

# Comic Book Writing Sample

by Carlin Cottam

Hal Slayton: Issue 1

We see a grand-looking hallway, filled with artifacts. It resembles a museum more than the tomb it is. For several panels or one big panel that fills the whole page, we see the beauty of this stonewall tomb.

This is the Great Milonian Tomb-Museum, a race of sentient robots that only used brick and wood in their designs. This tomb is so special because it is the resting place of the first, great Milonians emperor!

I've seen this lately in more recent comics. It's the same panel but only altered a little bit so it has an "animated" quality to it when it's read digitally. That's what I imagine with the panels on this page.

The panel focuses on one section of the wall amongst a bunch of artifacts and displays.

A section of the wall is being cut into. Red lines show the new "door's" outline.

The section of brick wall falls, revealing the silhouette of a man.

The man has entered the tomb-museum and the world gets its first look at HAL. He's a well-kept man, in shape, bearded, and has a pair of unusual goggles resting on his forehead.

Caption: HAL

Henry "Hal" Slayton to be precise. A former history professor at the Institute of Ascended Learning, now a professional "acquirer" of the rare and the difficult to find. Human, one of the last.

Hal: It's beautiful!

Conrad (behind Hal, out-of-sight/silhouetted): Great! Are we going to get paid?

Conrad emerges from the "doorway" and we get our first look at him. He's alien, maybe squid-like, maybe deer-like, maybe squid-deer-like. He's bipedal, but unusual for us earthlings.

Caption: CONRAD

Member of the Vlapper race. As one of the few members of his species to leave his home planet of Vlapore and to have a job outside of coral farming, Conrad is proud of his work as an “acquirer” regardless if that job is completely legitimate or not.

Hal: Short answer, indeed we will, you fantastic Vlapper you.

Hal: Emma, do you have a location?

Emma (from Hal's earpiece): Negative, but I've tapped into the Tomb's power grid. Try the holo-comp closest to you, it should be active.

Hal heads over to a holoprojector built out of wood and stone and examines it through his goggles. Conrad can be seen in the background examining a display.

Hal: Well done, Em.

Hal: Conrad look at this. This Milonian Tomb predates anything I've seen or read about before! If I'm reading this right, this tomb launched into this asteroid belt before any sentient life we know of was flying through the stars. While America was declaring its independence the Milonians were launching rockets. Incredible.

The same image of Hal examining the computer, but now Conrad's head is turned away from the display and towards Hal.

Conrad: What's America? Is that an Earthling thing?

Hal shakes his head.

Hal: That's... disappointing.

Conrad: Okay... okay... spare me the lecture. I can't be expected to remember all of the history of your motherworld. Just tell me, does this place have what we're looking for?

View of the Tomb-Museum Computer. Under the holographic display (which has a bunch of alien writing and images), you can see the wood and stone structure making up the computer.

Hal: This tomb is from the early empirical days of the Milonian Union. There's not a bit of metal anywhere on the ship. Good sign.

Hal: Only brick, mortar, wood, and yes—porcelain! This is the right place!

Conrad: Wait, there's more than one of these museum places floating out there?

Here we zoom out so we get a look at an outside view of the Tomb-Museum inside the asteroid belt. The Tomb looks like a big stone capsule, made up of great grey bricks floating among the asteroids.

A ship can be seen on the outside hull of the Tomb, the D'Artagnan, Hal's old, but well-maintained spaceship.

Caption: The Great Milonian Tomb-Museum. The resting place of the first, great emperor of the Milonia.

Caption: THE D'ARTAGNAN

Hal's reliable ride designed by Slayton Designs INC. Named after a great hero from a novel the galaxy has forgotten. Complete with detachable shuttle, living quarters, and a few tricks up its proverbial sleeves.

Hal (bubble coming from the tomb): The Milonian tradition was to launch their deceased to the stars. That's how they believed one entered the afterlife. Even with the hundreds the Institute has tracked down, there are probably thousands still floating out there. They're just super hard to find. That's why we had to make that deal with the Ortonian Smuggler just to get a general idea of this one's location.

Back inside the tomb.

Conrad: After this job, we should track down another one. You know, one where we can exploit for all its profit?

Hal: I don't see why not. We have to eat somehow.

