



They say you cracked up, Rhodes. Sealed yourself in a battleship's engine room.

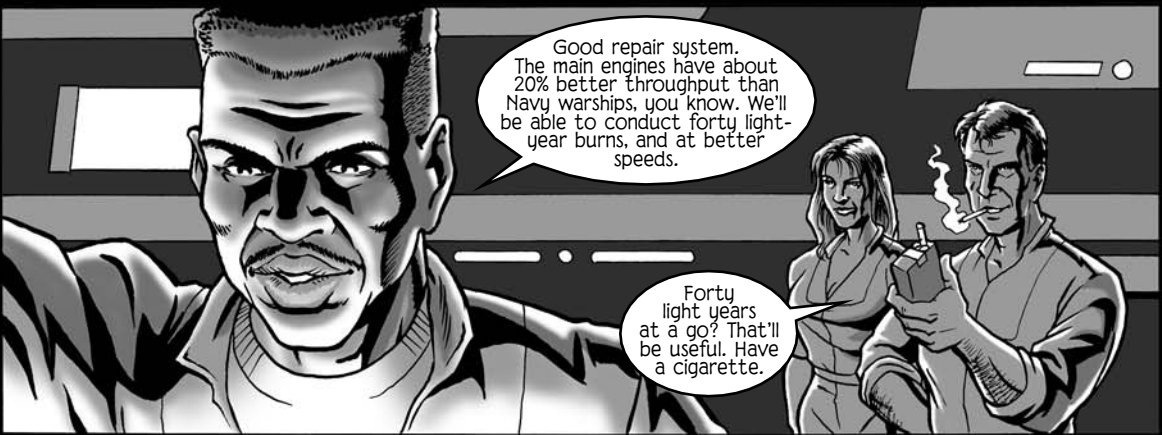
No. We were shot down on Lightning End. That's a Chasta world.

I brought the launch engine up to 33% efficiency from nothing, enough to get us back into orbit.
As you know, planetary launch is all engine power against weight penalties. But I'd cracked it. I could get us up.

But the Captain insisted on throwing half my people out on the ground to ensure we were light enough.
Abandoning a dozen people on a Chasta world for no damn reason.



So I sealed us in the engine room. Putting me in here was easier than explaining what really happened.



Good repair system. The main engines have about 20% better throughput than Navy warships, you know. We'll be able to conduct forty light-year burns, and at better speeds.

Forty light years at a go? That'll be useful. Have a cigarette.



Aliya Jones, gunner, last posting was on the *Reaver*... ?

Yeah. Can I take a look at this?

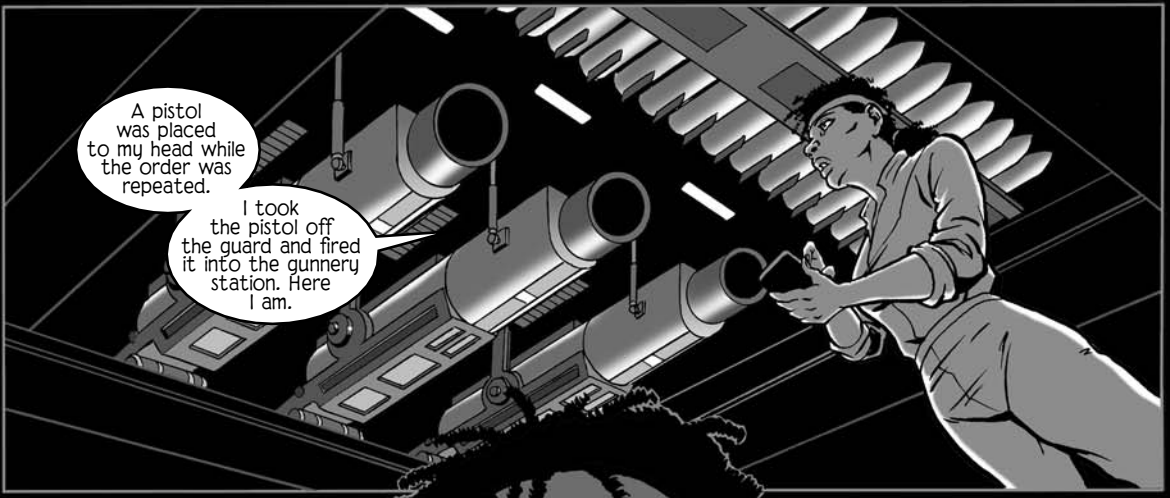
Want to tell us why you're in here?



The *Chasta* were airlifting their civilians off *Tau Ceti Four*. I was ordered to fire on them.

I refused, and explained why. I didn't join up to fire on civilians.

The order was given again. I refused, and locked off the gunnery station.

