

Part I of *Alpha*, an Online Comic Strip
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Alpha is a creation of my college years, taking inspiration from webcomics and videogames of the day, and getting a little guidance from Neil Gaiman's comic notes. Below are the first 100 strips. I have spare files detailing the remaining plot.

It is largely an exercise in character design. The characters all have names based on the international communications alphabet. That being: Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo, Foxtrot, Golf, Hotel, India, Juliet, Kilo, Lima, Mike, November, Oscar, Papa, Québec, Romeo, Sierra, Tango, Uniform, Victor, Whiskey, X-ray, Yankee and Zulu. (Yes, one is named Golf. He's the villain.) No character exists without a name, meaning there are no minor characters. An exception: "space amoeba" and "space crystal" monsters are compulsory in science fiction, and so these creatures are waiting in part II or later. You will see the "stick figure" monsters below, which are a pretty lame gag to start, but I already said this came from college.

The strips start off as four panels, so those entries are in four paragraphs with a little opening commentary. Each character gets a large intro "tech spec" page with several captions.

In addition, it is filled with unapologetic shorthand and references, since this file was written for myself. To ready it for any production, it would be reformatted to match whatever the artist needed.

Strip 1: Alpha's tech specs. Alpha is vaguely Megaman-like, perhaps due to having an arm cannon instead of his right hand (whatever it is, it fires bullets: see strip 21). He's very excitable and just a bit cheesy. Captions are on his head, arm cannon, general totality, and feet. (That just about covers it, huh?) Silly captions as follows (the words "head" and "arm cannon" and so on are not typed out):

Head--" 'Neatly-groomed hero' look permits impressing of extras at 20 paces."

Arm cannon--"Ultra-Destructo (TM) gun technology allows for rampant chaos and should not be allowed in the wrong hands. Hence, it's in the 'right hand.' "

General totality--"Patented graphite-to-scanner technology allows high-rez viewing of bad attitudes and corny sight gags."

Feet--"Triple-Z leg warmers are trendy, permit running very fast."

There might be a mini-animation cascading down one side of the strip showing Alpha, his gun trained on some target, doing a dramatic backflip. Centered at the bottom of the entire comic is one more picture of Alpha in a dramatic pose. Alpha--"Let's rock and roll!"

Strip 2: Yes, it's a pitiful opening gag. This one is four panels.

Alpha runs down a corridor that is very sparsely drawn. In fact, it's just one or two lines. The background style for all these panels is incredibly brief. Alpha--"Hey Bravo! Charlie! Time to get this show on the road!"

Still running, but looking around him. Alpha--"Huh? What's up with the background?"

Alpha is confronted by a squadron of stick figures and recoils in shock. Two of the stick figures are closer than the rest of the crowd. Alpha--"Bravo?! Charlie?! You're stick figures!"

Alpha is smacking himself on the forehead. Bravo (the one who's closer to Alpha)-- "Give us some slack, will you?" Charlie-- "Yeah, we haven't had our tech specs yet!"

Strip 3: Bravo and Charlie's tech specs. Bravo is skinnier than Alpha and has a "Swiss Army vest." That is, he has guns/rods/strange devices hanging off of him. They needn't all be drawn at once. Charlie is absolutely loopy and has sticky-out hair. He's stringy and freaky and has a tendency to use explosives (his pockets bulge and he has grenades across his chest). We like Charlie. Captions are on Bravo's Swiss Army vest, Bravo's feet, Charlie's head, and Charlie's explosives. Captions:

Bravo's Swiss Army vest-- "Natural packrat inclinations allow for plotline-saving with a minimum of wear and tear."

Bravo's feet-- "Wild Celtic heritage demands that his feet not stay still, but instead beat to the rhythm of his soul."

Charlie's head-- "Geometry-intensive hairstyle lends itself to comedic pixelation, corny sight gags."

Charlie's explosives-- "Charlie likes blowing things up."

Interspersed across the page may be miniature pictures of Bravo and Charlie (separately) smiling, doing dramatic poses, whatever. Centered at the bottom are Bravo and Charlie together, with a folded-armed Bravo looking smug and a wild Charlie standing with his arms and legs splayed out. Bravo-- "Are we bad?" Charlie-- "KEEYAAAA!"

Strip 4: And everything is magically better . . . Back to the four-panel comic style.

From stage right to stage left: Alpha in a victory pose, Bravo looking over his shoulder at the background (there actually is one, complete with a high-tech spaceship-style doorway stage left), Charlie in a happy pose. Alpha-- "We're in business!" Bravo-- "Backgrounds. Nice!" Charlie-- "Woohoo! Time for some chow!"

Alpha looks at them blankly. Bravo and Charlie are tossing comments over their shoulder as they enter the door. Alpha-- "Huh? What are you doing?" Bravo-- "What does it look like we're doing?" Charlie-- "Snack break!"

The camera has moved sideways to center in on Alpha a little more. Bravo and Charlie are gone. We suddenly see that there's a horde of stick people behind Alpha. He doesn't see them. Alpha-- "Wait! We just started the comic! You can't just--"

Same shot, but Alpha is now looking wide-eyed into space. Oh yeah, he knows what's behind him. Sound effect over Alpha's head-- "Spoing!"

Strip 5: I think we can guess what motivates Alpha.

Alpha is facing the stick people in fear. Alpha-- "Gah! What are you still doing here? Why didn't you change along with the backgrounds?"

Similar shot. Random stick person-- "We resist change, Alpha . . ." Another stick person-- "We haaaaaaate your comic . . ."

Alpha is holding his hands to his head in terror-stricken, um, terror. Another stick person-- "We will destroyyyyy your comic . . ." Another stick person-- "Abandon all hope, Alpha . . ." Sound effect over Alpha's head-- "Wubba wubba"

Alpha has snapped and is pointing his arm cannon at the stick people. Sound effect near Alpha-- "Snap!" Alpha-- "That's enough! I've gone through five strips and I haven't gotten to shoot anything yet! Time to fry!" Random stick person-- "Ooh, I'm scared . . ."

Strip 6: Beatings/jellyrolls. This is the first regular strip that can't conform to a four-square format. Dramatic is good. But it's important to avoid gore in any of these strips: blood must not become a target of humor, or else the audience won't be shocked when it turns up in a serious strip (see strip 18).

In a swath (curly or straight) across the page, Alpha is seen to be repeatedly blasting stick figures. His face is grim and purposeful. The stick figures don't really have much of a chance. Sound effects--"Kaboom! Blam blam! Squish! Presidential candidate!"

Alpha stands in an empty corridor that is marked with concentric blasts. Sound effect near Alpha--"Pant pant" Alpha--"I did it. I destroyed them all." Bravo (off-camera stage left)--"Incredible!"

The camera has moved sideways to make the door, as well as the returned Bravo and Charlie, visible again. Stage right to stage left: Alpha priding himself, Bravo holding out a jellyroll and looking at it with a smile, Charlie stuffing his face. Alpha--"Yes, I certainly am--" Bravo--"You need to try the jellyrolls! They're awesome!" Sound effect near Charlie--"Yum smack slurp"

Strip 7: Maybe it will be funny this time.

This shot should make visible a video monitor that is stage right of the three main characters. Alpha is verbally abusing Bravo and Charlie, who are just looking at him strangely and continuing to eat. The video monitor is crackling to life. Alpha--"What is wrong with--" Sound effect in the middle of the panel--"Crackle!" Delta (the person on the video monitor)--"Alpha!"

A stick figure is visible on the video monitor. All three present react in surprise. Delta--"Alpha, report to the bridge immediately!" Bravo--"Gah!" Alpha--"It's another stick figure!"

They're all still wide-eyed, but Alpha has the presence of mind to point his gun at the monitor. Like that would help. Delta--"What . . . ? It's me! Delta!" Alpha--"Why are you a stick figure??"

All fully-artistic persons smack their forehead. Delta--"I am? Dagnabit! Why haven't my tech specs been posted yet?!"

Strip 8: Delta's tech specs. Delta is the big, tough, boss-type character, which is appropriate because he's everybody's boss. Well, the good guys' boss, anyway. He some sort of commander of some sort of special task force (consisting of our dysfunctional main characters and their associates) and he got that position by being more ornery than everybody else. He doesn't carry any visible weapons. With his attitude, he probably doesn't need to. Captions are on his furrowed forehead, glowering eyes, gritted teeth, and everything else. (Are you starting to understand his attitude?) Captions:

Furrowed forehead--"Wrinkled forehead unpleasantly reminds viewers that this man can squish them into accordions."

Glowing eyes--"See-Into-Soul (TM) capability makes victims feel naked in public. While beset with Rottweilers. On fire."

Gritted teeth--"Intense chewing and gnashing alerts listeners to system overload. Just in case their being squished into accordions didn't give the clue."

Everything else--"Delicate coating of 'Don't-Mess-With-Me, I-Write-Your-Paycheck' reduces remaining miscreants to small piles of wiggling jelly. Also good for corny sight gags."

Scattered across the page may be slightly faded out photocopies of Delta's face glowering at the audience. He also stands centered at the bottom of the page, steam rising from him. Delta--"Stick one more caption on my face and I kill you."

Strip 9: Well, you rarely need more logic than this in action games.

Alpha is dashing onto the bridge, where Delta is. There's no need to draw other crew members (see strip 65). Alpha--"You needed me, Delta?"

They're just standing there. Delta--"Yes. I have a task briefing for you. There's a situation: we've been invaded by an army of dangerous stick figures, intent on our destruction!"

Alpha's brow is wrinkling. Alpha--"Huh? I just blasted them all." Delta--"Yes, um . . . there's more of them. They were just waiting or something."

They're both getting frantic, Alpha with confusion, Delta with anger. Alpha--"And how can we even be 'invaded'?! We're on a spaceship!" Delta--"It doesn't have to make sense, just go with it!"

Strip 10: Real enemies don't wait while you're loading the next level.

Alpha's holding his hands to his head. Alpha--"Okay, okay: I'll go and nuke some more randomly-generated stick people."

Alpha is looking up in surprise. Delta's pretty much unchanged. Delta--"Not so fast, shorty. You're going to work with Bravo and Charlie on this. Once I'm done shouting orders here, find and drag them along."

Alpha and Delta are looking at each other blankly. Alpha--"But . . . but I just *left* them a moment ago when you told me to come to the bridge. They're all back where I found those stick figures." Delta--"Um . . ."

The scene cuts to Bravo and Charlie, in their corridor, surrounded by stick people. Bravo and Charlie look panicky. Bravo--"Gah!" Charlie--"I'm never eating in that mess hall again!"

Strip 11: A look into the thoughts of Alpha. Another comic that can't fit into four squares. I hope to continue this trend for quite a while.

Alpha is running down corridors, a grim and concentrated look on his face. As he runs, he thinks things from the following monologue--"I can't believe this. Here I am, dragged from my friends' side just long enough to get them embroiled in the rampant destruction and mayhem that I *could have* been enjoying myself. Do I get to face down the invasion of the evil hordes? No, I'm yanked around and finally *ordered* back to save my friends from the evil hordes. I don't even understand how all these stick figures could get on our ship. Delta had better have a good explanation for this . . ." At about this time and proceeding 'til the end of the strip, the phrase "doooooom . . ." starts cropping up all over the page. More monologue--"And what's up with these freaky noises? Delta didn't say anything about freaky noises. They sound like those dumb stick figures or something."

The camera cuts to a shot of various stick figures clustered around a big, badly-drawn gun. They are pointing the gun offstage left, or wherever Alpha will appear in a moment. Text on gun--"Acme Vaporization Gun" Random stick figure--"Doooooom . . ." Alpha (off-camera)--"Hey, maybe there's a connection . . ."

Strip 12: Simplify, simplify.

Alpha has appeared in front of the gun and is both surprised and terrified. The stick figures are charging up the gun to fire it. Sound effect near gun--"Wum wum wum" Random stick figure--"Now you will die, Alpha!" Alpha--"Panicky noises!"

Alpha closes his eyes and ducks in terror, but the gun suddenly explodes, killing all the stick people. Big sound effect covering most of the panel--"BIG-KABOOM!"

Alpha all alone, probably in a very small panel. His eyes are open again but he hasn't dared to stand up. Alpha--"Huh?"

Suddenly Bravo and Charlie are visible. Alpha is jumping for joy, Bravo is looking cool and Charlie is looking happy for having blown something up. Bravo--"Couldn't let you have all the fun!" Charlie--"Explosives make everything simpler . . . "

Strip 13: It's hard to be original.

Our three Noble Heroes are standing in the same newly-charred corridor, conferring. Alpha at the least is very happy. Alpha--"You're all right!" Charlie--"Of course we're all right. There's nothing a few grenades can't fix."

Alpha looks mildly scornful, while Charlie is excited. Bravo--"Why don't we split up?" Charlie--"Yeah, we can do more damage that way!" Alpha--"Oh, come on. Enough with the *Ghostbusters* reference."

Alpha points his gun dramatically and his friends jump in excited agreement. Alpha--"How about . . . we just nuke things 'til they glow!" Bravo and Charlie--"Yeah!!"

Strip 14: Crawling around in air ducts.

Bravo is helping boost Charlie up to a grating in the ceiling. Alpha is not in the shot. Bravo--"Oof! You're heavy!" Charlie--"Almost there . . . "

Charlie has pushed aside the grating and is trying to climb up. Alpha is poking his head in stage left. Charlie--"Got it!" Bravo--"Whew." Alpha--"Um, guys?"

Bravo dusts himself off while Charlie looks down from the air duct. Charlie--"Yeah?" Alpha--"Um, we don't have to go crawling around in air ducts. There are bad guys right over here."

Bravo stares blankly at the other two. Alpha smacks himself in the forehead. Charlie--"But, but, I *like* crawling around in air ducts . . . " Alpha--"Get down from there, stupid."

Strip 15: And that's why we like Bravo.

Background: Charlie (on the ground now) complaining to Alpha (with folded arms). There is no text for their argument. Foreground: Bravo looking bored. Bravo--"Hmph."

Now Alpha is complaining to Charlie, again with no text. Bravo is fiddling around with the contents of his jacket. Sound effect near jacket--"Rustle" Bravo--"Now where did I put that auto pistol . . . "

Alpha and Charlie are violently gesturing towards each other, still with no stuff for the audience to read. Bravo has pulled out a door remote and is staring at it with one eyebrow raised. Bravo--"My door remote? Why was I carrying this thing around?"

The camera has panned over to one side, removing Alpha and Charlie from the shot, but revealing a doorway through which a stick figure is walking, zombie-like. Stick figure--" . . . Die, Bravo . . . "

Bravo clicks the door remote towards the stick figure. The door snaps shut, neatly smashing the stick figure down off of the screen. Sound effect on door--"Splat!" And that's all.

Strip 16: Logic? What?

Some form of large, dynamic display of the three main characters in fighting poses versus various stick people that they're slaughtering. Alpha has his gun out, Bravo is pointing two auto pistols gunslinger style, Charlie has a big grin and is covering his ears as something explodes nearby. Caption at top--"And so, our heroes cleansed the ship of the stick figure menace!" A falling stick figure at the bottom of the display--"We will destroy you, Alpha! Argh!"