Conrad: I like these Milonians more and more.

Alarms start blazing. Red lights flashing. Hal and Conrad look up at the lights suspiciously.

Hal looks down at the computer in alarm.

Hal: Not good. Did I mention that the Milonians were notoriously hard on thieves?

Conrad: Maybe I spoke too soon...

The walls are coming to life as robots of stone and wood come out of their hiding places. Three aren't just displays inside the Tomb-Museum but bots themselves.

Emma (in earpiece): Now you've done it!

Emma (in earpiece): Run! Run for the Burial Chamber! I'll lock you inside once you reach it. Go!

Fill this page with panels of Hal and Conrad narrowly avoiding getting sliced, chopped, or squashed by a large variety of nonwood robots. Fill in the dialogue as they go through the page and action.

Conrad: So, these Melon-heads—

Hal: Milonian.

Conrad: —Milonians. What happened to them?

Hal: Tragedy... \*grunt\* ... the Prototronians wiped them out in a war long before either of us was born. This might be one of the last places you can find these security bots functioning so well. Honestly, I'd be thrilled if they weren't trying to kill us.

Conrad: The Protos, huh? I'd imagine it's tough to stand your ground when your enemy's made of steel.

Finally, they've reached the Burial Chamber!

Take a few panels to show them diving into the chamber and the door shutting behind them.

Then a big panel, maybe Hal is on the ground looking around after he dove, showing the Burial Chamber. The ground has exquisite tile work with diamond-shaped tiles placed every few feet apart. There are glorious columns and chandeliers. At the end of all of it, we see a magnificent robot head made of wood, complete with painted designs on it (think grandma's tea set).

Emma: Did you make it?

Hal: Emma, we found it.

Hal goes to take a step toward the head but is stopped by Conrad's arm.

Conrad: It could be booby-trapped.

Hal: Oh, you're right! Try not to walk on the diamond-shaped tiles.

Conrad: Right.

Conrad is carefully tiptoeing across the floor while Hal is casually strolling, even stepping on some diamond tiles.

As the two of them reach the wooden, robot head, Conrad notices Hal's nonchalance. Hal just gives him a smirk.

Conrad: So, there's no booby traps.

Hal: Nope. Beyond the sentinel guards, that's not the Milonian style.

Conrad: Are you kidding me?

Hal: I'm sorry I couldn't help it.

Conrad and Hal inspect the head just out of frame. The head is seen in all its detail and glory. It's a beautiful piece of art.

Hal: Go ahead, grab it. Consider it my apologies for the *harmless* joke.

Conrad: That seems fair.

Conrad is pulling hard on the head, but it won't come off.

Conrad: Um... is there a lever or something that I'm missing?

Hal: Just pull it off.

Conrad: I'm trying...

Hal: Let me help.

Similar panel, but now Hal is pulling hard on the head.

Hal: Why. Won't. You. Give?

Both are standing next to the head examining it.

“RUMBLE” appears at the bottom of the panel.

Conrad: It's moving, right? You see that too?

The head is rising out of its pedestal revealing that the body is still attached to it! Bricks are falling off its body and just the top of its shoulders can be seen.

Hal: Yep, it's... alive!

The wooden bot stands nearly 15 feet tall as it stands up out of the ground. It's a glorious robot complete with an arm cannon. Conrad and Hal look up at it.

Hal: Umm, Em? When you accessed the power grid did you perhaps grant power to a giant wooden robot with porcelain accents?

Emma: Uh, maybe? I... it's an old system and—

The bot shoots an energy blast at Hal. We catch him and Conrad in midair as they jump out of the blast's path.

More bot action, more dodging action.

Hal: Can you maybe, I don't know, ungrant it access?

Emma: I'm trying, but I don't think it was me. Not all tombs are for the dead.

Hal: I'm not a fan of that thought.

A long sword extends out of the wooden bot's non cannon arm and takes a big swing at Hal. Hal barely moves out of the way in time.

Hal: Crap crap carp!!!

Emma: Hang in there! I... I'm going to try something. Try to keep the bot close to the wall.

Hal is pinned down next to the far wall, the bot towering over him.

Hal: Keep it close to the wall!? \*SIGH\* I'll do my best.

