

Hippies

Peter Stuart Fothergill

www.palaceofamino.com

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Toxic Venom

High-Tech Green Thing

Hippies *

* With contributions by Panos Aristidou, Justin Codd, Ross Meddle and Lawrence So

Hippies

Hippies

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1 Prologue

It had lived for eons on its wet blue world, consuming and producing life, and maintaining the ecosystem that had served it so well. It was only one substance, yet it could divide and think as many, and extend its influence to the empty void beyond the sky. Over time its abilities – intellectual and physical – grew virtually without bounds.

It was a purely joyous and fulfilling existence.

But then they came.

Visitors – small and fragile, soft and fleshy, and encased in metallic skins - descended down to the blue planet. They swept beneath the waves and set up home on the mountainous ocean floor. Even the deepest abyss did not escape colonisation. Soon domed habitats spread round the planet.

At first the substance welcomed the arrival of the visitors. It relished the thought of intelligent interaction and the start of a new and symbiotic relationship. But the visitors had no interest in such things. They began sucking away at the planet's minerals and animals, consuming its resources at an alarming and unsustainable rate.

The substance realised that its world was dying.

Joy became hate.

For the first time rage consumed the substance. Extending tendrils around its world, the substance carved deep splits into the habitats of the visitors, snuffing out the fragile life within. Many tried to flee in their skins of metal, but those too were split wide open.

Within hours the visitors were wiped out and absorbed. All of their domes were crushed and returned to dust - all but one, kept along with its glowing power source as a reminder that visitors were not to be trusted.

Stability returned.

Hate became joy. But the joy was no longer pure.

2 Alien Doom Cruiser

“Damn it!” Justin exclaimed, looking down at the blood splattered across his previously immaculate boots and trousers. He was tired of the flower-loving, tree-hugging hippies continually protesting outside the naval base. This time he had given them a few bloody mementoes to take with them.

Ross looked at the mess on his friend’s clothes. “Don’t worry, that’ll wash out.” he said, as he turned and leaned over the sink. He turned on the cold tap and began washing the fast congealing red liquid from his hands. “I’ve had quite a lot of experience getting blood out of clothing, believe me.”

Justin smiled. “I don’t doubt it!”

Pan was standing nearby. “I could use any tips on stain removal.” He said as he screwed up the now moist paper towel he’d been rubbing over his hands. He threw the sodden towel into the bin in the far corner of the washroom. His aim was impeccable.

Ross loved giving out that kind of advice. “Well, the first thing to do is rinse the bloodied area with cold water. That’ll get rid of a lot of it. Don’t whatever you do use hot water or you’ll cook it. You all know what black pudding looks like – fuckin’ foul. The next thing is to soak the stained clothing in dishwasher detergent. It has protein digesting enzymes which do a good job on blood stains. If there is still a stain try a little diluted hydrogen peroxide. That normally does the trick.”

Lawrence and Peter walked in, their boots caked in drying blood. Lawrence smirked. “I bet the shroud of Turin would never have existed if you were around back then, Ross.”

Everyone nodded in agreement.

Justin was the last to leave the washroom. He joined the others standing outside on the dock in the bright morning sunshine. Western Scotland was renowned for having the most cloud cover of anywhere in the United Kingdom, but today it was not living up to its gloomy

reputation. If I'm going to give out a good kicking, Justin thought, I prefer to do it on a crisp, bright morning like this.

Ambulance sirens could be heard fading away in the background as they ferried away the last of the bruised and battered protestors. Now was the time. "Right boys," Justin said with a serious tone. "I guess we should get on with business. Follow me."

Pan, Peter, Ross and Lawrence followed Justin. As they walked along the dock to the large grey building at the end Justin could sense the air of expectation amongst his friends. It was right that they felt that way. They were going to be the first civilians to see the Navy's latest and greatest piece of technology. The cost of the project had been phenomenal - no expense had been spared. They could only wonder at the capabilities of what lay hidden behind those massive grey doors. Justin could not help grinning. He loved to have important secrets locked up in his brain. And he loved to reveal them even more.

Ross broke the silence. "Hey, guys!" He said, as he produced a chrome-plated hip flask from his pocket. "I think we should have a toast." He undid the lid and raised the flask up. "To us!" After choking back a mouthful of the burning liquid he passed it on. Everyone repeated the little ritual.

Peter was the last to take his swig. He grimaced. "Bloody Captain Morgan! You'd have thought that he'd be able to make a decent bottle of rum by now." The consumption of strong alcoholic beverages was not one of Peter's favourite activities.

The group carried on their way to the giant grey hanger. Justin stood in front of a small panel just to the side of the large doors. As he did so a red laser beam ran quickly over his body before focusing on his eyes. Almost immediately the retinal scanner confirmed his identity. An unnecessarily sexy sounding computer voice spoke. "WELCOME, CAPTAIN CODD. YOUR MASSIVE AND IMPRESSIVELY PHALLIC VESSEL AWAITS YOUR PRESENCE."

With a hydraulic whooshing noise a small door next to the panel opened. A look of disappointment crossed the faces of Justin's companions, who had obviously been hoping the huge doors would ease their way open. It was the last time they were going to be unimpressed for quite a while.

They followed Justin through the small door.

Pan, Peter, Ross, and Lawrence stood and stared in awe at the sight before them. The interior of the hanger was incredible. At over a

hundred metres tall, and a kilometre in length, the building was the largest construction facilities in the world. High above, huge pieces of machinery hung from the ceiling like giant mechanical insects – some of them were moving slowly on wide rails. Running between the machines were a myriad of gantries, on which dozens of grey-haired men in white coats tapped away on palmtop PCs. Across the floor, autonomous robots ferried men and equipment in all directions.

From the centre of the ceiling, a thick cluster of cables and pipes dropped down and connected to the longest, blackest, tallest, widest machine known to man. This was obviously what they were all here to see.

Justin was sitting on a nearby robotic transport. “Climb on.”

Ross joined Justin at the front of the vehicle. Pan, Peter and Lawrence climbed onto the back and grabbed some hand-holds. The robotic vehicle accelerated quickly and headed towards the centre of the hanger, zigzagging between the other transports. Within seconds they were speeding along the side of the giant black behemoth, which was floating in a deep channel of water.

Justin took a deep breath, and then spoke proudly. “Behold!” He said with reverence. “The new flagship of the British Royal Navy, and the largest, most ferocious, and most deadly war machine ever constructed – *HMS Death Reaper!*”

Ross punched the air. “Fuckin’ yes!”

Justin continued. “It’s four hundred metres long, seventy wide, and sixty-six high. With twenty-two decks, nothing else comes close to this baby!”

The robotic transport slowed and came to a halt next to the giant submarine’s conning tower. Everyone stepped off the transport.

Pan looked up at the tower. “Man, this is cool! It beat’s that little old sub thing you showed us a couple of years ago.”

Peter agreed. “Yeah, that was - to put it crudely - crap!”

“It certainly was.” Justin agreed, leading the group onto the gangway that lead to a large hatch on the side of the *Death Reaper*. “We use those for target practice now.”

Two guards armed with assault rifles and grenade launchers met the group at the top of the gangway. They saluted their captain. Justin returned the salute and stepped through the submarine’s hatch.

Peter laughed. “If I could choose what my taxes are spent on,” he said, following Justin, “this would be it!”

The others followed, nodding in agreement.

“Gentlemen, if you would like to take your seats I shall continue.” Justin said, pointing across the small but luxurious compartment. Pan, Lawrence, Peter and Ross looked around and saw four seats with their names mounted over four of them.

“What’s going on?” Lawrence asked as he slowly surveyed the plush surroundings. The four friends sat down in their arm chairs fixed at various positions around the room. As soon as they were all seated, a small retina scanner descended from the ceiling. After the scanner had made a rapid flyby of everyone’s face, they were all positively identified and logged into their seats.

Justin began slowly. “A long time ago the Defence Agency realised that the people who joined the armed forces might not be the ones best cut out to fight for their country, or indeed the world. It became apparent that a process was needed to identify the ideal candidates. To this extent over the last twenty years every arcade game, computer and games console has had a small transmitter installed within it to relay high scores in intelligence, mental agility and speed of thought, and of course identity, direct to the Defence Agency. From the early Atari games consoles, to Play Station, to Gameboy Advance, players’ identities and qualities have been monitored. Even the Sinclair C5 had a chip to recognise driving skills, but we don’t like to talk about that one.”

Ross was playing with the controls surfaces on his seat. He had managed to access *HMS Death Reaper’s* weapons systems - an act that seemed reminiscent of some game he had once played. It was an act that also felt completely natural to him. “So, what you’re saying is that not only is this one bottom-kicking fucker of a vessel, but the crew is top-line and chosen from the best video game players this country can provide?”

“Yes, that is exactly what I am saying.” Justin replied. His tone lowered slightly. “But there are a few high-level crew positions still not filled. We need the best – the very best – video game players available.” He looked around the room. “In case you haven’t guessed, the best players available are sitting right here.”

Pan had found the doughnut maker next to his seat and was quite content chomping away on a fresh batch of sweet and doughy snacks. After hearing Justin’s last words he spat out his current mouthful. “You think we’re really that good?!”

Justin nodded. “We *know* you are that good.”

Peter leaned towards Pan. “Think about it. It’s obvious. Think of the incredible Gameboy and Play Station sessions we’ve had. They’re scarcely believable.”

Pan thought for a second. “That’s true, I never thought about our sessions like that before. I just thought of them as normal.”

Justin smiled. “That’s why you’re all perfect for these high-ranking bridge crew positions. You will fit in naturally. You’re superior hand-to-eye coordination and super-rapid reflexes will enable you to perform your tasks with ease.”

Ross punched the air. “Fuckin’ yes!”

Pan asked a question through another mouthful of doughnut. “So, what tasks would you want us to perform?”

Justin answered. “There is only one objective for the mission this vessel is about to embark upon: destroy an alien doom cruiser that is on a direct intercept course with Earth.”

Everyone was silent.

Justin had been expecting this reaction. “This is the real thing – no game. I will understand if you wish to decline. But the future of mankind is resting on your shoulders. Decline and we are all condemned to a lethargic and vegetarian future.”

Everyone looked at Justin, obviously perplexed at his final remark.

After a few more seconds of silence Peter spoke. “Do we get to blow up loads of strange and mental evil things?”

Justin nodded. “Yeah, why not?”

“And destroy strange far-off planets?”

“Hmm. Possibly.”

“Okay, you can count me in!”

Pan grinned. “Me, too!”

“Fuckin’ in your face!” Ross yelled, which was a close to a ‘yes’ as could be hoped for.

Lawrence had dozed off in his seat and seemed oblivious to what was going on. As everyone assumed he would say yes anyway, he was included.

Justin was very pleased indeed. “Okay, let’s head up to the bridge. We launch in ten minutes. And don’t worry; we’ll be back in time for tea and medals!”

3 Pain-Killers

Ross gazed at the woman standing at the back of the sumptuous ultra-high technology bridge of *HMS Death Reaper*. “Look at the fuckin’ melons on her!”

The woman - the ship's security officer - smiled back at him. "Sir, please strap yourself into your seat."

"Yeah, Ross." Pan said, doing up his straps. "We have more important things to think about than large breasts."

Ross frowned. He obviously did not agree with Pan's last statement.

Peter was also busy strapping himself in. "Come on, Ross!"

Ross took one more look at the large-breasted security officer and then nodded. "Okay, I guess you're right." He took his seat.

After they had finished strapping themselves in, Ross, Peter and Pan looked at their surroundings. Around them, super-high resolution screens displayed information on the ship's status. Even the day's canteen and restaurant menu was displayed in a large and futuristic font on one of the side panels. Pan drooled as he gazed at the delicious images of each course.

Justin was at the back of the moodily lit bridge. He finished strapping Lawrence into his seat. Lawrence was still in a deep sleep. Although Lawrence spent most of his days sleeping, this was an unusually deep sleep, even for him.

Justin made his way to the centre of the bridge and took his seat. "Mission control, this is *HMS Death Reaper*. Permission to launch requested."

A voice at mission control responded in crisp digital clarity. "*Permission granted. Launch now!*"

Justin barked an order at the pilot. "Go!"

The pilot at the front of the bridge nodded. "Aye, sir! Going now!"

With impressive force, the giant submarine lurched forwards.

Peter was excited at the forces playing with his body. "Hey, this is cool! This is a hundred times better than the free fall on Oblivion!" Despite his age, Peter had always enjoyed insanely fast rollercoaster rides far more than the others.

Pan was too busy stuffing his face with the output from yet another doughnut machine to notice. In fact, the force of the acceleration was helping him cram even more food into his mouth than normal. "Hmm... High-gee snacks!" Pan was one of the worlds most prolific snack eaters.

Ross threw his empty whiskey flask across the bridge and laughed as it bounced off the shaved cranium of the pilot. From his pocket he pulled out a can of beer and cracked it open with a hiss. He took a long swig and then turned to Pan. "Can that thing make beer doughnuts?"

Pan checked. "I think so. It'll take a couple of minutes."

“Fuckin’ excellent! But don’t let it cook too long, all the alcohol will evaporate!”

Lawrence let out a loud guttural snore, and then returned to his silent slumber.

As the vast submarine accelerated away from the base, Justin thought of how hard he’d trained to be here today - years of gruelling drills, treacherous walks on frigid moors, walking in the Sahara in gear meant for arctic conditions, and walking in the arctic in only a pair of boxer shorts. There was very little that Justin had not endured in preparation for this, his ultimate ambition, his destiny. Being captain of the fastest, largest, meanest submarine the world had ever seen was an intoxicating experience.

He looked around at his friends who had spent their post-university years working for huge faceless corporations as accountants, automotive engineers, software developers, and mattress durability consultants. Their training of pizza munching, beer swigging and games console playing brought them here today. Ironically, these guys were the best.

Who would have thought that Ross’s near collision with a police car at 70 miles per hour down a road with a 30 miles-per-hour speed limit back in the early 1990s had been recorded? The skill required to avoid a collision was second to none. The quick thinking that followed was proof that even under the influence of copious amounts of drink and illegal substances Ross could think under pressure and make the right decisions in an instant. Justin was rightly proud to be associated with such great men.

The pilot at the front of the bridge made a report. “Speed is now 160 knots.”

Justin nodded. “Excellent. Initiate escape sequence.”

“Aye, sir. Initiating escape sequence.”

An automated and sexy computer announcement sounded. “ESCAPE SEQUENCE INITIATION IN FIVE SECONDS. ALL HANDS BRACE.”

Pan was curious. “What’s the escape sequence?”

Justin was tightening his restraints. “Just do what the computer says. Brace!”

Before Pan had time to demand an answer an incredible force pushed him and the others back into their seats. It was an agonising sensation, like having a slab of clay pressed hard into their faces.

Peter tried to speak, but no air could escape his mouth. He cringed as the awesome acceleration forces pushed harder and harder.

Only a second later, all consciousness was lost...

Ross was the first to regain consciousness. He reached up and rubbed his forehead. "Oh man, what did I drink last night?" There was no answer. Ross's brain had, over the years of alcohol and drug abuse, built up an amazing resistance to just about anything. Being subjected to inhuman levels of acceleration just felt to him like he had had one to many tequila slammers the night before. "Where the fuck am I?" He looked around. "Or should I say, are we?" In a sudden blast of sobriety it all came flooding back. Ross undid all his safety straps, and then wandered around checking on all his friends. All of them were alive, but all were still barely unconscious. Ross began a serious bout of shaking and slapping.

After a few minutes of violence and a burst or two of pure oxygen, everyone on the bridge had all awoken and was quickly taking doses of pain-killers to numb the throbbing in their heads.

Pan recovered quickly, the dense amounts of sugar in his bloodstream giving him a great advantage over the others. He looked to the back of the bridge. "Hey Lawrence, how are you doing, man?" There was no answer other than a deep rumbling snore. Pan turned his attention to the others. "Anyone for a breakfast doughnut?"

Ross answered. "Yes! But only if it's that beer doughnut you were making me."

Pan grinned. "One perfectly cooked beer doughnut coming up!"

Justin's years of training enabled him to ignore the delicious scent of fresh doughnuts as he set about his job checking the giant vessel's systems. "Well, there doesn't appear to be too much damage after the escape sequence. I think we should be fine."

Peter felt the need to do something useful, so he began tapping away at a keyboard on the console in front of his seat. The keys almost seemed to move towards his fingers as he thought of pressing them. "Wow! A keyboard with telepathic abilities!"

"Indeed." Justin said, continuing to look at his screens. "They found it more reliable than voice recognition in a stressful situation, which some might consider we are in now, but obviously not you lot." He motioned towards Pan and Ross, who were still munching on doughnuts, and Lawrence who was still fast asleep.

Peter had a great idea. "Anyone for a game of worms?"

Pan nodded. Ross gave the thumbs up. Lawrence didn't move a muscle.

Justin was initially annoyed at the idea, but he quickly realised that they were simply rehearsing for the tasks that awaited them. A game of worms was simply a tactical exercise, and a perfect one at that.

4 The Laziest Being Ever Known

With the grace of a fin whale, and the silence of a lamb, the black mass of *HMS Death Reaper* accelerated out of the Earth's atmosphere, and entered the frigid void of space.

With an almighty thud, a powerful shockwave passed through the ship. Captain Justin Codd, the only member of the bridge crew standing, was thrown against a bulkhead. He bounced off it, and slammed face-first onto the floor.

Peter, Ross, and Pan, their instincts and hand-eye coordination tuned to perfection from decades of video game abuse, managed to grab hold of something just in time.

Lawrence was shaken like a cocktail, but remained asleep.

Distant explosions and shrill screams emanated from the lower decks.

The bridge lights dimmed to a cool and menacing level. Several deep red lights on the ceiling began to pulse on and off.

The ship's sexy female computer voice spoke softly. "WARNING: HULL BREACH ON DECKS TWELVE AND FOURTEEN. ALL THIRTY-TWO CREW MEMBERS ON THOSE DECKS HAVE DIED IN VARYING DEGREES OF AGONY."

With Justin out of action, Peter decided to take charge. He shut down the game of worms that they had been playing on one of the bridge's large screens. "What the hell happened, *Death Reaper*?"

"AN IBM MINE (WITH INTEL INSIDE) DETONATED OFF THE PORT BOW."

"Why didn't you avoid it?"

"AUTO-PILOT WAS NOT ENGAGED. THE INDIVIDUAL NAMED ROSS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE DRIVING."

Peter and Pan turned and glared at Ross.

Ross was slightly embarrassed, but stood his ground. “You invited me to play worms! How the fuck was I supposed to resist that?!”

Peter thought for a moment, and then nodded. “Fair point.”

Pan agreed.

Peter spoke to the ship once again. “Any damage to vital systems?”

“NEGATIVE. APART FROM LIFE-SUPPORT ON DECKS TWELVE AND FOURTEEN, OF COURSE.”

Pan smiled. “Not bad, considering we hit an IBM product. They’re very well built, and state of the art!” He spoke to the ship, “So, what was on decks twelve and fourteen? Obviously nothing important.”

The ship answered in its usual sensuous manner. “DECK TWELVE CONTAINED THE LAUNDRY PROCESSORS AND THE TOILET ATTENDANT’S QUARTERS.”

Pan laughed. “Yep! Nothing important!”

The ship’s computer continued speaking. “DECK FOURTEEN CONTAINED SIX MONTHS SUPPLY OF CAKE AND DOUGHNUT MIX.”

Pan’s laughter stopped in an instant. A look of gloom spread like rancid custard across his face. He spoke with quiet anxiety. “There must be more? Maybe on deck fifteen? Am I right? Please tell me I’m right!”

The ship answered. “YOU ARE NOT RIGHT. THERE IS NO MORE CAKE AND DOUGHNUT MIX ON BOARD THIS VESSEL.”

Pan screamed. “NOOOO!!!!!!” He ran over to the doughnut dispenser by his seat. It was empty! “We’re doomed!” Pan began to kick and punch the doughnut dispenser like Homer Simpson on a beer and acid bender.

