

## Dirk McAwesome the Smuggler by Richard Junk

Dirk McAwesome looked around at the terrible spaceport. "This is what they call a spaceport?" he asked as he joined his companions, the lovely Sophia Magicblade and another woman who looked like a pretty average tourist. Dirk was only there to move them off-planet, a mission given to him by the Supreme Galactic High Counsel Council.

"Don't be obtuse," Sophia said meanly. She hated working with Dirk because she felt like he was often a huge jerk, but by getting so defensive about it already, she was sort of being the jerk. "They're a tiny planet whose culture doesn't believe in technology."

Dirk huffed as he looked at the customs guards, each of them wearing a freshly-pressed uniform and wielding a standard military-issue rock, gray and weighty in their hands. He removed a lollipop from the pocket of his jacket.

"Just be cool," Sophia said. "The last thing we need right now is to be detained, for any reason."

Dirk glanced at the other woman with them. She had a notepad on a chain around her neck for sketching pictures of the beautiful landscape, and she wore a red tutu, which Dirk would have thought odd if every store on this planet wasn't selling fudge, knives, leather goods, and tutus. Tourist planets were all the same.

Two customs guards waved them forward to Checkpoint A.

"Did you enjoy your time on PBY-6?" the guard asked politely.

"It was wonderful, and we look forward to coming back," Sophia answered.

The guard etched some data into the rock in front of him. Sophia smiled, and the woman with her smiled, and Dirk didn't smile because he was too busy looking cool.

"And you sir, what is your favorite color?" the guard asked Dirk.

"Black," Dirk said.

"Black's not a color," the guard answered, frowning.

"Sorry, umm...silver," Dirk corrected himself. The tension was super thick.

The guard sniffed the air. "Sir...is that beer I smell on your breath?"

Dirk did his best to look innocent, even as Sophia was shooting him daggy looks. He was used to being recognized when he travelled, but he had registered in the Spaceport Registry as "McAwesome Dirk" so nobody would know he was here. He was sure his reputation as a hard-drinkin', hard-shootin', hard-talkin' SGHCC agent couldn't have followed him here.

"Of course not," he started, but the guard was already waving him toward a side station where two other guards stood. They were standing by a circle that had been drawn into the dirt.

"You'll need to step off to the side and take a breathalyzer test. Go on," the first guard ushered them away from his station as he chiseled furiously on his noterock.

"Did you drink before you came to get us?" Sophia whispered.

"Of course not," Dirk answered quietly. "This is a beer-flavored lollipop, though. Flying spaceships is hard and I needed to relax."

"You idiot," Sophia hissed loud under her breath as they walked. "That's an anti-magic circle over there! If we have to step through that, we're in trouble." She was so angry.

"What's the big deal?" he whispered back. "So you lose your magic powers for a second. I'm not even buzzed from this lollipop, so we'll be through quick."

Before Sophia could answer, they were standing before the two guards at Checkpoint B. The first guard motioned for the second guard, who held a fancier brick, to step forward.

"Charliexylb, do the breathalyzer," he said. Charliexylb sighed, because he totally hated having to be the breathalyzer all the time. He crouched down a bit to get his nose close to Dirk's face.

"Blow," Charliexylb said to Dirk, who complied. Charliexylb sniffed the air a few times. "Just a lollipop, nothing to worry about," he said as he stood upright again and stepped back to his previous position. Dirk flashed a smile at Sophia, one of those see-I-told-you-everything-would-be-fine-and-we'll-be-going-home-before-you-know-it smiles. Sophia looked crabby because she hated when he gave her that look.

"Ok everyone, step into the circle please. We'll make this quick." Dirk stepped in, nothing happened, and he waited for the others. Sophia stepped in slowly, holding her breath, and her image shimmered for a moment. No doubt the most powerful magic user in the galaxy could somehow defeat an anti-magic dirt-circle, though it was obvious it took massive concentration.

The tourist stepped into the circle, and that's when things got crowded.

The moment she set foot into the circle, there was the sound of a pop like a balloon, and the average tourist was gone. In her place was an elephant in a shimmering tutu. Everyone was a little shocked except Sophia, who kind of knew that this would happen.

"What the..." Dirk started.

"Elephant smugglers!" the smaller guard yelled. "Get them!"

"Uh oh," Charliexylb said as he dropped his fancy brick, because he was startled and a little clumsy and he'd been smelling alcohol-breath all day.

Dirk seized the moment and swung at the larger guard, knocking poor Charliexylb out with one punch.

The smaller guard held his rock threateningly, ready to strike. "Hold it, buddy!" he said, pants-poopingly nervously.

Dirk raised his hands. "Whoa, buddy. Easy," he said, don't-hit-me-with-a-brickingly.

Suddenly, Sophia was behind the guard, and she hit him in the head with her purse. The guard fell, and Dirk was surprised that the purse made a "thunk" and not a "thwak" sound.

"Good job," Dirk said. "Now, to the ship!" The elephant stepped out of the circle and became a small tourist woman again.

They turned to run toward their ship, only to find a wall of rock-wielding guards standing between them and their freedom.

Sophia grinned and flashed the inside of her purse at the guards, the larger guard's brick peeping out. She began to swing the purse around menacingly, and the guards panicked.

"Their technology hopelessly outstrips ours!" one of the guards squealed, and they all dropped their rocks and ran away.

Dirk, Sophia and the elephant were leaving the planet in no time.