From stage right to stage left: a smiling Bravo, a questioning Alpha, a distracted Charlie who is looking at a crackling video monitor stage left. Bravo--"We win! Excellent!" Alpha--"Yeah, but why did they all seem to know our names?" Sound effect covering stage left--"Crackle!"

Alpha and Bravo look over at the display in surprise and Delta's face appears on it. Delta--"Alpha! Bravo! Charlie! I've just received an intelligence report! After the stick figures were beamed onboard from their ship--"

From stage right to stage left: Bravo holds his hands out in a "stop right there" gesture, Alpha looks tired and sarcastic, Charlie just looks tired, Delta's image is fuming. Bravo--"Whoa whoa whoa! Since when was there an 'enemy ship'?" Alpha--"Yeah! When did *you* start using logic?" Delta--" . . . "

Strip 17: So they're biased.

Same shot. Bravo, Alpha and Charlie are paying attention to Delta. Delta--"Okay, just listen up, you ingrates. We were able to detect the enemy ship before it escaped and we will be sending you after it in a pursuit craft. Report to Echo and Foxtrot in the docking bay!"

The members of the Dynamic Trio exhibit identical looks of joy. Delta looks stunned. All three--"Echo? Sweet!"

Equally, they now look judgmental and give simultaneous thumbs-down signs. Delta glowers at them. All three--"Foxtrot? Boo."

Strip 18: Echo and Foxtrot's tech specs. Echo is our first female character and is a medic with a cybernetic eye (the right eye). Her hair doesn't do the sticky-out stuff, but is just long. Foxtrot is a rocketjock straight out of Buck Rogers and wears shades, a jumpsuit and an auto pistol stylishly holstered at his left hip. He is very proud of himself. Aren't we lucky. Captions are on Echo's eye, Echo's medical equipment (a Star Trek-style hypospray in her hand), Foxtrot's shades, and Foxtrot's jumpsuit. Captions:

Echo's eye--"Super-technobabble visual capacity allows for computer precision in diagnoses, withering glares."

Echo's medical equipment--"Personal Laser-Optical Technology device saves lives for you, So You Don't Have To Give A Hoot (TM)!"

Foxtrot's shades--"We have no evidence that Foxtrot has eyes."

Foxtrot's jumpsuit--"Aerodynamic jumpsuit deflects winds in excess of 30 kilometers per hour, attracts stares, corny sight gags."

Random images scattered across the page may include Echo looking at a high-tech patient's chart in her hand, Echo looking angrily at a broken P.L.O.T. device that's giving off sparks, Foxtrot smoothing back his hair as if he were cool and Foxtrot pointing his gun nonchalantly offstage. Centered at the bottom is Echo doing an angry, full-body "why me??"

gesture next to Foxtrot, who's just looking self-confident. Echo--"Why do I always get stuck with a narcissist?!" Foxtrot--"You saying I'm *not* all that?" And yes, yes she is.

[Notes. Much later, when Charlie dies, Echo gets a character revision to be the explosives-user (see strips 27 and 69). Yes, this freaks everyone out.]

Strip 19: All-natural, caffeinated goodness.

The trio is shown running into a docking bay from stage left, Alpha in the lead. (They don't all have to be visible if there isn't room.) Echo and Foxtrot look up from whatever they were doing. Alpha--"We're here! Now let's blast some bad guys!"

The trio has stopped running in front of Echo and Foxtrot. Foxtrot stands closer than Echo, since he talks first. He also has an obnoxious grin. Foxtrot--"Slow down there, tigers. Delta told me to brief you before you go." Echo--" . . . And he told me to give you caffeine injections to make sure you pay attention."

Alpha, Bravo and Charlie are doing their respective victory dances. Foxtrot and Echo are not amused. Alpha, Bravo and Charlie--"Caf-FEINE!!!"

Strip 20: Don't you wish you could do this?

Background: Bravo and Charlie are listening, bored, to Foxtrot. Foreground: Alpha is sticking his arm out in eager anticipation (left arm of course), while Echo fiddles with her P.L.O.T. device (she's probably one of those people who sticks out her tongue when she concentrates). Foxtrot--"The stick figures were a strike team sent specifically to target our defenders and blah blah . . . "

Background: similar, but perhaps partially obscured. Foreground: Alpha practically vibrates as Echo reaches for his arm. Foxtrot--"Our assailant obviously knows who we are so we need to assume blah blah . . . "

An image of Alpha explosively reacting to the caffeine injection, his gun firing wildly. The dynamic image obscures those in the background, but Echo looks calm. Sound effect on P.L.O.T. device--"click" Alpha--"Wooohoooooo!" Sound effect on gun--"Blam blam blam!"

Background: Bravo and Charlie are staring wide-eyed at where Foxtrot had been standing. Foreground: Alpha is relaxing in bliss, Echo is staring back at wherever Bravo and Charlie are also staring. Alpha--"Oh, yeah." Echo--"You just blasted Foxtrot."

Strip 21: Dangit!

Foxtrot lies in a pile of metal rubble, unfortunately alive. Foxtrot--"Whew! Good thing that I'm immune to death due to being plot-important."

Everyone (Echo, Alpha, Bravo and Charlie) is seen now, staring at Foxtrot. Foxtrot gets up and shakes bullets out of his hair. Foxtrot--"That and the fact that my hair gel stops bullets."

The same everyone (including Echo) screams in frustration, while Foxtrot stares at them. Echo, Alpha, Bravo and Charlie--"*Dangit!*"

Strip 22: Introducing the Beat.

Some shot that shows Foxtrot pointing to his ship down in the docking bay. No one else need be visible. Foxtrot--"So, time to get down with the Beat?" Someone off-camera--"?" Someone else off-camera--"What?"

We can now see Foxtrot's pursuit vessel better and, possibly, nothing else. It needs to look cool. Text on pursuit vessel--"Beat" Foxtrot (most likely off-camera)--"That's my ship; the Beat."

Background: Foxtrot, Charlie and Alpha are walking towards the Beat. Foreground: Echo has stopped Bravo from following them and is holding out a P.L.O.T. device. Charlie (small)--"Cool!" Echo--"Hey Bravo, hang on a minute." Bravo--"Yeah?"

Echo drops the device into Bravo's hand. Bravo looks at it in interest. Echo--"You might want to take my Personal Laser-Optical Technology device with you; it could come in handy." Bravo--"How?"

Echo explains. Bravo is still staring at the device. Echo--"Well, first, you could use it to give people more caffeine injections. And second--"

Echo screams at a startled Bravo. Echo--"It's a P.L.O.T. device!! Get used to it!!"

Strip 23: Time to fly!

View from inside the Beat, looking back from the viewscreen at the front of the craft. This is a standard view that will be used several times. There are four seats: two at the front and two at the sides. People get on the ship from the rear. Foxtrot is in the foreground, settling coolly into the stage right front seat. Alpha and Charlie are approaching the side seats with smiles on their faces. Bravo is dashing up towards the rear. Foxtrot--"All you babies strap in; it's time to fly!" Bravo--"Wait for me!"

View from outside the Beat. Bravo's feet are visible as he dives in the closing exit ramp. Echo can be seen with her back to us, one hand on hip. Voice from inside the Beat--"Get in, you idiot!" Bravo--"Aieee!"

Same view, but the Beat is rumbling into motion. Clouds of dust may be being kicked up. Echo hasn't moved. Voice from inside the Beat (presumably Foxtrot's)--"We are smokin'!" Sound effects on the Beat--"Clank! Rumble rumble!"

Same view, but the Beat has left. There should be a visible trail left behind. Sound effect on trail--"Voooooosh!"

Same view. The dust is settling down. Echo still hasn't moved. Echo--"Finally. Some peace and quiet."

[Notes. Sometime in the distant future, there'll be a "song cue" strip wherein people say "turn the Beat around, love to hear the percussion, turn it upside down, love to hear the percussion (optionally: 'love to hear it' is the rest of refrain)." The person who accidentally started this will point a gun at whoever said the last lines and comment how "Gloria Estefan can walk home, as needed."]

Strip 24: Quiet is boring.

Echo walks on to the bridge, where Delta is watching a screen. (Don't actually show the viewscreen.) She looks tired. He looks irritated. Echo--"They've just left. Things are gonna be quiet now." Delta--"Yes, yes, I know. You can go back to med bay."

Echo has turned around, but isn't leaving. She just looks around. Delta's brow furrows more, as he concentrates on watching our Intrepid Heroes.

Echo just looks around more. Delta maybe presses a button, at most.

Echo looks back over her shoulder at Delta, who closes his eyes and shouts in anger. Echo--"Wanna play some checkers?" Delta--"Just go back to the blooming med bay!"

Strip 25: More reasons why we like Bravo.

Back on the Beat. Everybody's in the chair arrangement that was already described. From stage right to stage left: Alpha staring intently at a monitor in the starboard side chair, Foxtrot looking slick in his chair, Bravo fiddling around with buttons from the co-pilot's chair, Charlie sitting backwards in the port side chair. Charlie--"Wow! You've actually got a cool ship!" Foxtrot--"Yes. And don't you forget it."

Everyone's watching Foxtrot, with less than enthusiasm. Foxtrot's just full of himself. Foxtrot--"This ship is my baby. I feed her, I clean her . . . heck, I change her diapers!"

The lessened enthusiasm lessens. Bravo has pulled a stapler out of/off of his coat. Foxtrot--"You want me to blast asteroids? You got it. You want me to show light speed who's boss? You got it. You want me to fly circles around--"

Bravo staples Foxtrot's lips shut. Sound effect--"Staple!"

Strip 26: Wait for it . . .

We're looking at a viewscreen on the ship of the villain Golf. Yes, Golf. Get used to it. The viewscreen shows starry outer space, centered on the Beat (which might be careening about due to the events of the previous strip, but doesn't have to be). We can see nothing else, *certainly* not any complicated background (see strip 28). In fact, every panel will have this viewscreen, though the Beat may move. Golf (off-camera) will be reading from following monologue--"Heh heh heh . . . I have lured them into the open. Perfect. With their mothership lagging behind and Verona station light-minutes away, they will have no defense when I strike. There will be no unwanted interference in their capture. The time is right to reveal myself and let my victims know the true terror of my name. Now . . . where did I leave that copy of the international communications alphabet. Here it is. Hmm . . . Charlie . . . Delta . . . Echo . . . Foxtrot . . ." At this point, one of the panels is completely devoid of speech. He's realized what his name is going to be. Last panel's offstage monologue--"Oh, no, merciful universe, no."

Strip 27: Golf's tech specs. There is nothing funny about Golf except his name. He is one big, freaky, dangerous bad guy. Golf is going to be the main villain for quite some time, until we get Uniform and Zulu, and as such needs to look good enough to hold down a plot. He has an extra set of arms that is just as strong as his normal set. He doesn't wear a cloak and probably doesn't carry around much in the way of non-concealed weaponry. He is tough and intelligent and is so very angry about his name being Golf. Captions on the full-page drawing emphasize his head, arms, general totality, and feet. (Does this remind you of Alpha?) Captions:

Head--"All-natural brilliance allows for high-success villainous schemes"

Arms--"Symbiotic Transfer and Anatomic Recombination provides designer anatomy for your destruction needs, corny sight gags if you're lucky."

General totality--"Frightening silhouette permits withering of henchmen at 20 paces."

Feet--"Kiss here if you want to keep your face."

Descending through the background should be a mini-animation showing Golf, in fury, thrusting his fists out wide. Centered at the bottom is him in his final pose, screaming in anger. Golf--"Someone will die!!!"

[Notes. The deal with his wanting to capture the main characters has to do with the S.T.A.R. machine that gave him his extra arms. You see, he's human: his extra arms are stolen from a previous victim. He wants to capture Alpha for his arm cannon, which would replace one of his current extra arms. Yes, this strip will get serious at some points. He will also want

Oscar's bio-robotic legs. As a joke, though, the feature that he wants from Charlie is Charlie's geometry-intensive hairstyle. He never gets it. Charlie dies first and Echo adopts the hairstyle when she takes over the explosives role (see strips 18 and 69). Unfortunately, Juliet and Romeo get stuck in the S.T.A.R. machine eventually, in one of the most messed up character revisions ever seen (see strip 39).]

Strip 28: If I keep telling this joke, you might laugh eventually . . .

Golf stands to one side of his viewscreen, raging. The background must be very simple, just one or two lines (see strip 2). Golf--"Golf?! GOLF?! Of all the places to enter the comic, how could I get stuck at GOLF!?!"

Golf is still raging, but he's directing an order offstage left. Golf--"I could have been Zulu, or Victor, or, or anything! Grrr . . ." Golf (another speech bubble)--"HOTEL! INDIA!" Two simultaneous voices off-camera stage left--"Sir!"

The camera has moved sideways to reveal more of the minimalist background, as well as two stick figures representing Hotel and India. Golf is surprised. Golf--"How?! . . . What's wrong with the background? And why are you two stick figures? Hasn't the tech spec--"

Golf smacks himself in the forehead with one of his hands. Maybe two. And that's all.

Strip 29: Hotel and India's tech specs. Hotel and India are Golf's immediate underlings. Hotel is the average tough grunt, but he's got a thing for long rifles that makes him a little cooler. India is bald (she's also our second female character). Together they're just Golf's primary agents and don't stumble over each other any more than usual. They do tend to get cheeky with Golf and that leads to some ugly situations. Captions are on Hotel's rifle, Hotel's dramatic hands-on-hips posture, India's lack of hair, and India's boot daggers (that is, daggers tucked in the tops of her boots). Captions:

Hotel's rifle--"Mark Iota Shell Spewer rifle has two modes: dramatically incapable of hitting a main character, devastatingly capable of hitting a plot point."

Hotel's posture--"Ego."

India's lack of hair--"Chrome dome allows for aerodynamics, laser reflection, easy job for the artist, corny sight gags."

India's boot daggers--"Concealed daggers permit efficient disemboweling, lots of fun with metal detectors and magnets."

Background images would involve Hotel and India, separately, doing various combat stances: Hotel firing in multiple directions, India dramatically pitching daggers sideways. Possibly India shaving her head with a dagger. Centered at the bottom would be the two of them back in a similar pose to the large one on the page, only with more of a "can-do" attitude. Hotel--"Who's the toughest henchman in the forces of evil?" India--"That would be me."

Strip 30: Never work with babies, puppets, animals or . . .

Golf's ship should have backgrounds now. From stage right to stage left: Golf giving orders, Hotel standing at attention, India inspecting one of her daggers. Golf--"Enough of this nonsense. The window to catch my prey is narrowing."

From stage right to stage left: Golf points commandingly at his underlings, Hotel stands in stern agreement, India smiles and makes a fist in grim agreement. Golf--"Organize strike teams from our stick figure army and launch them towards the pursuit vessel!" Hotel and India--"Yes, sir!"