Ross leapt up, grabbed his distressed friend, and held him tight. Even Pan’s frantic thrashing couldn’t break free from Ross’s powerful Tekhan-style grip. “Take it easy, mate” Ross said. “We’ll get the fuckers that did this. We’ll tear them apart, tie their entrails round their necks, and watch the life ooze out of them!” Ross laughed gleefully. “It’ll be fuckin’ cool!”

Pan sobbed. “But that won’t bring back the cake and doughnut mix!”

“Yes it will!” Ross said. “We’ll force the fuckers to make tons of the stuff before we slaughter them. We’ll even force them to do the baking, icing, and sugaring as well!”

Pan smiled weakly. “I suppose that would be good.”

Ross nodded, and let go of his friend. “Damn fuckin’ right it would!”

An alarm started sounding.

The sexy voice of *HMS Death Reaper* spoke. “CONDITION RED. ALL HANDS TO BATTLE STATIONS. THIS IS NOT A DRILL.”

“Oh dear.” Peter said. He was staring at a console screen.

Ross wandered over and looked. “What’s up?”

“I think something’s coming towards us!”

The screen showed a computer representation of a blob-like shape growing in size.

Peter looked up, and then questioned the ship. “*Death Reaper?* What’s that blob-like shape coming towards us?”

“IDENTITY OF THE APPROACHING VESSEL IS CONFIRMED AS *LENTIL SEED*.”

Peter and Ross looked at each other, confused.

Ross spoke. “What the fuck’s ‘Lentil Seed’?”

A moaning sound was heard. It was Justin, trying to scrape himself off the floor. Peter and Ross grabbed hold of him and helped him to his feet.

Justin spoke, spitting teeth and blood over his friends as he did so. “*Lentil Seed* is the name of that vessel.” He groaned. “It’s the reason we’re all on this mission.”

Peter grimaced as he wiped Justin’s blood off his own face. “What do you mean? Is that the alien doom cruiser you mentioned?”

Justin nodded, and then coughed. More teeth escaped from his mouth. “We have to destroy it. It’s the enemy’s mother-ship!”

Peter and Ross were still confused.

“Maybe it’s about time you told us who the enemy is?” Ross asked.

The last of Justin’s teeth flew through the air. “The people of the planet *Layzee-Sponjers*, more commonly known as, *Hippies!*”

Ross found it hard to believe what he was hearing. “You mean that hippies are actually fuckin’ space aliens?”

Justin nodded solemnly.

“This is fucking fucked up, man!” Ross looked at his friends. Peter and Pan were equally stunned by the news. Lawrence was still fast asleep. That annoyed Ross. He stormed over to Lawrence and shook him violently. “Lawrence, you lazy fuck! Wake up! You’ve gotta hear this!” Being violently shaken and shouted at by Ross would normally wake anyone. But not Lawrence. “I’m used to him being lazy, but this is excessive, even for him!”

Justin spat out more blood from his now toothless mouth. “Settle down, Ross. Leave him. Maybe something will sink in subconsciously.” Justin’s tone was serious. “Now listen to me carefully. We know that the Supreme Layzee-Sponjer, leader of all the Hippies, is said to be asleep somewhere on planet Earth. It is also believed that the *Lentil Seed* is here to rescue him.”

Ross spoke in his usual eloquent manner. “So you mean that we’ve known about these fuckers for fucking years?”

Justin continued. “All will be revealed in due course. But for the time being all you need to know is that after a great battle in 1990 with Royal Navy forces just beyond the orbit of the Moon, the Supreme Layzee-Sponjer’s ship was severely damaged. It crash-landed on the Earth. The 16MB memory card that we recovered from the crash site in Whiteknights Lake, Reading, revealed that the Supreme Layzee-Sponjer was put to sleep and his memory erased to protect him until the hippy mother-ship, the *Lentil Seed*, came to rescue him.”

As usual, Pan’s mind was elsewhere. “Anyone for white chocolate doughnuts? This is the final batch. No more mix, remember.”

Peter could never refuse anything that had white chocolate on it. He took three. “Thanks, Pan.”

A deep and slightly disturbing snore emanated from Lawrence’s mouth.

Despite the distractions, Justin continued. “It is imperative that the hippies remain leaderless. Without the Supreme Layzee-Sponjer they are disorganized and easily defeated. Even though their leader is the laziest being ever known, he is a dangerous opponent. It’s hard to believe, but his ability to sleep through anything is the source of his power.”

Ross scratched his shaved head. “I don’t fucking get it.”

Peter was anxious about something. “Pan, have you got any more white chocolate doughnuts?”

Pan answered. “Just a second, Pete. I’m thinking.” He was staring blankly at the front of the bridge as his thought process began to kick in.

Justin could not ignore this interruption. “All of you shut it and listen!”

Everyone was quiet.

Justin resumed. “We need you to infiltrate the *Lentil Seed* and destroy it from within. You will do this by...”

Pan dared to interrupt. “Justin? Do you know everything about us?”

Justin frowned, and then nodded. “Yes, although we had a little trouble finding out anything about Lawrence prior to 1990 – the start of his university years. Those idiots at Kent County Council didn’t have any of his records.”

Pan’s thoughtful expression deepened. “Is it possible that...”

A warning alarm blared. It was a strange siren – similar to a cacophony of screeching tires, duck mating calls, and a variety of face slaps and bottom smacks.

Ross looked around. “What the fuck’s that for?”

Justin looked more serious than he’d ever looked in his entire career. He silenced the alarm. “That alarm was personally created by me to indicate one terrible and catastrophic event. I programmed it to sound when a special and unique signal is broadcast from the *Lentil Seed* hippy ship.”

“What signal is that?”

“It’s the signal that reactivates the Supreme Layzee-Sponjer’s memory!”

“Fuck!”

Pan climbed up and stood on his seat. “Guys? We all met for the first time at Reading around 1990, right?”

Justin, Peter and Ross nodded. Lawrence, of course, remained sleeping.

Pan continued. “This is going to sound stupid, but Lawrence seems to fit the bill perfectly.”

Peter was a little confused. “Explain yourself, Pan.”

“Well, Justin said not long ago that the Navy couldn’t find any information on Lawrence before 1990. The same time the Supreme Layzee-Sponjer crashed on Earth. And Lawrence is in an almost permanent state of sleep, or near-sleep. It seems possible that he could be the...”

Once again Pan was interrupted, but not by an alarm. A groan, chilling and disgustingly loud, filled the bridge. That was followed immediately by a deep tearing sound.

Pan, Ross, Peter and Justin all looked round towards the back of the bridge. What they saw shocked them to the bone. Lawrence was standing in a hunched and distorted pose in front of his seat. He spoke. “Gimme da ganja me brudders, it feels like I aven’t ad un in tens of years.” He looked up; his face twisted and lined with anger. “Who da fuck are ya peoples?”

As usual, Pan’s instincts were right.

5 Huge Lava Lamps

Onboard the vastness of the space vessel *Lentil seed*, Commander A'Doner was issuing commands to his hippy crew. "Wake up, butt monkeys! There's an unidentified ship ahead!"

With a broad sweep of his large hands the commander struck up a regal pose, like an opera singer on some futuristic stage. All around him bleary-eyed hippies roused from drug induced stupors. Murmurs and moans came from all corners of the huge oddly decorated bridge.

"Hey man, not so, like, loud." A voice said from underneath the communications console.

Another voice came from the direction of the weapons array. "Yeah, chill out, or something. No need for noise!"

Commander A'Doner was in no mood for these hippies today. Unlike most people from his planet, he had no interest in taking recreational drugs. His youth had been spent planning and scheming to take over the hippy home world; which he'd achieved in a remarkably short span of time, probably due to the fact that all his opponents were too stoned to care one way or the other. Now the commander was embarking on his boldest scheme yet: to force the hippy culture on the rest of the galaxy's civilizations. Though not a user himself, the commander saw the potential for becoming the biggest dope dealer this side of the galactic core. He had an almost unlimited supply; his home planet was a lush green paradise - field after field of fertile hemp fronds. Due to some evolutionary quirk almost every plant from the tiniest moss to the largest tree would yield, with careful processing, incredibly potent mind blowing drugs. Some historians had speculated that some ancient sentient race of dope-heads had traveled the cosmos seeding whole planets with these plants so that wherever they were in the galaxy they'd never get caught short.

But Commander A'Doner wasn't concerned with history at this moment. His ship looked like it was under attack and action had to be taken, and he needed his crew to be as alert as possible. There was only one way he could think of to achieve that aim. He spoke, his voice powerful and deep. "I'm turning the lights on!"

On the bridge of the *HMS Death Reaper* Justin, Peter, Pan and Ross just stared at the staggering transformation that had occurred in front on them. The trusted friend they knew so well had just transformed

into their enemy - the enemy of mankind and civilization itself. Not just on Earth, but throughout the entire galaxy.

The shock-induced silence was finally broken by Ross. “Fuck! Fuckin’ fucked-up fucker!” Ross could always be relied upon to eloquently sum up any situation.

The being that was once Lawrence started speaking. “Haay, chill dare ma...”

The loathsome evil overlord, the Supreme Layzee-Sponjer, did not manage to finish the sentence. Ross leapt on him, pinning him to the floor. The hippy leader emitted a bone-chilling gurgling noise as Ross's grip tightened around his throat.

Justin, Pan and Peter grabbed Ross and dragged him away from the half dead convulsing body of the Supreme Layzee-Sponjer.

“Easy, Ross.” Pan said in a soothing voice.

“Fuck!”

Pan continued. “This thing was once a close and trusted friend. We can't just kill him.”

“Fuck!”

“We must find a way to restore him to what he once was: our friend.”

“Pan’s right.” Peter agreed. “He'd do the same for any of us.”

“Fuck!”

Justin, the captain of *HMS Death Reaper*, used his highly-trained Royal Navy mind to formulate a plan. “We could use him as the bait in a fiendish trap to bring down the whole of the hippy empire.”

Ross decided to use a different word for his response – a sign that he was calming down. “Shit!”

Everyone released their grip on Ross, confident that he would no longer try to snap Lawrence’s neck.

The ship made a sexy announcement. “THE LENTIL SEED, FLAGSHIP OF THE HIPPIY FLEET, IS CHANGING COURSE.”

Justin issued commands. “Pan, Peter? You guys put that hippy freak in some stronger restraints. Ross? You can help me with the attack on that ship.”

That idea pleased Ross immensely. “Yes!” He turned and glared at the image of the *Lentil Seed* on the main screen. “Fuckin’ hippies!”

On the bridge of the *Lentil Seed*, the hippies moaned like the undead, covering their eyes with smoke-stained hands. The lights - four huge

lava lamps, one at each corner - illuminated the bridge in brilliant shades of red and green.

“Oh man, that hurts!” the weapons officer said, staggering to his feet. He turned and squinted at Commander A’Doner. “Can’t we, like, sleep a bit longer, or something?”

The commander frowned and leaned forward in his well-padded chair. “Shut up, and look at the damn view screen, you manky-haired bum-loving freak!”

The hippy obeyed his superior and looked. The massive view screen at the front of the ship displayed a wide-screen high-definition image of the view ahead. Silhouetted against the blue-white disk of Earth was a black submarine-shaped vessel. The vessel’s identity was displayed at the bottom of the screen – *HMS Death Reaper*.

“Whoa!” the hippy said. “It’s, like, a British submarine. And it’s, like, out in space.” He looked down at the remains of several joints that littered the floor around his feet. “That must ‘ave been, like, some damn good shit we ‘ad last night!”

Commander A’Doner yelled. “It’s not a bloody hallucination, you greasy turd angel! It’s real!”

The weapons officer gazed at the screen. “Are you sure?” He concentrated hard, forcing his drug-eroded brain to comprehend the imagery before him. “Well, eat me!”

“I have no idea why there’s a British submarine in orbit,” the commander said, “but it’s in the way. Launch a missile and destroy it.”

The weapons officer nodded. He turned to his console and clumsily operated a few controls. He pulled on a large red lever. A deep rumbling sound reverberated through the ship, and then faded. “Missile away!” The weapons officer said. “Time to target is, like, about ninety-two seconds, I think.”

“Excellent.” Commander A’Doner said, getting to his feet. As he stood, the incredible bulk of his lardy frame became apparent. It was strangely at odds with the bony physiques of the other hippies around him, all of whom were now conscious, or at least as near to consciousness as they were likely to get.

The commander spoke. “The signal we sent out a few minutes ago should now have restored the memory of our leader, the Supreme Layzee Sponjer. Soon, the *Lentil Seed* will detect the stirrings of our great master, and at last, after many many years, we will find him, and bring him back with us to our home world.”

The hippy bridge crew cheered quietly, and raised their girly arms ever so slightly. They were still too stoned, sleepy and weak to show more enthusiasm.

A synthesized snoring sounded.

“That’s it! That’s the sign!” The commander said, excited. “The Supreme Layzee Sponjer has been found!” He wandered over to the communications officer; his wobbly gut undulated under his robes as he walked. “Display the location of our master on the main view screen.” He laughed. “Finally, we’ll know where on Earth his laziness has been resting.”

In a barely coherent manner, the communications officer did as he was told.

All the hippies stared at the main view screen. A digital map of the Earth and its vicinity appeared. A red arrow zoomed in from the side of the screen with the words ‘*The Supreme Layzee Sponjer is here*’ written above it. Everyone expected to see it stop at a point on the Earth’s sphere. It didn’t. The hippies watched in wonder as the red arrow continued across the screen and away from the Earth. Finally, it stopped at a point two-thousand three-hundred and ninety-seven kilometers above the Earth’s surface.

Commander A’Doner’s jaw dropped as he realized what he was seeing.

Five seconds later, after their slow spongy brains managed to comprehend the information on the view screen, the jaws of the other hippies dropped too.

The commander staggered backwards with shock. “He’s on that submarine!” He screamed. “The British Navy, our most fierce and determined enemy, has kidnapped the Supreme Layzee Sponger!”

With remarkable perception, the weapons officer spoke. “Erm... When our missile hits that submarine, won’t it, like, kill our master, or something?”

Commander A’Doner stomped heavily over to the weapons officer and whacked the hippy hard across the back of his head. “Of course it will, you flippin’ arse invader!”

The weapons officer cowered before his commander. “Maybe I should, like, make the missile self-destruct?”

“Obviously, bum fiend! Do it now!”

The weapons officer thought for a moment, and then slammed his hands onto his console. Incredibly, the right sequence of buttons and switches were pressed. The image on the main view screen showed the missile detonating harmlessly several seconds before impact.

Commander A’Doner sighed with relief, and then he whacked the back of the weapons officer’s head once again. “You’re damn lucky, anal dreamer! You were seconds away from killing our beloved master!”

The weapons officer rubbed his head and looked up at his commander. “But, like, it was you who ordered...”

“Silence!” the commander screamed. He turned and strode in a hippo-like manner back to his large chair at the center of the bridge. He sank heavily into its padded seat.

The image of the submarine filled the view screen.

Commander A’Doner pointed at the British vessel on the screen and snorted with rage. “Those Royal Navy bastards have taken our Supreme Layzee Sponjer. They will pay dearly for their crime against the very fabric of the hippy empire. They may have brutally defeated us during the battle of the Spliff all those years ago. They may have splattered our pale-skinned backsides and ripped the matted hair from our scalps. They may have stomped on the heads of our Earthbound comrades outside the gates of their naval bases. But now they’ve gone too far.”

Commander A’Doner looked at the *Lentil Seed’s* pilot, a wizened waif of a man sitting awkwardly on a stool at the front of the bridge. He was taking deep draws on a carrot-sized reefer. “Set a course for that submarine. Open the front bay doors and bring it inside. Once we rescue our master, those British fools will face the astonishingly absurd forces of maximum hippy justice!”

Like the jaws of a deformed walrus, the mile-wide door of the *Lentil Seed’s* front bay struggled open.

The flagship of the hippy fleet approached *HMS Death Reaper*.

On the bridge of the *HMS Death Reaper* the approach of the *Lentil Seed* was being monitored closely.

“We were lucky.” Captain Justin Codd said. “That missile could have caused a lot of damage. They must have realized that we have their leader.”

Peter was confused. “How could they know that?”

“As I said before, the hippies are quite intelligent and resourceful, despite their inconceivable laziness.”

Peter nodded. “They are indeed.”

“Fuckin’ hippies!” Ross added.

“Okay, listen up.” Justin said with remarkable authority. “I have a cunning plan. He pointed to the back of the bridge. “Pass me Lawrence, or the Supreme Layzee Sponjer, as I guess I should now refer to him.”

Ross's face widened with a devilish smile. He got up, undid the straps keeping Lawrence in his seat, grabbed him, and then threw him into the air with an easy overhand lob. The Supreme Layzee Sponjer was hurled across the control room, landing in a disheveled heap by Justin's feet.

Justin directed his voice to the ship. "*Death Reaper?* Open a communications channel with the *Lentil Seed*."

The ship's computer replied. "COMMUNICATIONS CHANNEL OPEN."

An extraordinarily obese man appeared on the huge screen at the front of the bridge. He had long greasy hair and had obviously not shaved in over a week. His uniform was unkempt, more like old robes, and worst of all snot oozed like rancid honey from his flared nostrils. "*My name is Commander A'Doner. What do you want?*"

Ross laughed. "Donna? Isn't that a fuckin' girls name?"

"No."

Ross glared at the disgustingly fat commander. "I think you'll find it is."

Commander A'Doner frowned. "*No it isn't!*"

"Yes it fuckin' is!"

"*No it isn't!*"

Peter felt he had to comment. "Sounds like a girls name to me."

"Me too." Pan said, nodding.

Another voice joined the conversation. It was a voice filled with hate, lethargy, and drool. "Aye man, it's a ganja-munchin girls name!"

When Commander A'Doner noticed the owner of the last comment he bowed in awe and respect. "*Yes, oh Supreme Layzee Sponjer, it is a girl's name. My mother hates me and I have no friends.*"

"Ha! You admit it!" Ross said with glee. "You weak fuckin' girly girl!"

Justin was not happy. "Excuse me, but can I get a word in, do you think?"

Ross grinned, and then nodded. "Sure. Go ahead."

"I am Commander Justin Codd of the British Royal Navy Submarine, *HMS Death Reaper*. As you know, we have your leader. We also have a large arsenal of weapons with which to completely obliterate you. I am a peaceable man." Just out of sight of the camera Justin's hands were deftly moving over the weapons console arming and aiming several quantum nuclear tipped space torpedoes, which according to the suppliers were guaranteed to seriously fuck up

anyone's day. He continued speaking. "I believe that we can end this situation with little or no blood being spilt."

Ross had not noticed what Justin was up to. He was not happy. "No way! Let's kill the fuckers!"

Justin grinned. "Okay, Ross. You've twisted my arm!" Justin pressed the big red fire button.

A dull rumble reverberated through the submarine. The female computer voice could be heard again. "TWENTY FOUR QUANTUM NUCLEAR TIPPED SPACE TORPEDOES LAUNCHED."

Peter sat in his seat and called up some information on his console's screen and checked the status of the weapons. "Cool! All torpedoes running fast and straight."

Pan had also seated himself. A full English breakfast was frying noisily his console's hot plate.

Lawrence, the Supreme Layzee Sponjer, was mumbling something to himself. He produced some ganja and a Rizzla from one of his pockets and skinned up.

Justin pointed at Lawrence. "Someone strap him back into his chair!"

Peter got up and carried out Justin's order.

Ross was becoming more and more excited as he watched the progress of the torpedoes. He pointed at the image of the hippy commander, A'Doner, on screen at the front of the bridge. Behind the commander there was a lot of lethargic activity as numerous hippy crewmembers staggered into action. "Fuckers! Die, you motherfuckin' fucks! Die!" Ross leapt into the air and head-butted the ceiling of the bridge. "You're all going die, you fuckin' languid freaks!"