Similar to the previous panel but now a drill has burst through the wall at the exact place the giant bot is—hitting the poor robo just under the neck. The body splinters apart, the body crumbles to the floor and the head is left without a base, falling to the ground.

As the head is still falling, Hal and Conrad scramble to catch it.

Hal: Grab it!

Conrad dives, just barely catching the wooden head before it hits the floor.

Hal: Yes!!

Conrad, now holding the head, stands next to Hal as they all survey the broken bot as the drill of the Rapier opens up.

SFX: Skree

The opened door reveals a small bot, Emma.

Hal: You missed. Some of the Tomb is still standing.

Emma: Ha. Ha. Ha. I think what you meant was, “Gee, thanks for saving our lives, Emma. Did I ever tell you how beautiful you are? Oh, and quick thinking with the Rapier! You’re the best!”

Caption: EMMA

Modified, “Swiss Army” bot from Zyushiro. Long-time friend and collaborator of Hal’s.

Hal: You’re pretty sassy for a bot, you know that?

Hal (new bubble): But thank you. Conrad was getting worried.

Conrad pats the head with pride and grins at the others.

Conrad: So, should we go get paid now or after you two flirt some more?

At the bottom of this page is the TITLE SEQUENCE:

HAL SLAYTON:

## A HEAD START

Now aboard the D'Artagnan, Emma pilots them away from the Tomb as Hal and Conrad examine the head on a table behind the pilot and copilot's chairs.

Emma: Alright boys, plotting a course for our employer. Is that thing strapped in secure?

Hal: It is.

Emma: Good. Wouldn't want my hard work to go to waste. You can have your information from them, Hal, but I expect a full share of the alphas.

Hal: "Full share," says the bot who crashed my shuttle into it.

Emma: First off, calling that sweet piece of tech a simple "shuttle" is a huge misnomer. Call it what it is, a modified asteroid mining craft that's illegal in any sector run by the Concurrent. Furthermore, the job was for the head and I didn't damage the head.

Conrad: She's got a point.

We get a closer look at what Hal and Conrad are inspecting on the head. Delicately, Conrad and Hal examine the base of the head, where the neck should be, with some sonic screwdriver-esque tools.

Conrad: Is it going to work?

Hal: Maybe. It looks promising. I'm hopeful.

Conrad: 5th time's the charm, right?

Outside shot of the D'Artagnan out in space.

Emma (Out of Frame): Engines ready. Preparing to enter Innerspace Tunnel.

Same shot, but a temporal portal opens up in front of the ship. The portal looks like the stars are spinning in the space just in front of the starship.

It looks something like this:



The spinning stars create a beautiful “tunnel” look and are something I haven’t seen before for a hyperspace jump.

A similar image, shot of the ship just outside the portal.

The ship is gone, with a visible emissions trail leading into the portal.

We cut to a new starship and are introduced to a Zahnian Command Ship of the Concurrence Navy. They’ve been watching our heroes in secret!

The dialogue Bubble from the hologram will be purple for distinction.

Zahn Cap: Do you think it’ll work?

Hologram: There is a higher probability than originally expected. Our informant on Zyushiro says the current calculations prove promising.

Now we move into the interior of the Zahn Command Ship. It's the classic Captain surrounded by other officers running the bridge, but not Star Trek. Totally not Star Trek. Okay, maybe a little Star Trek-like. Various aliens populate the bridge. The Captain looks the most human aside from his light green skin and red hair. The Captain is talking with a purple hologram. The reader will soon learn he's talking with the Zahnian Empress leader of the Zahn Concurrence.

#### Caption: THE ZAHNIAN NAVY

The jewel of the Zahn Concurrence, the Navy prides itself on its inclusive ranks. Note the Zahnians working alongside a multitude of species! All sentients are welcome to join the Concurrence with two exceptions: the Earthlings and a race called the Cisconish. However, neither of the excluded species seems to mind.

Zahn Cap: Should I follow this Acquirer Hal and his crew?

Empress: No. he's going back to his hangar on *the Last Bazaar*. We know where he's located. I have informants there that will keep me updated if there are any changes.

Set your course for Zyushiro and wait there, *out of sight*. I get the impression that it won't be long until Slayton is summoned to meet the Headless King.

Zahn Cap: By your command, your eminence.

