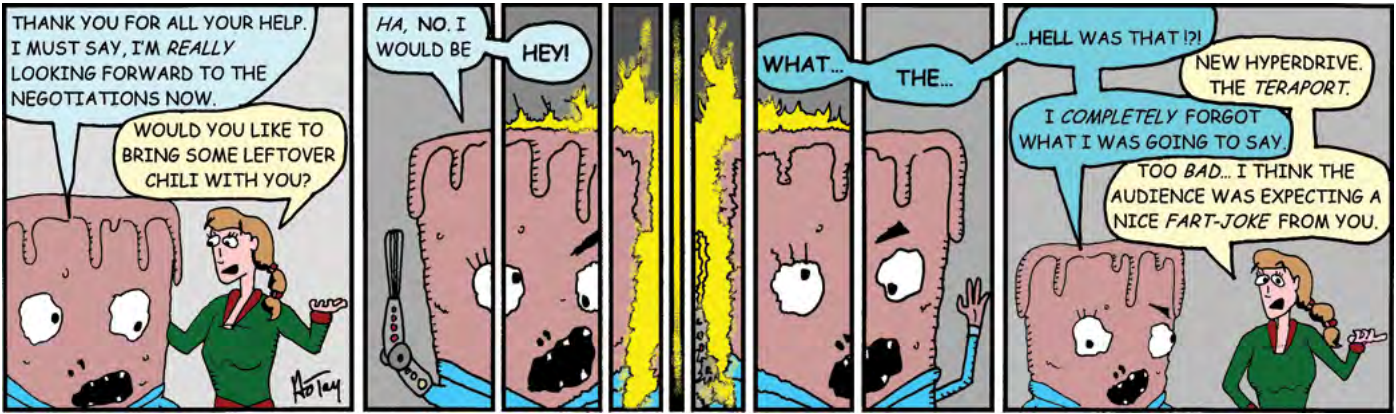


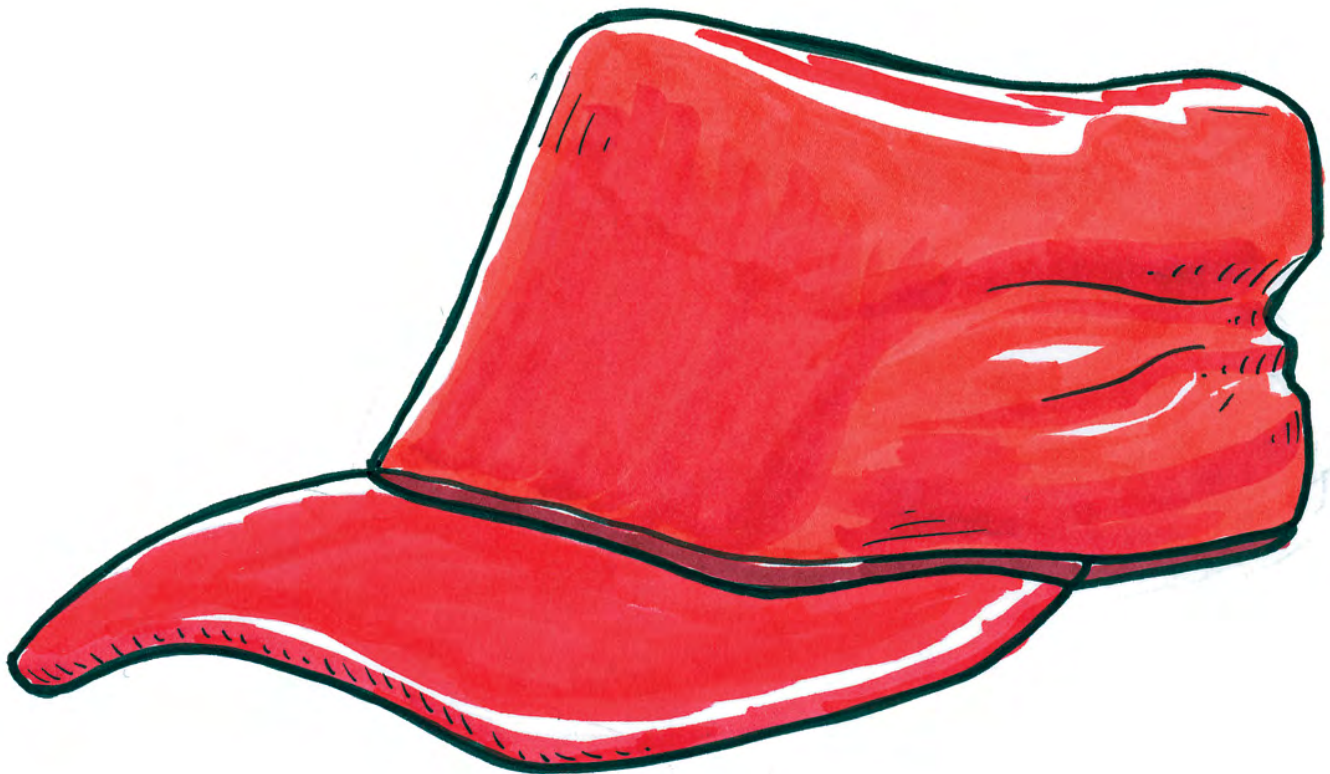
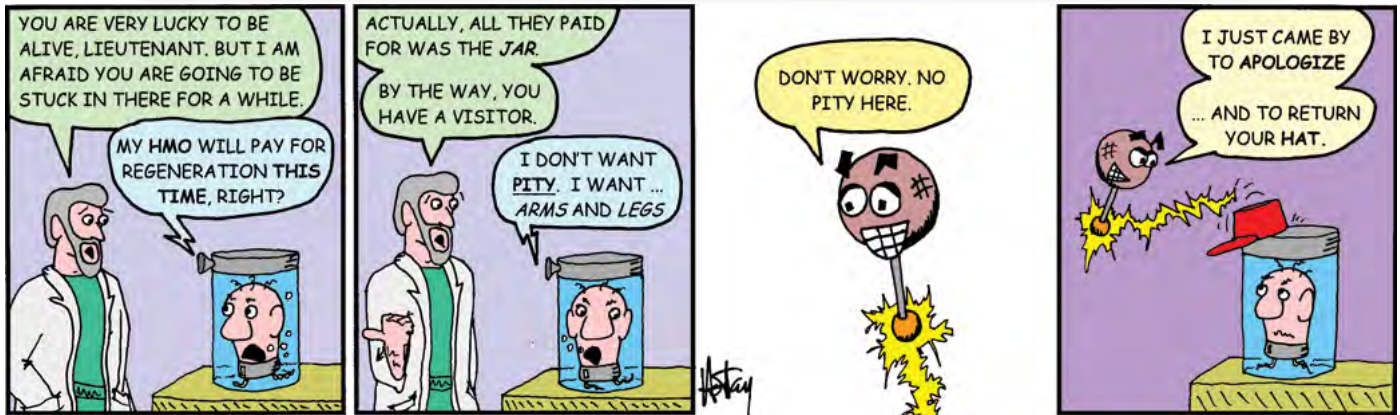
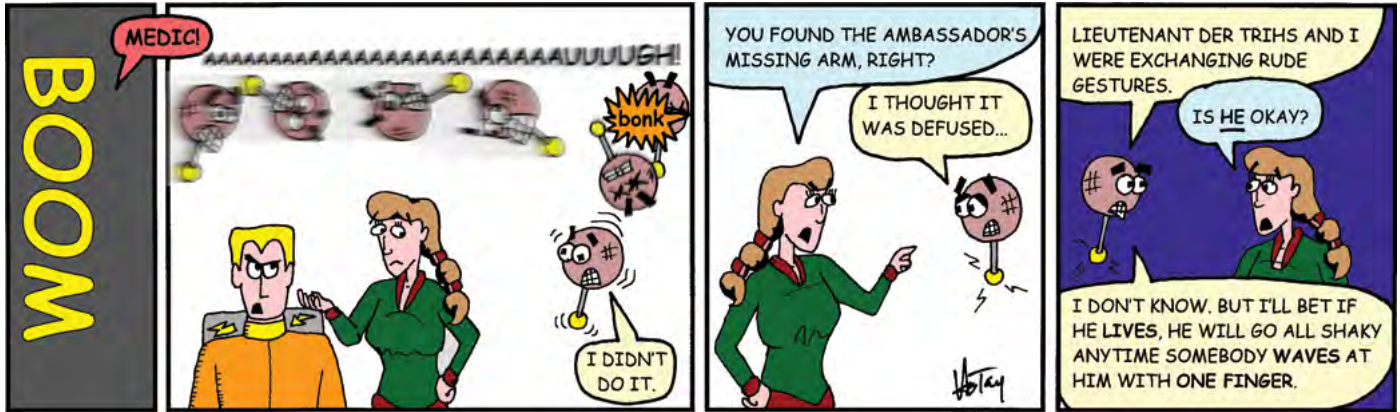


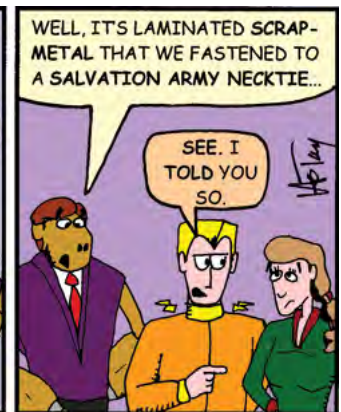
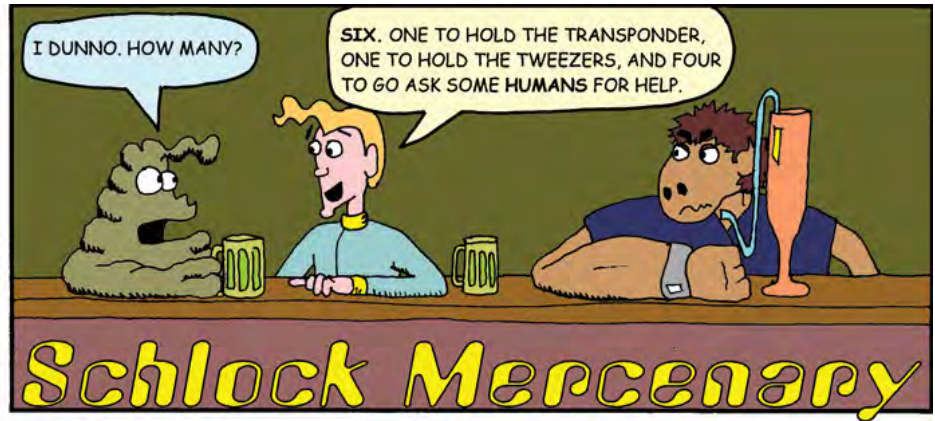