6 Flesh Particles

Back on cool oxygenated tranquility of planet Earth, General Kath had demanded that all her night's winnings be put on black. The roulette wheel was spun and the ball bounced its noisy way across the numbered bays. As the centrifugal force of the wheel lessened so did the ball's speed. The ball first landed on a red number, lingering there for what seemed like an age. And then the ball jumped out, dancing and toying with a multitude of other red numbers before finally landing on... a black number.

Kath grinned - another win. But her happiness was lessened by the absence of her friends. It just was not the same without those crazy chaps Pan, Ross, Peter, Lawrence and Justin. Kath recalled the last time they were all here; a perfect summer's evening back in their student days. It had not been the excessive gambling or eating that she was recalling now. It was the car races on dark country roads that had followed. Pan and Ross had destroyed several sets of tires in the process, and Kath remembered how she had giggled in her unique and endearing manner as her two speed-freak friends had pushed their cars beyond their theoretically determined maximum speeds. She chuckled as she recalled how Ross and Pan had decided to race despite a police car slowly pulling up behind them. Before the police had realized what was going on the two racers had screamed off at neck-breaking speeds towards a distant finish line deep in the Berkshire countryside. Peter and Lawrence had been at the finish line with bags of snacks and cases of beer for the winner. And for the loser too, in fact. And also for those that did not race.

General Kath sighed. Winning without those guys just was not the same.

"Splendid performance." Corporal Jackson said. "Will ma'am be playing again?" He was a little worried at the amount of cash his superior officer would have to carry home. Security was always on his mind. Only he and a useless private had accompanied the general tonight. She had promised that she would only bet ten pounds, and stay for no longer than an hour. He should have known better.

General Kath did not have time to answer. In the distance a commotion could be heard. The corporal and the general looked up from the table. Someone - clumsy and loud, was entering the casino.

Private Schwimmer appeared. His clothes were dirty and ripped, and his face was bruised and scratched. As he approached he bumped some of the casino's other guests, finally tripping over a tiny bump in the sumptuous red carpet. He fell hard onto his face. An air conditioning grill on the floor had managed to trap the private's nose. He fought with the grill for a while until the screws that held it pulled free from the ground. He looked up, his face screwed up in pain. Clambering to his feet, he pulled the grill of his nose, tearing a new nostril as he did so. He looked at the general. "Hum adasgas dagahasaghadasnaf, ma'am!"

General Kath was not impressed. "What have I told you about speaking too quickly, private? Take a deep breath and slow down. Think first. What's the matter?"

Private Schwimmer breathed deeply. "Royal Navy Mission Control requests the immediate assistance of the army, ma'am. It

appears that Captain Justin Codd, commander of *HMS Death Reaper*, has got himself into a spot of bother with the hippies again, ma'am."

"I've not spoken to Captain Codd since the battle of the Spliff." The general said. "And as far as I can recall that was his last encounter with those listless idiots. This should be interesting. I'll be there in a while, private. Give me half-an-hour to finish up here."

"Pan, Peter, Lawrence and Ross are also with Captain Codd, ma'am."

A glow filled General Kath's eyes and a massive grin spread across her face. She stood up. "Why didn't you say so before? Corporal? Private? Let's move out!" She somersaulted over the roulette table, dived out of the front entrance and leaped in a very ballet-like manner into her seat in the jeep. Corporal Jackson following closely behind.

As usual, Private Schwimmer was having great difficulty negotiating the casino's exit. A small Yorkshire terrier that was nipping his ankles only added to his troubles.

High above the surface of the Earth, the crew of the massive hippy ship, the *Lentil Seed* was trying to deal with a potentially deadly attack.

"Oh, heavy man!" The ship's weapons officer, said. There's, like, 20 or so torpedo-like things heading straight for us, commander!"

Commander A'Doner was standing right behind him. He swung his momentous gut sideways, whacking the weapons officer on the back of the head. "I know, arse magnet!"

The weapons officer was distressed, not least about the giant gut-slap he had just received. "What defence have we got against, like, those?"

The commander whacked the weapons officer once again. "Don't be such a thick faggot! We'll have to use our last line of defence." He reached down and lifted the safety cover on the weapons officer's console. A big black button was revealed. The commander pushed the button.

A few decks down, Randy Pansie, one of the most useless beings ever born, was relaxing in his bunk in the *Lentil Seed's* dank but flowery sleeping quarters. He was smoking like a chimney. "Man, dis dope iz de slamminist sheet!"

Randy's relaxed enjoyment suddenly turned to a state similar to very mild concern as a metallic door whooshed up pinning him into

his bunk. Next his bunk tipped up sending him tumbling into a wide and slippery tube. “Man, dis iz jist lick one of dem water slides!” He exclaimed as he fell. He managed to continue drawing deeply on his spliff. He relaxed again and settled down to enjoy the ride. He had no idea where he was going, but he really did not care. “Dis is outta dis world!”

With a dull pop, rather like the opening of a bottle of cheap sparkling wine, Randy was expelled out into space.

On the bridge of *HMS Death Reaper* Justin, Peter, Ross and Pan watched the torpedoes close in on the *Lentil Seed*.

Justin was amazed at what he was seeing. “They’re insane!” He said, his speech slurred by his lack of teeth. The giant screen at the front of the bridge was showing a frightening event. The *Lentil Seed* had expelled a cloud of hippies, thousands of them. They were drifting, frozen and dead, in the path of the torpedoes. With a flash of crimson the first of the torpedoes detonated as it hit a drifting hippy. Seconds later more of the torpedoes detonated as hippy corpses got in their way. “They’re using their crewmembers as chaff!”

Peter nodded. “Hideous. But in another way, cool!”

No one disagreed with their learned friend’s appraisal of the situation.

As the rest of the torpedoes detonated, the cloud of vaporized hippies thickened and grew.

Justin looked down at his console. “Damn! Only three of the torpedoes found their mark!”

Under cover of the vaporized hippy cloud, the damaged *Lentil Seed* limped of to rendezvous with the rest of the hippy fleet. Onboard thick smoke and loud moaning filled almost every deck. But most of the smoke was not because of the damage. The shock and stress of three direct hits had caused most of the hippies to instantly skin-up and draw huge lungfuls of dope. The shuddering of the heavily damaged ship worried them no longer.

On the bridge, Commander A’Doner leaned forward in his command chair. Sweat dribbled down his face and over his four chins. His plan to swallow up the British submarine into his huge ship and rescue his long lost supreme master had failed miserably. He was pissed off beyond belief. “Give me more speed, you boney bastard!”

The *Lentil Seed’s* wiry pilot, a being barely alive, looked back at his commander. “We’re, like, going as fast as we can.”

Commander A'Doner slammed his fist on the side of his chair. "Liar! We normally go much faster than this!"

"Not with only, erm,.. One engine."

The commander fumed. "How long will it take to get back to the fleet at this chronic speed?"

The frail pilot looked down at his display. "Erm... It'll take, like, a week, or something."

"Turds!" The huge bellied commander turned to his weapons officer. "Hey, cheek licker? What's that submarine up to now?"

"Well," the weapons officer answered, "that cloud of hippies that we launched vaporized really well. The submarine got, like, coated in bloodied flesh particles. But, like, they recovered pretty quickly. They're now following us and, like, they're gaining, or something."

"Damn it! We'll never get to the fleet in time, and we'll never survive another assault. There aren't enough crewmembers left to eject!"

The weapons officer leaned on his console and buried his face in his hands. He sobbed. "We're, like, doomed."

The commander got heavily to his feet. "You sad, pessimistic arse donkey!" He shouted, stomping over to the weapons officer. "I've had enough of your rectum-sucking whining."

The commander pulled a sledge hammer from out of his robes and swung it high into the air. With incredible speed, Commander A'Doner brought the hammer down hard onto the back of the weapons officer's head. With a dull wet slap, the weapons officer's head was crushed like a tomato against his console. Shattered skull and pulverized brain matter scattered across the bridge. The officer's headless body slipped sideways and on to the floor. His still beating heart pumped rich oxygenated blood across the carpet.

The commander wiped blood and bone off his face and looked around at the rest of the bridge crew. "Let that be a lesson to you all." He bellowed. "There'll be no more negativity on this vessel, is that clear?!"

The crew nodded lazily. Most were too stoned to care.

Commander A'Doner sat back down. "Set a course for Europa." He said to the pilot. "Our only hope is to hide at our secret base in the ocean deep below the ice and make repairs. There's no way they'll be able to follow us down there."

"OK, commander." The pilot said. He played with a few knobs and levers. "Course to Europa, nice and icy moon of Jupiter, is, like, laid in."

Back on the bridge of *HMS Death Reaper*, things were looking up.

Peter laughed and pointed at the main screen. “Even with all our damage from that IBM mine, and the hull smeared with pulverized hippy flesh, we’re gaining on that hippy ship!”

Ross punched the air. “Fuckin’ yes!”

Pan chuckled in an uncharacteristically evil manner. “We’re gonna get those smelly bastards! Vengeance will be sweet! Manky-haired shit mothers!”

Peter was concerned. “You’re taking all this a little personally, Pan. Try to stay objective.”

Pan turned and shook Peter by the shoulders. “The doughnut and cake mix, remember?! The skinny bastards laid that IBM mine that destroyed six months supply of the stuff! Apart from the emergency supply I always carry with me, there’s no more on this ship!”

Peter nodded, remembering. “I understand, Pan. Don’t worry, vengeance will be ours.”

Justin spoke, his voice slurred. He still had not got used to having all his teeth knocked out. “Look, the *Lentil Seed* has changed course!”

The large screen at the front of the bridge showed the hippy vessel’s new course.

“*Death Reaper*?” Justin said, directing his voice to the ship. “Where’s the enemy headed?”

The image on the screen was overlaid with a map of the solar-system. “THE *LENTIL SEED* IS ON A DIRECT COURSE TO EUROPA.”

“Of course!” Justin exclaimed.

Pan was perplexed. “You were expecting that?”

Justin smiled. His toothless grin was incredibly disturbing. “I’d almost forgotten. During the battle of the Spliff our intelligence uncovered some vague details of a secret Layzee-Sponjer base in the ocean deep below Europa’s ice layer.”

Ross spoke. “Why didn’t you destroy the fuckin’ thing?”

“We tried,” Justin said. “But the ice that covers the whole of Europa is more than ten miles thick. We just didn’t have the energy or technology to break through it.”

“Fuck!” Ross said, as eloquently as he could. “Those fuckin’ hippies are more advanced than we are! Motherfuckers!” Ross punched the ceiling, denting some piping.

“Not any more.” Justin said, smiling again. The others took a step back. Captain Codd’s lack of teeth was indeed a very disturbing sight. “This submarine is equipped with a supremely cool device that’ll get us through extremely thick ice with incredible ease.”

Ross grabbed Justin and kissed him on the forehead. “You fuckin’ star!”

Justin was speechless, so Peter gave the order. “*Death Reaper?* Set course for Europa, as fast as you can.”

With the elegance of a wounded rhino, *HMS Death Reaper* left Earth orbit and headed for the icy moon.

7 Ice Moon

The voyage to Europa took only two hours. Impressively short, especially for a submarine.

As soon as *HMS Death Reaper* had entered a low orbit around the icy moon Captain Codd gave what seemed to be a suicidal order to the ship’s pilot.

“Set full descent speed. Dive!”

The giant submarine angled down and headed down towards the surface.

Pan was concerned about his emergency batch of doughnuts. If the ship crashed, the doughnut’s may not survive the impact. “Erm... Justin? I may have missed something here, but I think we’re going to hit the ice with quite a bit of force. Isn’t that a little bit mad? Think of all the vital equipment that could be damaged.” He pointed at the doughnut maker on the side of his seat.

Justin smiled, his toothless blood-clotted gums exposed for all to see. “There’s nothing to worry about. The S.C.D.T.G.U.T.T.I.W.I.E. will create a temperature on the nose of this vessel almost equal to that of the centre of the sun. When we hit Europa, the ice immediately around this vessel will melt within a millisecond. We will slip effortlessly into the moon like a lubricated...”

Ross interrupted Justin and made his useless contribution to the conversation. “Fuck it! Let’s go faster!”

Peter was curious. “What is the S.C.D.T.G.U.T.T.I.W.I.E?”

Justin explained. “That’s the Supremely Cool Device That’ll Get Us Through Extremely Thick Ice With Incredible Ease.”

Peter nodded. "Wow, what an amazing abbreviation!"

"Thanks."

Peter, Ross, Pan and Justin watched the main screen as it displayed the ever growing surface of Europa. Impact was just seconds away.

The Supreme Layzee Sponjer, formally know as Lawrence, was lurching about at the back of the bridge. He had escaped the bonds of his chair once again. "Ya fuckers is mad! Ya'll doomed, ya bastads!"

The ranting of the Supreme Layzee Sponjer was ignored.

Everyone instinctively blinked as the ship hit the surface of the ice moon. But there was not even a jolt. *HMS Death Reaper* slipped smoothly and effortlessly into the moon's icy surface.

Captain Codd spoke. "Pilot? Update, please."

"We've penetrated six miles already, captain. We should break through into the ocean in a few seconds."

"Excellent. Once were through, begin a sonar search for the..."

A deafening clang echoed round the bridge. Everyone fell to the floor. Several power conduits on the ceiling ruptured, sending white hot sparks in all directions. Incredible gravitational forces pulled at everyone's bodies, only the ship's anti-inertia system prevented catastrophic injuries.

Ross was not happy. "What the fuck's happening?!"

The pilot spoke through a mouthful of blood. "My console shows we hit the *Lentil Seed*, but we've been shot back out into space. I don't understand how!"

Justin examined his console's screens. "Damn, you're right. We're heading back into orbit!"

"How could that be?" Peter asked, confused.

Justin was not a happy chap. "Their research into repelling technology is much more advanced than we'd thought." He turned and explained. "Basically, if a vessel tries to ram one of their ships it creates a reflective shield which has an atomic polarity field opposite to that of the ship or object that hit. Simply put, the colliding object is pushed away with the same force with which it hit." He turned and looked back at the main screen. "It was most unfortunate that we hit that ship down there. What are the odds, eh?"

Pan was looking at the screen. "Another idea is brewing in my mind."

Everyone waited in anticipation. Pan's ideas were legendary.

After a second or two of silence, Pan spoke. "Justin? Is the tunnel we melted though the ice still there?"

Captain Codd checked his screen. "It is."

Pan was excited. “Awesome! We can board down to that bastard hippy vessel, break inside it, and take control!”

Ross had a question. “But won’t the fuckers just repel us?”

“No.” Justin answered. “Their repelling device is only activated on large metal objects, not small carbon based life forms such as us.”

“Less of the small!” Ross shouted. He flexed his biceps with great pride.

Peter was grinning like the Joker. “Pan’s idea is fantastic! We haven’t been snowboarding for months. Let’s do it!”

Justin nodded. “I agree. I can’t think of anything better.”

Ross was in the process of flexing the rest of his muscles. “It’s a fuckin’ great idea!” He positioned his body in a full-muscle pose, held the pose for two seconds, and then punched the air with both fists. “Fuckin’ great, I tell you!”

Everyone shouted in unison. “Yes!”

“There’s no time to lose.” Justin said with more than a touch of melodrama. “Let’s get down to the air lock and get kitted up. Follow me.”

The ship spoke. “WARNING: VESSEL APPROACHING.”

The main screen at the front of the bridge switched to a display of the approaching ship.

Justin recognized the smooth dark lines of the vessel. “That’s *HMS Arse Kicker*! I had no idea another Royal Navy sub was in the area.”

The communications console crackled to life. “*HMS Death Reaper? This is HMS Arse Kicker. General Kath speaking. Please respond.*”

Everyone cheered. It was Kath!

Justin replied. “*HMS Arse Kicker? This is HMS Death Reaper, Captain Codd speaking. Great to hear from you, Kath!*”

“*The Navy contacted me. They thought you might like some assistance from an old friend.*”

Ross shouted, offended at the suggestion he needed any help. “We can handle anything ourselves, and you fuckin’ know it!”

Peter, Pan, and Justin glared at Ross.

Ross nodded and modified his attitude. “But you’re welcome to join us, Kath. We’re about to create carnage on a grand fuckin’ scale!”

Kath spoke. “*Sounds great! We’re pulling alongside now.*”

Justin said. “We’ll be down in airlock four on deck twelve. Once you’re docked, come and find us there.”

“*Will do. HMS Arse Kicker out.*”

“Right,” Justin said. “As I mentioned before, we really do have no time to lose. Let’s go!”

There was a cackling noise from the back of the bridge. Lawrence was waving his arms around and laughing like a twisted old lady.

“We’d better tie him up again before we leave.” Justin said.

Airlock four was large, at least by airlock standards. And it was brimming with lockers, cupboards, cubby holes, and racks filled with specialist and advanced military and sports hardware.

Peter, Pan, Ross and Justin were kitting themselves out for their latest mission objective – a snowboarding ride down to the *Lentil Seed*, deep below the ice of Europa. All of them had already put on their state-of-the-art environment suits.

Pan, as usual, grabbed as much equipment as he could - many a game of paint ball had taught him the value of loading up with as much ammunition as possible. Justin was more conservative and chose nothing more than an ultra-strength plastic assault rifle and a few spare clips. Peter grabbed a handsomely designed shoulder-mounted missile launcher. Ross grabbed a large and well-made baseball bat. Ross and a baseball bat were a lethal and bone-crunching combination.

There was a loud whoosh as the side entrance to the airlock opened. Pan, Peter, Justin and Ross looked round. They gasped. General Kath stood in the entrance, her long wavy blonde hair billowing wildly for a moment as the air pressures equalized. She was holding a massive gun in her right hand. With her free hand she brushed it slowly through her hair, shaking her head slowly as she did so. The soft orange light behind her added to the effect.

Peter was impressed. “Wow!”

Ross and Justin were speechless.

“Hmm... Incredible!” Pan said, taking a large bite out of a bacon sandwich that he had just pulled out of the airlock’s vending machine.

Kath grinned. “Hello, chaps!”

Pan looked up from his sandwich. “Who’s that behind Kath? It looks like Schwimmer!”

Cowering behind General Kath was indeed the diminutive Private Schwimmer. He stepped out into the open. “Erm... Hello.”

Schwimmer was immediately ignored by everyone.

Although Kath outranked Justin, this was his ship and his mission. He was still the commanding officer. He decided to assert

his authority and began issuing orders. “Right, everyone. It would be nice to stand and chat but we have work to do. Lock yourselves into your suits.”

Everyone did as ordered.

Justin put on his own helmet and lowered the visor. There was a short hiss as his suit pressurized, then only the intermittent whirr of the air pumps. He was now sealed off from the rest of the universe in a self-contained environment complete with a drink and snack dispenser, toilet, music system, and a high-definition heads-up display capable of showing TV, movies, and stunningly realistic video games.

His suit was still in its ‘boot-up’ phase, so Justin called up the TV guide. It appeared like an apparition before his eyes. He smiled. Ten new episodes of *The Simpsons* had recently been downloaded. Excellent!

The suit finished its ‘boot-up’ with a burst of the Itchy and Scratchy theme. Justin turned and looked at his friends. Peter, Pan, Ross and Kath were all suited up and ready for action. A sense of pride washed over him.

On the floor of the airlock, Schwimmer was writhing around. Somehow, he’d managed to get both his legs jammed into the left arm of his spacesuit.

Justin resisted the urge to vaporize the private. “Private Schwimmer!” the captain of the *Death Reaper* shouted over the suit’s com system. “Get out of that suit! Your incompetence will be of no use to us down on Europa. Go up to the bridge and wait.”

Schwimmer managed to pull himself out of the suit. He stood and looked around at the suited figures in the airlock in awe. He nodded to Justin and scurried out of the airlock in a classic Mister Bean-style manner.

“And don’t touch anything!” Justin shouted after him.

