



The Quantum Vault

Holographic Heroes

Space Will Never Be the Same

Quick Savant

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Introduction

“Guys, we’ve got company.” Freddie, a holographic quantum AI, said. Freddie bore an uncanny resemblance both in appearance and personality to an elderly Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. and believed he was Vonnegut’s reincarnated spirit.

“And it’s on a collision course with us, a head-on collision course.”

Captain Kael and Chief Pilot Vrie looked at each other. “Well, it was a nice run, wasn’t it Vrie? Would you have changed anything if you had to do it over?”

“Not a thing!” Vrie said. “How about you?”

“No, nothing.”

“We see it, Freddie.” Said Kael. “Our scanners are telling us it’s a Class A Architect ship, one of the biggest in the fleet. They are serious, this time.”

“Why can’t we outrun it like the others they sent.” Asked Doug, the famous Earthling who became the first human hologram after a near-death experience.”

The beautiful and graceful mermaid Luna appeared in the cockpit next to Doug, swam around him once, and then sat close to him. “Because that’s an alpha leader ship, they usually travel with a dozen or more smaller ships as escorts, all of them faster than us,” Luna said.

“She’s right, as always, look!” Freddie said.

The main viewport showed 10, now 11, now 12 more ships, and they had the Team Vault surrounded and all bearing down on a collision course.

“Bummer.” Doug said.

“We are being hailed.” Freddie said.

“Put them on the main viewscreen.” Kael said.

“I am Admiral Kai from the Architect fleet,” a distinguished alien said through translators.

“Kael and Vrie, consider yourselves under arrest.”

Odin, the Team’s famous German Shepherd, growled.

“Just what are the charges?” asked Doug.

“Dancing with lewd and suggestive gestures, as evidenced by aggressive twerking. Attempted transsexualism. Impersonating minors. Lip-syncing to obscene lyrics. Shall I go

on? We have a total of 37 charges. Dancing, in general, is prohibited in Architect culture. It has been that way for five billion years.”

“Attempted transsexualism? What are you talking about?”

“Kael and Vrie wore female costumes, which is short plaid skirts, thigh-high high heeled boots and Vrie put on a pink wig to look like Earth Korean teen-age girls.”

As he spoke, he put up a recording showing Kael and Vrie dancing in the described attire and performing obvious twerking acts.

“I guess he’s got a point there.” Doug said.

“Let me explain.” Freddie said. “We were in a rush to prepare, but most of our communications were down. When we searched for dance routines for Kael and Vrie to study, all we could get was a 400-year-old K-pop video.”

Stop this lunacy!” Luna said,” I take full responsibility for their actions. I asked them to dance because Doug likes to dance, although he has no skill at all, and he gets enjoyment and stimulation from watching others dance. (The admiral gave Doug a look of obvious disapproval) If you don’t know the story, Doug activated The Vault as a weapon to destroy the Void, which was about to consume the entire galaxy. He was killed in the process, but with Freddie’s technology and light show, my singing, and Kael and Vrie’s dancing, we were able to rekindle a spark in his consciousness, entangle it, and encourage him to sing back at me. Kael and Vrie’s dancing and backup vocals were part of why we got Doug back as the first human hologram and saved the galaxy from certain death. If Kael and Vrie had not danced, you, Admiral Kai, and all the rest of the Architects, and the entire galaxy, for that matter, were going to be sucked into the Void.”

“Luna, Vrie and I will go peacefully. You don’t have to do this.”

Luna looked Kael in the eye and said to the admiral, “Arrest me instead, I admit my guilt, I asked them to dance and chant.”

“Could you repeat your main statement? I suffered a communications glitch on this end, ” the admiral said.

“Which part?” asked Luna.

“The part after you said, “I take full responsibility, at the beginning...”

Luna rolled her eyes and sighed.

"You got to be kidding!" Doug said.

"I am kidding," said the admiral. I tried a little of your Earth humor. I heard every word and the entire galaxy, and I already know the touching story, but laws are laws, and Kael and Vrie stand accused of breaking the laws and must go to trial. They will get a sham of a trial and then be convicted, no matter what. We will use examples from Kael and Vrie to show that there was no more dancing in the architectural empire. That is our version of justice. I don't make the laws; I was sent to arrest you since you evaded our other ships. Justice is not always fair, and it's certainly not always pretty. Prepare to be boarded."

Chapter 1: Court

The courtroom shimmered like an ancient cathedral dipped in starlight. Architect judges—shifting, translucent forms that defied basic geometry—sat in their crystalline thrones, their faceless visages exuding the silent authority of a thousand civilizations. The air hummed with judgment, vibrating Doug McAllister's holographic form just enough to remind him that obliteration was an option on the table.