Empress: Captain, this operation is delicate. You have several starships at your command but only if **absolutely** necessary. You must be as patient and exact as a surgeon wielding a scalpel. I want the two parts together in one piece. Is that clear?

Zahn Cap: Of course, Empress.

#### Caption: THE EMPRESS OF ZAHN

The feared and sometimes revered leader of the Zahn Concurrence. The current Empress has been on the throne longer than any other Zahnian Emperor before her.

This panel will be smaller and at the top of the page so that more space can be taken up by panels that have more details.

The D'Artagnan flying through an Innerspace Tunnel. This needs to look unique since we're using this kind of travel. It can't look anything like a hyperspace jump in Star Wars. I like the idea of something like the "time tunnel" in Avengers Endgame where there are multiple branches and paths you could take. Leaps in the Hal Slayton universe will be hazardous unless you are constantly navigating and guiding the ship even in an innerspace tunnel.

Emma (from inside the ship): Exiting Innerspace Tunnel in 3... 2... 1...

The back shot of the D'Artagnan gives the reader a view of THE LAST BAZAAR.

The Last Bazaar is kind of a hodgepodge of a space station with pieces from different colonies and larger ships welded together to create this sort of floating island. On a section of the hull, there is an obvious growth that looks very similar to a wasp nest.

The Last Bazaar is the island of misfit toys. It's not so much a place for pirates (though low-level pirates do live there) as it is a place for all of those who don't have a home. These are the refugees, the rejects, and those who have nowhere else to go. However, this is not a sad place. It's lively and welcoming.

Emma (from inside the ship): Welcome home.

Caption: THE LAST BAZAAR

Not much to look at but a comfortable place to do business, get a hot meal, catch a few winks, or do all of the above. The interior is essentially a giant market, full of little shops and booths selling stuff from all over the known galaxy.

The self-proclaimed "Abbot" created this place to be not only a thriving market but also a home for those who have none. This lively place is open to all and brags wares from nearly every corner of the known galaxy.

Interior of the cockpit. We can see our heroes looking out at The Last Bazaar.

Control: Approaching starship, this Control Tower Alpha. Ease off on your thrusters! Traffic is heavy today. Docking will take some time in our main hangar, but we promise to keep the line moving.

Hal: Hello, Control! This is the D'Artagnan. We have a property code and a private dock.

Control: Please speak the code and transmit your ship's frequency.

Hal: Boarding Code: TJCN20-07. Transmitting starship frequency now. This is the D'Artagnan. Priority code: TJCN20-07.

Control: Accepted, D'Artagnan. Welcome home, Hal.

Hal: Roger that. Good to be here, Rexy!

Interior of the cockpit. We can see our heroes looking out at The Last Bazaar.

Conrad: Man, the Abbot should get rid of those hives. I think they are getting bigger.

Emma: Studies show that allowing some Hivers to attach themselves to a space station's hull helps to ward off high-level pirates and other marauders. They consider them a "bad omen."

Conrad: Hmm, something pirates and I agree on.

Something on the control panel lights up. Emma is looking at it.

Emma: We've been cleared. Heading to our hangar now.

We get a view of the Hangar, their home when they're off mission. It's a mess, but a good mess. This place looks like what you would imagine Indiana Jones's basement would look like.

The D'Artagnan is docked in their private Hangar and the crew are exiting the ship. Hal is stretching and yawning.

Conrad: I'm beat. Let's secure the head and then go to the *Harvest* for a bite.

Hal: Emma and I will secure it. You get a head start.

Conrad: Oh... you sure?

Hal: Of course! Just save us a spot and order me my usual.

Conrad turns to leave the Hangar and pushes the button that opens the door.

Conrad: Thank you!

Emma: Of course! See you soon!

The door whooshes shut. Once the door closes, Emma's deminer changes from cheery to annoyed.

Emma: Now, why did you just give us more work and let Conrad go early?

Hal: The Head? Oh, that's already secured on board. I'm not going to move it.

I was just hoping you'd stay back for a minute and... um... talk for a minute while we walked over?

Emma: Oh, Is everything okay?

Hal: Yes, it's just what if we get the Zyushiro databanks? And... I don't know... I guess things could change after that.

Emma: You mean you could go legit again?