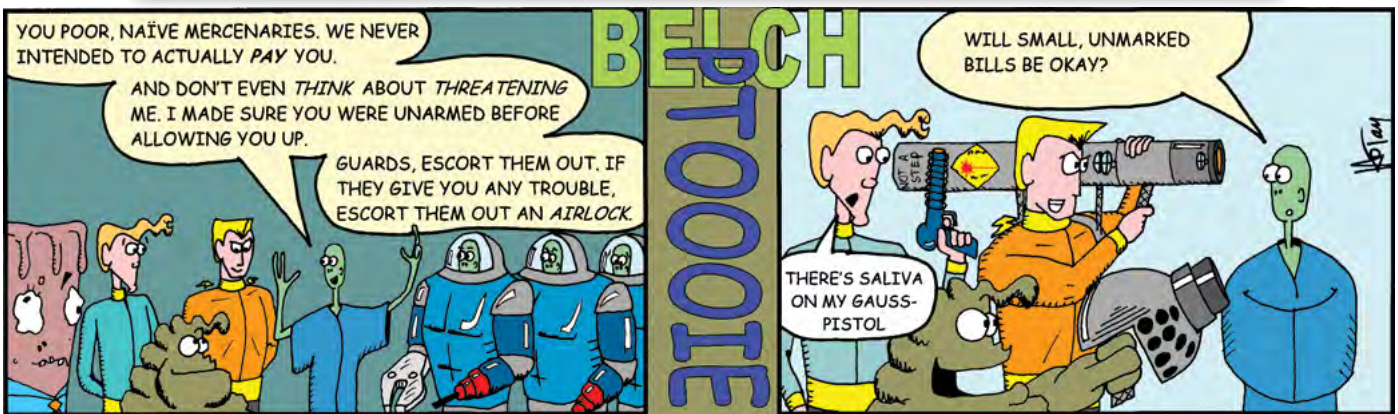
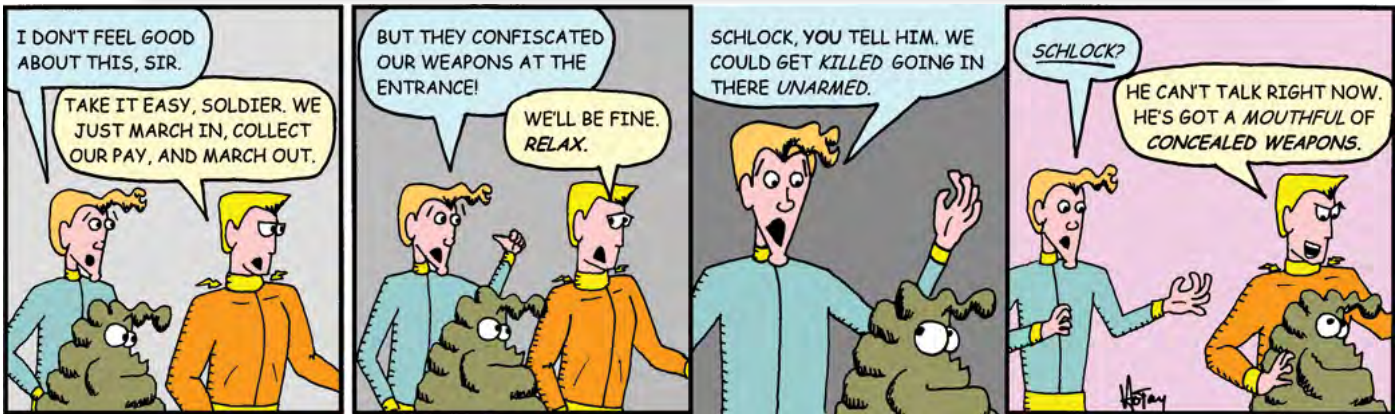
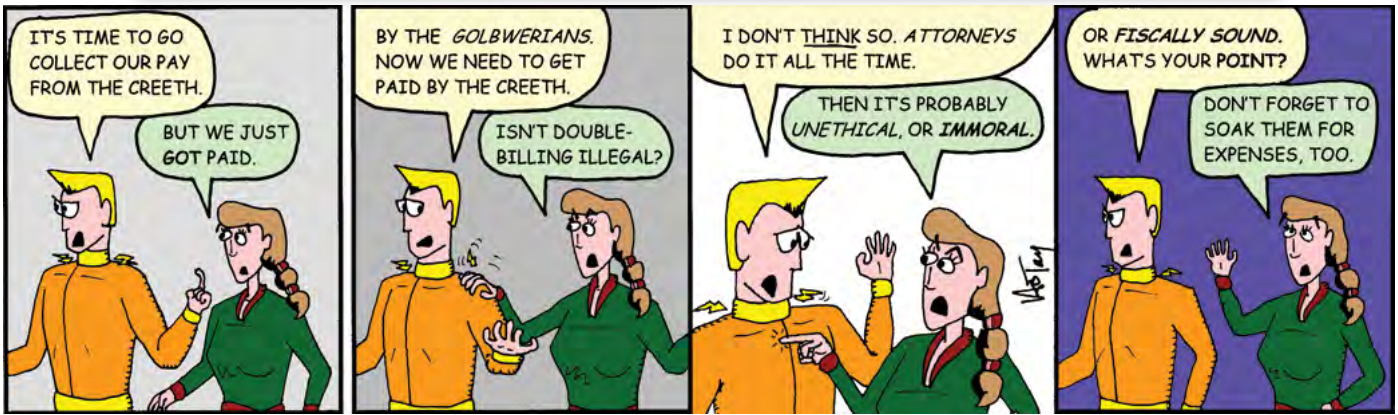
IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN A PG RATING, THIS PICTURE HAS BEEN REMOVED, AND THE ARTIST'S SHIRT HAS BEEN SENT OUT FOR CLEANING...

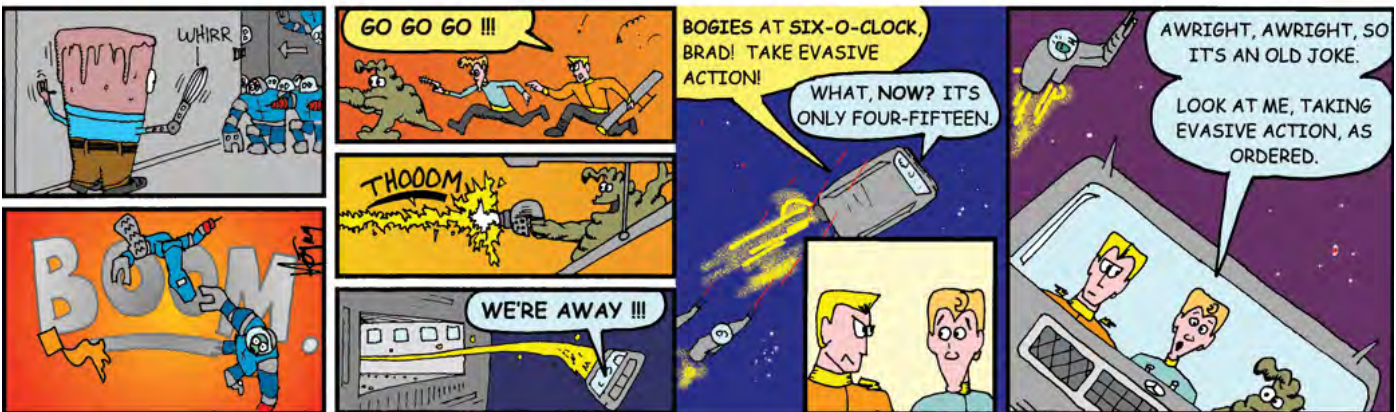
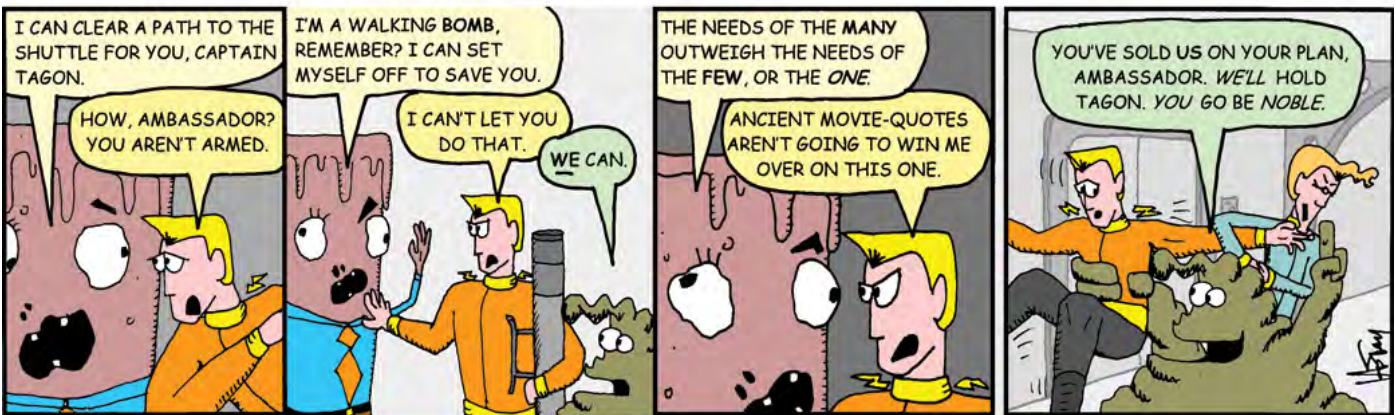
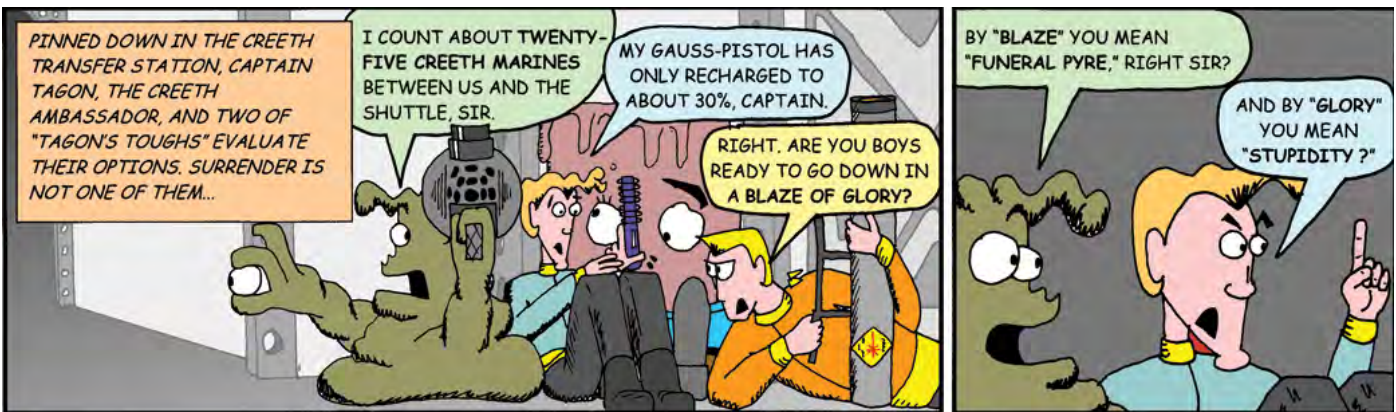








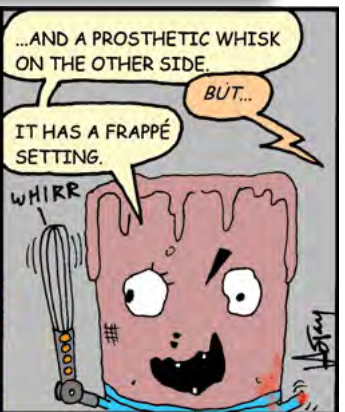
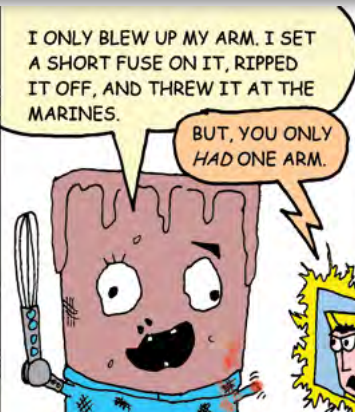
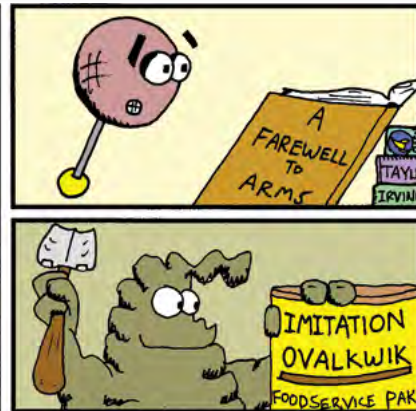
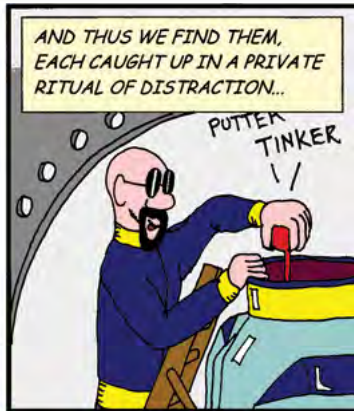