Doug "Trucker" McAllister adjusted the collar of his holographic spacesuit. Next to him, Luna flickered briefly, stabilizing her holographic form as she leaned closer to whisper through their private comm channel.

"Doug, stop fidgeting. They can smell fear," Luna hissed.

"Let them get a good whiff: I am not on trial, not yet anyway."

Across the courtroom, Kael and Vrie stood encased in glowing restraints. Their usual sharp pilot uniforms had been replaced with pristine, Architect-issued white robes, which made Kael look like an annoyed monk and Vrie like a reluctant fashion model auditioning for a cosmic cult. Kael radiated defiance, his glares daring the universe to bring it on. Vrie seemed to have accepted his fate and just sat there, his head down slightly.

The lead prosecutor's voice sliced through the air like the first note of a galactic symphony—sharp, resonant, and impossible to ignore. "Kael and Vrie of Team Vault, you stand accused of violating Law 472, Subsection B: 'No dancing, rhythmic movements, sexually suggestive gestures in sacred Architect zones.' Along with 36 additional laws of cultural sanctity. How do you plead?"

A commotion echoed through the grand chamber before Kael or Vrie could open their mouths. The colossal courtroom doors groaned open, revealing a figure who strode in with all the confidence of someone who'd already decided the trial was a mere formality.

"They both plead 'not guilty.' Team Vault, your savior has arrived!" a deep, but a little weird, voice boomed.

A man burst into the room, wearing a bright magenta suit with lapels so wide they could double as escape hatches. His shoes gleamed like twin stars, and his perfectly coiffed hair seemed to defy both gravity and good taste. A gold briefcase dangled from his hand, its monogram—"R.J."—etched in bold letters.

"That must be what's-his-name, Vrie and Kael's lawyer." Doug whispered.

"Reginald J. Fixer. The most infamous attorney of the five quadrants." Luna said.

Fixer twirled his briefcase theatrically before slamming it onto the defendant's podium.

"Kael and Vrie? My new best friends! Doug McAllister? Holographic scamp. Luna? A vision in pixels. And last but not least... the biggest bow-wow in town, Odin!"

A collective gasp rippled through the courtroom as a German Shepherd trotted in, tail wagging and eyes gleaming with intelligence. The dog's collar bore an emblem of the galaxy, a testament to his heroic deeds. Odin barked once, a sharp, commanding sound that echoed and echoed in the chamber and silenced even the murmuring judges.

Odin settled in next to Doug and gave the judges a stare that could melt neutronium. Doug instinctively patted the dog's head, earning a quick wag of approval.

Fixer cleared his throat dramatically. "Now then, honorable judges of unimaginable power, I invoke Article 9 of the Intergalactic Diplomatic Accords. My clients are entitled to representation, and I am here to ensure they get it. Pro bono? Absolutely not. But justice? Oh, justice will be served."

The courtroom buzzed with renewed energy. Article 9 was an obscure and ancient rule, rarely invoked but legally binding. The lead judge's geometric form shifted slightly, a subtle but telling gesture of discomfort.

"Very well, Reginald J. Fixer," the Judge intoned. "You may proceed."

Fixer grinned, flashing teeth so white they seemed to generate their light source. He spun to face the defendants, his magenta suit sparkling under the chamber's ethereal glow. "Kael and Vrie, this is going to be my performance of a lifetime. Stick with me, and not only will you walk free, but you'll do it with style."

Doug leaned toward Luna. "So... Kael and Vrie's fate is in the hands of a guy who looks like a disco ball?"

Luna gave him a dry look. "Welcome to Architect Court."

Doug's Nightmare Karaoke Night

Freddie, ever the opportunist for a good laugh and a solid point, cleared his holographic throat. "Your Honor, if I may, as an Assistant Defense Attorney, I'd like to introduce Exhibit B in defense of Kael and Vrie regarding Doug McAllister's motivation to sing...and by extension, his role in the concert."

Doug froze. He knew where this was going. "No," he whispered. "Not that."

Freddie ignored him, snapping his fingers to display a new holographic recording. "Ladies, gentlemen, and multidimensional beings, I present to you: Doug's 45th birthday party."

The courtroom lights dimmed, and the holographic screen flickered to life. Doug slumped in his floating seat, muttering, "This is how I die."