Ross’s voice screamed over the com system. “What the fuck are we waiting for? Let’s fuck with the enemy!”

Justin operated a control on the wall of the airlock. A panel slid sideways revealing a cabinet filled with snowboards and skis. “Take your pick!”

Ross, Peter, and Pan chose the slimmest, meanest, and fastest boards they could find. Kath – an accomplished SAS skier – chose a pair of highly-polished paisley-patterned skis. Justin, who could neither board nor ski, chose a plastic dustbin lid from the back of the cabinet.

“What are you gonna do with that?” Pan asked as he fastened his bindings.

“Sit on it.” Justin replied. “Bin lids are quite fast on ice.” He pulled a large yellow lever on the wall. There was a high-pitched hissing sound. Within seconds the airlock was silent.

The *Death Reaper* made an announcement over everyone’s com system. “DEPRESSURIZATION OF AIRLOCK COMPLETE. OUTER DOOR OPENING...”

Quickly and silently, one side of the airlock descended into the floor. A brilliant white light filled the room. Within milliseconds, everyone’s visors darkened to compensate. The glare of the sun on Europa’s frozen surface was blinding.

Peter shuffled himself and his board to the edge of the airlock and looked down at the jagged surface of the ice moon as it scrolled by. “We’ll need to reduce our velocity if we’re to break orbit, otherwise we’re just going to drift along with the ship.”

“That’s what these are for!” Justin said. Immediately, a small rocket appeared from out of his backpack.

“Cool” Pan said, as rockets appeared on the back of everyone else.

“These are preprogrammed.” Justin said. “They’ll fire at the correct moment to ensure that we reach the surface at the entrance to the tunnel the *Death Reaper* melted earlier.”

Ross could not wait any longer. “Enough talk! Let’s fuck to it!”

The foul-mouthed hero leapt out of the airlock and drifted quickly away. The others followed.

After a few minutes Ross, Peter, Pan, Justin and Kath had drifted several hundred metres from the ship. What a sight! *HMS Death Reaper* was silhouetted ominously against the bright ice of Europa, and behind Europa the gargantuan orange disk of Jupiter almost filled the field of vision.

Justin examined his heads-up display. “Ten seconds to firing.”

Pan prepared himself in the only way he knew how. From the snack menu he selected ‘Double Chocolate Doughnut’ and set the quantity value to ‘Max’. Several doughy snacks were pumped into his mouth. He chewed like a maniac.

“Three seconds.” Justin announced. “Brace yourselves!”

Three seconds later the rockets fired.

“Fuck! Yes!” Ross yelled, as a nine gee deceleration crushed his very soul.

With their orbital velocity already significantly reduced, the five heroes fell rapidly towards the surface of the icy moon.

The rockets ceased firing. A feeling of weightlessness returned. “Our altitude is three miles.” Justin said. “We’ll reach the surface in less than one minute.”

Peter looked thoughtfully at the approaching surface. Deep and jagged crevasses could clearly be seen in all directions. “This place would make an awesome winter resort!”

Pan agreed. “All we need to do is build some lifts and steak restaurants and we’re sorted!”

“Impact in ten seconds.” Justin said. “Assume your positions!”

The entrance to the tunnel could now be seen dead ahead. Peter, Ross, and Pan crouched low into their boards. Kath bent her knees slightly and brought her skis together. Justin held his dustbin lid onto his backside.

They entered the mouth of the tunnel.

Peter and Pan were the first to hit the surface, slamming into the ice at almost two-hundred miles per hour. Without even a second of imbalance, they began to arc across the smooth surface.

Kath hit next. She landed with the grace of a pelican and sped down the tunnel in a series of perfect curves.

Ross’s turn. With fearless skill he began to carve his board across the ice, sweeping up and down the tunnel walls. In what seemed like no time, he’d overtaken Peter and Pan. They both cheered as Ross sped by, impressed by their friend’s incredible boarding prowess.

And finally, Justin. He slammed into the surface butt-first and, without any control whatsoever, began to skim wildly into the tunnel.

After a few seconds of travel, the tunnel became very dark. Automatically, a floodlight on each spacesuit switched on producing an eerie look to the tunnel walls.

Justin’s description of his dustbin lid as ‘quite fast’ turned out to be an understatement. Spinning like a fairground Waltzer, he bounced past Kath and Peter and Pan. After a few more seconds he caught up with Ross.

Ross watched as the out of control Justin raced by. The thought of being beaten by a man on a plastic dustbin lid filled Ross with anger. With perfect determination, the foul-mouthed hero crouched even lower on his board and accelerated after Captain Codd. The sensor information on his heads-up display indicated that the end of the tunnel, and the vast sub-surface ocean, was only two miles away.

8 Cannabis-Soaked Atmosphere

Justin's screamed as he spiraled out of control deeper and deeper into the ice tunnel. He gripped tightly to his dustbin lid. "I'm no longer convinced this plastic bin lid was a good idea."

Ross was speeding close behind. "Justin? Slow down, you fuckin' idiot! We're almost at the end of the tunnel!"

Justin looked. The tunnel did seem to be coming to an end. There was no way he could control his bin lid. "Slowing down is not an option. But it should be okay, there's an ocean at the end. I'll surf across it and come to a gentle halt."

Ross checked the sensor readout on his visor's heads-up display. "There's no ocean! That fuckin' hippy ship is there. Slow the fuck down! Now!"

Ross's warning was futile, and far too late. Three seconds later Justin streaked passed the end of the tunnel and slammed into a huge boulder of ice next to the hull of the *Lentil Seed*. Almost every bone in the captain's body was shattered.

Ross dug the back edge of his snowboard deep into the ice and drew to a rapid halt next to the crushed body of Justin. Several streams of air could be seen jetting from tears in his suit. "Stupid naval motherfucker!"

Peter and Pan arrived a minute later.

Pan spoke, his voice muffled by a cherry muffin. "Justin's head is the only part of him that still looks okay. I've got a giant jar of M&Ms with me." He pulled out the jar from his backpack. "Let's store his head in here until we can get it back to the ship." Pan emptied the M&Ms onto the icy floor. The whole process was quite distressing for him but he covered his emotions well.

When the jar was empty Peter pulled off Justin's helmet and tore the captain's head from his ruined body. He placed the head into the now empty jar. "We'll leave it out here in the freezing snow until we get can get back to recover it. It should be well preserved."

Ross turned his attention to the green hull of the hippy ship. "How the fuck do we get in?"

Peter and Pan looked at Ross. No one had actually thought about how to get in once they'd reached this point.

Ross was mad. The rage of a thousand legless joggers filled his face. "Fuck!" He charged at the hippy ship.

Peter was concerned. "Be careful, Ross. You don't want to..."

Ross hit the hull of the hippy ship. He disappeared inside.

Pan was shocked. “Did I just see Ross pass through solid metal?”

Peter walked up to the hull. The whole where Ross had entered had already healed up. “This ship isn’t made of metal!” He looked back at Pan. “It’s a giant lent...” A hand grabbed Peter and pulled him in to the ship.

Peter found himself lying in a darkened room. Ross was looking down at him. Before he could say anything, Pan stepped through the wall. “Bit dark in here. Where are we?”

Ross was still angry. He was looking around. “Fucking Layzee Sponjers! Turn the fucking light’s on!”

Peter got to his feet and turned on his suit’s flood light. Ross and Pan did the same. An eerie fog filling the room.

Ross knew what he was seeing. He open his helmet’s visor and took a deep breath. “Fucking ace! This is good shit.” He grinned; feeling suddenly quite relaxed as the drugs penetrated his lungs and began to circulate throughout his body. His eyes began to glaze over.

Peter realized how bad an idea Ross had had. He slammed his palm onto the side of Ross’s helmet. The helmet’s visor slammed shut. A whoosh of air cleared out the smoke from Ross’s suit. “Wake up, Ross! You’ll turn into one of those hippies if you’re not careful!”

A dumb smile spread across Ross’s face.

Pan looked down. “Shit!”

Ross spoke. “Everything is, like, cool, man. Chill out.”

Pan and Peter looked at each other and shared a concerned look.

Pan punched the air. “Damned hippies!”

Peter heard something. “Pan, quiet! What was that noise?” Peter was trying to listen. He heard a soft female voice. He activated his shoulder-mounted missile launcher. He aimed in the direction of the sound and fired. With an almost deafening roar, a missile shot out of the launcher. It detonated at the far side of the room. The incredible shockwave knocked Peter and Pan to the floor.

Pan pushed himself up. “Pete, man! They’re not indoor fireworks! I think a little more care next time would be good!”

“Sorry.”

The room’s smoke was bellowing out of the large hole Peter had blown in the wall.

Ross got to his feet. “What the fuck are you up too?”

Peter smiled. “You’re okay!”

Ross nodded. “Of course I fuckin’ am!”

Peter, Ross, and Pan walked over to the smoking hole. Before they could get there, a figure emerged. The figure was coated in what looked like liquidized lentils.

“You idiots!” The figure said. “Look at the mess you've made of my suit!”

Peter was embarrassed. “Sorry, Kath.”

Everyone helped General Kath wipe the excess lentils from her suit. When she felt she was reasonably clean she headed for the smoking hole. “I’m concerned about Justin. I’ll go and look after his head.”

“Right. Looks like this is a lads-only mission!” Ross said. “Let’s try and find a way further into this vessel. This room must have an exit. Other than the one Pete made, that is!”

They decided to split up to search through the smoke filled room for an exit. They fanned out and walked into the dense smog. The visibility was still limited even though a large amount of smoke was still bellowing out of the newly formed entrance. They searched in silence slowly advancing into the cannabis-soaked atmosphere.

Suddenly, Ross’s excited voice was heard. “Fuck! Yes! I've found the fuckin’ exit!”

Daisy Muff was the most experienced and most expensive hippy whore on the planet *Layzee-Sponjers*. It was for that reason that Commander A’Doner had hired her as his personal onboard pleasure mistress - all on expenses, of course.

The commander of the *Lentil Seed* sat in his sumptuous command chair at the centre of the bridge. He smiled broadly and looked down as Daisy’s head bobbed up and down in his lap. What a true professional she was. “Excellent, my dear!” he said. He moaned as the whore worked her magic. She bobbed faster and faster, her head was now almost a blur.

Commander A’Doner could not hold back any longer. With a mighty roar, he delivered his payload. The rest of the bridge crew looked around lazily - too stoned to really care what was going on. The commander relaxed. He tapped Daisy on the head. “Thank you, my dear. Be gone!”

Daisy Muff swallowed hard and got to her feet. She bowed at her master, and then swayed sexily off towards the exit.

A siren began warbling.

Commander A’Doner looked round at his security chief, who was currently slumped over his console at the back of the bridge. “Fergus? What the hell doe’s that mean?”

Fergus looked up. Vomit was dribbling down his chin. “That’s, like, the intruder alarm, or something.”

“What?!” the commander shouted, getting to his feet. His limp manhood hung like a wizened fish from his pants. He quickly shoved it back inside and zipped up. He tied up his robes. “Where?”

Fergus looked at his screens. “Erm... At the port bow, deck twenty-six. About five minutes ago.”

“Five minutes ago!” the commander shouted. “Why in hell’s porn shop did the siren only go off now?”

“Lazy systems?” Fergus ventured.

“Damn Sponjers technology! Who are the intruders?”

“Erm... Not sure. I think it’s those British Navy dudes from the *Death Reaper*.”

The commander stamped his feet. “How did those bastard momma eaters get in through the hull?”

Fergus coughed. “Maybe it was the fact that the erm... the hull is made of lentils, or something.”

“Dammit!” the commander said, stamping his feet again. “Why didn’t our engineers use titanium alloys like all other advanced civilisations?”

Another alarm sounded.

Fergus gazed at his screens, barely able to focus. “The intruders are now on deck twenty-five. Erm... I think they’re headed this way.”

“Then stop them!”

“With what?”

“You’re fuckin’ mechanised hippy security squad, that’s what!”

Fergus thought for a few seconds. “Oh, yeah. That’ll be cool!”

“Send the squad out now!” The commander said, sitting back down in his command chair. “Those British navy shit cultivators may have broken through our weak lentil hull, but they will perish at the hands of the mechanised hippy security squad.” He looked round at Fergus. “Put the carnage on the view screen, I want to see everything in glorious widescreen!”

Peter, Ross and Pan strode fearlessly down a dank and gooey passageway.

“Did you hear that?” Peter asked. “It sounded like crunching.”

“No.” Pan said, passing Peter a piece of ketchup-covered lentil.

Ross was getting annoyed again. “For fuck’s sake, Pan! Stop eating bits of this fuckin’ ship!”

“But it tastes so good!”

“Then munch with your fuckin’ mouth shut! The noise is driving me mad!”

Further down the corridor more crunching could be heard.

Ross turned towards Pan. “Stop it!”

Pan shook his head. “Not me!” He opened his mouth. It was empty – a rare event.

The sound was getting louder and louder.

Peter was a bit suspicious. “That’s not a munching sound. It’s more like marching.”

Pan looked up. “Sounds like its coming from right above us!”

The sound reached a deafening peak and then suddenly stopped. Ross pulled out and brandished his baseball bat. Peter rearmed his shoulder-mounted missile launcher. Pan put down the huge mound of lentils he was carrying and activated his rifle.

There was a squelching sound from above. A flat metal foot was emerging from the ceiling.

Peter spoke. “That’s something I’ve never seen before.”

More metal feet appeared all along the ceiling of the passageway. And then the first of what appeared to be metal hippies dropped to the floor.

Ross screamed and swung his baseball bat high and fast. He brought it down hard on the nearest mechanoid, smashing its electronic face into a cloud of sparking debris. It shuddered and fell flat onto its back. Pan set his rifle to rapid-fire and sent a shower of armour-piercing rounds ricocheting into several targets. More sparks flew. Peter carefully aimed his missile launcher at one of the more distant targets. He fired. A huge explosion halfway down the passageway decimated several of the metal hippies.

Ross began pummeling another metal hippy. “Fucker!”

Only seconds ago the passageway was quiet and dimly lit. Now it was filled with fire and devastation, and some incredible and deafening explosions.

Peter pointed to the ceiling. “More are coming!”

Pan aimed at the ceiling and fired, shattering several of the metal feet that were protruding into the passageway.

Peter decided that a decisive move was required. “On the floor, face down!” he yelled. “This is going to be violent!” He aimed his missile launcher at the ceiling.

Pan was concerned. “Hey! I warned you about...”

Ross grabbed Pan and dragged him to the floor. “Pete knows what he’s fuckin’ doing! Leave him.”

Peter fired. The result was devastation on a grand scale. A huge portion of the ceiling was blown away in a sphere of white heat.

The scream of metal hippies as their electronic brains melted was highly disturbing.

Pan, Ross and Peter were in agony as the powerful blast wave passed through their bodies. Fortunately, their Royal Navy spacesuits were of the highest specification and provided just enough protection. The agony subsided.

Ross was the first to get to his feet. He helped Peter and Pan peel themselves off the floor. "Fuckin' great idea, Pete!"

But now, even more mechanized hippies were dropping into the scorched passageway. As soon as they landed they began marching through the twisted metal remains of their comrades and the lentils goo that had started dripping down from above.

"Fuck!"

Pan nodded. "You said it, man."

Peter shook his head. "There's just too many of them."

Pan made a suggestion. "Tactical retreat, anyone?"

Ross screamed. "Fuckin' run!"

Everyone ran like the wind. Pan took the time to lob a grenade behind him. The blast took out the two leading metal hippies. The blast also gave the three heroes a welcome boost in speed.

"In there!" Peter shouted, pointing to a room on the left.

Pan threw another grenade and followed Peter.

Under the cover of a deafening explosion, Peter, Pan and Ross dived into the room and slammed the door shut with a squelch.

Silence. Nice.

Peter spoke. "These hippies must be more advanced than we thought. Those drones are pretty persistent."

Ross shook his head. "I doubt we lost those fuckers for long."

Pan nodded. "But at least we have bought a few minutes to recover." He pulled a couple of burgers out of his backpack, placed them in a sesame seed bun he produced from his suit's thigh pouch, and tucked in. Ross followed suit and began to eat the burger he had stashed in his pocket – an old winter holiday habit.

Peter heard something. He put his ear to the door. He could hear a squeaking noise, like an old rusty gate, slowly getting closer. "They're still out there."

Ross stuffed down his food. "Then they're fucked! On three, we open the door and take them out! Any objections?"

Peter shook his head.

"Sound's like a good plan to me." Pan said, swallowing the last of his burger.

Ross nodded. "Three... Two... One... Go!"

Peter opened the door and leapt out into the passageway. Ross and Pan followed very close behind. What they found out in the passageway was not the fierce robotic army they expected. All the metal hippies were making agonizingly slow progress as they lurched forwards. The unmistakable orange hue of rust coated the drones. They squeaked, crunched, and then ground to a halt.

Ross walked up to the leading mechanoid. Swinging his bat high once again he brought it smashing down onto the machine. It crumbled to the floor. "It's fuckin' rusted! And in record time!" he turned and looked at Peter and Pan. "Not even the worst built Russian car would rust that fuckin' quick!"

Lentil goop was still dripping from the gaping hole in the ceiling. Peter played with some that had dripped onto the arm of his suit. "This gunk must cause extreme oxidisation."

Pan pointed down the passageway. "All of them are affected. They're all crap!"

Ross started laughing. "Stupid fuckin' hippies!"

Commander A'Doner had watched the rapid rusting of his mechanised hippy security squad on the command deck's huge screen. "Fergus!" He shouted, hitting the arm of his chair with his flabby fist. "What the hell were they made from?"

The security chief answered. "Erm... Well, I think they're made from old automobiles we, like, stole from Earth thirty years ago, or something."

The Commander could not believe what he was hearing. He pulled out a small pistol and aimed it at Fergus's forehead. "We have plenty of galvanised alloys on our home world. Why in turd's mountain did we use stolen ungalvanised steel? You're answer better be good, or your limited life will expire."

Fergus was obviously thinking as hard as his shit-saturated brain would allow. "Erm... Because we, like, wanted to, or something."

The bullet, blunt and high-velocity, passed through Fergus's skull, tearing off most of the back of his head. He slumped backwards onto his brain-coated console, and then slipped onto the floor. His body shuddered, and then was still.

Commander A'Doner looked at his late security chief's assistant. "Right, Moonbeam, we have no choice but to use the special gas weapon."

Moonbeam nodded. "Okay, big boss man, I'll see what I can do." The assistant security chief realised this could be his big break.

Get this right and progression up the Layzee Sponjers ranks would be guaranteed.

Deep in the hull of the ship the gas processing plant was in full production. Over 100 purely lentil fed hippies had their backsides wedged inside large suction cups. The lethal gas they produced was being processed and stored ready for deployment.

In a two-minute frenzy of round-house kicks and right-hooks, Peter, Pan and Ross managed to shatter all of the corroded mechanized hippy security squad. Rusty body parts, oxidized servos, and contorted components littered the corridor.

Pan nodded with pleasure. "That was so cool!"

"It was." Peter agreed, as he stamped hard at a piece of debris. It shattered like a popadom.

Ross picked up the head of one of the machines. He stared into its lifeless electronic eyes. "Useless fucker!" He drop-kicked the head, sending it flying up through the huge hole in the ceiling and onto the next level.

Pan looked around. "I guess it's time we found the dude who runs this ship and show him the true might of Earth justice."

Ross thought wisely for a moment, and then spoke. "Let's just kick his fuckin' head in!"

"Brutal, but fair." Peter said.

Pan agreed.

The three cunning warriors headed down the passageway.

Commander A'Doner hauled his ample frame impatiently around the bridge. He stopped and turned. "Moonbeam? What's happening with the gas?"

Moonbeam gazed at his console. "Erm... Give it a few more minutes."

The commander grumbled. "Okay, a few minutes – no more!"

Hooch McArse, a painfully thin cadet, shouted from his engineering station at the back of the bridge. "Commander? The engine room reports that repairs are complete! We have full power. We can now rejoin the fleet!"