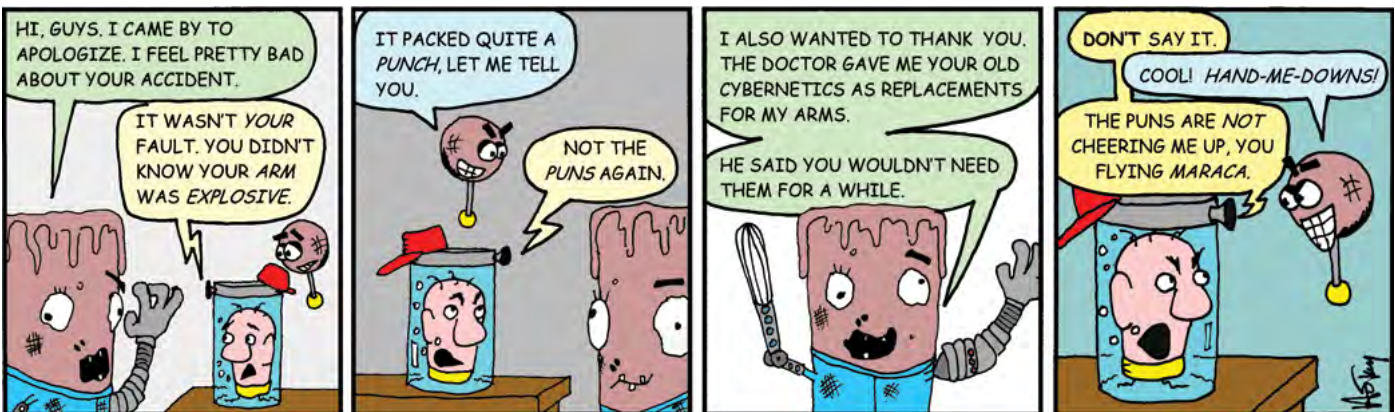
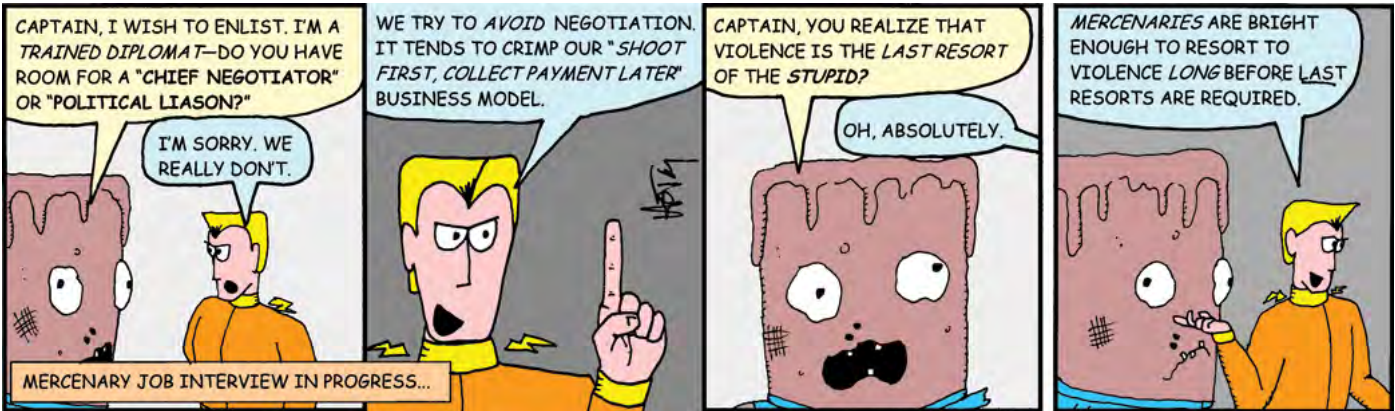
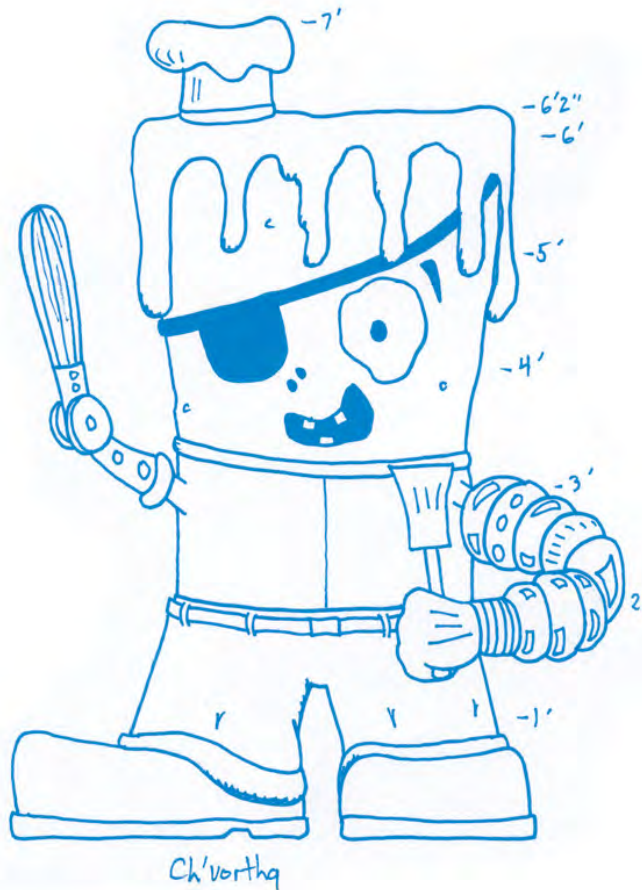




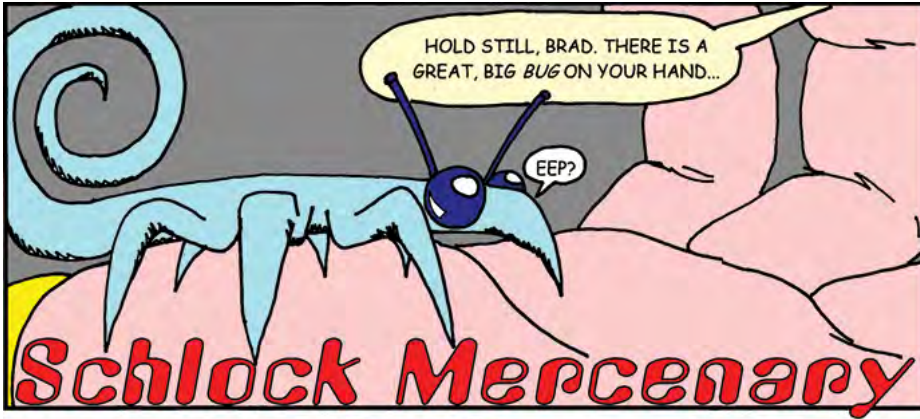
**MERCENARIES IN MOURNING**

THE LOSS OF THEIR FRIEND THE AMBASSADOR WEIGHS HEAVILY ON OUR COMPANY OF MERCENARIES. THEY ARE PROFESSIONALS, THOUGH. DEATH IS PART OF THE DAILY GRIND. THERE IS NO TIME FOR REAL GRIEF—JUST QUICK DOSES OF MICROWAVEABLE, LOW-FAT SORROW, FOLLOWED BY DIVERSIONARY TACTICS...

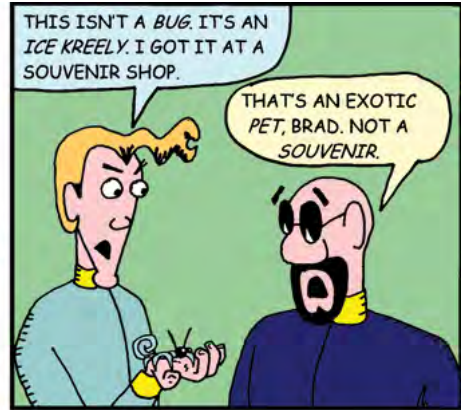






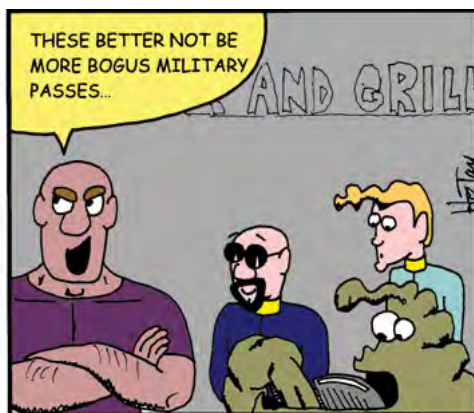


# Schlock Mercenary



**Note:** The week of *Schlock Mercenary* that you are reading, which appears in the storyline as August 28, 2000, through September 2, 2000, is actually the very **first** week-long storyline I scripted and drew (sometime in February of 2000). Unfortunately, I couldn't run it as week one, because I hadn't introduced "Kevyn" yet, and I wanted to do that with the "corporate takeover" plot line. Then I couldn't do it because all of the characters were not in the same place, or the place that they were in just didn't allow the kind of frolicking that would get them into the pinch they got into in this thread. So I waited, and bided my time, and finally found a spot for these six days. And they aren't non-sequitur — you'll see why on September 3rd...

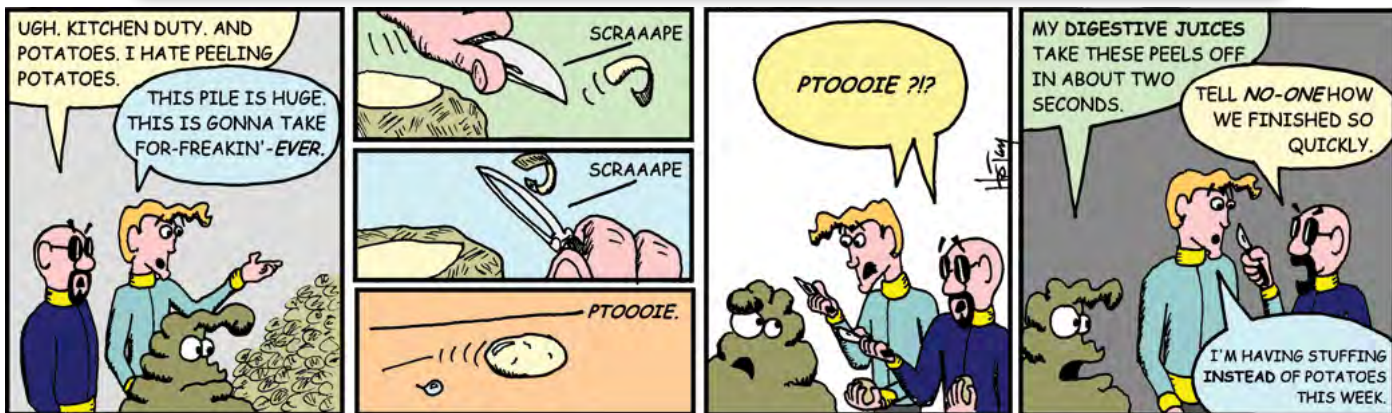
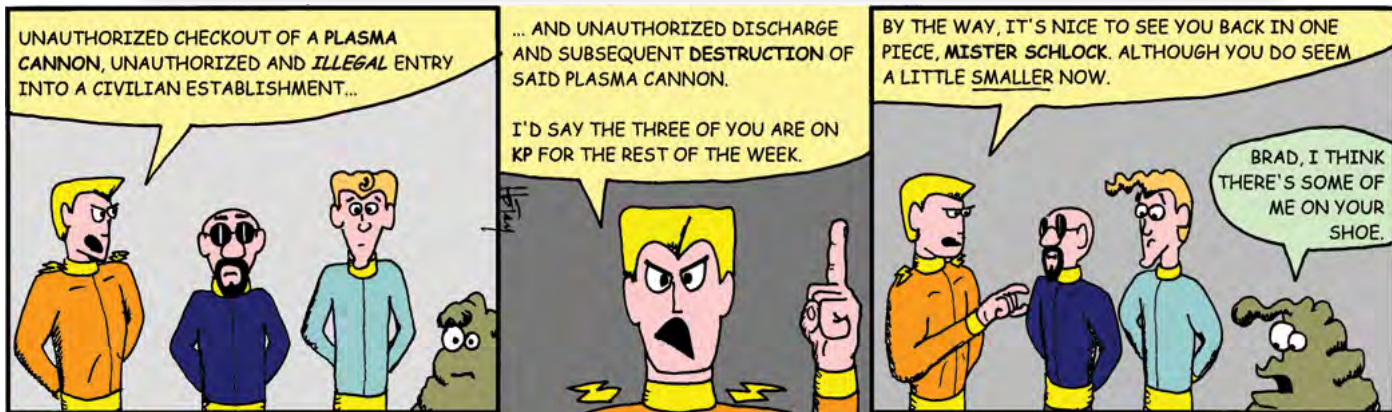
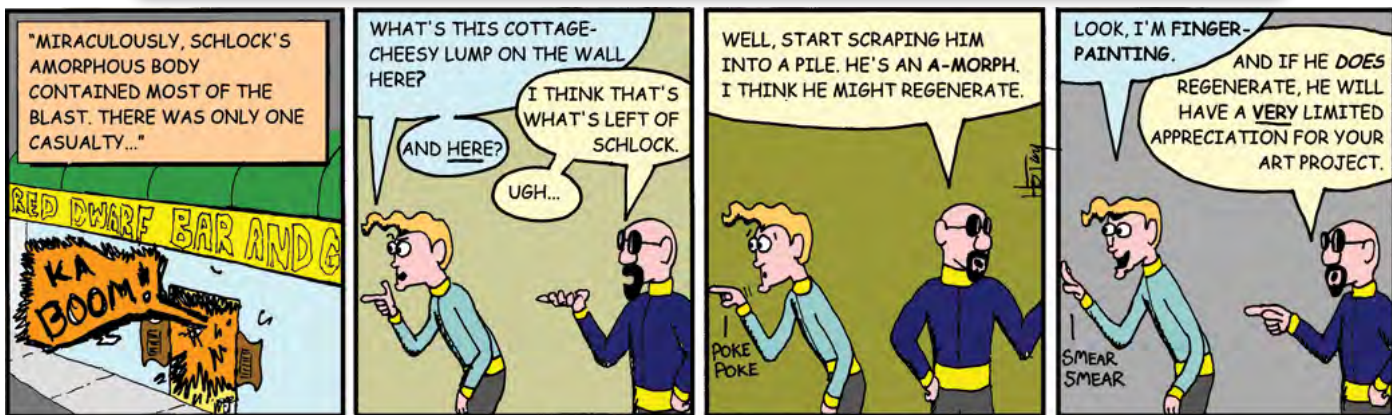
Hopefully this explains the slightly different appearance of the characters. I'm way too lazy to go back and re-draw anything — I just trust that you enjoyed it in spite of this.