Golf has turned around with a smile on his face and his underlings have departed. Golf-- ". . . " Golf (another speech bubble)--"My power will grow even more. I will be able to topple the greatest adversaries in the galaxy. And the instruments of my plan are so simple. How could it possibly go wrong?!"

The camera switches to a shot of Hotel and India standing in front of a horde of stick figures. Hotel is looking worried and is working on an electronic notepad. India is holding her hands to her head in bewilderment. Hotel--"Okay, let's have stick figures A1 through Q12 in one group . . . I mean 12 through 20 . . . uh, you are numbered, right?" Random stick figure--"Doom . . . " Another random stick figure--"Doom . . . ?" This strip's title comes from theater advice that, apparently, Jim Henson was given a long time ago. It's a good thing for the rest of us that he ignored it.

Strip 31: It's like the Oort cloud, only freakier.

Golf's face appears on a video monitor near Hotel and India, who are snapping to a startled attention. No stick figures are present. Sound effect near monitor--"Crackle!" Golf--"Hotel! India! Have you beamed the strike teams towards the pursuit vessel?" Hotel--"Beamed, sir?" India--"You said to launch them, sir."

Similar poses, but Hotel and India look worried. Golf--"Yes, yes, whatever. How many launching craft have you used?" Hotel--"Craft? Um . . . " India--"We just sort of threw the stick figures out the airlocks."

Golf is gaping at his underlings. Hotel and India have desperate grins on their faces. Hotel--"They should be bumping into them about now!" India--"Yeah!"

Outer space shot of the Beat flying between clouds of stick figures. Foxtrot (inside the ship, of course)--"Whoa, um . . . y'all wanna look at this?" Bravo (likewise inside)--"Does Mr. Stapler have to have another talk with you?"

Strip 32: You see, they've been moving all this time.

Golf is furious at his underlings, who cower before the video monitor. (Wow, social commentary. "Oh, great and terrible monitor! Show us a sign!") Golf--"You just threw away *how* many stick figures?! How incompetent are you? Get yourselves down to the launching bay with a strike team and go after the pursuit craft!" Hotel--"Sir . . . "

Same shot, but an alarm is flashing at the top of the image. Sound effect on alarm--"Awooga!" Golf--"And what's with this proximity alarm? We're light-minutes away from Verona station!" India--"Sir . . . "

Same shot, but Golf has gotten dangerously calm. Sound effect on alarm--"Awooga!" Golf--" . . . We're no longer light-minutes away from Verona station, are we?" Hotel--"Sir."

The last panel is blank except for the sound effect "CRASH"

Strip 33: Nothing new here.

Just checking in with Delta, back at the bridge of the good guy mothership. He hasn't moved (see strip 24). Echo isn't present. Delta (small)--"A collision at Verona station? I'll need to look into that mutter mutter."

Same. Delta (small)--"Mutter what on Earth? Clouds of stick figures? Mutter."

Same. Delta (small)--"Mutter mutter."

Echo has shown up carrying a checkers set. Delta is shouting in anger. Echo--"I've got my checkers set . . . " Delta--"How many strips ago did I tell you to go back to med bay?!"

Strip 34: Gigantic explosions are good.

Time for a non-standard view of the interior of the Beat: this time the camera has moved ninety degrees so that the front of the vessel is stage left. From stage right to stage left: an angry Alpha standing, a bored Charlie sitting backwards, a just-standing-there Bravo lounging, an angry Foxtrot seated in his command chair and still facing the front of the ship. Alpha--"That's enough! We've been flying around for 10 strips now and nothing's happened! I can't stand it anymore!"

Everyone's looking at Foxtrot, who is talking angrily without taking his eyes off the viewscreen in front of him. Foxtrot--"Well, if you hadn't kept threatening to staple me again, I would've told you about the gigantic explosion at Verona station. I'm heading to dock there now."

Alpha, Charlie and Bravo are very happy. All three--"Gigantic explosion? Alright!"

Alpha, Charlie and Bravo lean together conspiratorially. Foxtrot's jaws clench in fear, or some other non-eye-widening expression of fear 'cause we can't see his eyes. Alpha--"We get there, *then* you staple him."

Strip 35: You lose more motherships that way.

The camera has rotated ninety degrees again and zoomed in so that we are looking at the viewscreen at the front of the Beat. Back-of-head views of Bravo and Foxtrot are visible stage right and left, respectively. On the viewscreen is a large circular space station (Verona) with wreckage jutting out on one side. The wreckage of Golf's ship must not be too big in comparison to Verona, or else there would be no explanation for the station's continued existence. Bravo--"Whoa . . ." Foxtrot--"That's the ship we've been trying to find, alright. I'm docking this baby on the other side of Verona, so you can avoid the rush."

Flip the camera 180 degrees and resume the standard shot of the Beat's interior. Everyone's settling down into "can-do" mode. Large sound effect--"Foom-Fshhhhhhhh!" Foxtrot--"Docking . . . complete! Time to unseal the exit . . ."

Same shot, but with Foxtrot tearing down the exit ramp as fast as he can, leaving the other three in surprise. Foxtrot--" . . . and get my lips out of stapling range!"

Same shot, but Alpha, Bravo and Charlie are nonverbally expressing their dismay at Foxtrot. Foxtrot (no longer visible)--"Whoa!" Sound effect from same general vicinity--"CRASH MARK II"

Strip 36: It's an invasion!

Background: Charlie, Bravo, and Alpha disembark from the Beat and head towards some corridor stage left, Alpha in the lead. Foreground: Foxtrot lies in wooden rubble, broken flowerpots, and flowers. He had run into a florist's stall called Rosemary (the rest of which is offstage right) while he was panicking and is unconscious. Charlie (small)--"Should we do anything about him?" Bravo (small)--"Nah. He went in head first, he should be okay."

Charlie, Bravo, and Alpha are running down the corridor, and now we're zoomed in on them. Bravo looks dismissive, Alpha looks surprised. Charlie--"You're talking about his hair gel, right?" Bravo--"Take it how you want . . ." Alpha--"Look!"

We're looking from behind Alpha down the corridor, where he's pointing. At the far end, stick figures are overturning shopping stalls and smashing windows. Alpha--"There's an invasion of stick figures!"

Back to the side view. Alpha has turned back to face his friends and is gesturing excitedly. They are all a bit surprised. Alpha--"They must be pouring off of their wrecked ship in endless waves of destruction, to be stopped only by fated heroes in a climactic battle of bullets and brawn!"

Same view. They have the same surprised looks on their faces, but are glancing at the camera.

Our Slightly Messed-Up Heroes dash down the corridor, joyous violence in their eyes. From stage right to stage left: Charlie holding up a grenade, Bravo holding up two auto pistols, Alpha thrusting his arm cannon in the air. All present--"Yeeeeehaaa!!!"

Strip 37: Big, scary people aren't fun.

Golf stands on an exit ramp from his wrecked ship, surrounded by chaos and destruction. (This view is from outside his ship, not inside.) He angrily points at Hotel and India, who look up from the dust clouds and toppled stands. Golf--"Hotel! India!" Hotel and India--"Sir!"

Now the view is from behind Golf, who is still speaking to Hotel and India. A large shadow is slowly creeping up on him and he should be able to see the caster of the shadow out of the corner of his eye. Golf--"Commandeer a new vessel! Get our vital equipment and personnel transferred immediately!"

Golf has turned to face the person casting the shadow and thus is effectively facing the camera. Hotel and India are looking at the "camera" with shock and fear. Golf is still in command and points offstage in whichever direction Hotel and India aren't standing. Golf--"And you! Get out there and start wiping the floor with any would-be heroes!" Kilo (the person off-camera)--"Urrgh . . ."

The shadow is gone. Golf looks offstage where Kilo went, a smile on his face. Hotel and India are still cowering. Golf--"Heh heh heh." India (small)--" . . . Why does he keep that freak around?" Hotel (small)--"Don't ask me!" (There must not be any identifiable characteristics of the shadows used in this strip. This is because, as everyone knows by now, people always show up as stick figures until their tech spec comic. With the shadows in this and strip 42 the audience's suspension of disbelief must not be threatened.)

Strip 38: Commercialism knows no bounds.

Foxtrot lies in the wooden rubble, broken flowerpots, and flowers where he had landed two strips ago. He nears consciousness. Foxtrot--"Ugh."

Foxtrot is given pause as he's trying to stand up. Juliet (off-camera stage right in the remnants of the florist's stall)--"You break them, you buy them, pal."

He can't believe what he's hearing. Foxtrot--"What, are you kidding me? This station is falling down around your ears and you're giving me *this*?!"

Same. Juliet (off-camera)--"I'm not giving you anything, moron. Pay up." Foxtrot--"Who are you??"

Strip 39: Juliet's tech specs. Juliet gets to suffer from my twisted imagination like everyone else. First, she looks "normal": her hair is only shoulder length, she has no cybernetics of any sort, etc. What she's got is greed. She has an armor-plated purse at her waist (right side) a la the videogame Renegade. Captions are on her hair, purse, flowers from the stall (in her left hand), and soles of her feet. Captions:

Hair--"Enough Supra-Clean Shampoo Gel to stun a horse: 250 credits."

Purse--"Armor-plated purse to give concussions to those who try to use her for corny sight gags: 400 credits."

Flowers--"Abuse of the delicate beauty of nature for commercialist gain: 10 credits."

Soles of her feet--"Sticky paste composed of those who can't think of anything funnier than a MasterCard commercial parody: um . . . "

Background images of her could be anything, just so long as she looks suitably greedy or angry. Two possibilities are her swinging her purse at something and her flipping a bunch of credits in the air (in this universe, they look like blank credit cards of varying shades). The flowers are not a critical part of her image. The centered-at-the-bottom picture, though, is of her sticking the flowers in the audience's face. Juliet--"Give me money or I'll destroy your soul."

[Notes. The length of her hair matches the extent of Romeo's beard as seen later. Eventually, Romeo and Juliet will accidentally get stuck in the S.T.A.R. machine and be fused together, back-to-back (see strip 27). At this time, Golf will be calling for his technician November, will spy the two of them before the audience does and will comment "Whoa, more like January." Juliet and Romeo (off-camera)--"What happened to me!?!". The centered-at-the-bottom image on their character revision strip will probably have them both shouting "Mommeeeeeey!!"]

Strip 40: Fear the purse.

Slight camera change. The Beat doesn't have to be in the background, because we're now focusing on Juliet (tapping her feet angrily) and Foxtrot (finally getting to his feet). Juliet still has her flowers. Foxtrot has his usual stupid self-assured grin. Foxtrot--"Hey! What's someone like you working solo at a rough time like this?"

Juliet's sarcasm is amazing. Foxtrot is trying to be immune to it. Juliet--"Oh, wow. I've never met a condescending rocketjock before." Foxtrot--"Easy, easy. I'm just saying you might want to close up shop until the bullets stop flying."

Juliet has definitely raised an eyebrow. Juliet--"I can take care of myself perfectly well." Foxtrot--" . . . And I'm sure a slick one like you has got no problem with blood, huh?"

Juliet puts down the flowers and sticks a thumb in the direction of offstage right. Foxtrot fishes around for money. Juliet--"You want to see the pile of corpses out back?" Foxtrot--"Right, I'll be paying for those flowers now."

Strip 41: I think I'm starting to like this duo . . .

Foxtrot drops a selection of different-shaded credits into Juliet's hand, but he doesn't look too happy about it. Juliet's just down to business as usual. The flowers are getting left behind because she, of course, doesn't really care about them. (She may bring them back, eventually.) Foxtrot--"There! Bleed me dry, why don't you." Juliet--"Finally."

Juliet stuffs the credits into her purse. Foxtrot gestures offstage left. Foxtrot--"Now if you don't mind, I'm going to clean out this roach hotel. There's some villains that need killin'."

Juliet looks at him calmly, but he seems to be far from calm. Juliet--"I'll help." Foxtrot--"What? What makes you think I need help?!"

Foxtrot looks thoughtful. (Ha! That'll never happen again.) Juliet--"You ran head first into my stall, lemming boy." Foxtrot--"Oh, yeah."

Strip 42: Backlit foreshadowing!

Juliet and Foxtrot walk down a corridor scarred with blast marks, Foxtrot with his pistol out. They scroll past various signs of destruction as they walk. Juliet--"I'm not doing this for free, you know." Foxtrot--"Wow, news flash."

Same. Juliet--"You *can* reimburse me, can't you?" Foxtrot--"Sure, right out of my hazard pay!"

Same, but a darkened alleyway is coming into the shot. Juliet--"You can drop this attitude anytime!" Foxtrot--"Same to you!"

The alleyway is neatly behind Juliet and Foxtrot. There is a hulking shape in it which should be interpretable as either a big stick figure or the eventual shape of Kilo, and it should *not* have visible eyes. As previously noted, his tech spec comic has yet to appear. Kilo--"Urrgh . . . " Juliet and Foxtrot--"And excuse yourself when you belch!"

Strip 43: But . . . but . . .

Stick figures lay waste to a marketplace somewhere on Verona station. They're overturning stalls, punching out windows and at least one of them is spray painting walls. We can't see Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie, but they're hiding somewhere in the background, waiting to spring. Mostly-complete spray painted message--"Down with post-Modernism" Sound effects--"Smash smash smash! Crunch! Vandalize! Tilt!" Alpha (wherever he is, small)--"Three . . . two . . . one . . . "

Bravo, Alpha, and Charlie leap into a clear circle in the middle of the panel. The stick figures stop whatever they're doing to watch. Main characters--"YAAAAA!!!"

Exactly the same shot, with the stick figures still staring and main characters still being dramatic and threatening.

The stick figures resume exactly where they had left off, not giving a care about the main characters. Bravo, Alpha, and Charlie just sort of stand there, stunned. Sound effects--"Smash smash smash! Crunch! Vandalize! Tilt!" Alpha--" . . . "

Strip 44: Don't provoke the stick people.

We have a close up on the aforementioned characters and a ninety degree rotation of the camera. From stage right to stage left: petulant Charlie, ticked-off Bravo, determined Alpha. The main body of stick figures is offstage left in this view. Wherever the trio had been hiding a moment ago is offstage right. Charlie--"I want to blast things!" Bravo--"I know! What's with these people?" Alpha--"Listen: we're just going to have to make them fight." Sound effects stage left (small)--"Smash. Thud."

They're in agreement, Alpha has unified them to a cause, they're ready to rock and roll! Woohoo! Get excited! Alpha--"Fighting words, people! Fighting words!" Sound effects stage left (small)--"Thmash. Sud."

They suddenly leap into fighting stances facing stage left. The camera has moved to reveal stick figures looking up from their violence. Main characters--"Your mothers wear combat boots!!!"

The stick figures set up a badly-drawn flamethrower on a tripod and, strangely, the fight goes out of our main characters. Text on side of flamethrower--"Acme Burning-Things Gun" Sound effect on tripod--"Clunk" Bravo (small)--" . . . and they look really good in them."

Strip 45: Hey, make the best of a situation.