"Excellent!" Commander A'Doner shouted. He lumbered over to his command chair and sat down. "Let's spend no more time here. Pilot, get us out of this frigid moon now!"

The frail pilot nodded. His bony hands passed across his console. “Yes, sir. Setting course for the fleet.”

“No!” the commander shouted. “Change of plan. We should not rejoin the fleet. We have the British navy’s finest warriors on board, and soon they’ll be gassed into submission. We must take them to High Command for interrogation.”

The pilot turned to face his commander. “Erm... What course should I set, then?”

Commander A’Doner screamed. “The planet *Layzee Sponjer*, of course, you faggot-faced moronic turd collector!”

The pilot nodded. “Oh yeah!” He pressed a few buttons and pulled a huge lever next to his seat. “Erm... We’re, like, taking off.”

A deep rumble spread through the *Lentil Seed*.

General Kath was leaning against the hull of the *Lentil Seed* when its engines started. Startled, she moved quickly away, skidding across the ice. She slid to a halt and turned to look at the hippy vessel. It was shuddering wildly as the increasing power of its engines surged through the ship’s superstructure.

Kath was worried for her fellow warriors trapped inside.

The *Lentil Seed* was moving upwards now, and the ice was cracking, sending large chunks tumbling down from above. Huge crevasses opened up around her, revealing the deep ocean below. The light from her helmet’s flood light glistened off the ocean’s surface.

Major Kath had to act, before the tunnel to the surface collapsed and sealed her forever in this glacial tomb.

Bending over, she picked up the large M&M jar that had Justin’s frozen and lifeless head inside. She then made her way to her skis and clicked her boots into the bindings – not an easy task to perform when wearing a bulky space suit with the world collapsing all around, and with the frozen head of a Royal Navy captain in a jar under one arm.

She aimed her skis at the dark tunnel. She could just make out the small point of light at the tunnel’s entrance more than ten miles away. Quickly, the general activated her helmet’s head-up display and selected the rocket pack from one of the menus. She felt the whirr of servos as the small rocket motor popped out of her backpack. She looked at the fuel status. Although most of the fuel had been used in the de-orbit burn earlier, she still had thirty seconds left. Just enough, she thought.

It felt as if the whole moon was shaking now. More and more lumps of ice were falling. Kath took one look back at the *Lentil Seed*,

just in time to see the massive ugly bulk of its underside rise out of sight, surrounded by a flood of melt-water.

Kath waited no more. She selected 'Fire Rocket' from her display. With incredible force General Kath was thrust forwards. The nine gee acceleration pressed her hard to the back of her suit, and stretched the flesh on her face to breaking point. Within seconds she was skiing up the tunnel at over five-hundred metres per second.

I must get back to the *Death Reaper*, she thought, as the ice walls of the tunnel sped by. Wherever that stupid lentil ship is going, I have to follow; my friends may need my help.

The entrance to the tunnel was approaching rapidly. Kath crouched lower, increasing her speed and stability. Just as the rocket motor cut out she left the tunnel and flew up and away from the bright surface of Europa. All sense of acceleration disappeared as she drifted into a smooth ballistic arc that would take her, hopefully, into orbit.

Nudging at her suit, she turned around and began looking for the *Death Reaper*. Instead she saw a chilling and ridiculous sight – a giant lentil bursting out through the surface of the ice. Within seconds, the hippy vessel was no more than a small point of light.

Kath turned again. There, a few miles ahead, was the familiar shape of *Death Reaper*, easily visible now against the backdrop of Jupiter.

Using her suit's thrusters, the General Kath directed herself towards the space-faring submarine. She activated her communicator. "Private Schwimmer? Are you there?"

There was a loud crackle of static. "*Erm... Yeah.*"

"Address me in the proper manner, private!"

"*Err... Yeah, General.*"

Kath remained calm in the face of extreme insubordination. "I'm in orbit approaching you. Open the starboard side airlock. Once I'm inside set a pursuit course for the hippy ship."

"*Erm... How do I do that?*"

"Ask one of the crew to do it, imbecile!"

"*Good Idea. Should I open the airlock now?*"

"Of course!"

"*OK. Schwimmer out.*"

The communications link fell silent. General Kath drifted closer to the *Death Reaper*.

9 Asthmatic Donkey

The bridge of the lentil seed appeared eerily quiet following the rumbling, creaking and straining noises during the ship's launch from deep beneath the ice crust of Europa.

Commander A'Doner ended the silence. "Where are those intruders?"

Moonbeam, awakened by the commander's loud voice, slipped off his seat and fell to the floor with a thump. He pulled himself back up onto his seat and quickly operated his console. It took all the concentration his drug-saturated mind could muster to read the data on his screen. "Erm... The intruders are in, like, section four of deck three. I think they're, like, making their way to the bridge, or something."

Anxiety was obvious in the commander's voice. "They'll be here in a couple of minutes at this rate! Gas them! Now!"

"Erm... Like, okay." Moonbeam said. He hit a large green button.

Ross, Peter and Pan strode confidently down yet another dank passageway.

Ross screwed up his face. "Fuckin' hell, Pan! Have you dropped your guts?"

Pan took a defensive tone. "No way! You're always the one that farts without remorse. Never me!"

Ross shook his head. "Not this time."

Peter's face was also a little screwed up. "That's quite disgusting. Smells a bit like rancid vegetable soup."

Everyone yawned. And then everyone yawned again.

Realisation hit Pan like a hammer in the groin. "Shit! It must be some kind of sleeping gas! Close your visors!"

Everyone pulled down the visors on their helmets. Their suits' quickly removed all of the gas.

Peter was still yawning. "The medical status panel on my heads-up display is flashing red. What does that mean?" He yawned once again.

Pan voice sounded distant and dreamy. "I think it's too late. We've had too large a dose already." He dropped to the floor. A second later he was snoring like an asthmatic donkey.

"Fuck!" Ross said as he too fell to the floor.

Peter managed to stay on his feet for a few more seconds, but then he succumbed, just like the others.

Commander A'Doner had watched the screen on his console as the three humans fell to the ground. "Ha! Well done, Moonbeam, good work!"

Moonbeam grinned inanely. He lit up a cigar sized reefer and took a deep and satisfying draw. His eyes glazed over.

Hooch McArse, the emaciated engineering cadet, was curious. "What's that smell, man? It's makin' me, like, want to eat stuff."

All of the command deck crew – those that happened to be conscious, started sniffing the air.

Commander A'Doner's eyes widened. "Moonbeam, you vacant bum fonder! You've let the gas get in here!" He slumped back into his well-padded chair, barely able to focus. "I'm sending you to the..."

The commander and the rest of the command deck crew lost all remnants of consciousness.

An eerie silence took hold of the ship once more. All consciousness had been lost. The *Lentil Seed* continued on its course through deep space. No one was aware that the ship was on a direct collision course with an unusual anomaly - a rip in the very fabric of space and time.

Far behind the *Lentil Seed* - three-million miles behind in fact - *HMS Death Reaper* matched the hippy ship's course and speed. With its navigation lights off, and all non-essential systems shut down to prevent emissions of any kind, the giant British submarine was almost totally undetectable.

General Kath, now dressed in a tight-fitting electric-blue body suit, sat in the command chair on the bridge of the *Death Reaper*. The ship was in full stealth mode, and the only light around her was the blue and green glow of the many control consoles, each one manned by an anonymous and expendable crew member. They all seem decent enough, Kath thought, but they're still a poor substitute for my heroic friends trapped on that hippy ship.

Kath turned and looked towards the back of the bridge. There, strapped tightly into a chair with rope and gaffer tape, sat Lawrence. He snored deeply, and thick green bile dribbled steadily out of one

side of his mouth. No one had told her why her friend was in such a state, but she knew he was probably best left there. If the movie 'The Exorcist' had taught her anything, it was never to trust someone with green goop coming out of their mouth.

The general turned her attention back to the task at hand. The main screen at the front of the small but opulent bridge was showing the *Lentil Seed's* glowing rear end, far ahead.

"Status report?" She ordered.

The young officer to her side looked down at his screens. "We're twenty-three billion miles from Earth following the Layzee Sponjer vessel at maximum speed, and at minimum stealth distance. Heading is 213-by-012-by-331 – a direct course for the Hayzee Nebula. All systems nominal."

General Kath looked at her subordinate. "Are you certain we can't be detected?"

The officer smiled. "Oh yes, ma'am. We're at stealth level ten – the highest level possible. And the fact that we're so far away from the sun means there's very little light out here. They wouldn't see us even if they looked directly at us. We're as black as the inside of my arse, ma'am!"

Kath cringed. "Thank you for that vivid report. Maintain heading."

The officer nodded and turned his attention back to his screens.

The communications panel on the command chair beeped. Kath answered the call. "What is it?"

"It's... Erm... Me, *Private Schwimmer*. *Captain Codd's frozen head is in sickbay, as ordered.*"

"Excellent. Well done. Finally you did something right for a change."

"Erm... Well... Yeah, almost."

The general frowned with suspicion. "What does that mean?"

"*I dropped the jar just as I got here. The damage to Captain Codd isn't too bad, his lower jaw and left ear snapped off. The rest of his head seems fine.*"

"You clumsy idiot! What the hell is wrong with you?!"

"Erm... *The doctor still says he can save him. He's operating now!*"

"I've had enough of your mistakes!" General Kath shouted. "You present a danger to this mission. You're confined to the brig for the duration." She silenced the communicator. "Who's in charge of security here?" she asked the bridge crew.

"That would be me, ma'am." A particularly large-breasted officer said.

“Send a squad down to sickbay and have Private Schwimmer arrested and charged with incompetence. Throw him in the brig.”

“Aye aye, ma’am.”

“But don’t beat him.”

“No beating. Aye, ma’am.”

The *Death Reaper* continued its sly pursuit of the *Lentil Seed*.

...The bright sun glared fiercely off the powder snow. Pan, Peter, and Ross raced like jet-powered penguins down the eastern slope towards the town of Breckenridge far below.

Lentils were still falling like hail from the sky, and Pan, like the true gastronomic hero that he was, gulped down as many mouthfuls as he could.

“Got to eat them all!” Pan yelled. “Every single one!”

Ross pulled alongside his hungry friend. “There’s no way you can eat them all! You’re fuckin’ mad!”

“It’s my destiny!” Pan shouted. He swallowed yet another mouthful. “I must absorb the awesome power of lentils!”

Ross grabbed Pan and pulled him to the ground. The pair tumbled through the deep layers of snow and lentils and came to a halt at the edge of a deep crevasse.

Ross began to repeatedly slap Pan hard across the face. “What the fuck is wrong with you, Pan?”

Slap. Slap. Slap...

Pan opened his eyes. A loud banging echoed through his head. He looked up and saw Ross punching his visor.

“Wake the fuck up, Pan!”

Pan held his hand up. “Okay! Okay! I’m awake!”

Ross helped his friend sit up.

“What happened?” Pan asked.

“We were gassed, remember? I thought we’d be captured, but for some reason we weren’t.”

Further down the passageway, Pan could see Peter recovering. Pan looked up at Ross. “I had a dream whilst I was unconscious. I was snowboarding through a lentil rain storm. I felt compelled to eat them all, and you were trying to stop me.”

Ross looked shocked. “That’s so freaky! I had the same fuckin’ vision!”

“No way!”

“Fuckin’ way!” Ross confirmed, leaning back against the passageway wall. “What the fuck is going on?”

Peter crawled over. He looked at them both. “I just had a really strange dream.”

On the command deck of the *Lentil Seed* the crew members’ were regaining consciousness.

Commander A’Doner gazed dreamily at the giant screen in front of him. It was showing the view directly ahead. Something did not look right. The centre of the screen showed no stars. It was completely black. “Somebody tell me what that is!”

After a few seconds the ship’s sinewy pilot responded. “Well, I haven’t got a clue.”

The commander was recovering fast. He sat up straight, pulled his small pistol out from his robes, and aimed it at the pilot. “Try again.”

The pilot was still deeply stoned from the gas. “Erm... Try what again?”

A bullet, small and blunt, passed through the pilot’s wire-like neck, mincing his throat and blowing spine fragments far across the deck. The pilot slumped to the floor, blood pumping like a fountain from his gaping neck wound.

Commander A’Doner looked at the screen. The strange oddity displayed seemed larger. “Somebody else tell me what that is. Now!”

On a lower deck Peter was looking out of a small porthole window he had found at one end of a passageway. “Guys? I may be seeing things, but half of space has gone black - no stars. Nothing!”

Pan and Ross wandered over and took a look.

“Fuckin’ bizarre!” Ross exclaimed.

Pan was shocked. “Holy Shit! Is that a black hole? Those damn stupid hippies are taking us straight into it!”

Ross nodded. “Fuckin’ looks like it. We’re right on the event horizon. I think we’ve reached the point of no return!”

Pan reacted in the only way he could think of. He reached into one of his suit’s side pockets, and pulled out and unwrapped a king size Snickers bar. He stuffed the entire snack into his mouth. He began chomping like a hippopotamus.

Curiosity and a healthy touch of fear could be heard in Peter’s voice. “What’s going to happen to us?”

Ross, a genius of a physicist, answered. "At first we won't feel any gravitational forces at all. Since we'll be in free fall, every part of us and this ship is being pulled in the same way so we'll feel weightless. As we get closer and closer to the center of the hole we'll start to feel tidal gravitational forces."

"What does that mean?" Pan asked, opening another Snickers bar.

"You'll imagine that your feet are closer to the centre than your head. The gravitational pull will get stronger as you get closer to the centre of the black hole, so your feet feel a stronger pull than your head does. As a result you'll feel stretched. The tidal forces get more and more intense as you get closer to the centre. Eventually they'll rip you apart."

Peter asked an important question. "Any chance we could get out of this?"

"It depends on what type of black hole that is. What I just said is true for your regular run of the mill black hole. The equations of general relativity have an interesting mathematical property: they are symmetric in time. That means that you can take any solution to the equations and imagine that time flows backwards rather than forwards, and you'll get another valid solution to the equations. If you apply this rule to the solution that describes black holes, you get an object known as a white hole. Since a black hole is a region of space from which nothing can escape, the time-reversed version of a black hole is a region of space into which nothing can fall. In fact, just as a black hole can only suck things in, a white hole can only spit things out."

Peter pointed at the porthole window. "That looks pretty black to me."

"Pete's right." Pan said, dribbling chocolate.

Ross continued. "If the black hole we're entering is rotating and has an electrostatic charge it's possible to fall into it and not hit the singularity. In effect, the interior of a charged or rotating black hole can 'join up' with a corresponding white hole in such a way that you can fall into the black hole and pop out of the white hole. This is more commonly known as a wormhole."

Peter seemed happier now. "Sounds good!"

Ross had not finished. "There is one draw back to this."

Pan took a swig of Fanta from his suit's dispenser. "What's that?"

"Well the white hole may be somewhere very far away from the black hole; indeed, it may even be in a region of space and time that,

aside from the wormhole itself, is completely disconnected from our own region of time and space – essentially a different universe!”

“Well,” Pan said. “As long as there’s food there, I don’t care where we come out of that thing.”

Peter was a bit concerned for Ross. “Are you feeling all right? You haven’t uttered a profanity for several minutes.”

Ross nodded. “Yeah, I feel fine. Thanks for asking.”

Pan stepped in front of Ross and punched his chest hard.

Ross stumbled backwards, almost falling to the floor. “What the fuck did you do that for, you fuckin’ horse-rapin’ piss drinker?”

“Yep.” Pan said, grinning. “He’s fine.”

And then everyone shuddered violently as reality folded away...

10 Large-Breasted Security Officer

The *HMS Death Reaper*, the largest, fastest and most powerful submarine ever constructed, continued on its course through the frigid void of deep space.

“It just disappeared, ma’am!”

General Kath glared at the young officer. “It can’t have done! What on Earth could have made that fat hippy ship vanish?”

The officer looked confused. “Nothing on Earth did, ma’am. It was something in space.”

The general was becoming highly impatient. “Then tell me what, in space, made it vanish?”

“Some sort of space time anomaly is usually the culprit. Probably a black hole.”

Kath got to her feet and stared at the main screen. All that was displayed was the expanse of stars ahead. The centre of the screen, though, now had no stars. She noticed that more and more of the stars were fading and distorting, and then disappearing from view. “It seems to be sucking in all the light from those stars!”

The young officer smiled. “Indeed! Its gravitational field is so strong that no light at all can escape – just like the inside of my...”

“Enough!” shouted General Kath. “Mention the inside of your arse once more and I’ll relieve you of duty. Understand?”

The officer nodded. “Yes, ma’am, no more arse.”

The general sat back into the command chair. A wave of sadness passed over her. "If it is a black hole, then my friends have been crushed into nothingness."

The young officer shook his head. "Not necessarily."

"What do you mean?"

"That black hole could also be one end of a wormhole. That hippy ship may emerge safely in another region of space, possibly thousands of light-years from here."

Kath's mood perked up. "Really?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Could we follow them?"

"Erm... Well, I guess we could, ma'am, but..."

"Then do it!"

The young officer was shocked. "But what if it's not a wormhole? What if it's just a plain old lump of super-dense matter? We'll be compressed to the size of a flea's arse!"

"I said do it! Set course for that anomaly, now!"

The young officer stood. "I must formally object, ma'am. You are putting the crew of this fine submarine in extreme and unnecessary danger!"

General Kath stormed over and grabbed the officer's shoulder, pulling him back into his seat. "Don't you understand? My friend's onboard the *Lentil Seed* are the only hope humanity has to defeat those hippy bastards! If they've perished, then we will perish too, even if we don't go into the anomaly."

The officer thought for a moment. "Maybe, but I still think..."

"Trust me, young man. Do as I order. My friends need me. And they need you, too."

Kath's emotive speech worked. The young officer operated his control console. "Heading altered. Course set to intercept the anomaly."

The command deck of the *Lentil Seed* was in chaos.

Three gallons of lentil soup erupted from Commander A'Doner's mouth, and landed squarely on the face of Hooch McArse. The force of the vomit pushed the cadet away from his engineering station, smashing him against a bulkhead. One of the nearby lava-lamps shattered, releasing its globules.

Another cadet slipped on the commander's puke, and landed heavily on Hooch's legs. Hooch screamed as his femurs snapped. He then vomited on the cadet.

All over the bridge of the *Lentil Seed*, the crew were puking and slipping, and breaking all sorts of bones. The tidal forces of the black hole were playing havoc with the stomachs of the hippies. Many of them were inhaling deeply on huge spliffs in a valiant attempt to stop the sickness, but not even that helped.

The commander pulled himself into his chair. “Status!” He gurgled, vomit still oozing out of his mouth.

The *Lentil Seed*'s new pilot wiped a thick layer of semi-digested lunch off his console and examined his screens. “I think we’re, like, still being drawn into that black hole thing.”

“I know that, you fuzzy butt manipulator!” The commander bellowed. “How can we escape?”

The pilot heaved his guts as he thought, this time spreading his breakfast over his screens. He wiped his mouth, and then faced his commander. “Like, we can’t, I guess.”

Commander A’Doner went temporarily insane with rage. There was only one cure for that. He reached out with his flabby right arm and smacked a nearby hippy cadet hard in the face. The cadet’s nose split like a ripe tomato. The commander grabbed the cadet and pulled him down hard onto his knee. The dull snapping of ribs was heard. The cadet rolled onto the floor, gasping. Laughing like an old lady, the commander hauled himself to his feet and stamped hard on the cadet’s neck. The cadet went limp. Commander A’Doner admired his handiwork, and then vomited yet more lentil soup.

The ship started to shudder violently.

“Commander?” The pilot said.

The commander looked up. “What?”

“Look at the main viewer! There’s, like, a bright light outside!”

The viewer was showing a white - almost blinding - light dead ahead. It was growing rapidly. The ship’s shaking was getting more violent.