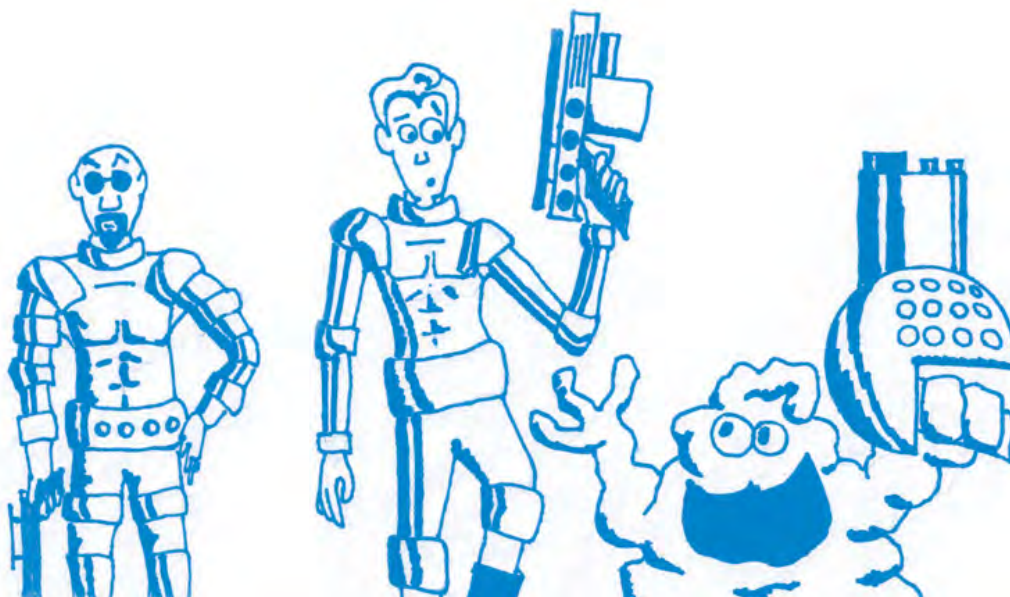
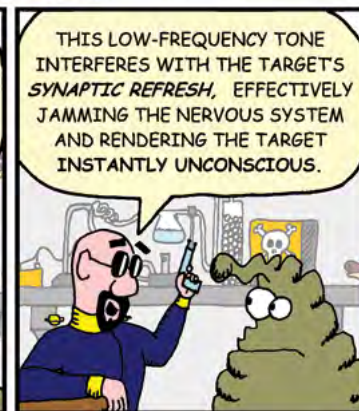
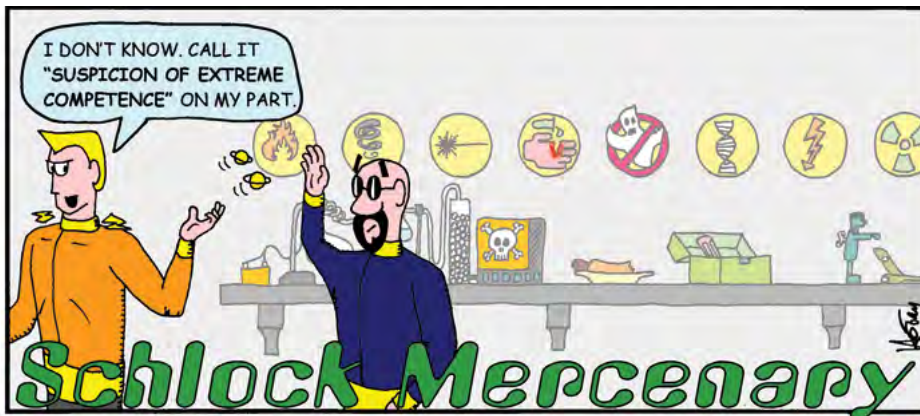


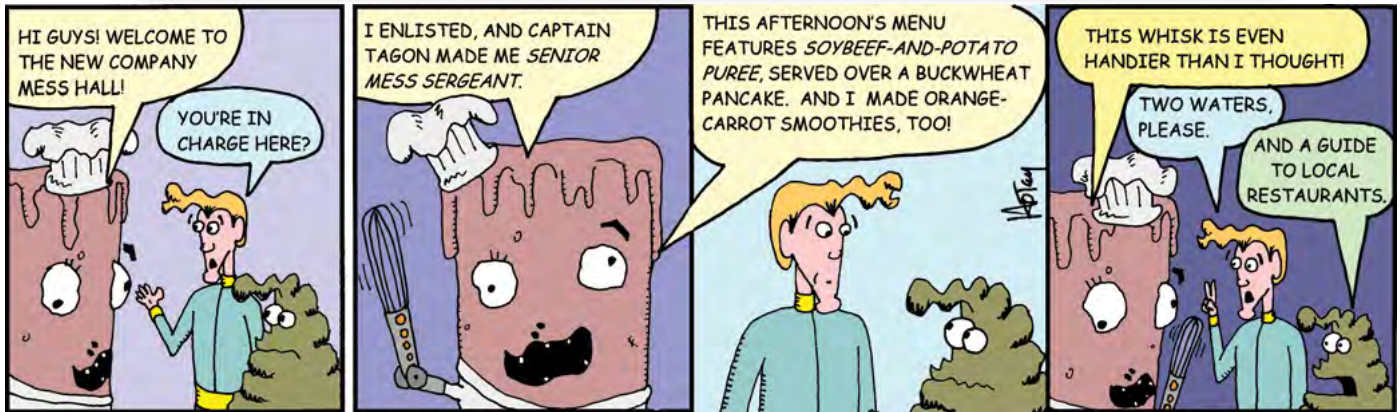
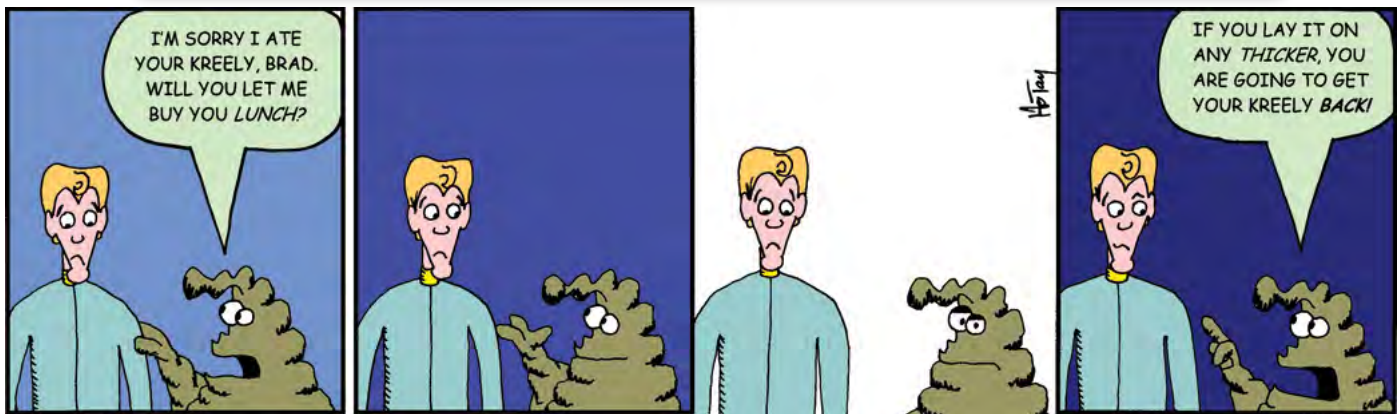
**Product Endorsement:** Schlock is carrying a BH-209 Plasgun, dubbed "plasma cannon" by the trade magazines of the burgeoning 31st century microfusion industry. Quoting from the product flyer:

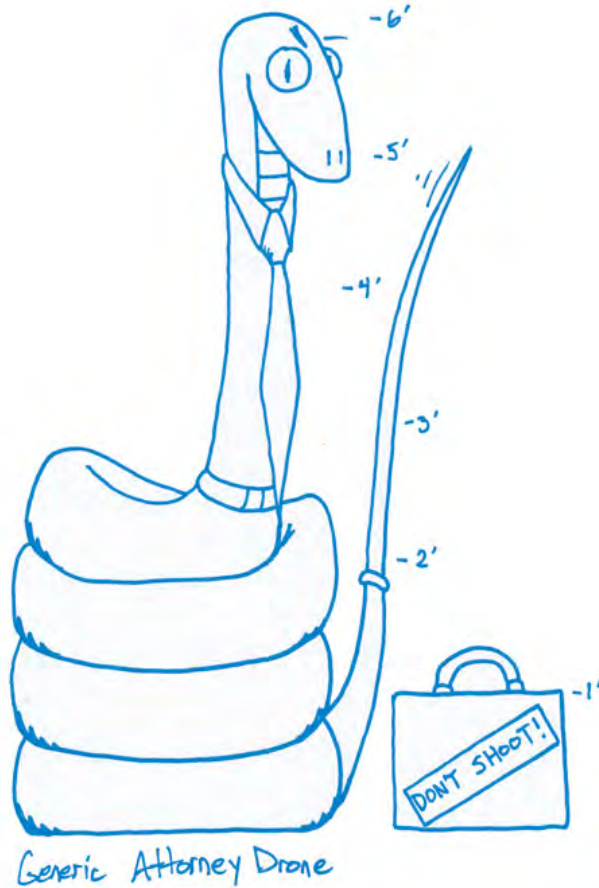
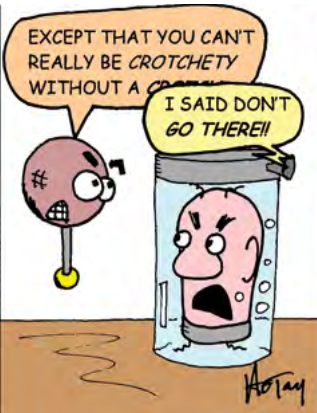
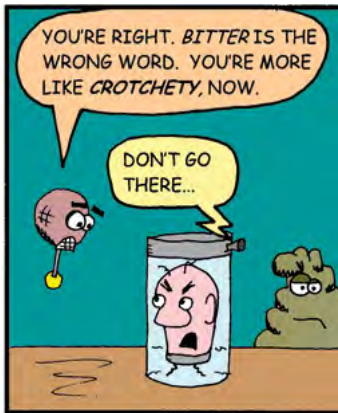
The BH-209's variable mag-bottle aperture allows for full control of beam width, which can be dialed from a relatively narrow 1 cm setting to a splashy 10:6 expanding cone (6-meter beam diameter at a range of 10 meters) useful for crowd control.