Here we have a strange camera view: it's in the same location as the previous strip, but moved upwards so that we are mostly looking at the ceiling. There should be a sequence of gratings in the ceiling for ventilation, evenly spaced, with one slightly above dead center. Text and sound effects here, of course, occur towards the bottom of the panel. Bravo (off-camera)-- "Really, they do!" Alpha (off-camera)-- "Woah!" Sound effects-- "Rat-a-tat-tat! Fwoosh!"

Charlie is violently expelled from the fighting and shoots up to the ceiling, where he grabs hold of the grating above center. Charlie-- "Aieeee!" Alpha (off-camera and farther stage right)-- "Bad stick figures, bad!" Sound effects-- "Blam! Blam! Smash smash smash!"

Charlie looks at wherever Alpha and Bravo are, down and stage right somewhere. Alpha (still off-camera)-- "Retreat!" Sound effects-- "Rat-a-tat! Blam! Blammity-blam-blam!"

Now Charlie looks below him and a little stage left, wherever the flamethrower is set up. Sound effects-- "Blam! Fwoosh!"

Charlie gently drops a grenade down toward the flamethrower. Sound effect-- "FWOOSH!!"

Charlie gives the camera a big grin and a thumbs-up gesture. Sound effect-- "boom."

Strip 46: Darn bald people!

Bravo and Alpha tear like heck down some corridor, in the direction of stage right. Bravo-- "We might have lost them!" Alpha-- "Keep running!"

Bravo keeps running out of the picture, but Alpha pulls up short in front of a dagger that impacts the wall in front of his face. Sound effect on dagger-- "Thud-ud-ud" Alpha-- "Eep."

Alpha doesn't exactly move. He might move his eyes to look behind him a little. Alpha-- "There's somebody a lot nastier than a stick figure behind me, correct?" India (off-camera left)-- "Ooh, this one's smart."

Strip 47: Okay, maybe not so smart.

The camera has moved sideways to reveal India, calmly holding a dagger. Alpha has turned around to face her, but he looks somewhat confused. India-- "Great, so it's you hero-types. Looks like I'm going to be busy for a while."

Same general positions. India has raised an eyebrow. Alpha-- "Who are you? I don't remember any tech specs!" India-- "The name's India: I'm a henchman. Wow, you've missed a lot."

Alpha's perking up a bit, but India's starting to look frightened: she doesn't want people to make fun of her boss. Alpha-- "Hey, 'India' doesn't come after 'Foxtrot!' Was that your boss in there? Now, who's left in the alphabet . . ." India-- "Uh . . ."

Alpha stands laughing at India. She looks sarcastic and resigned. Alpha-- "Hotel! The big bad guy's name is Hotel!" India-- ". . . On the bright side, at least you're dumb."

Strip 48: Darn non-bald people!

Charlie's just hanging out on his grating. Woohoo. He thinks things from the following monologue-- "Nice view from up here. You can really appreciate what they did with this marketplace. I mean, before the rampant carnage. Though the rampant carnage is nice too: aesthetic blast marks. And I like those bullet holes. Oh . . . and that toppled pane of glass over there. Yeah. I do wonder where all the stick figures went, though. It's getting kinda boring around here. Of course, it is comfortable just hanging from this grating. Hey! Maybe I can shove this grating in and crawl around in air ducts! Let's see--"

The grating is blasted by a rifle shot and Charlie gives the camera a very cartoon-like frightened look. Sound effect on grating--"Bang!"

A few clouds of dust indicate the direction in which Charlie fell (that being down). Charlie (off-camera)--"Whoever you are, this had better be good." Hotel (off-camera and a bit stage left)--"It was all in the wrist."

Strip 49: It's just a bad place in the alphabet.

Charlie rubs his head as he gets up off of the scorched floor. Hotel rests nonchalantly on his rifle. Charlie--"Oog. Before I blow you up over and over again, who are you?" Hotel--"I really should get going, but I might as well tell. The name's Hotel."

Charlie stares at Hotel. Hotel is still smug.

Charlie explodes in laughter and points at Hotel, who angrily raises his rifle. Charlie--"HA HA HA HA HOO HOO HA HA HA!" Hotel--"Okay, say goodbye to that hairstyle."

Strip 50: And it starts to get ugly . . .

Bravo's running towards the camera, but looking back over his right shoulder. Stylistically, this might look somewhat like the third panel in strip 36, just flipped horizontally. And, for that matter, front to back. Bravo--"What?! When did I lose Alpha?!"

A change in camera angle. From stage right to stage left: Bravo screeching to a halt, Juliet staring in amazement, Foxtrot both staring in amazement and gibbering. (Foxtrot's gun is still out, if it matters.) They're staring stage left, of course, at a point a few feet above head height. Bravo--"Whoa! Foxtrot! Who's this new person?" Sound effect on Bravo's feet--"skid" Foxtrot (small)--"Gubba. Wooba. Flubba."

Bravo's stopped moving and is just looking at Foxtrot. Bravo--"And why are you gibbering incoherently?" Foxtrot (small)--"Zubba. Zibba. Wibba."

The camera changes to be looking at the threesome from Kilo's viewpoint, where he has been standing offstage left. Bravo now looks at him in open-eyed, slack-jawed amazement. Bravo--"AND WHO ARE YOU?!?" Foxtrot (small)--"Guh." Kilo (off-camera)--"Kilo . . . hit things!"

Strip 51: Kilo's tech specs. Kilo is a titan. Kilo is just big. Kilo is the big, threatening sort who would beat you into a pulp in a dark alley and that's why you voted for glow-in-the-dark pavement on the last referendum. To put it more accurately, this monstrosity is about twice as tall as anyone else and is covered with lots of metal plates. He's got a helmet too and some sort of brass knuckle/fingerless glove combination thing on his hands. I don't think he's got spikes, though. Captions are on his helmet, hands, and points at his shoulders, waist and ankles. (Ooh, he gets five captions! I'm breaking with tradition! How will I face myself in the morning.) Captions:

Helmet--"Ablative Z-42 armor plating is cutting-edge fashion, endorsed by blast doors everywhere."

Hands--"Natural, intense violent streak allows for general henchman work, bulldozer action, human origami and, yes, corny sight gags."

Point at his shoulders--"You must be this tall to even think of taking him on."

Point at his waist--"Unfortunately, you are this tall."

Point at his ankles--"And you will be this tall if you keep standing there."

Background images have Kilo violently pounding various things along with the occasional "I'm big and I'm raging" pose. Centered at the bottom is Kilo in a hulking, muscle-flexing, angry mood. Kilo--"Small squishy things go BAM!"

Strip 52: Getting swatted.

This is the camera view where we had previously watched Bravo, Juliet, and Foxtrot from the side. From stage right to stage left: Foxtrot flying horizontally offstage, Bravo staring in amazement, Juliet staring in amazement (a trend!), Kilo swatting the airspace where Foxtrot had been. Foxtrot--"Ackpth!" Sound effect where Foxtrot had been--"swat" Kilo--"Grr."

From stage right to stage left: Bravo (if he's even in the shot) flying diagonally up and offstage, Juliet ducking, Kilo making a massive backhand that barely misses Juliet and barely hits Bravo. Juliet is lucky that she wasn't hit and she looks like she knows it. Bravo--"Woah!" Sound effect where Bravo had been--"whack" Kilo--"Rowr."

Juliet dramatically leaps up and smacks Kilo in the face with her armored purse. Kilo is stunned. Juliet--"Eeeep!" Sound effect--"Ka-pow!"

Juliet stares at her handiwork with a look of mixed fear and amazement, possibly with a little bit of hope (good luck drawing all that). Kilo hasn't moved. Sound effect gradually shrinking, as an echo effect--"pow ow ow ow ow"

Juliet is taken aback. Kilo is giving her a thumbs-up of approval. Juliet--"!" Kilo--"Heh."

And now, Juliet follows the same track that Bravo did, sailing offstage from a tremendous punch. Juliet--"Waugh!" Sound effect where Juliet had been--"punch"

Strip 53: Where can I get that armor?

The camera angle is the same as the previous strip, but shifted sideways to follow the action. Bravo and Foxtrot are on the ground, any relevant guns lying nearby. Juliet is sailing by overhead, coming to a halt against a wall stage right. Bravo is just wide-eyed, but Foxtrot is starting to recover since he had been first out from the previous strip. Kilo isn't visible at this time. Juliet--"Aeioufff!" Sound effect--"Thud!"

The camera rotates. Background: Kilo charging towards the camera. Foreground: Foxtrot lying as he had been, but his hand is near his gun. No other wholly-visible characters. Kilo--"Squishy pounding!" Sound effect gradually increasing, since he's getting closer--"Bom bom bom bom bom!"

The camera rotates again. Now we have a close-up on Foxtrot as he fires frantically at Kilo. Sound effect--"Rat-a-tat-tat!"

Now we have a close-up on Kilo as the bullets deflect off of his helmet and armor. His eyes are a bit wide. Sound effect--"Ping! Ping! Ping!"

Back to the original shot. From stage right to stage left: Juliet propping herself up and looking unhappy, Bravo resuming a stunned stare, Foxtrot just refusing to believe this, Kilo laughing. Kilo--"Ha ha! Tickles!" Juliet--" . . . I'll just stick with blunt force trauma. It seems to work better."

Strip 54: And here we see the limitations of my style of comic strip.

Golf rages angrily, shouting out orders in various directions offstage. In the background there could be anything, but he's probably standing on the exit ramp to a new ship that he's commandeered. (The ship should be offstage left. Although it's not nearly as big as his ex-

mothership, it's much larger than the Beat.) Golf--"Get the last of those stick figures on board the new vessel! Pack up the art supplies! Go! Go!"

More shouting. Golf--"Forget about the mainframe; we'll integrate our setup later! Just get the last of our equipment in place! Let's move it!"

Now he's just angry. Golf--"Why don't I see people moving?!?"

The camera has zoomed out, revealing Golf to be perfectly alone in the docking bay with his new vessel. His shoulders are slumped. Golf--" . . . Sigh. What I would give for henchmen who didn't need tech specs." Golf (another speech bubble, small)--"Now I have to wait until I'm off-camera again."

Strip 55: Talk about a giveaway . . . It occurs to me that I don't really have a protocol for action sequences. I have plenty of ideas for what I think should happen in fight scenes, but I can't always know how they would look on paper. Therefore, any and all of my vague descriptions of non-plot related combat are open to interpretation.

We have the side-on view of the characters that were facing Kilo. From something vaguely like stage right to stage left: Juliet readying an attack, Bravo scuttling backwards (towards stage right), Foxtrot leaping madly out of the way of Kilo, Kilo violently smashing his fist into the ground. Foxtrot--"Don't kill me!" Sound effect--"Smash!" Kilo--"Roar!"

From the same vague stage right to stage left: Foxtrot clinging like Velcro to the wall, Bravo rustling around with the contents of his jacket, Juliet making a violent leaping/swinging attack with her purse, Kilo catching her purse harmlessly on his hand-protector thingies. Sound effects--"Swish! Parry!"

Dynamic, exciting close-up of Bravo as he discovers the P.L.O.T. device that he had somehow forgotten all this time. Bravo (possibly as a thought bubble)--"The P.L.O.T. device! I'd nearly forgotten it!"

Bravo looks up to discover that Kilo is holding Foxtrot (by the throat) in one hand and Juliet (by the purse) in the other. (Of course, she's too greedy to just let go of the purse.) Since he just grabbed Foxtrot, Kilo is looking at him instead of Juliet. Kilo--"Pound to pulp!"

Bravo lunges dramatically to inject Kilo with the P.L.O.T. device. Kilo widens his eyes and lowers his arms a little. Sound effect on P.L.O.T. device--"click"

Close-up on Kilo as he vibrates in the same pose as the previous panel. That's all.

Close-up on Kilo as he sits down heavily. Sound effect--"thud"

And now we see Juliet, Bravo and Foxtrot standing around the felled (seated, really) Kilo. They look stunned as well. Foxtrot--"What did you *do*, man?" Bravo--"I . . . I think I broke him!"

Strip 56: A new friend!

A strange panorama: body language is very important in this one. From stage right to stage left: Juliet checking her purse with displeasure, Bravo backing away from Kilo in fear, Kilo slowly raising his head again, Foxtrot going for his gun in defense. Juliet--"Finally! I better not have lost anything . . ." Bravo--"!" Kilo--"Uhh . . ." Foxtrot--"!"

Close-up of Kilo's face. He's groggy. Kilo--"Kilo . . ."

Close-up of Kilo's face. He's starting to perk up. Kilo--"Like . . ."

Another strange panorama. From stage right to stage left: Juliet being completely lost, Bravo practically dancing for joy, Kilo smiling like the caffeine-injected person that he is,

Foxtrot doing an "I'm incredibly cool and I win" pose. Kilo--"CAFFEINE!!" Juliet--" . . . ?"
Bravo--"Yes!" Foxtrot--"Sweet!"

Strip 57: . . . A bit overeager, though.

From stage right to stage left: Kilo staring at this newfound friends with eager joy, Bravo being all calm and friendly towards Kilo, Foxtrot being full of himself in the general direction of Juliet, Juliet lost in her own world. (I like those last two. They say much about character.) Kilo--"Don't squish no more!" Bravo--"Hey, thanks. Now could you tell me who sent you to 'squish' us?" Foxtrot--"Are we good, or are we good?" Juliet (small)--"Caffeine . . . ? Injections . . . ?"

From stage right to stage left: Kilo being pretty much the same, Bravo not quite understanding what he's hearing, Foxtrot being pretty much the same, Juliet being fed up with Foxtrot. Kilo--"Big master Golf send me to wipe floor with you!" Bravo--"Golf??" Foxtrot--"I mean, you have to admit that was slick back there!" Juliet--"Shut up."

Kilo has left the panel, stage left. In fact, everyone has left the panel. There is a reason for this, having something to do with the all-consuming trail of dust and motion-lines stretching across the panel. Sound effect on trail--"Shoom!" Kilo (off-camera)--"Take you to him!" Someone (off-camera)--"Yaaaa!" Someone else (off-camera)--"Shriek!"

Strip 58: Let's play pick-ups.

We leap into the middle of the battle between India and Alpha. India is running to duck behind some wreckage, Alpha is blasting away. Alpha--"I will destroy you, foul evildoer! Your vast array of precise and incredibly pointy dagger-thingies will protect neither you, nor your evil Lord Hotel!" Sound effect on gun--"Blam! Blam! Blam!"

India is behind cover, Alpha is keeping her covered. India--"If you knew how stupid you sounded . . . !" Alpha--"Hey, I'm not the one who came up with these names!"

Same scene, but everything is vibrating. India--"Who's doing that?" Alpha--"What in the world?"

Another all-consuming trail stretches across the panel. Sound effect on trail--"Whoosh!" Someone (off-camera)--"Woah nellie!" India (off-camera)--"Kilo! What are you doing?!" Someone else (presumably Alpha, off-camera)--"This was not in the job description!"

Strip 59: Continuing in the same vein . . .