“What, in a faggot’s bowels, is that?”

The pilot smiled, mesmerized. “It’s, like, beautiful!”

Reality stretched and flexed.

A billion dimensions merged together, and then parted.

Then a crunch to end all crunches wreaked havoc across the already dilapidated *Lentil Seed*.

Pan, Ross, and Peter had managed to stagger up one more deck. They were now holding tightly to a handrail next to a huge porthole

window. Around them, the wreckage of hippy machinery, ceiling panels, and bony body parts was strewn across the floor. The ship shuddered like a freshly shaved monkey in a fridge full of salad.

“I think that was the loudest crunch I’ve ever heard!” Pan said as he selected ‘Apple Pie’ from his suit’s dessert menu. An almost molten MacDonald’s style snack was propelled into his mouth. He gasped.

A dazzling wash of pure white light suddenly surrounded the ship. The three heroes turned away from the window. The light faded fast. The shuddering stopped.

“And that,” Pan said, selecting ‘Dr Pepper’ from his suits beverage menu, “was the brightest light I’ve ever seen!” He sucked hard and cooled his scalded mouth.

Peter looked out of the window. “We’re back in normal space!” He said, with obvious relief.

“About fuckin’ time!” Ross said. The vista of stars was noticeably shifting. Below, the blue mass of a planet was coming into view. It was very close.

“We appear to be heading for that.” Peter said. “And this ship appears to be out of control.”

“There can be only two reasons for that.” Ross said, with sage-like wisdom. “Either this ship’s engines and stabilizers are fucked, or the ship’s command crew are fucked.”

Pan was still gulping down Dr Pepper. “Or both?” He suggested, through a mouthful of carbonated liquid. “Whatever the reason, we should make the most of the situation.”

With a swift motion, Peter drew a long battle knife from his backpack. He held it high, stabbing a hole into the ceiling. “To the bridge!” he shouted. “And to glorious victory!” He ran off down the passageway.

Ross watched his mad friend running away. “Where the fuck did Pete get that fuck-off knife from?”

Pan headed after Peter. “Knife shop?” He suggested.

Ross shrugged and followed Pan.

Unlike the *Lentil Seed*, which was constructed entirely out of lentil-derived materials, *HMS Death Reaper* was built out of high-tech steel, titanium, and tough plastic composites. This ensured a much smoother ride over the event horizon of the black hole.

The bridge crew of the *Death Reaper* held on tightly as the submarine creaked under the incredible stresses it was enduring. Vibrations were strong, but bearable.

“Status?” General Kath asked, holding tightly on to the arms of her command chair.

“Course is remarkably steady.” The pilot said. “It’s hard to believe, but I think we’re going to survive!”

Kath reached forwards and smacked him across the head. “Of course we are! Be positive, young man, or I’ll dismiss you!”

The pilot cowered. “Yes, ma’am.”

The main screen showed a bright light ahead. It was growing in size.

Private Schwimmer entered the bridge. He looked at the screen and screamed. “We’re doomed!” He ran to the general and cowered at her feet. He covered his face with his hands and began sobbing like a little girl.

General Kath shouted. “Why the hell are you here, private? I thought you were in the brig?”

Private Schwimmer looked up at his superior. “I was in the brig, but the vibrations shattered the locking mechanism on my cell. As there was nothing keeping me there I decided I’d rather come up here and be by your side. Also, I passed sickbay on the way here. The doctor told me to tell you that he’s almost finished connecting Captain Codd’s head to a new...”

General Kath leaned over and glowered down at the private. “The bridge of the navy’s flagship submarine is no place for someone with a rank as low as yours. Get out. Now!”

Private Schwimmer scurried away, bowing and sobbing as he did so.

“We’re going in!” The pilot stated. “Brace yourselves!”

The bridge crew of the submarine gripped tightly onto their seats.

The huge phallic mass of *HMS Death Reaper* swept through six distinct realities, and then vanished into the light...

The light faded. Stillness reigned.

General Kath sighed with relief. “See!” She said to the *Death Reaper*’s pilot, who was seated in front of her. “We made it!”

The pilot nodded. “I guess we did.”

The rest of the bridge crew began laughing and chatting, the stress of the journey through the wormhole disappeared.

“That’s enough.” Kath said. “Everyone back to work. We have a mission, remember?”

The crew stopped yakking and returned to their duties. All except one, it seemed. The general could still hear someone laughing - although 'cackling' would have been a more accurate term. She stood and turned, expecting, for some reason, for it to be the large-breasted security officer.

It was not.

There, still strapped into a chair, sat Lawrence, green drool still dribbling down his chin. He looked intently at the general, and sniggered like a cartoon character.

Kath smiled. "Lawrence! You're awake! How are you? I was worried about you. Why are you tied up like that?"

Lawrence stopped sniggering and spat at the general. "Ya stupid fookin' bitch! Ya shud not be callin' me Lawrence. I be da fookin' Supreme Layzee Sponjer!"

There was a loud tearing sound as the Supreme Layzee Sponjer, the being formally known as Lawrence, tore through the gaffer tape and ropes that tied him to his seat. He stood unsteadily, his wizened legs - atrophied after a decade of very long lie-ins - barely able to support even his own light weight. He put his right hand in his hair and ruffled it about.

General Kath frowned. "You are obviously ill, but that's no excuse to insult me! I'm a general in the British Army, and temporarily captain of this submarine, the flagship of the British Navy! I demand respect!"

The Supreme Layzee Sponjer spat at the general again. "Shuddup, ya smellee whore!"

Kath was about to launch a punishing roundhouse kick to Lawrence's neck when an alarm started blaring. She turned and looked at the pilot. "What's that?"

"Collision alert!" the pilot said.

"With what?"

The pilot pointed at the main screen. "With that!"

General Kath looked. The screen showed the yellowish green mass of the *Lentil Seed* dead ahead, framed by the disk of a deep blue planet. She looked back at the pilot. "Change course, you idiot! Avoid it!"

The pilot had started to sweat. "I can't! All maneuvering thrusters have failed! That wormhole did more damage than we thought!"

"Then full reverse! Now!"

The pilot tried but failed. He slammed his hands on his console in despair. "Nothing's working! Collision in twenty seconds! There's nothing I can do!"

“Ya is all doomed!” The Supreme Layzee Sponjer yelled.

Kath turned to see the body of Lawrence lurching towards her. He was pointing at the main screen. “Meez peoples are here! Meez peoples’ will fookin’ tear yer bastard fookin’ ears off!”

“Restrain him!” The general ordered.

The large-breasted security officer bounded forwards and grabbed the Supreme Layzee Sponjer from behind. “Cease and desist! You’re under arrest.”

“Get ya fat hands off mez, ya tit monster!” With a burst of strength, the Supreme Layzee Sponjer broke free, turned, and vomited hard in the security officer’s face. She fell backwards, gargling drool. Laughing, the Supreme Layzee Sponjer leapt onto her ample frame, ripped off her uniform, and began gnawing on her nipples.

General Kath wanted to intervene, but there were more pressing problems. At least the security officer’s abundant melons would keep Lawrence occupied. She turned her attention back to the main screen. The hippy ship loomed large as it tumbled slowly above the planet.

“Ten seconds to impact!” The pilot announced. He was on the verge of tears.

It’s too late to do anything now, Kath thought. Sadness washed over her. Her heroic friends were on that vessel, and the collision would almost certainly mash every living being onboard. Realizing she still had a job to do, she sat back in her command chair and operated her communications panel. She made an announcement to the entire ship. “All hands, collision alert! Brace for impact in five... four... three... two...one...”

11 Thick Carpet of Vomit

Ross, Pan and Peter were running down yet another of the *Lentil Seed*’s damp and dismal passageways.

Ross made an astute observation. “The design of this ship is a fuckin’ nightmare.”

Peter was still brandishing his battle knife. “Can’t argue with you there.”

Pan shouted. “Look at that!”

Ross and Peter stopped running and looked back at Pan. He was pointing at one of the large porthole windows. They walked over to the window and peered out.

Pan continued. “Is that what I think it is?”

A huge and superbly designed black behemoth was approaching at an incredible speed.

Peter's jaw dropped. He was speechless.

Ross was never speechless. "Fuckin' run!"

They ran, but not very far. The impact literally took the floor away from under their feet.

Like a toad inflated by a foot pump, the hull of the *Lentil Seed* split wide apart.

General Kath pulled some debris from her hair and looked around the bridge of *HMS Death Reaper*. Apart from many damaged consoles, and some hideous injuries, the collision with the hippy ship seemed to be uneventful. Suddenly, fear for the lives of her friends filled her mind. She activated the com system. "Ross? Pete? Pan? Are you there?"

There was a crackle, and then a voice. "*Doughnut! I really need a doughnut!*"

Kath grinned, a tear of happiness crept down her cheek. "Pan! Thank God you're all right!"

"*Yep, we're all fine, thanks to our suits.*"

The general sniffled. "That's so good to hear!"

"*Do you have any doughnuts over there?*"

Kath looked around. "I'm not sure. I think the doughnut machine here on the bridge is broken."

Pan's voice was anxious. "*I really need one!*"

"I understand." Kath said. She had known Pan for years and understood the seriousness of the situation. "I'll get right on it. *Death Reaper* out." She turned and looked at the disorientated bridge crew. "Sort yourselves out. I want this ship back into tip top condition A.S.A.P., or some heads will roll."

The bridge crew rose out of their stupor and activated the ship's auto-repair systems.

The general pointed at the broken doughnut machine. "Make that the priority!"

Peter, Pan and Ross drifted majestically through the vacuum of space accompanied by thousands of contorted hippy corpses and masses of frozen lentil soup. After several minutes they reached *HMS Death Reaper* and grabbed on to its hull. After Peter had finished chiseling away with his battle knife at the lentil goop that had solidified over a nearby access hatch, they clambered inside.

Many of the *Death Reaper's* bridge systems were back on line. General Kath was impressed with the speed of repairs.

"General?" The pilot said. "Some of our sensors have detected a trail of lentil particles heading towards the blue planet below."

Kath walked over and looked at the pilot's screens. "Interesting. Survivors?"

"Possibly."

"Let's find out. Are my friends safely on board?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Good. Follow those lentil trails."

The pilot shook his head. "Sorry, general, but the engines are not operational. They suffered very heavy damage. It'll be another two hours before they're repaired."

"Damn!" She exclaimed with frustration. "Do we have any smaller ships, like shuttles or fighters on board?"

"We do. As far as I know they're all fully functional."

General Kath smiled. She put her hands together and drummed her fingers. "Excellent!" She turned and headed towards the exit. "I'm off to greet my friends. Pilot, you have the conn."

The pilot nodded. "Cool!"

"And keep a close eye on Lawrence."

The pilot looked to the back of the bridge. Lawrence was squatting over the lifeless form of the large-breasted security officer, his face buried in her bloodied chest. He was munching steadily on her flesh. The pilot shuddered. "Not cool!"

Several six-metre wide globules of solidified lentil soup drifted away from the leftovers of the *Lentil Seed*. The globules, each powered by a small rear-end lentil-vapour-derived ion thruster, maintained a perfect 'V' formation as they descended to the blue planet.

Inside the lead globule, Commander A'Doner hauled his heavy bulk to a transparent patch on the back wall. Anger burned through his soul as he looked out at the shattered remains of his ship. Beyond, he could see the distant but distinctive profile of the *Death Reaper*.

"It was those bastard British navy anal stretchers!" The commander shouted. He turned to Moonbeam, one of his two companions in the escape globule. "Why, in butt monkey's hell, didn't you spot that shit-stabbing submarine before it hit us?"

Moonbeam took a quick and deep draw on his reefer. “It’s like, not my job to spot submarines.” He said; smoke billowing out of his mouth and nostrils. “I’m, like, your security assistant. Not your, like, submarine lookout, or something.”

“Then whose job is it?”

Moonbeam keeled over and giggled as the weed took effect. “Hooch’s, of course. But he’s, like, been totally blown away. He’s, like, history man. He’s, like, climbed the heavenly spliff and returned too...”

Commander A’Doner’s fat fist silenced Moonbeam’s rantings. The security assistant’s teeth embedded themselves in the back of his throat. He groaned and coughed blood.

The commander glared at him. “Waffle like that again, you bottom-burgling turd master, and I’ll force your nose bone right through your brain. Understand?”

Moonbeam smiled a toothless bloody smile, gave the commander a big thumbs-up, and then passed out.

Commander A’Doner breathed heavily. The loss of his ship and the incompetence of his crew had stressed him almost to breaking point.

Daisy Muff, the commander’s personal pleasure mistress, was his other companion in the escape globule. Noticing her master’s discomfort, she crawled over and began to massage his blubbery neck and shoulders. The commander sighed.

The small console at the center of the globule bleeped. Commander A’Doner brushed Daisy aside, leaned over and pulled a lever. “What?”

“It’s, like, me! Doey Limprist!”

“Who, in hell’s rectum, are you?”

“I’m your, like, chief engineer! I used to sit in a deck chair in the engine room and do nothing at all! I’m in the globule behind yours.”

The commander looked back. There, through the transparent front of the escape globule behind, he could see Doey. The chief engineer was waving and smiling in a very girlie manner. Commander A’Doner cringed. It was that disturbing gay bastard he had always tried to avoid. “I see you. What do you want?”

“I thought you’d like to know that we are about to enter the atmosphere of the planet below.”

“I can see that!” the commander screamed. “What about it?”

“I was wondering what your orders were. Only twenty of us escaped alive and we’re going to splash down in that planet’s huge ocean in ten minutes.”

The commander thought for a moment. “My orders are simple. We are going to regroup on the ocean’s surface and come up with a devious plan to rescue the supreme Layzee Sponjer from that British submarine, and then we will destroy it in a most spectacular way.”

The peculiar engineer laughed. “*With what? All we have are, like, these escape globules, and two weeks emergency rations of lentils and spliffs!*”

Commander A’Doner screamed with rage. “We will prevail! How dare you doubt my genius?”

“*Sorry, commander. But you must admit, we are, like, deep in it!*”

“We must succeed in rescuing the Supreme Layzee Sponjer! His powers will then help us to destroy the *Death Reaper*, and return us home to *Layzee Sponjer* for a heroes welcome!”

“*Err... Okay, I guess.*”

The commander’s escape globule began to shudder. Outside, an orange glow brightened rapidly. In a blaze of lentil plasma, the little fleet of escape globules entered the blue planet’s atmosphere and headed for the rolling seas below.

“I’m so glad you’re all okay!” General Kath said, rushing into the *Death Reaper*’s side airlock changing room. She gave Pan, Ross and Peter a big welcome hug. “I thought I’d lost you.”

“Really?” Peter said calmly, zipping up the armoured jump-suit he’d just put on. “There was nothing we couldn’t handle.”

“Yeah!” Ross agreed, stepping out of his space suit. He grabbed an armoured suit similar to Peter’s and began suiting up. “Those fuckin’ hippies are brainless twats! No fuckin’ problem!”

Pan was still inside his space suit. He nodded, agreeing with the others.

Peter was curious. “Aren’t you going to change out of that space suit, Pan? You’d be better off in one of these trendy outfits.”

“No way!” Pan said. “This space suit’s still full of snacks and drinks. I’m keeping it on till I’ve had the lot.”

General Kath remembered the task at hand. “Keep the suit on if you must, but we have to get moving. We detected a trail of lentil particles heading down to the planet.”

Ross clenched his fists and stabbed at the air. “Escaping hippy fuckers!”

“Right.” Kath said. “Unfortunately the *Death Reaper*’s engines are damaged, so we’re going to have to go after them in one of the smaller craft we have on board.”

“Cool!” Pan said. “We’d better check on Lawrence first. Make sure he’s still strapped down.”

“He’s not.” General Kath said, as she made her way out of the changing room. “But he’s still on the bridge. He attacked the large-breasted security officer. He’s been busy munching on her big fleshy nipple domes since before we came through the wormhole. Her breasts are large enough to keep him occupied for quite a while, I think.”

Ross was shocked. “I can’t believe it! Fuckin’ pervert!”

Kath was curious. “Why was he strapped down, anyway?”

Peter answered. “He’s not Lawrence anymore. He’s the Supreme Layzee Sponjer, long lost supreme ruler of those hippies!”

The general was stunned. “Bloody hell!”

Pan selected an energy-boosting snack. It shot into his mouth. “Ross?” He said through a cloud of crumbs. “That security officer’s massive knockers won’t keep him occupied for that long. You and I had better get up there and sort him out!”

“Fuckin’ right!”

Pan and Ross sprinted away.

Kath looked at Peter. “You’d better come with me. Your legendary Micro Machines skill will come in useful piloting one of the *Death Reaper’s* smaller craft.”

Peter smiled. “I knew that skill would come in useful one day!”

General Kath and Peter headed down to the *Death Reaper’s* main hanger bay. After a brisk one-minute stroll they arrived. Peter operated the control next to the hanger bay’s door. The door whooshed open.

The interior of the hanger bay was not as expected. A multi-myriad of colours - every colour that ever existed, in fact - smoothly swam to and fro in an endless oily soup of mistiness.

Peter was shocked. “Usually hangers are full of spacecraft. What the kind of hanger is this?”

General Kath did not answer. She was transfixed by the swirls of colour before her. She took a step forward, her eyes wide and bright.

“Kath? Are you okay?” Peter asked, concerned.

The general continued to ignore her friend. She took another step forwards. One of her boots was now touching the coloured oily misty stuff.

“Kath?”

General Kath still did not respond. She took another step. She was now standing on the mist itself. She turned and looked towards Peter.

Peter stared in amazement at the general. Her eyes were a rainbow of colour. She opened her mouth as if to speak, but all that emerged were a multitude of colours.

Peter activated a communications panel next to the hanger bay door. "Security? Get down to the main hanger bay. Now!" Peter composed himself and looked back at his friend. "Kath? Please step away from the hanger. I think you need to get some..." Before he could complete the sentence Kath coughed, releasing a dense cloud of the colourful stuff. In less than a second, Peter was completely enveloped. He fell to the floor as weak as a flu-ridden kitten.

Kath turned and floated gently up into the air. The colourful oily misty stuff was changing, fading. Within seconds it was black. Pure deep impenetrable black.

Ross and Pan rushed through the entrance into the bridge. The stench of puke that greeted them was almost overwhelming.

Ross grimaced. "What a fuckin' odour!"

For the first time in his life, Pan lost his appetite. "You're not wrong, mate." He lowered his visor to get rid of the fetid tang.

The bridge certainly looked different from the pristine condition it was in just a couple of hours ago.

Ross pointed. "What's that over there?"

They both made their way through the thick carpet of vomit. What they found was quite the opposite of pleasant. A young woman, almost naked and covered in congealed blood, was lying spread-eagled on her back. A defiant but pained expression filled her pale face. Her eyes stared lifelessly at the ceiling.

"Fuck!" Ross exclaimed. "Nauseating! It's the massive-meloned security officer." He pointed at the two huge wounds on her chest. "Her fucking tits have been completely eaten away!"

Pan was not happy. "That's disgusting! Killing people by double mastectomy is a more heinous act than I ever thought Lawrence was capable of. And believe me, I thought he was capable of some hideous things!"

Ross looked at Pan. "You mean the Supreme Layzee Sponjer?"

"Of course I do. Same person, isn't it?"

"I guess so." Ross looked back at the mutilated security officer. "Poor fucker! What a waste."

A quiet squelching and crunching sound could be heard.

Ross looked around. He spoke quietly. "I think I hear something."

Pan nodded. “Over there.” He pointed to the navigation console near the front of the bridge. “Behind that.”

Pan took the left side and Ross approached from the right. With perfect timing they leapt on Lawrence – the Supreme Layzee Sponjer, dragging him off his latest victim. Pieces of what were once the navigation officer's small but well-formed breasts dropped to the floor. Ross scowled, and then punched Lawrence hard in the face.

Lawrence spewed several litres of vomit, and then rolled away. “Ya’ll fookin’ die fa that, ya uglee maggot!”