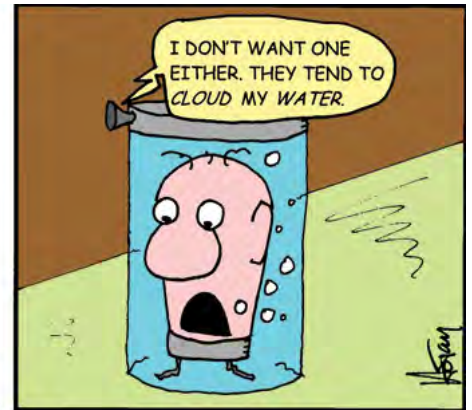
Powered by a Striggs & Bratton 2-stroke microfusion plant, the BH-209 need never be recharged, provided it is allowed to "breathe" periodically. When primed and flipped from "safe" to "decidedly unsafe," the BH-209 cycles local atmospheric gases into the plant, producing a noticeable acoustic effect. While this hum is stealth-defeating, many law-enforcement agents have reported that it serves as an excellent deterrent.



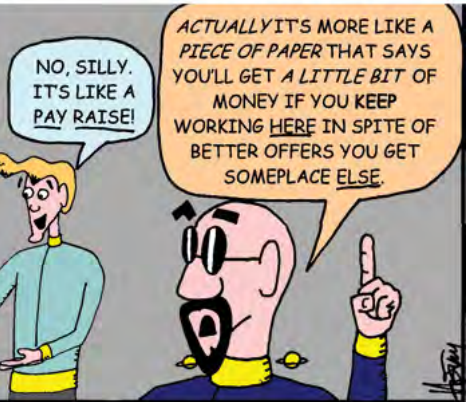


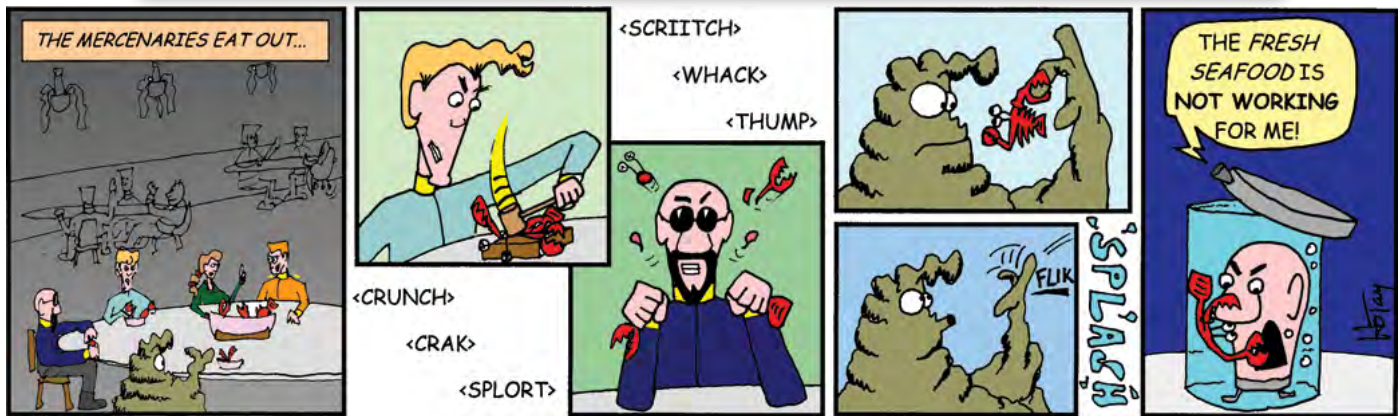
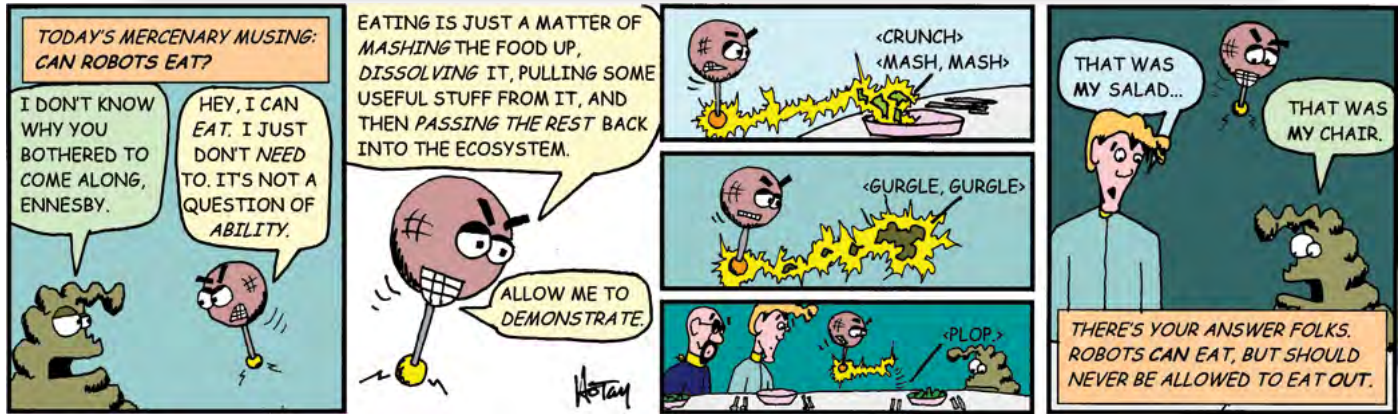
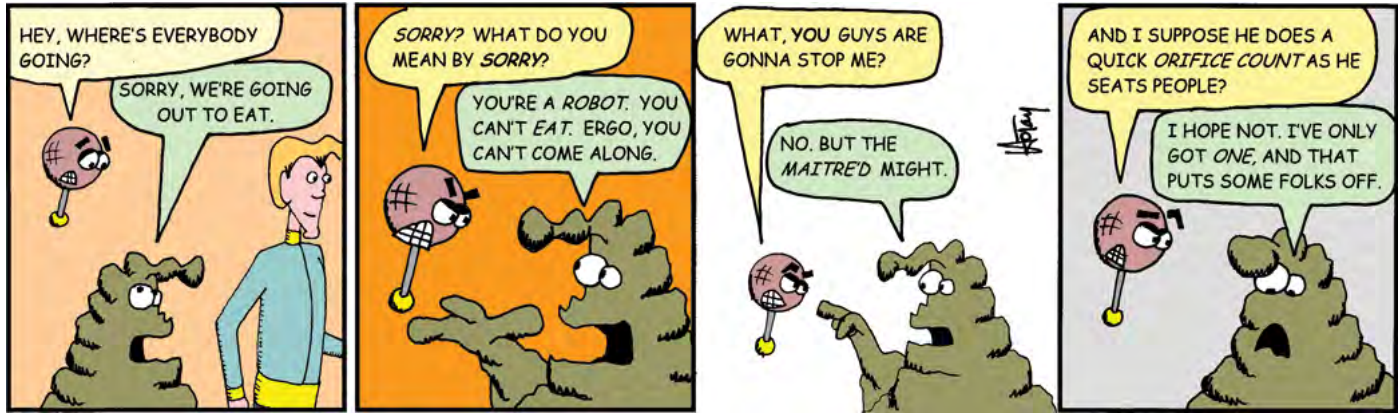




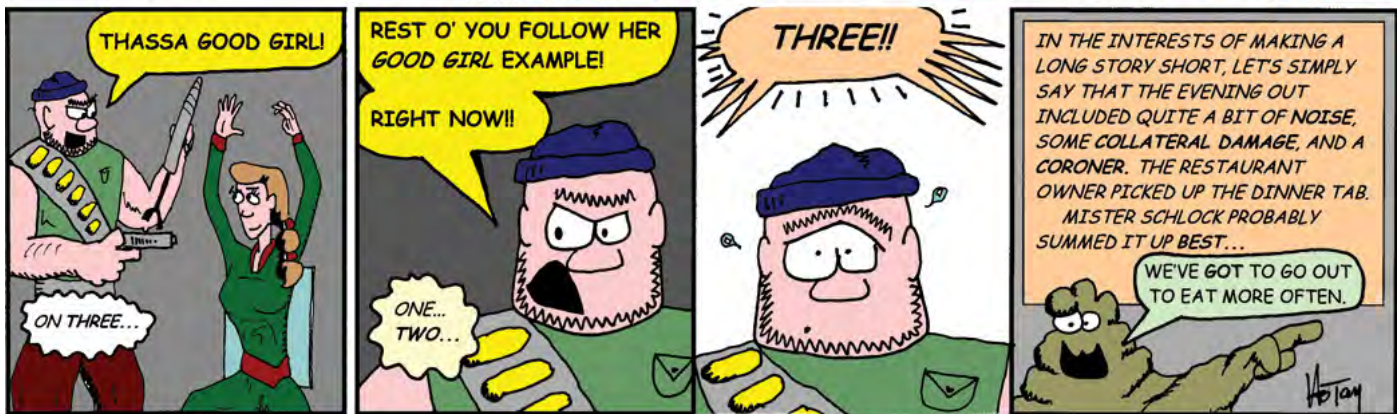
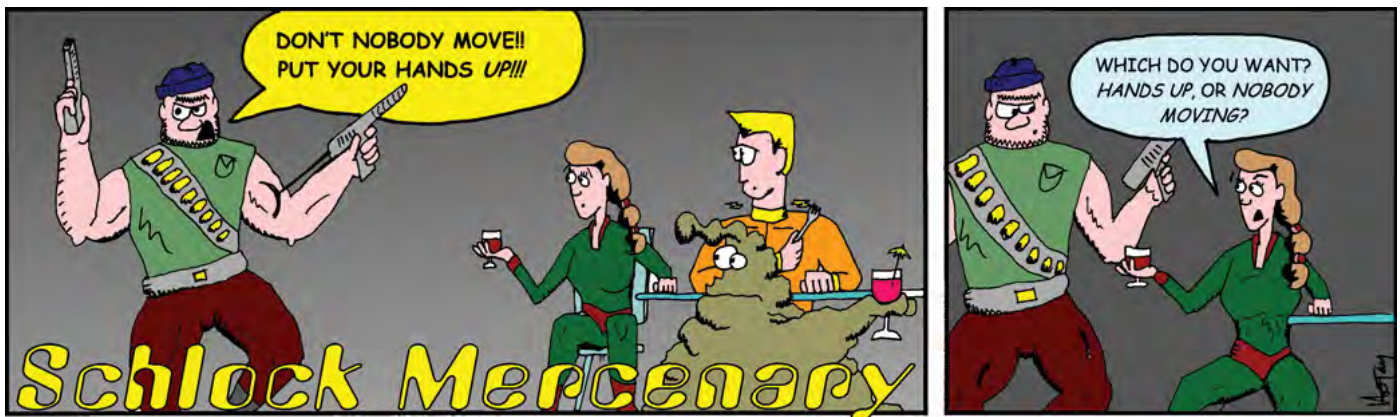