We leap into the middle of the battle between Charlie and Hotel. Explosions rock the panel and Hotel fires his rifle repeatedly. Charlie--"Nya, nya, missed me!" Hotel--"Stand still already!" Sound effects--"Crash! Kaboom! Bang bang!"

Charlie does cartwheels and Hotel just gets more and more irritated. Charlie--"Whee! This is fun!" Hotel--"Graaaahhh!" Sound effects--"Boom! Bang bang bang!"

They've both frozen and everything is vibrating. Charlie--"Huh? I didn't do that, did I?" Hotel--"What is this?"

And yet another all-consuming trail stretches across the panel. Woohoo! Sound effect on trail--"Zoom!" India (off-camera)--"Hotel!" Alpha (off-camera)--"*That's* Hotel?!" Someone (off-camera)--"How do we stop this thing?!"

Strip 60: That is just too many main characters in one panel.

We're looking at Golf again, as he points (and faces) angrily into his new vessel from the exit ramp (meaning he points stage left). Golf--"Finally, that's the last of the stick people! Get the equipment strapped down in there and prepare for launch!"

Everything is vibrating! Golf is standing in a more neutral position so that it will seem more natural when he turns to face stage right next panel. Golf--"We leave as soon as this mysterious . . . shaking . . . dies down . . ."

The camera has moved sideways to allow us to see Kilo standing stage right, draped with Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Foxtrot, Hotel, India, and Juliet in any order. Golf is looking at them. Every last one of them has a sheepish grin (except for Golf, of course). Golf--"And . . ."

Exact same shot. They just keep looking at each other. No dialogue.

Exact same shot. Sound effect (small)--"pin drop"

Strip 61: The shame will follow him until the end of his days.

Everyone stands where they had been in the previous strip, but the attitudes are different. The Kilo Collection is beginning to look frightened, as Golf begins his evil speech. Golf--"Ahh . . . excellent work, Kilo. My incompetent henchmen have failed me, but somehow I knew that you would be invaluable in my conquest."

Golf gets more dramatic. Golf--"With these enemies captured, my strength will become unsurpassable by any force in the galaxy! Those who would once challenge me will now tremble at the sound of my name!"

Golf is very, very dramatic. Those watching are wide-eyed. Golf--"Know now that you are held prisoner by the mighty overlord . . ." Golf (another speech bubble, small)--"Golf."

Kilo, Hotel and India look sheepish. Golf is in exactly the same pose, but with pain writ across his face. Everyone else is *laughing*. Juliet--"Snicker." Foxtrot--"Hee hee!" Charlie--"Bwa ha ha ha!"

Strip 62: Woah, he's slicker than you thought.

Similar situation. There is still laughter occurring, but now Golf is angrily pointing at Kilo. Bravo--"Hoo hoo ha!" Golf--"That's enough of this. Kilo! Put those miserable wretches into the hold!"

Kilo violently shrugs his burden off of him, sending the good guys sailing off-camera stage right and Hotel and India down at his feet. Someone (off-camera)--"Yargh!" Hotel--"Ack!" Sound effect--"SHRUG" Kilo--"No! They give Kilo caffeine! Don't want to see them messed up!"

Hotel and India are still just lying there. Golf is chastising. Golf--"Kilo, Kilo, Kilo."

Golf angrily shoves a large jar into Kilo's surprised (and happy) face. Hotel and India are relieved. Alpha pokes his head in stage right. Golf--"Why do you think I carry caffeine pills!?" Alpha--"Did I miss something?"

[Notes. Kilo is referring to the "messaging up" that would occur to them in the S.T.A.R. machine.]

Strip 63: At least they didn't get beaten up by Kilo.

Golf throws the jar of caffeine pills onto the ship and Kilo tears after it. Hotel and India are getting to their feet. Golf--"Fetch, boy!" Kilo--"Yayyy!" Sound effect--"Charge!"

Golf turns to order his minions, who are ready for action again. The good guys may be visible stage right. Golf--"Hotel and India, keep those morons busy with a fighting retreat!" Hotel and India--"Yes, sir!"

Total change of camera angle: now we're watching this action in the docking bay from a point on the ceiling. The good guys are at the top of the picture, blasting away (Juliet is just cowering, possibly with bullets bouncing off of her purse). Hotel and India are firing and throwing knives as they back up towards the ship at the bottom of the picture. Golf is already hurrying up the ramp of the ship. Sound effects on combat--"Blam blam blam! Rat-a-tat-tat! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!" Golf--"It's time to take off!" Sound effect on ship--"Rumble rumble!"

The bad guys have all gotten onboard. The good guys shrink away from the dust clouds kicked up by the ship's movement. Alpha--"Dangit!" Sound effect--"Va-va-voom!"

The ship has gone. Alpha--" . . . Does this mean we win?" Bravo--"Let's just say that." Sound effect--"dust settling noises"

Strip 64: Just have to check in one more time.

And here we're looking again at the bridge of the good guy mothership, with our underpaid friends Delta and Echo (see strips 24 and 33). Delta is still at work and Echo is playing checkers on the floor. Delta (small)--"Verona station's no longer in danger? At least something went right."

Same. Delta (small)--"I still think I should just have a marine corps instead of these lunatic main characters mutter mutter."

Delta pushes a bunch of buttons. Sound effect--"beep beep beep"

Echo makes a move in her game of checkers and Delta gets ticked off one more time. Echo--"You lose again." Delta--"This is insubordination!"

Strip 65: It's Lima, the generic extra!

And here we are looking at our conquering heroes. At stage right is Lima, in his/her guise as some young random bystander. "Lima" is the name that will be given to any extra needed to advance the plot. Extras are good. Especially when there's no one who isn't a main character or a stick figure. (As a sidenote, Lima should probably be the other gender from how he/she will appear in strip 76, just to establish quickly that Lima can be anyone.) All the other characters (Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Foxtrot, and Juliet) are milling around during the first few panels, so they don't all have to be drawn if they aren't speaking and there isn't room. Likely activities for those who aren't speaking include high-fives and self-assured poses. Alpha is looking at Juliet. Lima--"You got rid of the stick figures and saved all of us! You're incredible!" Foxtrot--"Thank you, Lima. Don't we know it." Alpha--"And who's your new friend, Foxtrot?"

The camera shifts a little, so Lima is no longer in the shot. Juliet looks off-camera in the direction of Lima with a confused expression, but Alpha and Foxtrot are focusing their attention on her. Juliet (small)--"Who was that?" Foxtrot--"This is Juliet, one mean shot with a purse if ever I saw one." Alpha--"Cool! Is she joining the crew?"

At the sound of money in the making, Juliet has perked right up. Bravo is rummaging around with the contents of his jacket. Juliet--"If you pay me well, I'll sure stick around. A gun might be nice incentive, too." Bravo--"I think I've got something somewhere . . ." Sound effect near jacket--"Rustle"

Juliet looks thoughtful and is sticking a thumb towards Foxtrot. Everyone else has paused. Juliet--" . . . Of course, I'd probably just shoot him with it."

Now everyone looks thoughtful, with the exception of Foxtrot, who looks terrified. No text.

Foxtrot leaps to stay Bravo's hand. Foxtrot--"No! No! Cash only! We are a cash-only operation!"

Strip 66: Musical chairs is more fun when you're violent.

Our selection of main characters is walking up to the Beat, perhaps past the destroyed florist's stall (see strip 36). Alpha--" . . . And that's our ship, the Beat." Juliet--"Yeah, I saw it before. Expensive. I like it." Foxtrot (small)--"Actually, that's *my* ship."

We look at the interior of the Beat from our standard viewpoint at the front (see strip 23). From stage right to stage left: Juliet approaching a seat, Foxtrot and Bravo settling into their seats, Alpha and Charlie approaching the last seat remaining. Alpha--"Hey, I'm sitting here." Charlie--"No way, I'm not giving it up."

From stage right to stage left: Juliet inspecting the screens in front of her, Foxtrot starting up the engines, Bravo giving a sneaky sideways glance at what Foxtrot is doing, Alpha and Charlie arguing. Alpha--"I've got a gun!" Charlie--"I've got explosives!" Sound effect--"Rumble rumble!"

From stage right to stage left: Juliet holding onto the control panel in front of her, Foxtrot being startled, Bravo smacking some controls in front of Foxtrot, Alpha and Charlie desperately holding onto the back of the chair as the Beat rockets forwards. Bravo--"I've got acceleration!" Juliet--"Woah!" Foxtrot--"Hey!" Alpha and Charlie--"Aaaaahh!" Sound effect--"Voooooosh!"

Strip 67: More action game logic.

For this strip we're watching the Beat as it flies through space. Verona station (complete with crashed mothership) does not need to be in the background, but it could be visible in just the first panel. They aren't chasing after Golf: they're returning to their own mothership. Alpha (inside the Beat, small)--"Jerk. Just because he has *two* hands, he holds on to the darn seat." Juliet (inside the Beat)--"Wait a minute, Foxtrot. We're not going after Golf?" Foxtrot (inside the Beat)--"Nope. No way. We're done with this one."

Juliet (inside the Beat)--"Why did you even hire me, then?" Foxtrot (inside the Beat)--"Well, obviously, we'll need your help when it's time to pound Golf again."

Juliet (inside the Beat)--"But you just had the opportunity to chase down his ship a minute ago!" Foxtrot (inside the Beat)--"Who cares? We mopped up the mess on Verona station, so it's time to get a change of scenery and some just rewards."

Juliet (inside the Beat)--"But the only reason you were on Verona station was to find that man!!" Foxtrot (inside the Beat)--"Sheesh, lighten up." Someone else inside the ship (presumably Alpha)--"Yeah, you'd think you'd never played video games before."

Strip 68: Really, he's been waiting 30-plus strips to do that.

The bridge of the good guy mothership. Echo is excitedly perking up from her game of checkers, Delta is tossing an order over his shoulder to her. Delta--"Echo, the Beat is docking. Meet the returning crew in the docking bay!" Echo--"Really?!"

Echo vanishes stage right, leaving behind a trail in the air. Echo--"Finally!" Delta (small)--" . . . Finally." Sound effect on trail--"RUN"

Echo, however, has left behind the checkers set. From wherever Delta was standing in the previous panel, he swivels his eyes to look at it cautiously.

Delta cautiously, very cautiously, moves a piece on the checkers board. Sound effect near board--"plink"

Strip 69: I'm not paying for that screen.

The crew piles off of the Beat (stage left) into the docking bay, as seen in a shot at three-quarters view. Echo enters somewhere in the background stage right. There's no need to draw all the characters if there isn't room. Alpha--"And here we are!" Echo--"You all seem to have made it back in one piece." Bravo--"Hey, Echo . . ."

Now we have a simpler side view. From stage right to stage left: a crackling video monitor that will presently have Delta on it, Juliet and Alpha looking at the monitor, Echo (slightly in the background) receiving the P.L.O.T. device back from Bravo, Bravo (slightly in the background) giving said device. Sound effect on monitor--"Crackle!" Juliet--"And what's this?" Alpha--"That'll be our commander." Bravo (small)--"Here's the P.L.O.T. device back. Thanks."

The camera has moved sideways to center in on Delta's image, Juliet, and Alpha. Delta--"Alpha! I presume it's mission complete." Alpha--"Hey there, Delta!"

Alpha is gesturing towards Juliet, who now has her hands on her hips. Delta--"And is this a new recruit or something?" Alpha--"Yep. This is Juliet. She helped keep Foxtrot from getting killed. For some reason."

Same poses. Delta--"What can she do?"

Juliet matter-of-factly smashes the screen with her purse, much to Alpha's panic. Sound effect--"Splang!"

[Notes. Even though Echo now has the P.L.O.T. device back (as her tech specs say she should) she won't have it forever. After Charlie dies, she'll give the device to Bravo as the last thing she does before changing her hairstyle and taking over Charlie's role (see strips 18 and 27). All of this is better explained in the spare files, along with the causes of the events.]

Strip 70: Character conflict! Woohoo!

A very wide panel, allowing us to see everyone as well as the previously-seen exit door from the docking bay somewhere in the background stage left. From stage right to stage left: the crackling and sparkling monitor that Juliet hit, Juliet looking as she had before, Alpha being a little more calm, Echo fiddling with the P.L.O.T. device (making sure it's still in working order), Bravo and Charlie just taking it all in, Foxtrot exiting the door. They're not all necessarily at the same distance from the camera. While Delta speaks, various sound effects such as "Spark! Crackle!" and so on interrupt his text bubble, but they do not obscure his meaning. Delta--"I see, uh, she's hired. Good. Echo, I want you to assign her proper quarters. Alpha, report to the bridge to supply a complete report on the incidents at Verona station. And the rest of you I *order* not to destroy this ship while I'm busy calculating hazard pay!" Foxtrot (small)--"He just wants to crimp my style."

Now the monitor has shut off. From stage right to stage left: Alpha walking off stage right, Juliet turning to face Echo, Echo turning her body towards Juliet but still looking at Bravo and Charlie as they leave (get all that?), Bravo and Charlie waving over their shoulders as they head towards the stage left exit. Foxtrot has already left. Alpha--"Well, duty calls. Wish me luck." Bravo--"The dinner bell rings." Charlie--"See ya."

Juliet and Echo are looking at each other for the first time. Bravo and Charlie are exiting the door. Charlie (small)--"Just not that same mess hall as last time . . . "

There's nothing here but Juliet and Echo looking at each other. The bland disapproval is just amazing. Juliet--"A cybernetic eye. That is such a cliché." Echo--"A purse. Are we *trying* to say 'gender role'?"

Strip 71: An unfortunate part of the job.

Echo and Juliet trudge stage right down a corridor. Echo is slouchingly angry, while Juliet is stiffly angry. The difference is that Juliet gets to stare at the back of Echo's head as she leads her to her quarters and Echo knows this. Neither of them is too happy with this arrangement. Echo--"So . . . you spend your time violently beating people up when they don't feed your self-centered, capitalistic goals." Juliet--"Duh. What do you do then, Miss Perfect?"

Still walking. Echo--"I have a profession devoted to mercy! I tend to the wounds of those harmed on the battlefield! It's my job to keep people from dying and I don't get paid unless I've *fought* for their lives!"

Still walking. Echo doesn't yet realize to what she is about to agree. Juliet--"So . . . your job is dependent on folks like me violently beating people up?" Echo--"Y--"

They've stopped walking. Echo is hanging her head, Juliet is smiling for the first time that we've seen. We almost wish she weren't. Echo--"Give me a moment."

Strip 72: Its fate!

Echo leads Juliet into her quarters. They enter through a door in the middle of the panel, just stage left of which is a video monitor in the wall. There's a bed stage right along with a nightstand and open closet door. There's a dresser and door to a bathroom stage left. Quarters are good stuff on this ship. Echo--"Here you are, Your Highness." Juliet--"Finally, due recognition."

The camera centers in on Juliet and Echo. Juliet is walking stage right and Echo is pointing a thumb stage left. Juliet--"This setup still needs work . . . " Echo--"The bathroom's through that door. If you want, the video monitor gets sub-wave broadcasts, but don't forget to change channels if Delta calls."