The recording began with a festive scene. A massive birthday banner hung crookedly above a crowded room filled with Doug's friends, family, and business partners. Balloons floated aimlessly, a few popping in the background as if in protest. Doug stood at the center of the room, clutching a microphone and swaying slightly—several drinks past his limit.

"Oh no," Luna muttered, unable to hide her amusement.

Doug, on-screen, slurred into the mic. "This one's for... for all you people who didn't think I could... uh... sing Bruce Springsteen. You're wrong!"

Freddie paused the video. "For context," he said to the court, "Doug had just downed his third margarita and mistakenly believed he could tackle one of the most notoriously difficult karaoke songs of all time: 'Thunder Road.'"

The courtroom erupted into murmurs. Even the Architect judge's symbols flickered with what could only be described as disbelief.

The video resumed. Doug launched into the song, missing the key entirely and mispronouncing half the lyrics. "You... you ain't a beaut, but you're all right..." he warbled, his voice cracking like a poorly tuned violin. The crowd's initial cheers turned to awkward silence, punctuated by a cough.

"No...no..." the real Doug muttered, sinking lower in his seat.

On-screen, Doug continued to massacre the song. "Show a little fail..."

Luna was sure that Doug's rendition of his famous song would make Bruce Springsteen turn over in his grave.

When one man made fun of Doug's performance, "You sing like a retarded dog with peanut butter stuck in his throat." Doug took a drunken swing at him, missing, and the man adeptly landed a punch to Doug's jaw, dropping him on his back, passed out.

A team of human and robot police quickly arrested Doug and his assailant, and Doug would spend the rest of his birthday in jail holding an ice pack to his jaw.

Freddie summarized the psychological analysis: "You see, your honor, and ladies and gentlemen and whatever of the jury, Doug never forgot the incident, and the court ordered therapy as part of his punishment plan."

"After his two years of required therapy, Doug came to the conclusion that the only way to end the pain of his karaoke night was to turn the experience into something positive, something that would help him and Luna later on in life."

"When The Vault and Luna, yours truly, and Kael and Vrie started to bring back Doug from the dead, Doug discovered he had a new-found confidence in his singing. Doug always had a hidden affinity for opera, even though all his friends said it was for homosexuals and stuck-up, rich phonies from California and New York. He felt so confident that he could challenge opera singer Luciano Pavarotti to a sing-off, an Italian operatic tenor who became one of the most famous tenors of all time when he transitioned into popular music in the latter years of his career. Doug thought he could even sing in fluent Italian, even though he had never studied it. This was obviously The Vault talking. Pavarotti became well-known throughout the world for his tone and earned the moniker "King of the High Cs" by recording many operas and individual arias. Doug felt that it was about time for a new king of operas. We will show you the clip and its impact at the end of the trial."

"Doug's performance made operatic history, and the recording became the top galactic single since then." Continued Freddie.

"In addition to his pathetic original singing ability, Doug also could not dance. Many people had even experienced nausea while watching his variety of cringe-worthy moves, and several had even vomited. But he liked dancing, and was resigned to watching since Luna, his friends, and family would not let him embarrass himself on his way into fighting and legal troubles.

“So, Luna needed Kael and Vrie to dance, and to dance well to entice Doug back from his Zombie state of consciousness. He needed to see his friends dancing and enjoying themselves to literally “lift his spirits” from the dead.”

“Kael and Vrie willingly helped Luna out by dancing, even though no Architects had ever danced before, and they knew there would be criminal liability. They sacrificed themselves for their new human friend and for this, they should be treated as compassionate heroes rather than criminals.”

The crowd murmured and debated among themselves. A few even clapped, although weakly, to avoid too much attention.

“Kael ended up doing quite well, even though their initial introduction to dancing came from a female Koren K-pop group and a 400-year-old digital copy. But this is why they were wearing short skirts, white shirts and ties, and long high-heel boots while performing.”

“They obviously got caught up in the music and the moment and perhaps made some moves that were sexually suggestive, that were inappropriate, but this is what happened, and this is normal for K pop. Not that Doug enjoys watching young Korean girls giving sexually suggestive gestures in their dancing. (Doug received a lot of odd stares of condemnation from the crowd) It's an art form that was very popular in its time even though somewhat exploitive.”

“Sure, Kyle and Bree made gestures like they were having intercourse, receiving it from behind, such as twerking but as part of a dance routine it was considered acceptable.”

Humans were, and are, sexual animals. As Kael himself once said back on Earth, sex is as natural as farting.”

The crowd gasped and looked at each other before murmuring once again.

“Kael and Vrie are going to jail.” Doug said to Luna.