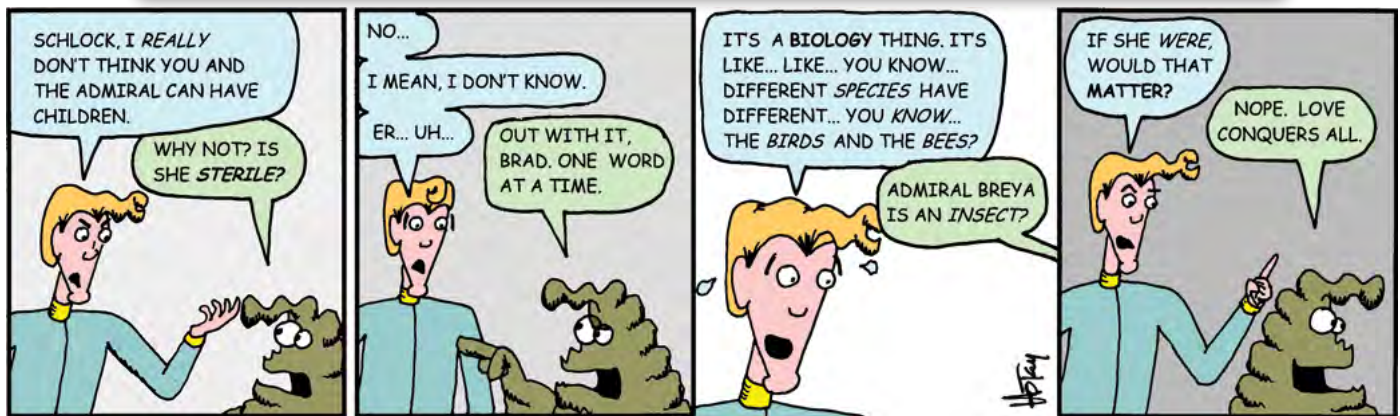
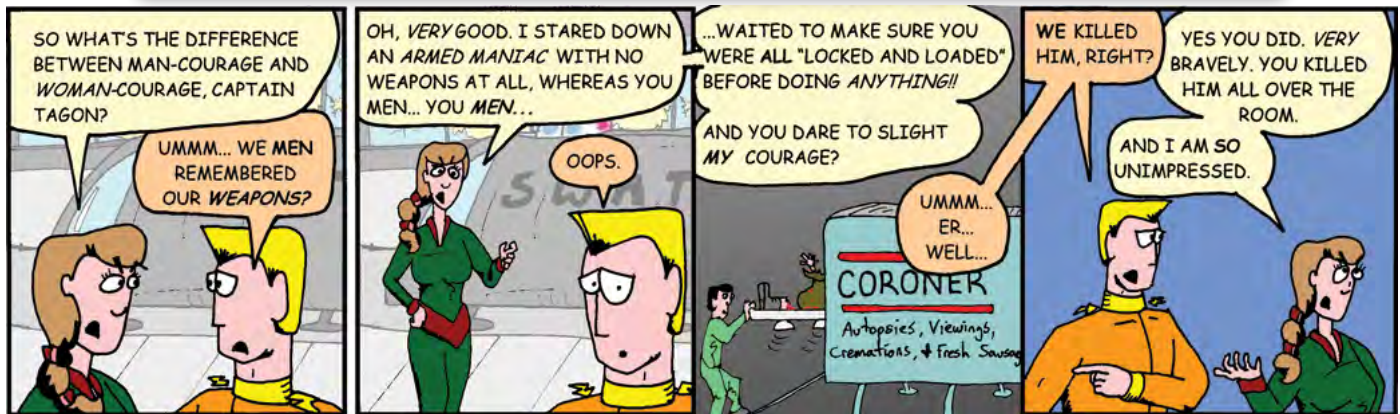
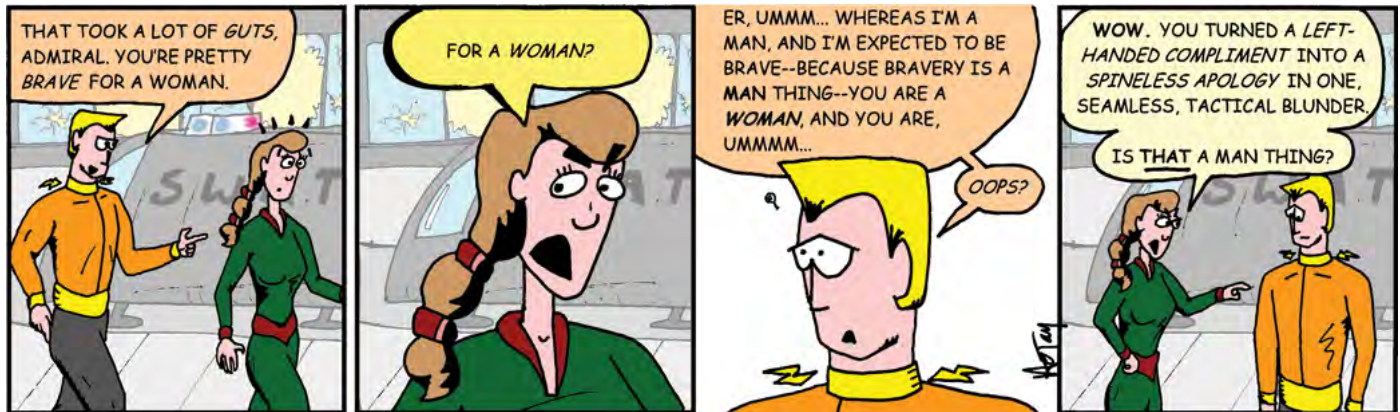
# Schlock Mercenary













Dave Kellett  
www.sheldoncomics.com



**Note:** In the early days, *Schlock Mercenary* was a project that occupied a bunch of time, but tied up very few financial resources. I needed pens, but for paper I used a box of legal-sized laser printer stock. I experimented a bit with erasers, and settled on the kneaded kind. And that was pretty much it.

I did all my drawing on the kitchen table.

This had some advantages. For starters, I couldn't draw on a sticky surface cluttered with dishes, so the table was getting cleared off regularly. Then there was the fact that even though I was working, I was still part of the family. The kids could come up and talk to me. I could carry on conversations with Sandra.

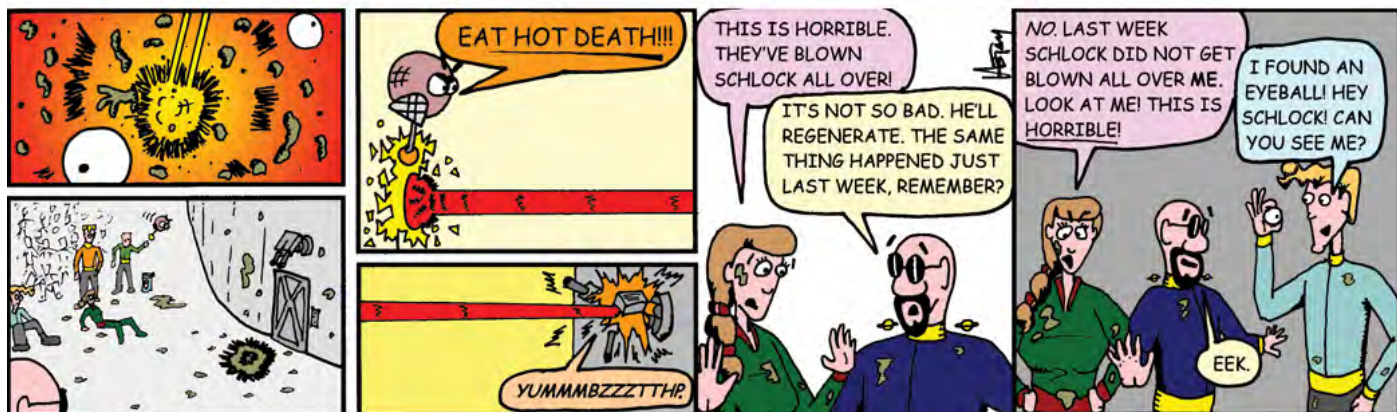
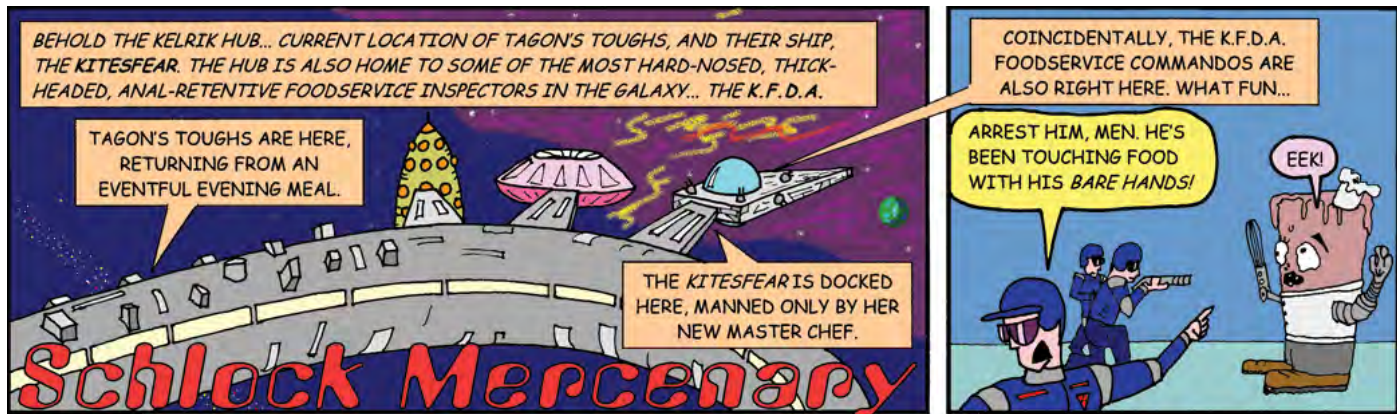
I miss the kitchen table years.

I don't miss the spoon-dents. My oldest son banged on the table a lot, and every so often my pen would cross one of the dents he'd made in the surface of the table. I remember being worried that one day I'd have to refinish the table, and I'd have to do it quickly, lest I be without a drawing surface for an extended period.

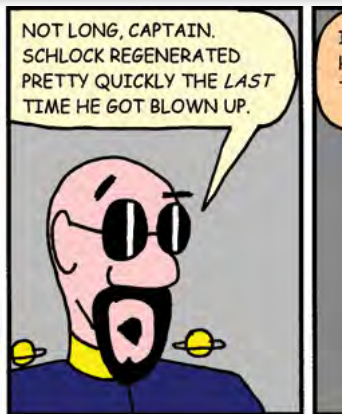
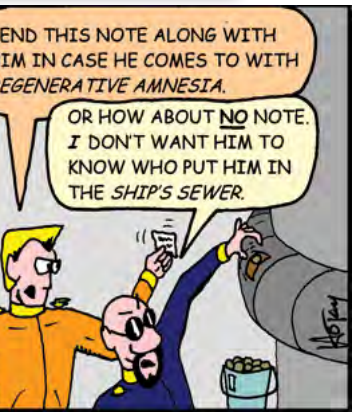
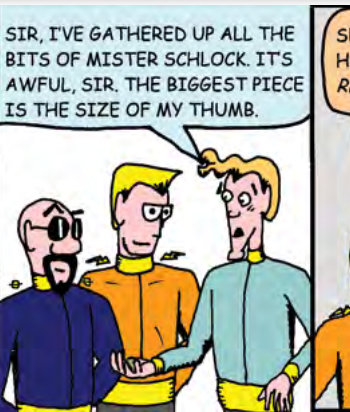
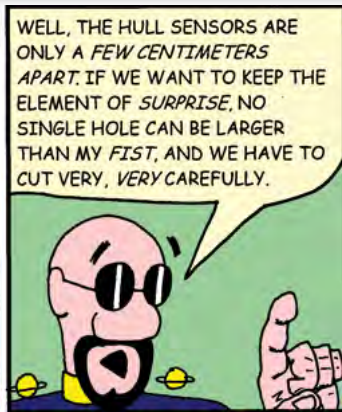
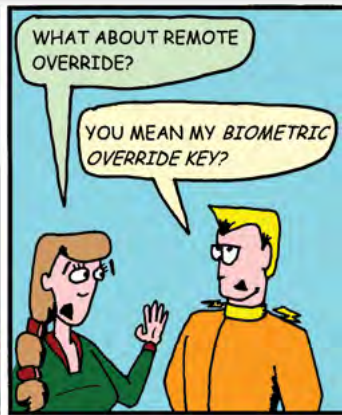
I have two very nice drawing tables now — one at home and one down at Dragons Keep — the comic and games store where I do almost all of my pencilling and inking lately. When I need family time, I stop what I'm doing and give them my whole attention.