Juliet is beginning to pose grandly, another greedy smile on her face. Echo is surprised. Juliet--" . . . but with a stable military platform, I can stretch my commercial reach to previously unknown heights!"

Juliet marches to stage left, fists in the air in victory. Echo's face is falling. Juliet--"Within a matter of weeks I can own this ship, outfit and command! I will be able to extend my influence through the armed forces and into the government without risk of financial loss! I will be seen as the greatest economic mind in the galaxy!"

Echo has at least one hand to her face. Juliet is smiling cruelly and looking at her sideways from her self-assured pose. Echo (small)--"I can't believe it. I'm stuck with another narcissist." Juliet--"What was that? Are you reflecting on my glory?"

[Notes. "Sub-wave broadcasts" will be a bit of a running gag and they won't be defined for a long time. If I'm not mistaken, the reason people are so secretive about watching them is that they're public television children's shows.]

Strip 73: Okay, where's the referee?

Same view from inside the room. Echo is in a similar sort of slumped position as she had been in the previous strip, but now her expression is getting dangerous. Juliet is just being self-important in her direction, having prematurely accepted her role as Empress of the Universe. She's holding out one hand towards Echo, which is flopped at the wrist in that weird gesture that snobby movie-people make when they say "Dahling!" Juliet--"So, future slave, how do I get room service? Do you do that, too?" Echo--"Ggrphglrgblgg . . ."

The camera rotates somewhere around 180 degrees so that we're looking at Echo from out in the corridor. She's fed up with things and is marching out towards stage right. Juliet is visible through the door and is wearing a sour expression. Echo--"That is enough of this! You're on your own!"

From stage right to stage left: Foxtrot colliding with Echo, Echo rebounding, Juliet walking out into the corridor. Foxtrot--"Whoa, there!" Sound effect--"Bump!"

Same panorama, but now Echo's whipping her head back and forth to listen to both persons speaking to her. Foxtrot--"I was just coming by to see if you had any of those industrial-strength sugar pills like the other day. You know, the ones with the caramel coating I like." Juliet--"So you *are* up for requests! Here I'm just trying to settle in and all I get is grief!"

Foxtrot's looking at her critically, probably with his arms folded because we can't see his eyes to determine his facial expression that well. Echo's looking back with a bewildered or disbelieving expression. Juliet's just looking innocent. Foxtrot--" . . . Echo, have you been making the new recruit feel unwelcome?"

Echo marches off stage right, yelling. Foxtrot and Juliet are just looking at her, not having moved. Foxtrot is quizzical, Juliet is grinning. Echo--"TAG TEAMS AREN'T FAIR!"

Strip 74: The fundamentals of commander-subordinate communication!

We now cut to Alpha and Delta on the bridge of the ship, where Delta sourly listens to Alpha's "report." Over the next few panels, we see Alpha regaling Delta with a long and unnecessarily drawn-out tale of the battle, staring wistfully into the distance at the start and working up to full "I'm very proud of myself" poses towards the end. There is no text for his speech. Instead, each panel has a separate caption from the following--"Myopic recollection. Elaborate explanation. Questionable analysis. Blatant self-aggrandizement. Request for increased pay."

Alpha practically topples over backwards as Delta bellows at him. One more caption--"Reaction."

Strip 75: Always read the fine print.

Alpha is on the receiving end as Delta vehemently chews him out. Alpha stands at a feeble sort of attention, but there's one sentence dead center (it's obvious from the monologue) where he's got a curious look on his face for a moment. Delta shouts. A lot. There is no text for his beration. Instead, Alpha thinks things from the following monologue--"Ahhh!! Not the yelling! Not the yelling! Mine ears cannot take the torment! Like it's my fault that we've got a budget cut. Like it's my fault Verona station is suing us for 'careless application of an action sequence.' To listen to Delta, you'd think I was responsible for those three priceless antique stores that jumped between me and the stick figures. I wonder if Delta knows that I can see his uvula? Ooh . . . and I forgot to mention that I was short about 3000 rounds of ammo. I might have missed my chance. This would probably be a bad time to bring up that upgrade to Mega-Assault Incinerator Munitions, too. . . . Yikes, are you finished yet? Can we get on to the--" At

this point, Delta holds out a stack of credits. Delta--"--hazard pay, if you can take the time out of your busy schedule."

Alpha is snapped out of his reverie and greedily grabs at the credits. Delta is looking to his pocket, where he is pulling out an electronic notepad. Alpha--"Heck yes!" Delta--"Good."

Alpha blankly accepts the notepad that Delta hands him. Delta--"And here are the calculations: once you've distributed that to everyone else, give yourself seven credits and a candy bar."

Strip 76: . . . And I'm going to keep telling this joke until you're sick of it.

Charlie and Bravo stand in a corridor, facing a doorway that's stage left. Charlie is nervous, Bravo is "Pshaw!" in both word and deed. Charlie--"I don't know, Bravo. This looks kinda like that mess hall from 70 strips ago. I don't want to get ambushed by stick figures again." Bravo--"Pshaw! Do you want grub or not?"

They're inside. The mess hall is surprisingly opulent, looking rather like a modern-day restaurant instead of a high-tech ship. (No patrons are shown, of course.) The door through which they went is sliding shut in this panel. The counter behind which Mike works is offstage left. Charlie is looking around with curiosity, Bravo is feeling vindicated. Sound effect on door--"Fwish" Charlie--"Whoa, this is new." Bravo--"What did I tell you? Nothing to fear." Mike (off-camera stage left, small)--"Okay, Lima, that's it for you." Lima (off-camera stage left, small)--"C'mon, one more!"

The camera has moved sideways to reveal the entire counter, complete with Mike as a stick figure and Lima as some random patron slumped across the far stage left end. Lima is petulantly holding up an empty milkshake glass with a straw in it. It is not important for him/her to not look anything like he/she did in strip 65. In fact, he/she should probably be the other gender. There is a table stage right of the counter and a little in the background that will be relevant later (see strip 81). Both Charlie and Bravo are reacting in shock. Charlie--"Ahhh! I knew it, it's a stick figure!" Mike--"No, it's me! Mike!" Bravo--"Then why aren't you drawn in?"

Charlie and Bravo wince. Lima flops face first onto the counter. Mike--"How could I be? I haven't had my tech spec comic yet!" Sound effect near Mike's left arm (see below for reason why)--"Ba-dum CHING!" Sound effect on Charlie--"wince" Sound effect on Bravo--"wince" Sound effect on Lima--"wump"

Strip 77: Mike's tech specs. Mike is a walking amalgamation of cybernetic upgrades. He's got panels on his head and arms, plus a selection of little lights on his left arm to signify that there are controls there. He also has dark skin, short hair, and some sort of vest as his primary concession to fashion, and has no armaments. He's the proprietor of the snazziest mess hall on the ship and is an all-around likable fellow. The only reason you might get a little annoyed if you hung out with him is the fact that his arm gadgetry is a personal sound effect generator. (It also plays a wide range of popular and eclectic music!) Captions are on his head, arms, and vest. Captions:

Head--"Super fuzzy logic circuit allows for hyper-suspension of disbelief. Handy when you're a comic book character."

Arms--"Noisio (TM) brand electronic gadgetry makes background music and sound effects for all your punctuation needs. Fun for the whole family until they beat you to make it stop!"

Vest--"Image enhancement (and corny sight gags) made possible through a complex series of interwoven fibers, themselves formed by condensing polyhydric alcohols with dibasic acids. And 75 percent cotton."

Background images on this tech spec make a sort of mini-comic in and of themselves. They start off with Mike whistling as he cleans a glass. A little musical note should be drawn as a "sound effect." He soon gives sneaky glances around and puts the glass down on a nearby table. His right hand thus free, a grin spreads across his face as he reaches for the controls on his left arm. Centered at the bottom is a picture of Mike vibrating half with rapture, half with the intensity of the gigantic musical notes that spew forth from his Noisio (TM) brand doodads. The nearby glass explodes. Mike--"Blue Man Group forever!"

Strip 78: Greetings/milkshakes.

Here we look at Charlie, Bravo, and Mike all together at one end of the counter. Lima is no longer in the shot: he/she was just there for one strip because, after all, he/she's an extra. Charlie still looks a little worried, Bravo has his eyebrows raised, Mike is smiling and leaning on the countertop. Charlie--"So . . . you really aren't the advance scout for another nightmare invasion of stick figures that would wreak havoc upon us all?" Mike--"Nope, I just keep this mess hall running and try to make it a place you'd actually want to eat. I also try and expand the menu to items beyond the typical military fare." Bravo--"Like what . . .?"

From stage right to stage left: Charlie bouncing in gleeful surprise, Bravo with his features similarly lit up, Mike whipping some milkshakes (with straws) out from behind the counter and offering them into the outstretched hands of his new customers. Mike--"Like . . . MILKSHAKES!" Bravo and Charlie--"Yeah!"

Charlie and Bravo stand with their milkshakes, while Charlie slurks his down. Mike stands there in a slightly less pompous version of one of Foxtrot's "I did something cool" poses. Charlie (small)--"Scrumptious milkshake goodness . . ." Bravo--"Looks like you've made yourself some new friends, Mike my chum." Mike--"Perhaps. But friendships need something to sustain them." Sound effect on Charlie's glass (small)--"slurk"

From stage right to stage left: Charlie turning his back in a protective gesture around the milkshake, Bravo with a sour expression on his face, Mike pressing a button on his Noisio (TM) device and laughing uproariously. Even though Charlie and Bravo are closer to the left side of the panel, Mike and his sound effect are to be read first, so they should take up most of the top space of the panel while Charlie and Bravo's comments are at the bottom. Mike--"Which is why I dish out *sustenance!*" Sound effect near Mike's left arm--"Ba-dum CHING!" Charlie (small)--"Stay away from my milkshake. You scare it." Bravo--"Okay, *that* is gonna have to stop." Like I said, sometimes he does this sort of thing. Don't worry, it's just one aspect of the whole.

Strip 79: You know it's bad when you skip the straw.

Similar shot to the previous strip with everyone standing in pretty much the same places. Things are calm. From stage right to stage left: Charlie peering into his emptied glass with one eye (cartoon character style), Bravo chatting with Mike, Mike still smiling but not going for the buttons anymore. Instead he's leaning on the counter. Charlie--"Hmm . . ." Bravo and Mike--"Small talk small talk chat chat chat." Sound effect stage right, near the off-camera place where the door is--"Fwish"

Everyone turns to look, smiles as appropriate. Echo (off-camera stage right)--"Oh, hi Bravo. Charlie." Charlie--"Echo!" Bravo--"Huh? What?"

The camera has panned a little so that Echo is now in the shot. She is walking zombielike towards the counter. If Mike is visible, then he is just looking at Echo. Charlie-- "You're finally off work, now?" Bravo-- "Oh, hey Echo!"

Echo has walked zombielike past Charlie and Bravo, who now are speaking enthusiastically. Charlie-- "Isn't this place great? Have you ever been here before?" Bravo-- "You've got to try some of the stuff here! You've never had anything like it!"

The wind is going out of Charlie and Bravo's sails. Echo is raising a hand towards Mike, who is nodding back at her. Echo-- "Hey, Mike." Mike-- "Hello, Echo." Echo-- "The usual." Mike-- "Coming up."

Charlie and Bravo watch. Echo stares at a large glass of milkshake (with straw) that Mike puts on the counter. Sound effect on glass (small)-- "Clunk"

Charlie and Bravo are surprised as Echo tears the straw out of the glass and tosses it behind her. Echo is focused on the glass. Mike just looks grimly sympathetic. Sound effect-- "FLING!"

From stage right to stage left: Charlie looking sad, Bravo staring, Echo guzzling the entire glass, Mike looking impressed. Sound effect-- "GLUG!" Charlie-- "I wish *I* were cool enough to down an entire milkshake in one go." Bravo-- " . . . "

Strip 80: I hear they're out of lime, though.

From stage right to stage left: Charlie and Bravo conferring, Echo looking woozy (but not dramatically improved) while the empty glass dangles limply from her right hand (she's also facing the camera so her right hand is, well, stage right), Mike putting the glasses that Bravo and Charlie had emptied somewhere to be cleaned. Charlie and Bravo (small)-- " . . . ? . . . ? !" Echo-- "Woo. Cold sugary beverage."

Charlie has crossed past Bravo and is approaching Echo, who's leaning towards the counter and gesturing at Mike with her free hand. She looks rather determined. Mike, who still has the glasses, is glancing back at her with a smile. Charlie-- "Echo? You're acting funny." Echo-- "What other flavors are there?" Mike-- "Well, there's twenty today. Chocolate, vanilla, coffee, strawberry--" Echo-- "Fill me a new glass." Mike-- "Hey, don't ignore blueberry, raspberry . . . "

Bravo is still just watching the goings-on, while Charlie is still trying to get Echo's attention. Echo is starting to snap, while Mike has put the glasses away and is in speech mode, happily gazing into the distance as he recites flavors. Charlie-- "Um, Echo? Uh . . . you still have your old glass." Mike-- "boysenberry, peach, banana, lemon, cappuccino . . . "

From stage right to stage left: Bravo reacting in fear, Charlie reacting in fear but also simultaneously being lifted up by the shirt, Echo grabbing Charlie and screaming in his face while waving the empty glass over his head, Mike holding his hands out to try to prevent bloodshed. Echo-- "IT'S NOT BIG ENOUGH FOR TWENTY MILKSHAKES, ALRIGHT?" Mike-- "Okay! My mistake! Coming right up!"

Strip 81: We'll just assume it's the stress talking.

Thankfully, the above scene does not end in mass destruction and the mess hall is still in one piece for this strip. To stage right of the counter and slightly in the background there is a table, at which Echo is already seated in the stage left chair. In front of her is a titanic milkshake on which she always has one hand, possessively. We don't ask how she drinks it. Bravo is timidly leaning over the chair opposite her, pulling it out and hoping that he has permission to sit

down in it. Charlie is standing at the counter, looking over his shoulder nervously. Mike is just staring wistfully at the gigantic glass. Bravo (small)--" . . . ?" Echo (small)--" . . . miserable . . . rotten . . ." Charlie--" . . . I am grateful for my life." Mike--" . . . What an heirloom. My great granddaddy used that to serve thirty-two different flavors of cola at once."

Background: Bravo has sat down opposite Echo. Foreground: Charlie is now talking with Mike. Bravo (small)--" . . . ?" Echo (small)--" . . . money-grubbing . . . why I'm gonna . . ." Charlie--"So, do you have any pastries?" Mike--"I've got jellyrolls!" Charlie--"Oh, no. Bad memories." Sound effect stage right, near the off-camera place where the door is--"Fwish"

We can now see Alpha coming in stage right, so this is probably a wider panel. Everybody's looking at him, with Charlie's face being the most lit up by his presence. Alpha, for his part, is practically dragging himself in. Alpha--"Hey hey, everybody. Delta said I'd find you all here." Charlie--"Alpha! Have you met Mike? You've got to try these milkshakes!"