Hal: Well... I... I could use it to get off the blacklist the Institute got me on and I could... I could teach again, Em. I'm not looking for an out, we're partners and we've built up rewarding reputations as Acquirers, but I still miss teaching. I miss using my degree for more than just a rich client who wants to expand their collection.

Emma: Hal, if you... do you want to... I mean... Don't we have... Just don't teach for that cult again. Anywhere else is probably fine.

During this conversation, we get a view of Hal and Emma traveling through the Bazaar to the Aure Harvest. Here's a chance to show the diversity and different alien species of this galaxy.

Hal: Cult? Do you mean the Institute of Ascended Learning? It's not exactly a cult. Cult-ish, sure, but what isn't?

Emma: Honey, if you have to define something as "not exactly a cult," it's probably a cult.

Hal: Haha. Point taken.

Hal: Emma, of course, we have fun. That's why I'm bringing this up. The long shot that this works, that this head revives a dead king, and I clear my name, I want you to know that you are a good partner and an even better friend. Not all of this has to go away if I teach again.

Emma: Don't get all sappy on me, Hal. And of course, if you go part-time, you'll have to take a cut of your shares.

Hal: It'll be like that, huh?

Emma and Hal are outside the Azure Harvest. Conrad waves to them, visible from the bar on a stool.

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Interior of the Azure Harvest. Hal quickly spots Conrad sitting at the bar with various plates of noodles and sushi in front of them. Similarly, the patrons of the Harvest also have various oriental-inspired foods and mugs full of different colored drinks.

Behind our heroes is our first major easter egg, C.E.E., and Savage (former comic characters) sit in the background behind Conrad and Hal, enjoying a drink together with two humans named Neil and James (to represent my childhood friend and me).

Hal and Conrad enjoy their meals in relative silence for a handful of panels. Conrad slurps down some clam-plant soup.

Conrad: The cook outdid themselves tonight.

Hal: Amen to that.

A beeping comes from Emma's arm. She presses a button and a holo message floats above her wrist.

Emma: Oh, It's the Queen.

Now more urgent.

Emma: Hal! It's the Queen! She wants us on Zyushiro right now!

Hal: What?

Emma: The Queen, the palace, Zyushiro now!

Emma knocks over her drink of Piston and the Crew gets up.

The Crew are running back to the Hangar.

Conrad: I didn't get to finish my soup. It's a crime to leave such ripe clam-plant uneaten.

The Crew jumps into their seats.

Hal: Buddy, if this works out, I'll go all the way to Vlaporia to get you another bowl.

The D'Artagnan takes off from the hangar and leaves the Last Bazaar.

The page opens on a crisp, beautiful planet: Zyushiro.

Caption: ZYUSHIRO

Home to the bot species known as the Shiro. Outside observers think of Zyushiro as a paradise. However, things have not been the same since the head of the good King Sargon went missing.

The planet looks like the dream of the future. There are flying cars, pristine buildings, and giant bots that guard the planet. The buildings are upside-down pyramids. It's the epitome of a science fiction, technological utopia.

The D'Artagnan heads towards the biggest upside-down pyramid, the Palace.

The starship lands on a pad with the BUTLER REMUS and a handful of PLUS and MINUS BOTS (the palace guards) waiting for them.

Butler: Welcome to Zyushiro! I believe this is the first time visiting our majestic planet for the Vlapper and Earthling, but of course not the first time for you, Emma, daughter of Zyushiro. Welcome home!

Emma: You can call them Hal and Conrad, Butler. Let's get going.

Butler: As always your blunt nature is equally biting as it is charming.

Now, the Queen awaits you all in the Throne Room. Quickly, now. Her Majesty is quite anxious to try this *Milonian* head.

Hal: Thank you for having us, Butler Remus. Lead the way.

The Crew follows the Butler into the palace.

Conrad: This place is breathtaking. You grew up here, Emma?

Emma: Well, I--

Butler: She didn't "grow up" in the palace. Emma was--er--is a lower-level citizen and since her, let's say, *departure* from Zyushiro, she never got the chance to advance her role, as I have. A true shame. I imagine Emma would have served our planet well.

Hal: Butler Remus, I highly recommend that you drop the social commentary about my partner. It would be a shame for you to have to explain to the Queen why the head left this planet on our starship.