Pan kicked hard, pushing the metal sole of his right boot into Lawrence’s groin. The Supreme Layzee Sponjer doubled up, vomiting more of his vile juice.

One more rapid kick to the head by Ross knocked Lawrence out cold. He splashed back into a thick pool of his own toxic puke.

Pan smiled. “Nice one!”

A loud emergency siren sounded. Pan and Ross hurried over to one of the consoles.

Ross found out what was happening. “Fuck! The main hanger bay has been breeched!”

Pan twiddled some controls. “Isn’t that where Pete and Kath went?” A view of the entrance to the hanger bay was shown on the main screen. Kath was there, floating on nothingness towards the camera, her expression bland and devoid of all emotion. As she got closer to the camera they noticed her eyes. They were as black as night. Kath opened her mouth as if to speak, but no words came out. The inside of her mouth was as black as could be. She drifted off down a corridor.

Ross spoke, a touch of despair in his voice. “Another of our friends has lost it!”

Pan nodded. “Look’s like it. Wonder what happened?”

12 Bipedal Machine

Two well-toned female security guards helped Peter to his feet. He rubbed his face and looked around. Everything was a blur, his tongue felt like leather, and his head pounded with pain. Exactly like waking up from an alcohol-induced coma, he thought, remembering several intense binges he’d only just managed to survive back at university.

“You were lucky, sir.” One of the security officers said in a sensuous manner. “That weird multi-coloured stuff was all over you.”

“What happened to it?” Peter said, starting to feel a little better.

“It just slid off you, turned black, and then went back into the hanger bay.”

Peter looked down at his armoured jump-suit. “Whatever this is made of, it must have repelled it.” He suddenly remembered his friend. “Where’s General Kath? Is she all right?”

The security guard’s face took on a sad appearance. She shook her head. “The stuff got inside her. The general floated off down the corridor.” She pointed.

Peter pressed the activate button on the communicator located on his chest plate. “Ross? Pan? Are you there?”

“*Pete! We though it’d got you too!*” Chewing noises could be heard over the com channel.

“It almost did, Pan, but this body armour I’m wearing protected me. Kath’s skin-tight body suit was obviously a poor defence.”

“*Yeah, we just saw her on one of the screens floating down a corridor! Spooky, or what?*”

“We’ve got to find her.” Peter said. “There must be a way to get that stuff out of her.”

“*We’ll join you down there. Sensors show she’s still on your level.*”

“OK, I’ll wait for you here. I’m with two well-toned female security guards who should be able to help us.”

The two security guards giggled with delight at being noticed.

“*Cool!*”

“They are! Did you sort out Lawrence?”

“*Yeah.*” Pan said. “*He’d completely lost it! I had to smash his bollocks to get him to stop. He’d vomited on nearly every console and ripped the breasts off two crewmembers with his teeth! There was pendulous melon flesh everywhere!*”

Peter cringed. “That is sickening!”

Ross joined the conversation. Distress obvious in his tone of voice. “*Yeah! Four great fuckin’ tits – ruined!*”

“What about the male members of the bridge crew?”

“*Lawrence killed them with deep bites to their necks. He’s a vampire with a fuckin’ breast fetish!*”

“Is he secure now?”

“*Yep! I hog-tied the fucker and hung him from the periscope shaft. He ain’t goin’ fuckin’ anywhere!*”

“Good stuff. Now let’s go and sort out Kath so we can get back to dealing with those bastard hippies.”

Seven lentil escape globules bobbed on the surface of the blue planet's endless ocean, each globule was tied to its neighbour with tough resin-coated lentil vines.

On top of the centre globule, Commander A'Doner sat with his private pleasure mistress, Daisy Muff, and puffed deeply on three spliffs. He was sweating profusely, the twin suns that blazed overhead were rapidly heating up his hefty flab-ridden body. Daisy lifted up his clothing and nuzzled into the folds of his belly, lapping up the pools of perspiration and fungal matter to make her master more comfortable.

Around the commander, on top of the other escape modules, the other surviving hippies had broken into their emergency reefer rations and were also puffing away.

Now that his inferiors seemed nicely relaxed, the commander decided to speak. "Out of the five-thousand strong crew of the *Lentil Seed*, we twenty are the only survivors."

The other hippies cheered. One of the older crewmembers fell off his globule and splashed into the ocean.

"It's nothing to be proud of!" the commander shouted. "That ship was fitted with a thousand escape globules. Why, in the Bowel Lord's name, didn't more of the crew get into them?"

Doey Limprist, the *Lentil Seed's* abnormal chief engineer was sitting on the escape globule next to the commander's. He answered. "Probably because they were, like, too slow in getting into them."

Commander A'Doner fumed. "Obviously, you shit farmer!"

Doey smiled. He found his commander's bad temper quite arousing.

Daisy's nuzzling calmed the commander. He continued. "Enough about our fallen comrades. They were slow and as thick as marmalade and got what they deserved. We must quickly devise a cunning plan to board that British submarine and complete our mission to rescue the Supreme Layzee Sponjer."

"Impossible!" Doey said. "Just give it up! There's no way to get off this planet? These globules are, like, useless."

The commander was sick of the strange engineer. He got heavily to his feet, knocking Daisy off his undulating gut and onto her back. He pulled out a small gun, pointed it at Doey, and flicked a switch. The gun powered up and hummed deeply. "You're insolence and negativity will end now!" he yelled.

Before the commander had a chance to pull the trigger a chilling scream and splashing sound disturbed him. He looked round. Several of his stoned crewmembers were looking down into the water.

"What's going on?!" the commander demanded.

“It’s, like, old Tom.” One of the hippies said. “He fell off his globule and was trying climb back up when something grabbed him.”

“What do you mean, ‘something’?”

“It was, like, weird and swirly and psychedelic. It, like, wrapped around old Tom, turned as black as my little goatee beard, and then pulled him under.”

The commander was dubious. “How much have smoked today?”

“I’m not hallucinating!” the hippy said. “At least, not too much, anyway.”

The hatch on the commander’s escape globule flipped open. Commander A’Doner looked down to see Moonbeam looking up at him. He still looked dazed from the beating the commander had given him before they splashed down. “Commander? There’s something huge in the water below us! The globule’s sensors have detected something really massive!”

“What is it?!”

“All I know is, it’s big!”

“You useless, piss-swilling idiot!” The commander kicked Moonbeam hard in the face sending him crashing back into the globule. Commander A’Doner looked around. Even though the suns were still bright overhead the ocean was darkening. The globules began to vibrate, and then the ocean’s surface turned to foam. Suddenly, and silently, an immense wall of blackness rose out of the water, completely surrounding the small group of escape globules.

The hippies shrieked with terror as the wall of blackness continued to rise. More spliffs were lit up and huge draws taken in an attempt to shut out the fear.

The wall of blackness now reached hundreds of metres into the air. It began to close in overhead like a giant aperture.

Commander A’Doner gazed upwards, a sense of complete despair filled his soul. He said the only thing he could think of. “Pants.”

Pan and Ross joined Peter down at the entrance to the main hanger bay.

“So, what are we going to do about Kath and her odd behaviour?” Pan asked.

Peter answered. “If it was someone we didn’t know, I would say that the only option we have is to flush her out of one of the airlocks.”

Pan frowned. “But we do know her.”

Peter nodded. "I know. That's why we can't flush her out of the airlock."

"Come on, guys!" Ross shouted, annoyed. "Why the fuck are you discussing what we can't do? Let's discuss what we fuckin' can do!"

Peter looked at his foul-mouthed friend. "What do you suggest?"

"Freeze her."

"Nice idea." Pan said. "Then we'll have plenty of time to get a small sample of that weird black stuff that's possessed her and find out what it's made of."

"How the fuck are we're going to do that?"

Peter answered. "This is the flagship of the British Navy, and the largest and best equipped ship ever created. It must have labs onboard."

Ross nodded. "I guess it must. So, how are we going to freeze Kath?"

"There must be liquid helium in the ship's heat shield." Peter said. "We can extract some, put it into one of the flamethrowers in the armoury and spray it on her."

"Yeah!" Pan said. "I was just about to suggest that."

"Fuckin' great idea, Pete!" Ross said. "While we're at it, we can spray Lawrence, too!"

Peter pointed. "That's the front of the ship down there. That's where the most liquid helium will be located. I'll go and figure out how to access it. You guys go and get a flamethrower."

Ross punched the air. "Flamethrowers rule!"

Thirty minutes later, it was done. The freezing of Kath and Lawrence had gone entire according to plan, and their cold, solid bodies were now in the *Death Reaper's* lavishly equipped sickbay.

"Well," Ross said, still brandishing his liquid helium thrower. "It fuckin' worked!"

In the middle of the sickbay General Kath was now frozen solid and sealed into an insulated transparent tube. Next to her, in an adjacent tube, was the Supreme Layzee Sponjer, formally known as Lawrence. He was still gagged and hogtied, but now deep-frozen.

Pan slurped down the last of his spacesuit's Dr. Pepper and nodded. "Yeah. Easy as pie!" He thought for a moment. "Hmm... Pie..."

Peter quickly checked the transparent tubes. "He turned and smiled. "They're in perfect hibernation!"

The *Death Reaper's* chief medical officer, Dr Mario Kart, approached. "I'm-a glad-a you-a like-a my hibernation tubes." He said proudly. "I-a invented them-a myself!"

"How long will those two possessed fuckers stay frozen?" Ross asked.

"A long-a long-a time-a." Dr Kart said proudly. "Those-a tubes are the most-a insulated tubes ever created."

"Cool," Ross said, "but I think someone should stay and guard them. The two fuckers in there will cause havoc if they defrost and escape."

Peter agreed. "Doctor, as we all need to go off and kick some emaciated hippy arse, it's going to have to be you."

The chief medical officer was annoyed. "I cannot-a do it! I am-a too-a busy! I-a need-a to examine that weird-a rainbow black-a stuff inside the general!"

"That's true," Peter said to Ross. "We need him to concentrate on that if we're to have any chance of saving Kath."

Ross frowned. "Then who the fuck is going to guard them?"

Two loud metal clangs reverberated around the sick bay. A semi-electronic, and vaguely familiar voice boomed. "I will do it!"

Ross, Pan and Peter turned. A shocking sight befell them. There, standing rigidly in the doorway that lead to Dr Kart's laboratory, stood a seven-foot tall bipedal machine of incredible ugliness. It was covered in a myriad of hydraulic pipes, servos, and cables. A small pool of oil had gathered at its plate-like feet. But the most shocking part was the head. It was mainly human, encased in a thick glass dome, and connected to the machine below with a thick riveted iron collar and what looked like a vacuum-cleaner tube from the top of the skull. The head looked tiny in comparison to the bulky metal torso and limbs below.

Dr Mario Kart spoke. "Of-a course-a! I-a forgot to-a mention my-a life-a saving surgery on-a Captain Codd's-a severed head-a!"

Ross, Pan and Peter stared in disbelief at the freakish sight before them.

After a few seconds of stunned silence Ross burst into fits of laughter. "Ha harr! It's Justin! It's fuckin' Justin!"

13

Eerie Blue Glow

Commander A'Doner was still finding it hard to comprehend the gargantuan dome of blackness that had risen out of the sea to completely enclose all the surviving hippies of the destroyed *Lentil Seed*. "Back in the globules!" He yelled. The commander dived back into the top hatch of his globular escape capsule, almost wedging his swollen flabby mass in the round opening as he did so.

On the escape globules around the commander's, hippies stumbled, fumbled and staggered wildly as they attempted to get back inside. Many simply fell into the swelling sea, too stoned and emaciated to care.

The blackness that now enveloped them was total; the only light coming from the bobbing escape globules themselves. Commander A'Doner hammered at his globule's instrumentation in desperation. Behind him the globule's top hatch folded closed.

"We're going to die!" A voice wailed. It was Moonbeam

The commander could not stand pessimistic yellow bellies. "Shut up, you worthless, mouldy ring burglar!" He screamed, yanking at some controls. "We're getting out of here!"

Moonbeam began to moan like a scabby wolf as the globule began to lurch violently from side to side. "These globules can't fly, they're landers only! Doomed, we are! Doomed!"

"They may not be able to fly," the commander said, "but they can sink!"

With an incredible bubbling sound, the globule quickly descended below the waves.

Moonbeam was looking at the output of the scanner. "Whoa! That black stuff has, like, disappeared! It's no longer on our sensors! The route below is clear! It must all be above us!"

Commander A'Doner grinned. He turned to Moonbeam. "I've outsmarted death again!" He looked back at his console and looked at its readouts. His depth was currently 87 metres and descending at a rate of three metres per second. Trailing behind were the six other hippy escape globules. The commander was a little surprised. He had not expected to see all of the others following. He had expected at least half of them to forget to close their globule's hatches and drown. He activated the communicator. "This is your commander. Report your status."

The reports that were returned renewed the commander's lack of faith in his subordinates.

“We’re, like, trippin’, man! Feels like we’re sinking...”

“Everythin’ is, like, jelly. My feet are as soft as pancakes. Awesome...”

“Hey! Did you just, like, look at my reefer? Ah, yeah, man! Suck on this...”

“Oh, man! This is the greatest funk of my existence...”

They were all as stoned as retards. But they were hippies, and that was normal. Still, Commander A'Doner was not happy. He switched off the communicator. Those brainless hippies were as much use as papier-mâché machine guns. What he needed was to regroup his forces, find a way to gain the upper hand over that annoying British Navy submarine, and return the Supreme Layzee Sponjer to the hippy home world. With the Supreme Layzee Sponjer reinstated as leader, the commander could continue his plans for galactic domination. He would then assume power once again from behind the throne, controlling the Supreme Layzee Sponjer's actions, and using the respect and reverence his people had for their leader to fulfill his megalomaniacal dreams. After all, it was he who had first appointed the Supreme Layzee Sponjer as leader. It was he who had been the driving force behind the expansion of the hippy empire. It was he who had forged the largest fleet of lentil-armoured starships the galaxy had ever seen. Although many hippies had not backed his plans, he had somehow succeeded. But when the Supreme Layzee Sponjer had disappeared he had almost lost his exalted position. Only his quick announcement that he personally would lead the rescue mission had saved him from a severe public thrashing. That and the extreme laziness of the hippy home world's chief thrasher, of course.

Commander A'Doner checked his console's readouts once again. The depth was now 1,352 metres and still falling. The six other globules were still close behind. The spherical nature of the lentil escape globules was certainly pressure resistant, but not indefinitely so. This descent into the depths of this strange ocean could not continue much longer.

A light appeared from below, illuminating the surrounding water in an eerie blue glow.

Commander A'Doner leaned forwards and looked down through the forward window.

Daisy Muff, who had been snoozing next to him sat up, startled by the brightening light. “Wow, that's beautiful. What is it?”

The commander's eyes widened. “It looks like were not the only ones down here. There's a bright light on the ocean floor!”

Peter strapped himself into the pilot's seat right at the front of the cramped but luxurious interior of the *Death Reaper's* space capsule, the small vessel normally reserved for the use of the ship's captain only. The three-metre domed window in front of him filled his field of vision, the view only interrupted by two flat-panel touch-screens and a control stick.

"This capsule seems adequate." Peter said, pulling on the stick. "Lucky this was onboard, with that rainbow black stuff swallowing up all the attack craft in the other hanger bay."

"Fuckin' black rainbow fucker!" Ross mumbled.

Ross was sitting just behind Peter at the weapons console. His hands were a blur of activity across his screens as he armed every offensive and defensive system he could find. Murmurs of "Oh yeah! We'll need one of those fuckers!" and "Cool! That'll fuck 'em up, the fuckers!" could be heard, accompanied by devilish chuckles. He was obviously quite pleased with the array of destruction at his fingertips.

Pan had just managed to squeeze himself in through the small hatchway. It closed behind him and locked with a buzz of servos. "Hey!" Pan said, looking at his two companions. "How come you two get the cool seats?"

"Because," Ross replied, still configuring the capsule's weapons, "you insist on wearing that bulky fuckin' space suit instead of one of these snug-fitting armoured jump-suits!"

Peter turned and pointed to a small round opening in the ceiling. "If you can get through there you can go up to the top turret. I bet it's a great view from up there!"

Pan looked up. He shook his head. "I'll never get up there."

"If you take the suit off you will."

"Never!" Pan shouted, looking sternly at Peter. "I made a solemn vow not to take this suit off until it has been completely emptied of all snacks and beverages. I will not break that vow!"

Both Peter and Ross knew how seriously Pan took his solemn vows, especially regarding food, so they said nothing more about the suit.

"I guess you can sit at the back and monitor the engines, then." Peter said.

Pan looked round at the complex array of digital readouts on the back wall. On the floor a low fixed stool was the only seating. "That'd be cool." He said, sitting down. He selecting a Twinkie from his suit's 'American Classics' menu. It shot into his open mouth with a satisfying thwack.

Peter touched the 'Start' symbol on his right hand touch-screen. The space capsule's engines hummed to life. A deep throbbing pulsed through the small vessel.

Pan looked at his readouts. "The engines are running." He said, spitting crumbs. Some of them ricocheted off the back wall and onto Ross.

"If you're gonna keep eating," Ross said, "close your fuckin' visor first!"

"Sorry." Pan said. His visor hissed shut.

Ross turned to Peter. "What are we fuckin' waiting for? Let's go and tear those escaping hippy fuckers a huge new fuckin' arse!"

Peter smiled at Ross's eloquent grasp of the English language. He reached over to his left-hand screen and pressed what he hoped was the 'Launch' symbol.

With an incredible bang, the *Death Reaper's* lower hanger bay doors folded open. Immediately, the space capsule dropped out from the underside of the giant submarine. Pan, Ross, and Peter gasped as their stomachs seemed to lodge in their throats. Pan, the only one not strapped in to a seat, smashed into the ceiling.

"Fuckin' A!" Ross yelled. "Yee fuckin' harr!"

The space capsule accelerated at a phenomenal rate towards the blue planet below.

Doctor Mario Kart examined the frozen fragment of rainbow black stuff in the test tube. He'd just spent the last ten minutes carefully chipping away at the inside of the Kath monster's – formally General Kath's – mouth. It had been a difficult task to get any of the rainbow black stuff out, but finally he'd managed.

The doctor stepped away from the transparent tube that held the Kath monster. "OK-a, I have-a my sample. Captain, please-a shut-a the door."

Captain Codd heaved his hefty metal body over to the tube. "Anything to help, doctor." His semi-metallic voice boomed. He slammed shut the small opening in the front of the tube. It hissed as the door sealed.

"I must-a study this-a substance urgently." Doctor Mario said, walking into his private laboratory. "Please-a watch over these-a two."

Captain Codd replied, his expression as cold as his metal-clad body. "Anything to help, doctor." He started to march heavily up and down the sickbay, his eyes locked in focus on the two transparent

tubes. The Kath monster and the Supreme Layzee Sponjer were motionless in their frigid prisons. No way were they leaving.

On the sickbay's polished floor, several black specks lay unnoticed by the dominating presence of the mechanized captain. As he whirred and hissed and stamped up and down, the black specks melted and returned to a liquidized state. They moved slowly across the floor, merging with the drops of oil that had found their way out of Captain Codd's joints. The occasional flicker of colour sparkled across their surface.

The captain continued his pounding march round the sickbay, thinking nothing of treading in the small harmless pools of oil he was creating. He made a mental note to mention the leaks to Doctor Mario as soon as he returned. Oil leaks were a sign of inefficiency, and efficiency and the need to function optimally within a well-defined set of parameters suddenly seemed very important.

The oil stuck unseen to the soles of his feet, and cycled through a billion shades of red, green, and blue. Quickly, it crept through the microscopic gaps between the captain's armour plating, turning a deathly shade of infinite black as it did so.

14 **Butt-Weasle**

The juddering was getting intolerable. Ross yelled. "Fuckin' hell. Pete! Fly steady!"