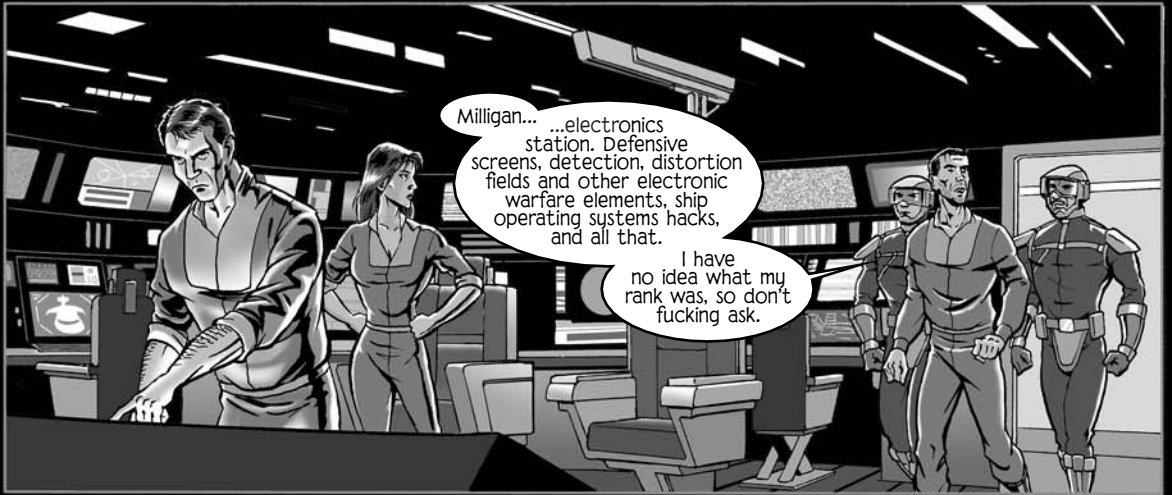


A pistol was placed to my head while the order was repeated.

I took the pistol off the guard and fired it into the gunnery station. Here I am.



Okay. I may have fired it into the guard too.



Milligan... ..electronics station. Defensive screens, detection, distortion fields and other electronic warfare elements, ship operating systems hacks, and all that.

I have no idea what my rank was, so don't fucking ask.



Milligan? You practically **invented** e-station tactics. Why are you in here?

I was e-station on the *Splendid*. Fired on by a Chasta frigate off Sirius Four.



I ran the distortion field to kill their targeting systems, and then scanned the boat.

It had human prisoners sealed in the back hold. So I hacked into the boat's systems, got into their hatch sequencing, and blew open every airlock door on it.



Only survivors were the humans in the sealed hold.

Unbelievable. I had no idea you could even **do** that. You just opened the doors...

...and all the air sucked out, yes. But the gunner was an admiral's son, and I took away his chance to fire on a vessel and get a medal. Here I am.



That's fucked up.





Okay. We've got an engineer who locks himself in the engine room on bad days. We've got a gunner who won't fire her guns unless she wants to.

Probably the most brilliant man in the Navy, can't operate e-station unless he's all fucked up on drugs. And a pilot who humps procedure books at night.

We're doomed. But we got a nice boat.



The General wants to know if you need anything else, Sir.

Get rid of the uniforms. Fabricate us something basic black, unisex, no embroidery or bullshit. If we're the Viet Cong, then we want our black pajamas.

And bring beer.

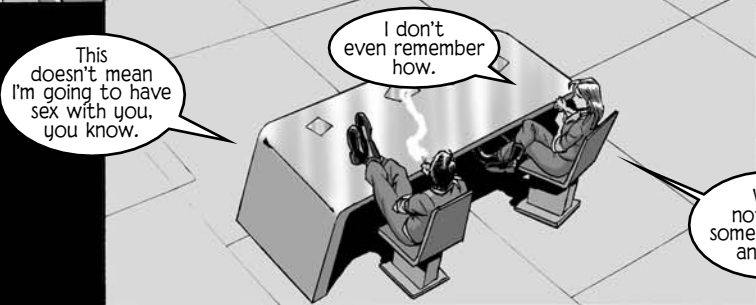


What?

Oh, come on. Why not? Tonight we can have a drink, tomorrow we're going to get killed by her own crew.



Well, shit. When you put it like that.



This doesn't mean I'm going to have sex with you, you know.