Alpha has walked another pace or so to consolidate all the characters in the room into a smaller panel. Everyone else is frozen. Alpha--"Nah. I hate sugary drinks."

Alpha jolts in surprise as everyone points at him, screaming. Everyone (except Alpha, of course)--"HEATHEN!"

Strip 82: You see, as opposed to "soul" . . . oh, never mind.

From stage right to stage left: Alpha trying to get people to not kill him, Bravo looking curious, Echo looking the same, Charlie looking excited and "Woohoo!"-like, Mike smiling and coolly pressing a button on his left arm. Alpha--"Don't kill me! Don't kill me! I come bearing funds!" Bravo--"Funds?" Echo--"Money?" Charlie--"HAZARD PAY!" Sound effect near Mike's left arm--"Cha-CHING!"

From stage right to stage left: Alpha holding out a stack of credits to Bravo with his left hand while he reaches for the electronic notepad with his right hand, Bravo standing and accepting the money with a pleased expression, Echo (who has yet to let go of the glass) just watching and rising to her feet, Charlie criticizing over his shoulder to Mike, Mike smiling and holding out his hands in a placating gesture. Alpha--"Yeah. Delta stuck me with dealing it out. He didn't even listen to my rational assessment of my day's workload." Charlie--"Now, what did Bravo say about using that thing?"

Alpha has pulled out the notepad and has tromped angrily past Bravo. Charlie is looking back at Alpha, while Mike is sneakily pressing buttons behind Charlie's back. Bravo--"And . . . have you dealt with Foxtrot and--" Alpha--"Don't remind me of Foxtrot! I ran into him in the hall while he was in full pompous mode. Grrmph." Alpha (another speech bubble, small)--"I hadn't gotten to blast anything in almost twenty strips, so what did the jerk do? Reinforce his hair spray, of course!" Alpha (another speech bubble)--"And I can't even *find* that new person . . ." Sound effect near Mike's left arm (small)--"beeyoop beeyoop beeyoop"

Alpha hands the notepad and some credits to Echo, who just looks at them in wonderment. Charlie looks about in confusion while Mike continues the auditory assault. Alpha--"Look, we handed Juliet off to you. *You* know where she is. *You* do the math. Whatever money's left over goes back to Delta." Echo (small)--" . . . Juliet? . . . Money?" Charlie--" . . . Subconscious . . . tingling." Sound effect near Mike's left arm (small)--"mmmmmmmmmm"

Bravo is still just watching the proceedings. Echo hasn't moved at all. Alpha has moved past Charlie and, with a trailing arm, has stuffed credits into his hands perfunctorily. Charlie, of course, is quite delighted. Mike looks somewhat disappointed at being taken away from his target, but is servicing to Alpha. Alpha--"And I need a candy bar."

At stage left, Alpha reaches for the candy bar that is handed to him by Mike, tired and unaware of what is occurring behind him. This is the least interesting part of the panel. Of moderate interest is both Bravo and Charlie reacting with deep-seated, paralyzing fear. Of major interest is Echo, caressing what she has been given now with both hands, as a tremendous and malevolent grin spreads across her face. Bravo--"Charlie, she has that grin again." Charlie--"Oh, no." Bravo (another speech bubble)--"I remember that grin, Charlie." Charlie (another speech bubble)--"Oh, no." Bravo (another speech bubble)--"We still don't know where the cactus went after the last time, Charlie." Charlie (another speech bubble)--"May there be mercy on Juliet's wretched purse."

Strip 83: Meanwhile . . .

Here we cut over to Golf, in front of his viewscreen. He looks menacing. The viewscreen is just showing stars. Over the course of the next few panels, Golf stands in different poses of menace and contemplation. Eventually, however, his expression goes sour. Each panel has a separate caption from the following--"And so, in another place, nefarious plans are laid! And the forces of good are brought to great danger! And a criminal agenda is masterfully advanced! And fries or onion rings are available for half-price! And the passive voice is used excessively! And too many sentences are begun with 'and!'" At this point, Golf shouts and waves an angry hand at the caption box. Golf--"Enough already!"

Strip 84: Unusual uses for your fellow henchmen.

We are looking at Kilo as he stands in the business end of a rifle range with some shredded targets around. He's looking, with a slightly saddened expression, at the empty jar that used to have caffeine pills (see strips 62 and 63). Bullets are bouncing off of him from off-camera stage left. Sound effects on ricochets--"Kapwing! Poing!" Sound effects closer to stage left (small)--"Bang! Bang!"

Kilo has turned the jar upside down and is speaking disconsolately to himself. The bullets continue to fly. Kilo--" . . . No more caffeine." Sound effects on ricochets--"Ping! Ping! Clang!" Sound effects closer to stage left (small)--"Bang! Bang! Bang!"

The camera has panned suddenly and we can now see Hotel and India standing at the other end of the rifle range, far stage left of where Kilo had been. Hotel is firing his rifle with a look of concentration on his face. India is just leaning against the doorway from this room, looking on with not that much interest. Sound effect stage right (small)--"Kapwing!" Sound effect on rifle--"Bang!"

Hotel has lowered his rifle and is now cupping a hand to his mouth, to aid in shouting. India is remarking to the camera. Hotel--"Hey, Kilo! Can you move around a bit?!" India--" . . . At least we're getting some use of the freak."

Strip 85: Sorry about that. She can't make puns.

The camera is still on Hotel and India. Hotel is slinging his rifle over his shoulder, while India toys with a dagger she's just pulled from her boot. Hotel doesn't look like he's had that much fun. Until things get more wacky, the general attitude is relatively calm. Hotel--"Well, that's about as much of that as I can stand." India--"Mm hmm."

They are now walking out of the rifle range and into a corridor, possibly passing by a corridor branch in the background. Hotel is pretty much watching the ceiling. India is holding the dagger out in front of her. Hotel--"Shooting Kilo--although satisfying in that it means I don't

have to be close to him--just doesn't do much for me." India--"What you need is a nice, meaty main character to blast; just as I could use a walking pincushion or two."

They are still walking. Hotel is watching India's knife. India is flipping it. Hotel--"Yes . . . I think you may have gotten to the heart of the matter." Sound effect (small)--"flip flip flip"

They have stopped. Hotel is giving a sort of disbelieving grimace to India, who is merely smirking and pointing the dagger. A little glimmer on the dagger's point would not be inappropriate. Note that the speakers are out of synch with their visual. India--" . . . You might even say that I've got a *point!*" Hotel--"And you're trying to be funny why?"

Strip 86: Selective attention knows no bounds. This strip has a little fun with panel placement. There are only three panels, but the third contains all the scenery shown in the first two and therefore is twice as large.

The camera has rotated so that now we are looking at Hotel and India from ahead of them. Hotel is still stage right and India is still stage left. They have walked out onto the upper level of a larger room, with a handrail between them and the camera, and all other details behind the camera. They now walk toward stage left. Hotel is mid-stride. India is grimacing and is tilting to tuck away the dagger in her boot. Hotel--" . . . Anyway, do you think Golf is still mad about us tossing those stick figures out the airlocks?" India--"Eech. Let's hope not. He's so irrational."

Hotel and India are now walking along the walkway, stage left. Hotel is probably looking down into the room, while India is probably running her hand on the handrail. Hotel--"Yeah." Hotel (another speech bubble)--"Hey, what do you want to do now?" India--"I don't know, maybe get some coffee."

This large third panel consists of the entire area presented in the first two panels. Kilo's voice (and Kilo) comes bounding down the corridor, while Hotel and India simultaneously look back in terror. Sound effect gradually increasing, since he's getting closer--"Bom bom bom bom!" Kilo--"Caffeine!!" Hotel and India--"Aaaaaagh!"

Strip 87: A (slightly interrupted) look into the thoughts of India.

Kilo towers over Hotel and India who are, to a certain extent, cowering in fear. That extent will increase over the next couple panels. Kilo is just ecstatic. Hotel is stuck with facing Kilo head-on. India is barely safer from the object of their fear because she is behind Hotel. Kilo--"Friends give Kilo caffeine! Kilo *want* caffeine! Where is caffeine?!" India (thought bubble)--"Oh no. Oh no. Buck up India, old lass--you can stand before the brute freaky terror that is Kilo."

Kilo is growing the slightest smidgen less ecstatic and is leaning in a little bit more. Kilo--"Caffeine! You get caffeine for Kilo? Kilo *want caffeine!*" India (thought bubble)--"You'll just admit that we're all stuck with decaf since we lost our old supply in the Verona crash. Then everything will be alright. He won't crush you into little quivering bits."

Kilo is leaning in even more and is drooping a bit, as his expression falls. Hotel and India are practically vibrating with the need to escape. Kilo--"Kilo want caffeine. You don't give Kilo caffeine? Caffeine . . . Kilo want . . ." India (thought bubble)--"And there's almost no reason to be irrationally afraid of his intense, violent, mutant-like murderous strength ever being unleashed because of a lack of caffeine. Certainly not."

Much more dynamic scene. From stage right to stage left: Kilo exploding with rage and holding his clenched fists before him, India being dragged nigh-horizontally through the air,

Hotel dragging her by the arm as he bolts in terror. Kilo--"CAFFEINE!!" India (thought bubble)--"Then again." Hotel--"RUN!"

Strip 88: That's just a great mantra, really.

We join India and Hotel already in motion. They are careening through the halls of the ship at breakneck speed (India now on her own feet), as Kilo pursues them from some distance off-camera stage right. There are no handrails between them and the camera because they are now just in ordinary corridors. Kilo (off-camera)--"GIVE CAFFEINE!" Sound effect--"Bom bom bom" Hotel--"Not-the-squishing-not-the-squishing-not-the-squishing"

Hotel has thrown his arms up in the air. Because what he says is supposed to be read first and he's standing stage left, his words should take up the space at the top of the panel. Kilo (off-camera)--"Caffeine . . ." Sound effect--"Bom bom bom" Hotel--"Not the squishing!" India--"Calm down, Hotel! He can't squish us if he doesn't catch us, right?!"

India is wide-eyed and looking slightly towards the camera/behind her. Hotel is back to normal running, but doesn't look the slightest bit less terrified. Kilo (off-camera)--"Must have caffeine . . ." Sound effect--"Bom bom bom" Hotel--" . . . Which he just might do since he has a longer stride."

The background blurs as India takes off at lightning speed, dragging Hotel behind her by the back of his shirt collar. Kilo (off-camera)--"Caffeine?" Sound effect--"Bom? Bom bom?" India--"Well when you put it that way!!"

Strip 89: And you thought strip 83 was a one-time gag.

Hotel and India are as we had left them, but now Hotel (being dragged in the air) is looking stage right, where they are losing Kilo. Sound effect gradually decreasing, since he's getting farther away--"Bom bom bom bom bom" Hotel--"Hoo boy, that's some serious distance. Yup. You're definitely giving him the slip." India--"That's why I'm running like this!"

Kilo can no longer be heard and India has slowed slightly. This means that Hotel is flying at a slightly lower angle and the background is a little less blurred. Hotel--"You've lost him, alright. I think you can stop now." India--"Good!"

They have come to a stop. Hotel is crouching on the ground, regaining his balance and still looking to stage right. India is resting with her hands on her knees, but her attention is caught by something off-camera stage left. Hotel--"Whew. I really think we should go and report to Golf, now." India--"This might not be a good time." Sound effect near India--"Huff huff"

The camera has rotated/panned so that we can look in the direction that India is looking. There, through a doorway, Golf is bellowing in rage and flailing his arms as he is deluged with captions (see strip 83). We can see the various captions curling around him in three-dimensional space. The captions are from the following--"And socks will be entangled in the laundry load of eternity! And prominent public figures will be hit with cream pies! And stupid phrases will become popular parlance! And sports figures will be paid far more than they deserve! And internal organs will be goopy!" Hotel--"Why?" India--"Um . . ." Golf--"GRRRAAGH!"

Strip 90: Sometimes, good help is hard to find.

Hotel and India lunge into the room, blasting and stabbing away at the captions. Golf ducks into the background, shielding himself with two of his arms. The captions are as above.

Sound effects--"Bang bang bang! Crack! Snap! Slash slash double-slashy! Crinkle! Piff!"
 Hotel--"Hyah!" India--"Take that!"

The captions lie in shards on the floor. From stage right to stage left: Golf standing angry and impressive as if were not unnerved at all by the captions, Hotel making a cool pose as he slings his rifle back, India spinning a dagger on her finger. Hotel and India really aren't paying any attention to what Golf is saying. Golf--"I see you have arrived without my needing to summon you. Good. I have evil machinations that require the expertise and intellect of my crack team of henchmen. The proper time to act is at hand." Hotel--" . . . Thank you, thank you." India--"Who's still got it? Who's still got it?" Sound effect (small)--"spin spin"

Golf just stares at Hotel and India. Hotel is looking at Golf with arms crossed and a smirk on his face. India flips the dagger and catches it. Hotel--"No, really; I'm sorry, but I don't do autographs." Sound effects (small)--"Flip! Nab!"

Golf heads off stage right to find intelligent life. Hotel looks after him with the same smug expression, while India continues to mess around with that dagger. Golf--" . . . Where is that miserable scientist?"

Strip 91: November's tech specs. November is our fun happy mister scientist friend. He makes the warm, loving family that is the forces of evil just a little more whacked out. He is as nuts as Charlie, just with an eye more towards machinery than explosives (he bears no weapons). He's shorter than his boss Golf--which is easy, I must admit, so let me also say that he is shorter than Hotel and India. He is perpetually nervous, having seriously bulging eyeballs and a tendency to rub his hands. (He might even walk with a hunch if startled.) To finish it off, he has wild yet sparse hair. November is Golf's technician-type-person or head scientist. Well, probably his only scientist, since everyone else is a stick figure. Captions on the drawing emphasize his hair, bulging eyes, wringing hands, and legs. Captions:

Hair--"Tree ring-like sequence of singed hair permits quick estimation of nervousness, recent laboratory failure."

Bulging eyes--"Bulging eyes good for . . . *corny sight gags*." Nearby is Mike (in miniature) laughing and doing another "Ba-dum CHING!" with his arm doodads. Immediately nearby *him* is Bravo, who looks irritated and is holding out a stapler. Bravo--"Okay, that's it. Prepared to be stapled."

Wringing hands--"High-velocity hand-wringing burns calories the natural way, builds arm muscles, starts small fires. See: hair."

Legs--"Absent mindedness leads to congealed dinners, escaped experimental subjects and only occasional episodes of wearing pants the wrong way around."

Background images are only on the side of the page that doesn't already have the miniature Mike and Bravo. They can involve such things as him looking around nervously, him grinning insanely and pressing buttons on a small electronic notepad and him typing away furiously on a large computer. Centered at the bottom is a picture of him whipping around to look at the camera in nervous surprise. November--"Ahh! What?! What is it?! I didn't do it! And I certainly didn't let the hunter-killer bio-form out of its cage!"

Strip 92: He thinks too much; such men are funny.