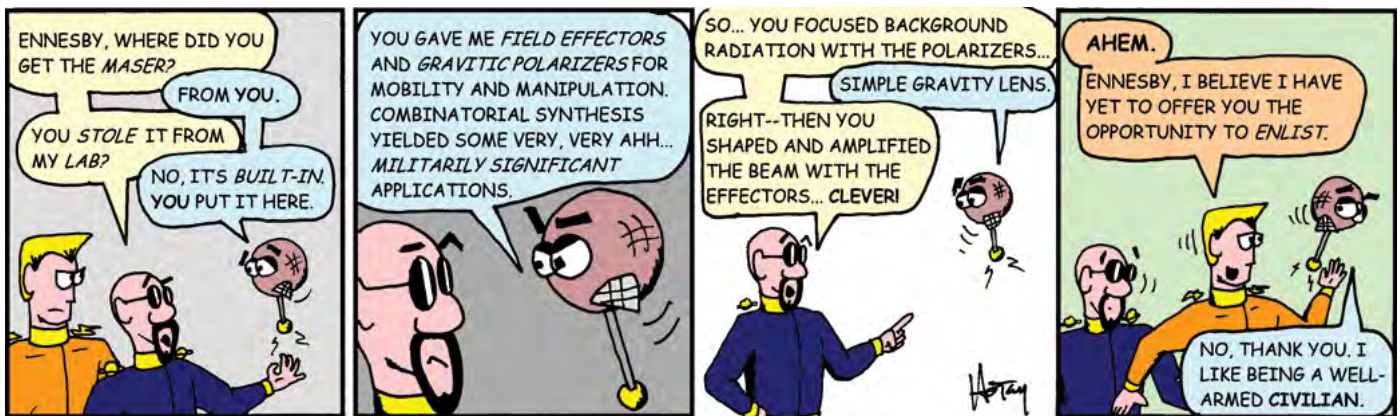
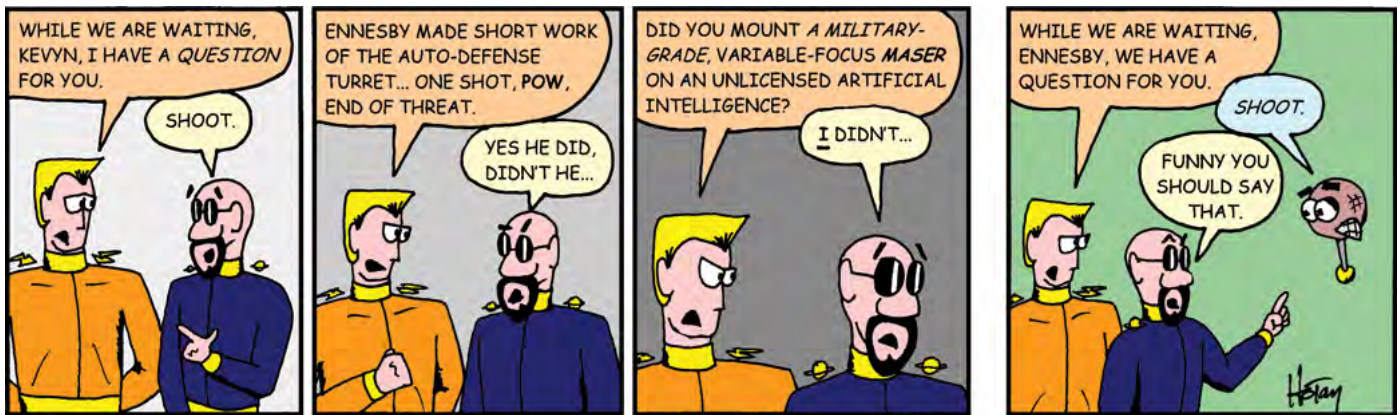
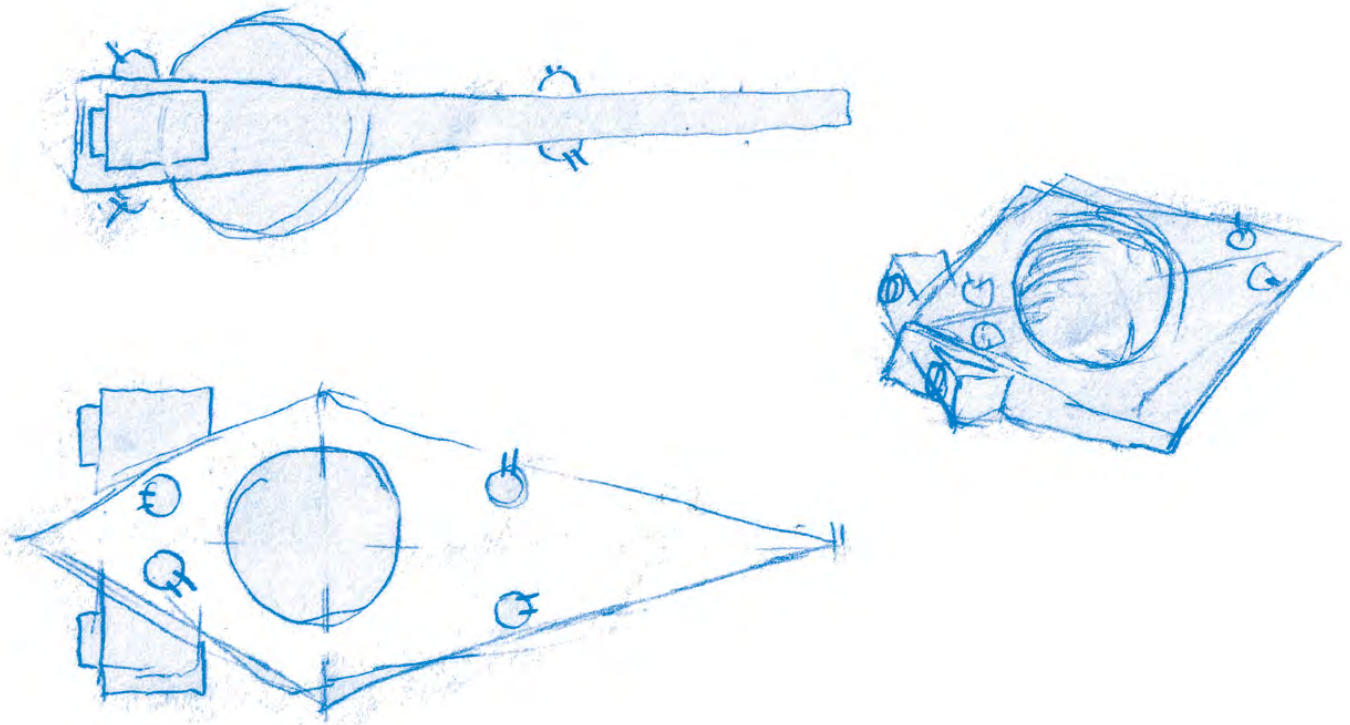
The spoon dents are still there on the kitchen table, and I still worry that someday I'll have to refinish that table. After all, while that project sits unfinished for months, where will we eat?





**Note:** According to Benzel's Comic Lexicon of the 31st Century (Harper & Blow, 3116), "YUMMMBZZZTTHP" is, strictly speaking, the sound of an automated defense system digesting hot death. We apologize for any confusion this may have created.





ABOARD THE WARRANT-CLASS CRUISER HABEAS CORPUS, WARRIOR-ATTORNEY DRONES OF THE PARTNERSHIP COLLECTIVE™ PREPARE FOR A JAUNT THROUGH HYPERSPACE...

WE HAVE REACHED THE WORMGATE. IN MOMENTS WE WILL TRANSFER TO THE KELRIC SYSTEM.

WITH THEIR SHIP UNDER K.F.D.A. CONTROL, THOSE MERCENARIES CANNOT ESCAPE US WITH THEIR CLEVER NEW HYPERDRIVE.

THEY'D BETTER NOT. IT'S YOUR BUTT ON THE LINE IF THEY DO.

# Schlock Mercenary

UMMM, THE LAST TIME WE CHECKED, WE WERE A HIVE-MINDED COLLECTIVE. YOUR STATEMENT IMPLIES INDIVIDUALITY.

OH.

BESIDES, I'M A SNAKE. I DON'T HAVE A BUTT.

OKAY, MISTER NO-BUTT SMARTY-PANTS: IF WE'RE A HIVE-MINDED COLLECTIVE, HOW COME WE TALK TO EACH OTHER?

UMMMM...

DO YOU KNOW?

IT'S A PLOT DEVICE. BESIDES, IT MAKES YOU ATTORNEYS SEEM JUST A LITTLE LESS EVIL, TAKING SOME HEAT OFF OF THE AUTHOR.

HE'S GETTING PRESSURE FROM REAL ATTORNEYS?

REAL, LIVE, BAR-CERTIFIED, EARTH ATTORNEYS??

YUP.

NOW THAT IS SCARY.

THERE'S NO WAY I... ER... WE CAN COMPETE WITH THAT.

<SIGH>. YOU ARE NOT HELPING MATTERS ANY. NOW GET ON WITH THE STORY.

RIGHT, THEN. UMMM....

LINE?

"... WITH THEIR CLEVER NEW HYPERDRIVE."

BUT I'VE ALREADY DONE THAT BIT.

HEY, HE'S GONE ON WITHOUT US!

TRAPPED IN EINSTEINIAN SPACE, OUR HEROES ARE RUNNING OUT OF TIME--AND THEIR ONLY HOPE JUST CRAWLED OUT OF A TOILET. TUNE IN TOMORROW. PLEASE.





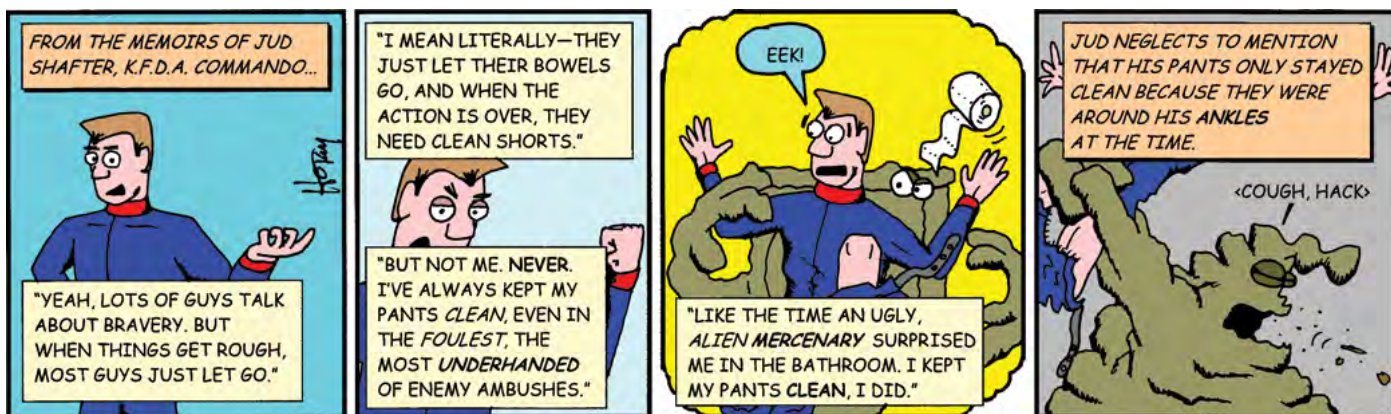


**Historical Note:** 21st-century readers may be confused by what appears to be an IBM logo on what appears to be a conventional toilet. This depiction is neither an attempt to slight the fine business machines made by IBM, nor to malign toilets.