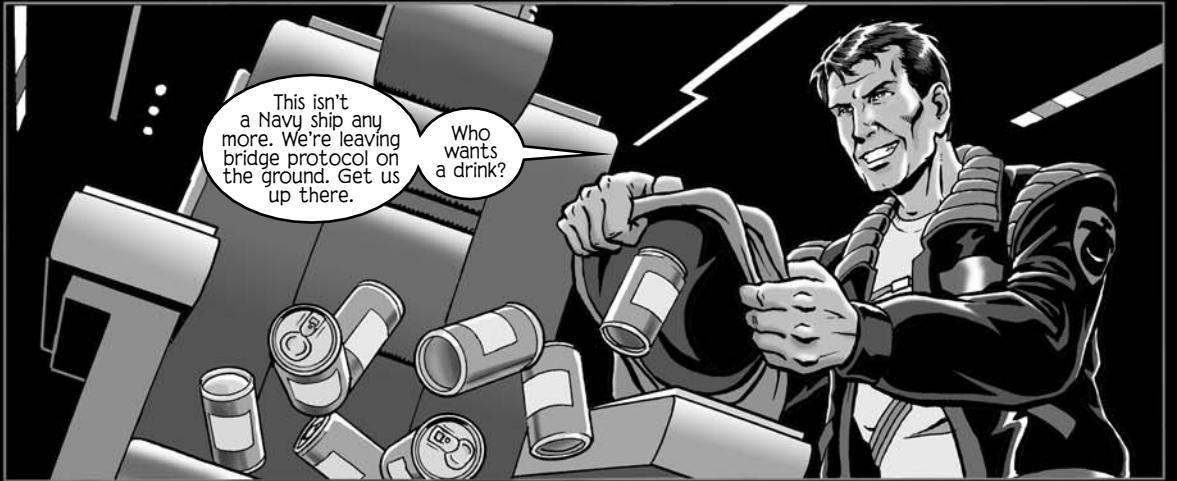
I don't even remember how.

Well, not with someone else, anyway.



Ready to go.

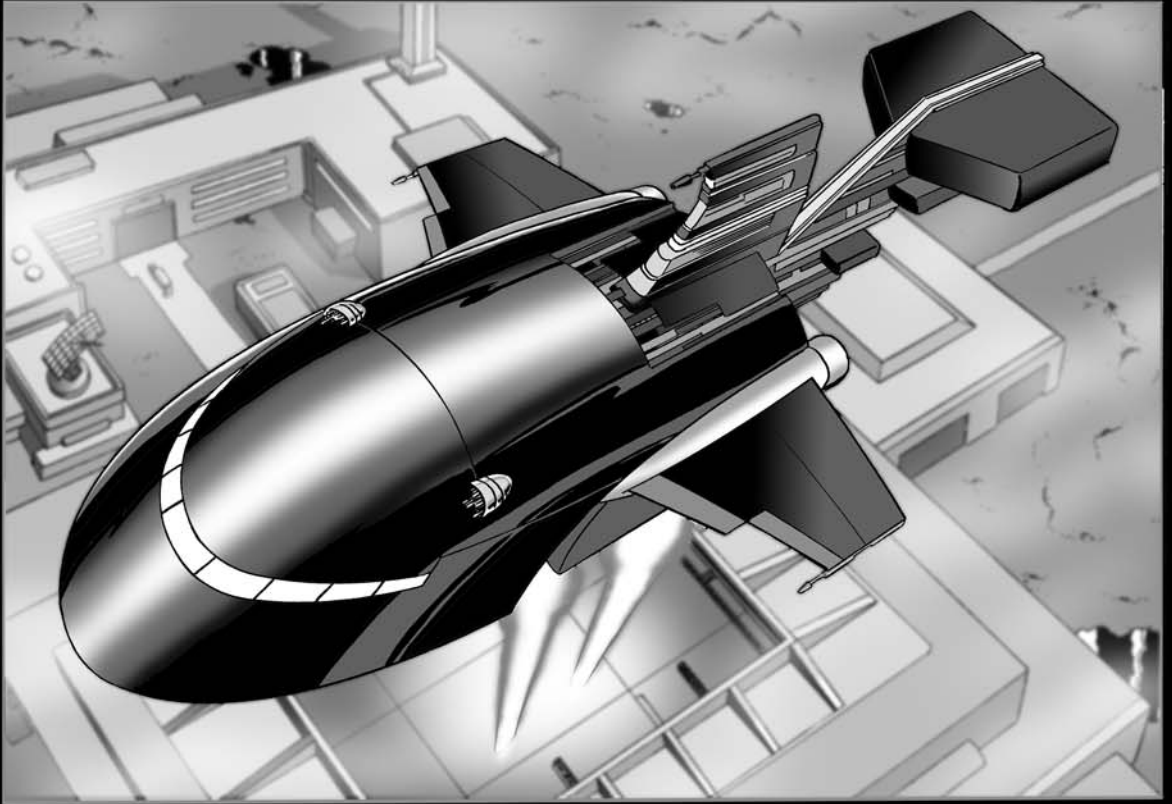
Go for launch, Captain.



This isn't a Navy ship any more. We're leaving bridge protocol on the ground. Get us up there.

Who wants a drink?









I'm going to end up shooting you, aren't I?

Main drives start working from fifty thousand miles outside a gravity field.

So take her to fifty, and then prep for a short burn into the Jupiter system, clear the dust out of the engines...



You think?

Yeah. Spend a day using the orbital engines, knock the dust out of her, give Rhodes a baseline for engine performance.

Then we'll push free and light main engines, let Harwood get a feel for her in full flight before we head out of the solar system.



Still want to head to Proxima Centauri?

Don't see why not. Two planets there worth hiding on, and Proxima's all quiet now.

Course laid in, Captain. Awaiting your word.



Christ... fucking go on then, son. Do I look like I've got all bleedin' day? Twat.



Main engine start.