November stands facing slightly towards the camera, but mostly stage left. He's on the ground floor of the room from strips 86 and 87, surrounded by a lot of computer equipment. Not all that much of the computer equipment need be shown, actually, as much more of it will appear

in the next strip. There's a closed doorway in the background on this, the bottom floor, on stage right. This neatly places it on a direct line behind November's back. November is intently typing away on a computer. Sound effect--"takatakataka" November--" . . . But keeping the Blerfenwibble Value *constant* means that the machine intelligence will remain always at unsatisfactory levels. However, if we posit a reality where we can *vary* it as easily as electron orbits, then we can infuse Q.Q.Q. Particles directly into the silicon wafers."

November is getting much more excited and is typing away at the computer practically in a frenzy. Sound effect--"TAKatak! TakaTAKatakaTAK!" November--" . . . And then the intelligence factor could, theoretically, break boundaries hardly even conceived by modern science! Why, we could create a disembodied computer brain that could think for itself!"

November has slowed down with a sudden fearful realization. Sound effect--"taka . . . " November--" . . . But then, we might even be able to create computers that could read minds. Then they might become aware of those that are manipulating them day in and day out."

Golf dramatically bursts through the door and shouts to November, who practically explodes in hair-standing-on-end terror. Sound effect on door--"Fwish" Golf--"November!" November--"AAHHHH! Don't let the computer eat me!"

Strip 93: Evil plots, evil priorities.

The camera for this strip is rotated 90 degrees so that it shows more of the room and gets November stage right of Golf. From here, the entire back wall is covered with one gigantic computer setup that exists to control the S.T.A.R. machine. The machine isn't visible in this strip, however, because it is just off-camera stage right. November is standing and rubbing his forehead in relief in front of his computers. Golf is walking forward. For future reference, the camera is resting on a staircase that leads up to the aforementioned raised walkway. November--"Ah! . . . It's you, master Golf. Phew . . . " Golf--"Yes. I've just completely lost faith in the rest of my incompetent underlings and I was hoping you'd been more productive." Sound effect on door--"Fwish"

Golf is closer to November now, so the camera can zoom in on smaller panels. November is glancing sideways at the computers and wringing his hands. November--"Ah, yes. Productive. I've been very productive; very productive indeed. Um . . . "

November is looking rather sheepish and Golf has folded at least one set of arms. November--"Which productive things, exactly, are the reason for this visit?" Golf--"Perhaps the integration of our computer setup with this new craft, November. That which I told you to do several hours ago."

November is sort of cringing away from Golf and reaching for something just out of sight behind his computer. Golf's expression is souring. November--"Oh, well, you see . . . when I got this computer up and running it loaded the old file I had been writing for *Evil Science Monthly* and . . . " Golf--"November, when I give you a task I expect you to complete it."

November is holding out some magazine for Golf to see, but Golf is just shouting his frustration to the heavens. November--"But . . . but I might get on the cover of their 'Mad Maniacal Malcontent' issue!" Golf--" I don't *care* if you get on the cover of their 'Mad Maniacal Malcontent' issue!"

Strip 94: . . . Right.

November discards the magazine and moves closer to the camera. Golf merely follows with a glower. November--"But look, I've not been idle. When you set me to work, I got right on it! See?"

November is now slightly more hopeful and types away quickly at another keyboard as Golf refolds his arms. The computer screen lights up. Sound effect--"takataka" November--"I immediately set myself to reconfiguring this ship's more commercial mainframe to work with our programs. After a few repeat trials of old experiments, I can say that the assimilation has worked flawlessly!"

November smiles now, pointing at the monitor with one hand, typing with the other and still somehow managing to look over his shoulder at Golf. Golf hasn't moved. The monitor displays something different from the previous panel with a much darker background. Sound effect--"taka" November--"I concluded in my logs that we will be able to proceed with only a temporary loss in efficiency. I got the rest of our hardware wired up in a matter of minutes and I've networked them to provide immediate access to all our vital systems! See?"

November stares at the screen as Golf makes an observation. Golf--"That looks like Pong."

They haven't moved. Sound effect--"beep boop"

November looks back at Golf. November--"Right. In the sense that it's a vital system to which we have immediate access." Golf--"Ahhh . . ."

Strip 95: Look at all the toys!

The camera has moved nearly opposite the last two strips so we finally can see all the main room features. The staircase leading up to the raised walkway is in the distance. Farthest stage right is the door Golf used to enter. The recent computers are stage right, where November and Golf have been standing. Over to stage left the large computer that controls the S.T.A.R. machine is partly visible, and most of stage left is taken up with the S.T.A.R. machine itself. It is a very large rectangle, slightly curved on top for style, with wide forbidding doors on the near end and a huge selection of meters and glowing panels. Above the door is the inscription "S.T.A.R." November is walking towards the giant computer as Golf follows him. November--"I even got the S.T.A.R. machine hooked up! The power supply *is* more than sufficient, thankfully . . . and there *is* enough room for work, even including the escorts . . ."

A smaller view down along the giant computer panel and towards the S.T.A.R. machine. November is approaching the controls, but Golf is just watching as before. Text on giant computer panel--"Control for Symbiotic Transfer and Anatomic Recombination" Golf--"So what's stopping you?" November--"Well, we've completely exhausted our Hamandcheese reserves. What with previous usage and the strain of transport, the old one was shot."

Golf is thinking and looks mildly displeased. November is trying to be encouraging. Golf--"Hmm. Of all the things to go wrong, to need more Hamandcheese . . ." November--"I assure you; as soon as we get a replacement, the system will work perfectly!"

We've returned to the first large panel's view. Hotel and India are entering in the background through the corridor on the second level. They are gabbing away. Golf and November haven't moved in the slightest. Hotel and India (small)--"Gab, gab, gab, gab, gab . . ." Golf--"Which, I can tell you, is an improvement in the general condition."

Strip 96: Irony or incompetence? You decide!

Same shot as the first panel in 95, just zoomed closer to the staircase. From stage right to stage left: Golf walking away from the camera while saying his last lines to November (this will also place him near the door that he had used to enter back in strip 92), Hotel and India coming down the stairs, November just sort of standing somewhere unobtrusive near the camera and watching Golf. Golf--"Well, I'll look into the matter. I did not expect such a problem." Hotel--"Sir! We didn't know where you had gone." India--"You just wandered off on us."

Having reached the door, Golf stops to turn and speak to Hotel and India with an unhappy look. Hotel and India are taken aback. Golf--"Yes. And the two of you should anticipate a deduction in pay once I have the time to calculate it." Hotel--"What?" India (small)--"Does this have anything to do with our tossing those stick figures out the airlocks?"

Golf expresses his anger. India is starting to look to her left a little. Golf--"No!" Golf (another speech bubble, small)--"Well, that too." Golf (another speech bubble)--"But mainly I am displeased at the needless delays you incur in my plans. It seems clear that neither of you can see anything through to completion!" Hotel--"But that's not true, sir!" India--"We never--"

From stage right to stage left: Golf looking back towards November, Hotel whipping his head around towards the computers, India going towards the smaller cluster of computers in delight, November nodding his head at Golf. India--"Ooh! Pong!" Hotel--"Pong? Alright!" Golf--" . . . " Golf (another speech bubble)--"Good work, November. I will contact you again presently." November--"Sir."

Strip 97: Cheater.

At the center of this panel is the computer screen where India (stage right) and Hotel (stage left) are playing Pong. India has one point, Hotel has two. They are both grinning. Over the next few panels, they will steadily get more and more involved in the game. India--"Lucky shot. All you had there was a lucky shot." Hotel--"Right, India. Suuuuure it was." Sound effect--"beep boop"

The score is five to three. India--"Who's laughing now?" Hotel--"Hang on . . . ha! Watch this!" Sound effect--"beep boop beep"

The score is eight to ten. India--"That was cheap." Hotel--"Don't worry. It will be over before you know it." Sound effect--"boop beep "

The score is fourteen to thirteen. India--"You're going down! Say your prayers!" Hotel--"Not happening! Nothing's gonna stop me now!" Sound effect--"boop beep boop beep"

India and Hotel pull back from the screen in surprise as a giant pixelated monster descends from the top and destroys the pieces. India--"Yikes!" Hotel--"What?!" Sound effect--"bleeple blargh!"

The camera pans sideways to reveal November working on a nearby computer that has a nearly identical display on it to the one that India and Hotel have in front of them. The only difference is that it declares his score to be twenty-seven. India and Hotel shout at him in anger while he just grins back at them in insane, bug-eyed Novemberness. India and Hotel--"NOVEMBER!!"

Strip 98: And the horror begins anew.

We are back to the view in strip 96, looking along the floor of this room with the door that Golf had used on stage right. November has moved towards the door so he is stage right of India and Hotel, who glower at him. November--"He he he." India--"That wasn't fair!" Hotel--"What she said!"

November holds out his hands in a placating gesture. Hotel, at least, has folded his arms. November--"Oh, calm down! That was just a little diversion I completed in my spare time. I'll let you play with it if you want." India--"Hmm. I don't know. If it's anything like your other little 'presents,' I think we'll pass." Hotel--"Yes. I'd be worried about it blowing up in my face."

November tosses a hand. He turns partway toward the door. India and Hotel are starting to look worried. November--"Alright, alright." November (another speech bubble)--"I know! How about a sample from my stash of experimental chocolate bars? They're fortified with laser-reflective proteins, not to mention having the same systemic effects as an entire pot of coffee!" India--"Uh . . ."

The door flies open as Kilo forces it by hand. (If doors are automatic, then why force it by hand? Because then it opens *faster*.) The other three react in the now-traditional terror at his sudden appearance. Sound effect--"Creeeeak!" Kilo--"CAFFEINE!!" November, India and Hotel--"Aaaaaagh!"

Strip 99: Now with scene changes so fast you'll get whiplash!

We watch Golf as he paces in front of his viewscreen. He is deep in irritated thought and may have a hand to his chin. Golf--"How much worse could the timing be? I need to strike while they could not respond to the revelation of my intentions. Any delay allows them to gather allies and intelligence."

The camera suddenly switches to Delta as he stands on the bridge of the good guy mothership. He's facing a monitor stage left, but we cannot see who is on the monitor. He is also making a little "not now" gesture with his hand towards Charlie, who stands behind him stage right speaking to him. Charlie--"Delta, I feel like I should inform you that I am an aardvark. My subconscious tells me so." Delta--"Not now, Charlie . . ."

Back to Golf. He still paces, but his hand gestures have no doubt changed. Golf--"Lacking the Hamandcheese *forces* delay. By the time I have found a way of replenishing it, I may lose the opportunity to strike at my foes while still divided!"

Back to the mothership. From stage right to stage left: Charlie wandering off stage right, Echo holding out towards Delta the electronic notepad and remaining credits that Alpha had given her, Delta grimacing and attempting to shush Echo so he can get back to the person on the monitor. Charlie (small)--"Now I must tell Alpha about the quilting . . ." Echo--"Delta, here's the hazard pay stuff you gave to Alpha. Feel under no obligation to recheck your calculations before further use." Delta (small)--"Not now, I'm in a meeting."

Back to Golf. He stands still, possibly facing the camera. Golf--" . . . I wonder. Is there a way around both my problems?"

Back to the mothership. Echo just tosses the items down on some table as she walks stage right. Delta clears his throat and talks to the monitor. Sound effect on items (small)--"plink" Delta--"Ahem! So, Oscar! What can my outfit do for you?" Oscar (the person on the video monitor)--"We need your assistance with the retrieval of this Hamandcheese . . ."

Strip 100: Behind the scenes, part I. Every hundred comics there will be a "Behind the Scenes" strip hosted by Lima. Lima, in these strips, will look each time like a different person from among those who are responsible for "Alpha" the comic. Therefore, if I'm the only person working on this, then Lima will always look like me. The characters (Alpha, Bravo etc.) will be portrayed as actors playing the characters--as in, they will still be called by the same names, but

they will be relaxing, chatting, drinking coffee etc. They are mostly in T-shirts and stuff, with all cybernetics and other "makeup" removed or being applied or whatever as needed.

Lima smiles invitingly and waves to the audience as he walks through a hallway in our fictional studio. Props line the walls, such as the sign to the florist's stall called Rosemary (see strip 36) and the Acme Vaporization Gun (see strip 11). Mike and Hotel wander by in the background sans cybernetics and rifle, chatting. Lima--"Greetings, readers! I'm Lima, your host to this, the 100th comic! I hope you've all enjoyed part I of our little show--it took quite a while to get this far. In celebration, we here at *Alpha* wanted to take a moment out from the strip to show you what goes on behind the scenes!"

Lima enters a lounge where Alpha, Bravo and Delta are sipping from mugs at a table. The three of them are looking at the camera with smiles. Yes, even Delta. They are dressed like people from our times, and Alpha has two hands. Lima--"First we have Alpha, Bravo and Delta." Delta--"Hey there!" Lima--"Ha! That didn't sound like the Delta you know, did it? Turns out he had to take voice lessons to do the deep, ominous rumble that is so prominent in the strip." Delta--"Here, wait a minute . . . harrumph . . . *Alpha!* Report to the bridge or I'll reassign you to *cheese grater* duty! . . . Pretty cool, huh?" Lima (small)--"Um, yeah."

Lima heads to the set for the good guy bridge. November, with his hair combed back, is working on a monitor with an ordinary screwdriver. The monitor will be blasted by a sonic boom in strip 101. Charlie is operating a camera on-set. His hair is still spiky. It will always be spiky. Lima--"Oh, and looky here! I bet you weren't expecting to see *him* behind the camera! Little trivia piece for you: Charlie does *all* the camera work when he's not in the scene himself." Charlie--"Wheeee!" Lima--" . . . Which explains this shambles." Charlie--"Hey!"

We are now in a corridor, looking across the short dimension to a door on the other side. Lima sticks a thumb at it as he walks past. Text on door--"COSTUMING" Lima--"All of us here at *Alpha* are, of course, very friendly with one another. You may not know this, but off-camera Echo and Juliet are just as chummy as you've seen the rest of the crew. We were going to bring you an interview, but they're getting ready for a later scene and so we're going to leave them be." Lima (another speech bubble, small)--"If we didn't, Juliet might start collecting teeth." Text with arrows pointing towards Lima's speech bubbles--"irony"

Lima walks to an open area somewhere surrounded by props, backdrops etc. Foxtrot, Golf and India are wandering up from the background, completely in stage garb. They are all cheerful. Lima--"We have lots of work to do now, of course; acting, fight scenes, all sorts of moments for our actors to shine."

Kilo is wandering up on one side while fixing a plate that had come loose on his shoulder. The other three are closer to the middle. Lima stands, facing the camera. Lima--"But what about this *new* character, Oscar? Who else is coming with him? And what is going to happen with this 'Hamandcheese' thing everyone keeps bringing up?"

If the others weren't big panels, this one must be. Foxtrot, Golf, India and Kilo stand on either side of Lima and all of them are waving at us. Alpha, Delta, possibly November and whoever the heck else feels like it, all walk in or lean in on the sides to wave as well. Lima--"Well, you'll just have to tune in to strip 101 and see what happens next! I hope you'll stick with us and that you all have a good time in part II!"