Butler: Understood. I ask forgiveness. I meant no ill will.

Emma: Of course, you didn't.

Emma (whispers): Rusting, slime bot.

The Crew enters the Palace. The place is grand. Queen Sabine stands in the center of a round room as Plus and Minus Bots stand guard throughout. The ceiling is painted with the exploits of King Sargon. A crimson curtain covers up a spot in the center of the room.

Butler: Queen Sabine, I present to you our faithful Acquirers!

Queen: Thank you for coming!

Hal: Forgive us, Queen Sabine, for being late. We arrived as soon as we could.

Queen: No no no. It is I who broke protocol. When Emma messaged that you found the Milonian head, I couldn't wait for our previously scheduled meeting. I had to see if this head worked as soon as possible. I hope my impatience didn't cause problems.

Conrad: Well, my soup--

Hal: Of course not, Your Majesty.

Butler: And you believe that this head will work? That it will fit my king?

Conrad: The joint looks good.

Emma: I'd give the neural networks an 87.6% chance of compatibility.

Queen: I'll accept those odds.

Open the curtains.

A Plus and Minus Bot pull strings to reveal King Sargon's body sitting on his throne.

Caption:

SARGON, THE HEADLESS KING OF ZYUSHIRO.

Queen Sabine turns towards her husband's headless body and looks affectionately at it.

Queen: Sargon, these are the Acquirers I told you about. They have returned with a head that seems compatible with you. It's a head from an old Milonian king. I am very hopeful about this one, my love!

May we have the head, please?

Hal: Of course.

Hal hands the remote controlling the drone carrying the head to a Plus Bot.

The Queen: Please attach the head.

Conrad looks at the events in awe.

Conrad (whispers): This is incredible!

Hal (whispers): Yes, they've never let us see the king before. I wish I could have showered first.

Emma (whispers): This better work.

The Plus and Minus Bots are all over the head, inspecting it and caring for it with their space tools.

Conrad (whispers): If this works, remind me why the King won't have the same personality as the bot Emma destroyed.

Hal (whispers): You seriously need to read our clients' briefings better, brother.

Hal (whispers): Like the Shiro people the Milonians have their memory where their heart would be. The *processing* power is in the head. That's why it took so long to find the right fit for King Sargon... At least, that's the theory. Honestly, this is pretty new territory. No one has ever attempted such a transplant, but Sargon's heart will overpower whatever Milonians have in their head.

Conrad (whispers): And by heart you mean the chest?

Hal (whispers): Of course.

Conrad (whispers): Wait... that's where Earthlings have their hearts? Their chests?

Hal (whispers): Yes.

...

Wait, where's your heart?

Conrad (whispers): I'm not telling.

Hal (whispers): You're not *telling*?

Conrad (whispers): No.

Hal (whispers): You know where my heart is, I want to know where your heart is.

Conrad (whispers): No, it's too intimate. Vlappers only share that info with their life-mate.

Hal (whispers): Too *intimate*? I... hold on. Is the location of your heart different for each member of your species?

Conrad (whispers): I can't tell you that. Again, too intimate.

Hal (whispers): Holy Nova! If "too intimate" is going to be your response to everything I ask I'm going to--

Emma (whispers): Would you two sentients shut up!?

Emma (no longer whispering): Look. It's working!

Conrad and Hal together: It's working?!!

For the new few panels, focus on King Sargon, the throne, and the Queen.

There is no change in the slumped-over body of the King, but there is now the wooden head attached.

The King's eyes glow.

Using his staff, the King begins pushing himself up.

The King is hunchbacked, but standing. The Queen rushes to his side.

Queen: Sargon?

Sargon: In... in... in... incomplete. Incom... incom... incom... incompatibile. Configuration paused.

Conrad: I'm not sure if--

EXPLOSION!

Part of the roof falls and Zahn soldiers spill through.

The Crew hides and there is chaos as the Plus and Minus Bots fight the Zahn invaders.

Queen: Zahn. The Zahnians are invading Zyushiro!

Hal (angry): Martians.

Queen: My love, we must get you to safety.

Sargon: Sabine! My configuration is still incomplete... incomplete... incompatible.

Emma: The head's not working.