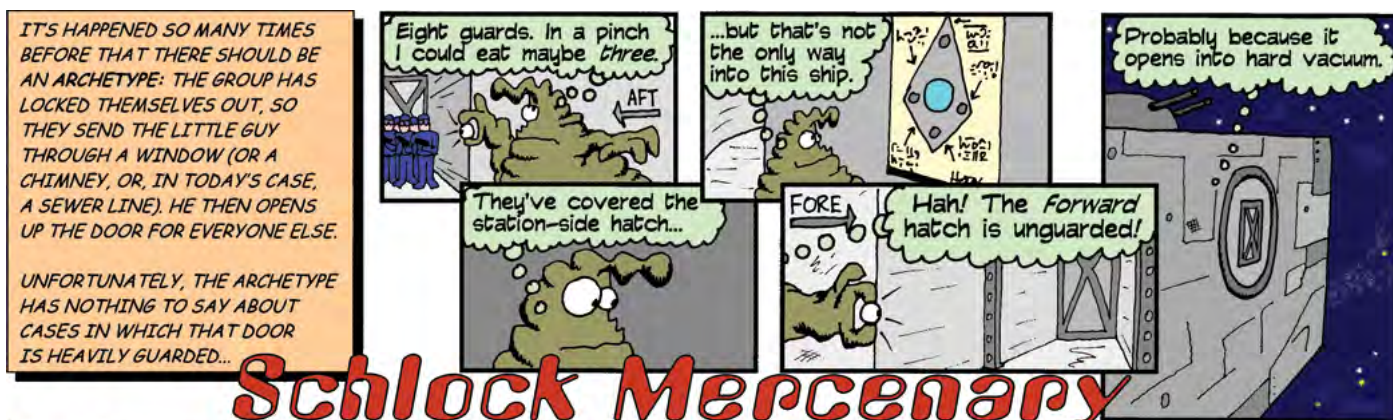
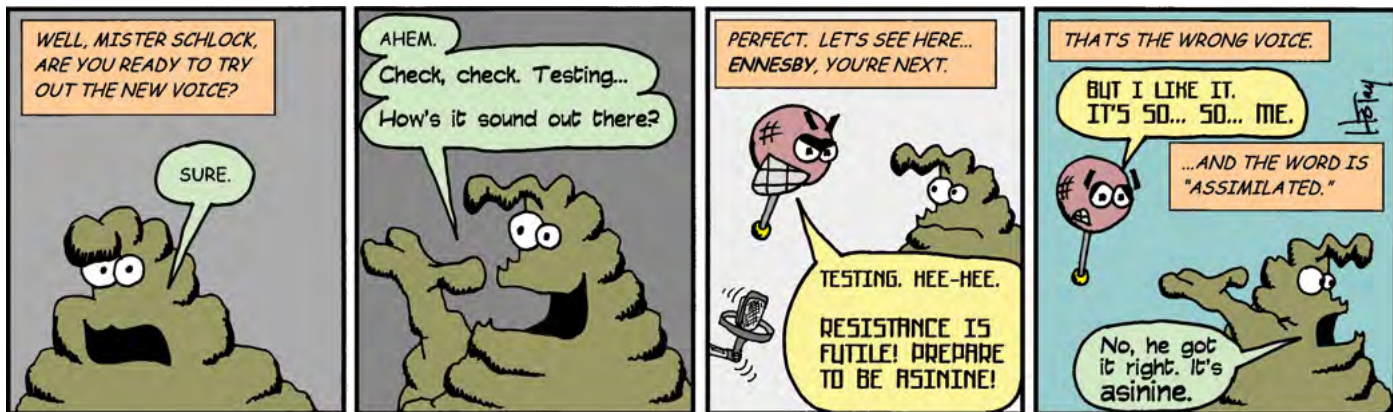
In the late 28th century, the old Earth corporation, International Business Machines lost its trademark to a much larger, more powerful, intragalactic corporation. After all, by that time Earth's "IBM" was making outmoded processors that were still huge by galactic standards (nearly the size of an eyelash!), while the mighty galactic IBM, "Intragalactic Bowel Movements," was making top-of-the-line toilets for spacecraft.

Intragalactic BM put up with Earth's little computer manufacturer for centuries before initiating the suit. They tried for over 130 years to resolve the trademark dispute out of court, but finally the Bowel Movement company decided not to take any more of IBM's crap.

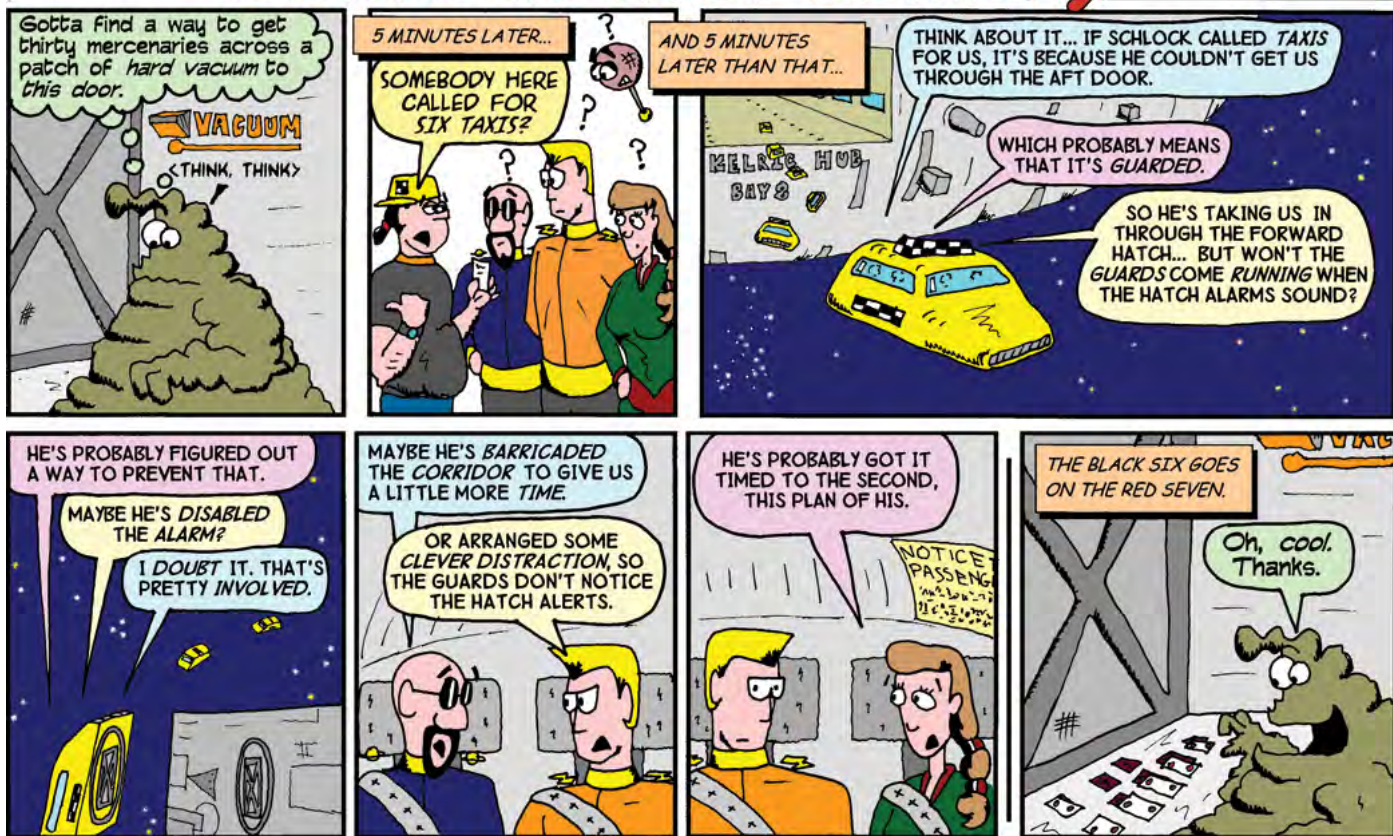
The tide of public opinion was in favor of Intragalactic Bowel Movements. After all, Earth's "IBM" made cold, impersonal machines, but **IBM** had form-fitting, self-sterilizing, heated toilet seats going for it. With successful media blitzes ("Gotta B.M.? Think IBM!" and "Where do you want to go today?") and the help of a few hundred Partnership Collective attorneys, Intragalactic Bowel Movements sued the relatively tiny Earth company, and took the trademark.







# Schlock Mercenary



FROM THE MEMOIRS OF JUD SHAFTER, K.F.D.A. COMMANDO:

"SO THERE I WAS, TIED UP AFTER MY INTERROGATION. BUT I KEPT MY HEAD, AND LOOKED FOR ANY WEAKNESS I COULD EXPLOIT."

"IF I COULD BREAK FREE FROM MY BONDS, I'D BE ABLE TO SOUND AN ALARM, AND MY SQUAD WOULD COME DOWN ON THE ENEMY LIKE A TON OF ROCK ON A PILE OF MANURE."

"AND THEN I FOUND THAT EXPLOITABLE WEAKNESS I NEEDED. I HAD BEEN TIED UP WITH TOILET PAPER."

"THERE WAS A LOT OF IT, BUT THAT DIDN'T MATTER."

JUD NEGLECTS TO MENTION THAT IT TOOK HIM WELL OVER 15 MINUTES TO FREE HIMSELF.

DOGKED

Finally, they're here. Now I just need to let them in.

I'M FREE. NOW I JUST NEED TO SOUND THE ALARM!

WE'RE ABOARD!

AUDACITY

CURIOSITY

I HEAR THE HATCH ALERT AND THE GENERAL ALARM...

INQUIRY

WHAT'S THE PLAN WITH THE ALARMS, SCHLOCK?

I planned to open the door for you guys, and then finish my game.

WOOP WOOP WOOP WOOP

CELERTY

WE'VE BEEN BOARDED! FULL ALERT! LOCK AND LOAD!

IGNORE THE FORWARD HATCH ALERT! THEY'RE HEADED FOR THE AFT HATCH!

TEMERITY

APATHY

WOOP WOOP WOOP WOOP WOOP WOOP WOOP WOOP WOOP

I THINK THAT THE GENERAL ALARM HAS DISTRACTED THE GUARDS.

WE HAVE THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE!

SCHLOCK, YOU ARE A GENIUS! I'M PROMOTING YOU TO SERGEANT, ON THE SPOT!

Ummmm... I think the alarm might have been pulled by someone who saw me. I have no plan. This was an accident.

OKAY, THEN, YOU CAN BE A CORPORAL.

I guess I need to have loud, life-threatening accidents more often.

OUR HEROES SNEAK ABOARD THEIR OWN SHIP, TO THE TUNE OF THE GENERAL ALARM.

HURRY IT UP OUT THERE! WE'VE STILL GOT FIVE MORE TAXIS TO UNLOAD!

WOOP WOOP WOOP

I HAVE A PROBLEM WITH THIS PARTICULAR STRATEGY.

WHAT'S THAT?

WELL, WE'RE BOARDING A VESSEL, AND PREPARING TO AMBUSH AN UNKNOWN FORCE, WHILE ALARMS SOUND.

YES?

AND THE FIRST BOARDERS WERE THE COMMAND STAFF.

AND?

AND? AND?! WE ARE THE COMMAND STAFF. NOT THE GRUNTS!

SORRY, ADMIRAL.

BESIDES, I'M UNARMED.

WOOP WOOP WOOP