Queen: Please, help me get Sargon to safety.

Hal gets under one of the King's arms and the Queen is under the other.

Fighting continues behind our heroes as the Plus and Minus Bots run interference between the Zahn Marines and their struggling King.

The Crew and Queen manage to get out of the Throne Room and swiftly start racing for the D'Artagnan. They are stopped by a pair of Zahn soldiers.

A Soldier: Halt!

Conrad switches with Hal and takes Sargon's arm.

Hal: Hey friends! Now, this must look awkward, but there's a simple explanation. You see we're tourists here, and--

In an instant, Emma's right hand transforms into a cannon and blasts the two Zahn Marines away.

Emma: For the record, Hal, I wanted to hear where you were going with that.

Hal: Let's go.

Our heroes make it through the doorway to the landing pad, fighting a few Zahn marines along the way. The path appears clear...

Conrad: We're close!

Hal: Just a little further!

...but a troop transport starship swoops down, cutting off the Crew from the D'Artagnan.

Emma: And trapped...

Another Soldier: Lay down your weapons, turn around, and put your hands on your head!

Queen: I'm sorry, everyone. But I believe it's over. Thank you for bringing my Sargon back to me, even if it was only briefly.

The Crew begins to comply, when:

Sargon: Not... not... not... not yet.

Sargon steps forward.

Another Soldier: Freeze or I will shoot you!

Sargon's staff starts spinning, emitting light.

Another Soldier: Burn them down!

The laser blasts bounce off the spinning staff protecting the body of the King. Only the Milonian head gets hit occasionally.

Conrad: What is he...

The Crew grab their weapons and start shooting at the Zahn Marines!

King Sargon starts using his staff to knock down the Marines, knocking a few off the edge or zapping them with the end of the staff. Without the protection of the spinning staff, the Milonian head is getting pelted by blaster fire now.

Caption: KING SARGON

The last of the Marines are dealt with even as Sargon collapses to the ground.

Queen: Sargon.

The Queen runs to Sargon's body.

The lights in the Milonian head are fading. With a final ounce of strength, the King touches his queen's face.

Sargon: My love, this is for the best.

The Crew arrives at her side.

Emma: I'm so sorry, Your Majesty.

The Queen cradles the King's body like the piety statue.

Queen: The brave fool. He protected his body. Only the head died. We're back to square one. But I didn't lose him.

Hal cautiously approaches.

Hal: Your majesty, come with us. We can take you somewhere safe and--

An explosion comes from the Palace.

Queen: I can't. I have to stay.

Get to your starship, get out of here before the Zahnian Concurrence forms a blockade.

Hal: We can't just leave--

Queen: Yes you can. You have to. Get out now while you can.

Hal: I-- thank you, Sabine.

Our heroes run to the ship as Plus and Minus Bots run to the Queen's aid.

In the cockpit, Emma and Hal prep the ship and take off.

Hal: Conrad, get on the rear gun.

Let's try to take a few of them out with us.

Conrad: On it!

Hal: Alright. Let's do this.

The D'Artagnan enters the fray, taking on Zahn starfighters.

A command ship faces the D'Artagnan.

Emma: I don't think we can take out a Command Ship, Hal.

Hal: We won't. We just need to irritate them. Irritate them so much that they use their Particle Cannon on us and don't realize they've pulled the trigger too close to--

Emma: Oh! You want to pull a "Kid Icarus," don't you?

Hal: Exactly.

The D'Artagnan takes out one of the Command Ship's underguns.

Emma: Missile incoming.

The D'Artagnan deploys flares and the missile explodes, missing its target.

Emma: They're charging their Particle Cannon.

Hal: We've got to pull them closer to the spot.

Emma: Would this be the wrong time to remind you that we've never successfully pulled off the Kid Icarus?

Hal: Most definitely!

The D'Artagnan fires at the Command Ship again.

Emma: We're in position.

They're about to fire!

Hal: Perfect.

Hal hits the intercom.

Hal: Brace yourself, Conrad!

The D'Artagnan loops away from the Particle Cannon as a steady energy beam launches from the Command Ship.

The beam misses our heroes and hits the other Command Ship nearby. The Command Ship rips apart as jagged crystals grow out of it.

Hal: Wahoo!

Emma: Nice work!

Conrad: The Cannon's charging up again. I think you made them mad.

Hal: Emma, my dear, I believe we've outstayed our welcome at this party.

Emma: Preparing to jump.

The D'Artagnan warps out of the battle just as the Command Ship launches another beam from its Particle Cannon.

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Caption: THREE DAYS LATER

We return to the Zyushiro Throne Room. The ZAHNIAN EMPRESS looks at the throne where Sargon once sat. Rubble surrounds her and the throne. She carries Sargon's staff in her hands.

Butler Remus approaches, escorted by two Zahn Marines.

Butler: You wished to see me, your eminence?

Empress: You have served me well as my informant, Remus. However, your people are not taking as kindly to me and the Concurrence as you have.

Butler: The Shiro are a hard-hearted people. Stuck in their ways, as it were. But I'm sure they'll see the benefit of your rule, in time.

Empress: I'm glad to hear it. Then accept your reward, Remus.

Butler/Remus: Empress?

Empress: You are now my Steward. The emissary between the Shiro and myself. You will lead Zyushiro *in my name*. Doing all I command and working towards the benefit of the Concurrence. My navy and army will stay here, for your planet's *protection* and to weed out Sabine and her pathetic force of so-called "*liberators*."

The Butler drops to a knee and bows his head in respect.

Butler: I am honored to govern this planet, as you see fit of course.

Empress: Very good. Now stand by my side and act in your new role as my steward. Bring him in.

Zahn Cap is escorted into the Throne Room.

Zahn Cap: My Empress, I am honored to have you--

Empress: Explain it to me, Captain.

Zahn Cap: Explain what, my Empress? The Queen's escape? Well, that Acquirer proved much more capable than originally--

Empress: Oh, how the Queen Sabine escaped *does* interest me. How the Acquirers escaped interests me. The fact that you gave the order to shoot down one of your Command Ships interests me. However, I was referring to an earlier event when you used full force to smash into the palace when I insisted, nay commanded, that you capture the King and his new head with *patience*!

Zahn Cap: ...

When I got the Butler's message that the head activated I decided a strong force was necessary. I called my forces that were hiding nearby into action and we attacked.

I hoped the surprise would overwhelm them and I could simply come in and take the King.

Empress: And it *FAILED*. All that I have of the King is his staff and the dead Milonian head, carelessly left behind as Sabine *ESCAPED*!

Zahn Cap: I was trusting the Butler's information and–

Empress: It's *Steward*.

Zahn Cap: What?

Empress: It's Steward Remus, now.

Zahn Cap: The *butler bot* is your emissary for Zyushiro? I thought that I would--

Empress: Now why would I grant that title to a failure?

Zahn Cap: I'll find him, I'll find the King and... and the Queen! And I will make her pay! I will... I will! You have my word!

The Empress regards the staff in her hands.

Empress: You should have done that when I gave you the chance the first time.

In one swift motion, the Empress jabs the end of the staff into the Captain's chest.

Zahn Cap: Aaaaaaiiih!!!

We see his skeleton glow through his skin for a moment and then he drops to the ground dead.

Empress: Such a fine weapon.

Steward, until the next time.

The Butler regards the smoking body of the Zahnian captain and answers without taking his eyes off it (two panels).

Butler: Yes... yes, of course, your eminence.

The last panel is a closeup of the Empress's face, you can still see the Butler staring at the body behind her, and she has a crooked smile.

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The D'Artagnan is traveling out in space. Hal is in a different set of clothes to show that time has passed.

Emma: Incoming message... from Zyushiro!

Conrad: Queen Sabine?

Hal: Let's hope.

A holographic image of the Queen appears above the console.

Queen: Hal. Currently, we still have working communication on Zyushiro, but we don't know for how much longer. So I wanted to get this out while I still have a chance.

In gratitude for what you have done for me, with this message you will find data files of what I could dig up on that symbol you showed me, Hal. It's not anything close to what Sargon must have in his memory banks, but it's something. I'm also transferring some Alphas to your account. It's more than we agreed on because I am hiring you for another job. Whenever you can dedicate time to it and however long it takes, find Sargon's head, his real one. Find it and keep it safe for me until I can liberate my people from Zahn's heinous act!

END OF ISSUE ONE