Peter struggled with the flight stick. "This is tough! I don't think this craft is aerodynamically stable!" Keeping his eyes on the large domed window at the front of the space capsule, Peter guided the capsule round a spread of sparse clouds. Far below, the deep blue of an expansive ocean could be seen. The shaking was getting worse. "The thickening atmosphere is to blame, not me!"

Ross reached across Peter and touched one of his screens. The shuddering stopped almost immediately.

Peter was stunned. "Amazing!"

Ross pointed. "D.S.C. – Dynamic Stability Control! You had the fucker turned off!"

"Oops... Sorry."

The ocean appeared much closer now. Peter pulled back on the flight stick. He looked at his screens. The altitude was just over one mile above the waves. "Ross? Better do a scan. See if you can see those hippy escape pods."

Ross was fiddling and twiddling the controls on his console. “Well ahead of you there. First scan is almost complete... Done!”

“Excellent! Found anything?”

“Well, I’ve found what I think are the escape pods, but they’re well below the surface. Almost a fuckin’ mile!”

Pan shouted from his stool at the back. “Cool! They sank!”

Ross shook his head. “I don’t think so. They seem to be gathered neatly around a round structure. They’re down there on purpose.”

Peter leaned over and looked at Ross’s screen. “You’re right! Do you think there’s some kind of base down there? I assumed this planet was uninhabited.”

Ross nodded. “The fucker’s have found a safe haven! Let’s get down there and fuck up their lives!”

Peter checked his screens. “I’m not sure if this craft is able to travel under water.”

Pan stood up, banging the helmet of his spacesuit on the low ceiling. “This suit can!” He said, his voice muffled by his visor. “Give me a mother of a weapon and I’ll take them all out single handedly!”

Peter and Ross were amazed. That was once of the bravest and most stupid things their friend had ever said. Still, they could not think of anything else.

“Okay with me.” Peter said.

Ross was more reluctant, but agreed. “I guess so. But I’d much rather be the one doing the fuckin’ violent stuff!”

Pan was sympathetic. “I know, mate, but that’s the way the cookie crumbles.” His mind wandered. “Hmm... Cookies...”

“Fuck, Pan! Concentrate!”

“Sorry.”

Ross turned back to his weapons console and checked the inventory list. “There’s a load of fuck-off hand-held devastation devices in the cupboard in the airlock. Get in there, make your choice, and then we’ll dump you in the water. With luck you’ll be heavy enough to sink to the bottom without a problem.”

Pan opened the hatch and began to step into the side airlock. He paused for a moment. “Once I’ve mashed up those bony-armed hippies, how do I get back to the surface?”

Ross and Peter were silent.

Finally Peter shook his head. “I don’t know.” He looked at Ross. “What about you?”

“Ross shook his head. “I haven’t got a fuckin’ clue, mate.”

Pan nodded. “No problem. I’ll wing it!” He stepped into the airlock. The door whooshed shut behind him.

“Right.” Peter said, pushing forward on the flight stick. “Going down...”

“Are you sure we’re securely docked?” Commander A’Doner asked.

Moonbeam was standing next to the side hatchway. He looked out of the small porthole window. “Erm... Yeah, sure.” He took a quick glance out of the rear window. “Looks like the other globules have docked, too.”

The commander struggled to his feet. “Good. Open the hatch. Let’s see what this deep under-water place we’ve discovered can...”

There was a screaming whoosh as fast stream of water flooded into the lentil escape globule. Moonbeam yelped. “Owee! Cold!”

Commander A’Doner was fuming. “You wirey arse-pumper! Close the hatch! Now!”

With an incredible struggle, Moonbeam managed to close and lock the hatch. The flow of water stopped.

The commander waded through the knee-deep water towards Moonbeam. When he reached his assistant security chief he screamed. “Evacuate the airlock of water first, you bony bastard mother of a butt-weasle!” The commander punched Moonbeam hard in the gut.

Moonbeam doubled up, and then vomited hard. He whimpered. “Yes, commander.” He looked up at the hatch controls and pressed a couple of switches. There was a rumble as the water was sucked out of the airlock. “Done, I think.”

“Open it. Then go through.”

The assistant security chief nodded and opened the hatch. He peered through it. “It looks, like, a bit spooky in there!”

Commander A’Doner kicked Moonbeam in the back. “Go!” Once Moonbeam had tripped and stumbled through the hatch, the commander followed. Once he had passed through he turned. He could see Daisy Muff shivering in her skimpy translucent outfit at the far end of the globule. “Come on, my dear. Whatever’s in this place I’ll still need your special services!”

After a moment of hesitation, Daisy followed.

In the glaring light of twin suns, Pan plummeted boots first towards the swelling ocean half a mile below. He moaned. “Oh, yeah! So good!”

Peter’s voice spoke over the communicator. “*Glad to hear you’re enjoying freefall!*”

“It’s not that.” Pan said, his voice muffled. “It’s the cheesy paste I’ve just discovered. It’s like there’s a party in my mouth, and the whole galaxy’s invited!”

Ross spoke. “*Concentrate, Pan! You’re about to hit the fuckin’ water!*”

“When?” Pan asked as he examined his suit’s beverage menu.

“*Now!*”

At almost two-hundred miles per hour, Pan, cocooned in the relative safety of his space suit, slammed into the sea.

Pan groaned. Although his suit was well-padded, the shock of deceleration was still tremendous. He watched a hoard of bubbles swirling outside his visor. “Alton Towers has nothing on that!” The water was getting rapidly darker. Pan looked at his head-up display. “I’m sinking very fast – about three metres per second!”

Peter spoke over the communicator. “*That’s good. You’ll be at the bottom in less than ten minutes.*”

Pan activated his suit’s entertainment system. “Just enough time to watch a few classic Simpsons clips!”

Commander A’Doner, Moonbeam and the other surviving hippies stood at the centre a large domed room. Daisy Muff cowered at the commander’s side. The room was lined with what looked like rusted metal panels, partly covered in slime and mould. At the centre of the domed ceiling was a bright blue light. The air was dank and rancid. Several hippies had already hurled their guts, and several more had lit-up and were taking deep satisfying draws on their long, thick reefers. Idle chit-chat was growing in volume.

Doey Limprist, the former chief engineer of the destroyed *Lentil Seed*, swayed over to Commander A’Doner. He waved gaily. “Hi!”

The commander scowled. “What do you want, shit miner?”

“Well,” Doey said, fumbling with his groin. “I was just wondering, now that we’re down here deep under the ocean in this smelly and deserted dome, what exactly we’re, like, going to do?”

Commander A'Doner took a deep breath, and raised his corpulent frame to its full height. He looked around the room, his robes billowing. "Shut-up and listen!"

The room fell silent.

The commander spoke. "Our great ship was destroyed by those Navy bastards, and most of our crew mates were murdered by them, too. And all we were left with after that wicked attack were our seven escape globules."

The hippies groaned in agreement. One hippy at the far side of the room collapsed as his huge inhalation of drug-saturated smoke took effect.

Commander A'Doner continued. "Thanks to my remarkable leadership and wisdom we are now safe and sound under an alien ocean. Now we can concentrate on our primary mission once again. We will rescue the Supreme Layzee Sponjer from his prison onboard that malevolent British submarine. We will disfigure and marinate those that imprisoned him. And the hippy civilization will dominate the galaxy for eternity and beyond!"

The hippies cheered feebly with joy. Many arms were raised slightly.

Commander A'Doner smiled, reveling in the adoration of his crew, and the nuzzling of his groin by Daisy Muff.

Doey Limprist was still standing in front of the commander. He was not as joyous as his crew mates.

The commander looked down at him. "What's wrong with you, ring stabber? Celebrate like your fellow hippies. That's an order!"

Doey did not look convinced. "What you said was, like, quite motivational, I guess."

The commander narrowed his eyes. "You guess?" He slapped his palm down on top of Doey's head. "Of course it was. I am your leader. It's part of my job to keep you all happy, content and motivated. Now, act happy, content and motivated!"

Doey took a step back from Commander A'Doner and rubbed his head. "I will be happy, content and motivated when you explain exactly how we are going to live down here with only the limited air supply, food and reefer rations in the escape globules. And how we are going to get up to that British submarine without any means of even getting out of this filthy stinking long-abandoned alien deep-sea slime dome? And how will we avoid that black stuff that forced us down here in the first place?"

By now all the other hippies – those that were still conscious, anyway – were quiet and listening.

Commander A'Doner looked around the large domed room. All eyes were on him. He had to think quickly to maintain control of his stoned crew and continue to hold their respect. "This dome has obviously been abandoned for a very long time." He said. "But there is one thing down here that we can utilize to get back up to the surface."

"Like, what's that?" Doey asked.

The commander pointed straight up. "That light. It has obviously been functioning for many centuries since this place was abandoned. Its power source must be strong and reliable. We will use it to escape." He punched the air like a true hero. "We will use its awesome abilities and be victorious!"

The hippies cheered feebly once again.

But not Doey. He took a step towards the commander. "I would really like to know how that light can..."

A bullet – small, fast, blunt and true, passed through Doey's head. The bullet clanged off the room's corroded wall long before the hippy's lifeless body had slumped onto the soggy floor. The other hippies looked at Doey's corpse. Only the haze of their drug-soaked minds kept them from being completely shocked.

Commander A'Doner spoke. "His negative attitude would have been our undoing. His death was necessary." He shouted loudly and raised his arms. "We cannot fail!"

The hippies cheered feebly yet again. Within seconds a dozen more reefers were ignited. Seven more hippies collapsed to the sodden floor.

Commander A'Doner grinned confidently at his crew. But behind his grin his mind was filled with deep anxiety and dread. He envied his dopey crew and their spongy small brains that enabled them to so easily believe his bullshit. They were indeed happy, content and motivated by what he had said.

The commander knew that there was a good chance they were doomed.

Above there was only blackness, the brightness of the suns having long since faded away. But below, there was now an eerie blue light. It appeared to be getting brighter.

Pan realized he must be getting close to the bottom. He turned off the classic Simpsons clips he was watching, retracted the snack dispenser from in front of his mouth, and prepared to land.

The light appeared to be rising now, but in the wrong place.

Shit! Pan thought. I'm off course. He decided to complain to Peter. He activated his communicator. "Hey, Pete? You dropped me in the wrong damn place!"

Other than the crackle of static, there was no reply. And then Pan remembered. High-frequency radio communications do not work through water. Double shit!

A second later Pan slammed into the ocean floor. A cloud of silt washed up, accompanied by numerous wriggling worm-like creatures. Slightly shaken by the force of the impact, Pan struggled to his feet, brushing off some of the worms that were attempting to chew through his suit. He wiped some silt from his visor and looked around. Through the clearing cloud he could see the blue glow. It looked quite far. And uphill, too. Triple shit!

Grumbling like an arthritic old man in a pharmacy full of hormonal teenagers, Pan began to trudge awkwardly along the uneven sea bed.

This was going to take a while.

15 Self-Illuminated Vagabonds

The unsteady pyramid of hippies was almost complete. Just one more and the blue light at the top of the dome could be reached and examined.

Commander A'Doner shouted at Moonbeam, the only hippy left who was conscious and not part of the pyramid. "Looks like the honour is all yours. Climb up to the top."

Moonbeam looked up. He shuddered at the thought of climbing up four levels of unstable and heavily stoned hippies, some of whom were still smoking. "It's, like, too high. I'm not good with heights."

The commander bellowed like a moose on heat. "Do as I order, bum bandit!"

With incredible nervousness, Moonbeam clambered onto the nearest of his crewmates and started to ascend the pyramid.

The commander watched with inner despair. It was a futile attempt at escape. Still, it was good to keep his crew occupied. At least their last few hours of life would not seem futile. He sighed, and looked down at the bobbing mass of his robes. Even the pleasuring of Daisy Muff gave him no comfort now.

Pan was not a happy man. The uphill tilt of the ocean floor was hard going, and the uneven terrain and extreme pressure at this depth was making progress extremely slow. The blue glow of the light ahead seemed no closer, despite half-an-hour of relentless trudging. Pan puffed and panted like an irritable buffalo, and cursed under his breath: Damn hippies! They're gonna suffer for this! He thought about the sonic pulse rifle and concussion grenades strapped to his back and cheered up a little. Using those is going to be so cool!

And then he slipped.

Flailing like an abandoned baby, Pan slid on his backside down the side of a steep crevasse. A shoal of tiny translucent fish flicked out of the way as the space-suited hero jammed between two outcrops of rock.

Pan turned on his helmet's flood light, something he should have done a long time ago, and looked around. Below, the narrow crevasse seemed to go on forever. He had been lucky. If the outcrops had not stopped his fall, he could have fallen into oblivion. Above, the lip of the opposite side of the thin crevasse loomed over him almost five metres up.

After few seconds of inane profanity and rock punching, Pan calmed himself and began to think logically. Using his visor's head-up display he called up a list of his suit's tool inventory. The fourth item down, right under toe-nail clippers, was exactly what he was looking for: a pocket-sized grappling hook and launcher, located conveniently in his suit's chest pocket. Pan opened the pocked and pulled out the pistol-shaped device. Following the onscreen instructions, he energised the launcher pistol and aimed just above the lip of the crevasse.

He fired.

With a muffled thud the grappling hook and line shot up and out of the crevasse and disappeared from view. As instructed by his head-up display, Pan waited for a few seconds to give the hook time to land, and then he pulled. The line was tight and seemed secure. Gripping the launcher pistol with both hands, he shimmied out of the grip of the two rocky outcrops and swung out into the open. He sighed with relief as the line held. He clicked the retract button. Powerful and noisy fusion-powered servos whirred into action, yanking Pan violently up towards the lip of the crevasse. Before he could even consider choosing another snack from his suit's menu, he slid over the lip of the crevasse and slammed into something hard. Letting go of the pistol, Pan, slightly stunned, clambered uneasily to his feet. A cloud of silt shrouded his view and took a few seconds to clear.

There, straight ahead, was the blue light, and for once it seemed a little closer.

An incredible pain shot up his left leg. Pan yelped and looked down. A crab-like creature the size of an award-winning marrow was gripping tightly with its pincers to his leg just above his boot. The water around was turning deep red. His suit was punctured, and so was his leg. Pan attempted to shake the crab loose but it just gripped harder, sending even more intense pain signals to his brain.

There was only one thing to do. Pan reached round to his back pack and grabbed the sonic pulse rifle. Aiming down, he targeted the centre of the crab's shell and fired. With a huge thud, a blast of intense and focused sound hit the crab. The crab's shell shattered, scattering over a wide area. Its fleshy innards were split and shredded, and sank into the silt.

The shock of the sound blast pushed Pan back a few metres, but he managed to keep standing. He reached down and removed the crab's pincers, which were still gripping onto his left leg. With the obstruction removed the suit's emergency anti-leak system burst into action, filling up the breach in a second with a thick foamy substance.

Pan howled as the substance entered his wound. After a few seconds the pain subsided, but his anger did not. With renewed determination he limped forwards towards the light, mumbling in a deep and devilish voice. "No mercy! The hippies shall know no mercy!"

"Oops!" Peter said, pointing at one of the screens in front of him. "Just noticed something."

Ross looked over. "What?"

"This capsule *can* function underwater after all."

Ross scowled. "Then why the fuck did you say it couldn't?"

"The on-line manual is presented in a very peculiar font." Peter pointed at the screen again. "It's not easy to read."

"Hmm..." Ross said. He nodded. "Actually, you're right. Fuckin' Navy and their creative typesetting!"

Peter took the capsule off auto-pilot and pushed forward on the control stick. Outside the large domed window at the front of the capsule, the rolling ocean now filled the view. It was approaching fast.

Ross was curious. "What are you doing?" he asked, as his stomach leapt up into his throat.

"Well, we sent Pan down their on his own because we thought he was the only one who had a space suit, and therefore the only one

who could go there. Now that we know we can go there we should go and help him.”

Ross was not convinced. He shook his head. “Pan was looking forward to dealing with those fuckin’ hippies single-handedly. He’ll be pissed off if we barge in there.”

Peter angled the capsule into a steeper descent. “No, he’ll appreciate our help. Anyway, why should he have all the fun? I want my piece of the action!”

Ross thought for a second, and then nodded vigorously. “Fuck! Yeah! I want my piece too. A fuckin’ large piece!”

Peter grinned. “Excellent!” He examined his screens. “We’re on a perfect course. Prepare to hit the water.”

Ross tightened the straps on his seat. He laughed as he looked at the rapidly approaching ocean. “This is going to be one huge fuckin’ splash!”

For the last ten minutes Moonbeam had been fiddling with casing of the blue light. Unlike the wall of the dome, the light’s casing was not at all corroded. In fact, it seemed brand new.

Commander A’Doner shouted from below. “Well? Have you done it?”

Moonbeam looked down at his commander through the steadily deepening haze of reefer smoke. “Erm... No.” He swayed as the wobbly pyramid of hippies beneath him moved. “The light is, like, really well constructed. I can’t seem to find a way in.”

The commander bellowed. “Why, in Bernard’s Bowels, not? I saw your service record. You were trained in assembling and dismantling hardware of all types. Are you telling me you can’t dismantle a simple light?”

Moonbeam hugged the light to steady himself as the hippy pyramid swayed. “Well, I was trained on hippy hardware, which is poorly built and, like, easy to rip apart. This light is, like, very well designed, and built to the highest standards. It’s, like, totally impenetrable, or something.”

Commander A’Doner fumed. “I’ve had enough of you anal love muffins! I’ll do it myself!” He pulled out a small energy pistol from beneath his vast robes. “All of you! Out of my way!” He kicked hard at the legs of the hippy at the left hand side of the pyramid.

After a second or two of lethargic wailing, the hippy pyramid crashed to the floor. The hippies moaned like the undead.

The commander aimed his pistol. “This will open up that light. And then the power source inside will be mine all mine all mine!” He fired.

A potent beam of sparkling red energy connected with the blue light. Immediately, arcs of lightening crackled across the ceiling, filling the dome with a strobe of blinding light. The sound was deafening.

The commander ceased firing, but the effects of his rash action grew worse by the second. Already, three of his crew were blazing infernos, ignited by the electric arcs. They were screaming feebly, and staggering like self-illuminated vagabonds. One of them turned and approached the commander, his arms outstretched. He obviously wanted a comforting hug from his superior. The commander had no choice. He aimed his pistol and fired. The hippy’s head split in two. His lifeless flaming body crumpled to the floor.

“Commander!” Moonbeam shouted. He was moving awkwardly towards Commander A’Doner. His fall from the hippy pyramid had broken his leg. His snapped right femur was sticking out like a gatepost. “I think you, like, caused a malfunction!”

When Moonbeam was in range Commander A’Doner punched him hard on his forehead. The hippy staggered and then fell to the floor, landing hard on his protruding leg bone. He yelped and began to sob like his sister.

Commander A’Doner yelled. “Get up, you idle pillow-biter! Do your duty! Protect me!”

Moonbeam struggled to his feet and positioned himself between the commander and the violently sparkling blue light. More and more of the hippies were bursting into flames as arcs of power connected with their bodies. “This is, like, depressing.” Moonbeam moaned.

Commander A’Doner repeated his order. “Do your duty!”

Moonbeam nodded weakly. And then was hit by lightning. He howled as his right leg ignited, and then fell to the floor. Frantically he patted the flames, trying to put them out.

Another bolt of power zigzagged across the dome. Without Moonbeam as an obstruction, the dazzling energy hit Commander A’Doner’s robes. The robes burst into flames.

The commander fumed as he patted his burning clothes. “Damn it, Moonbeam! I ordered you to do your duty and protect me! Help me put this out!”

Moonbeam ignored the commander. He was too busy putting out the flames on his now well-cooked leg. He flinched as another arc of power flashed across the domed room, fortunately in the other direction.

There was a stifled scream from beneath the commander's robes. Daisy Muff, her face blackened by smoke, crawled out. She coughed deeply, spat out some phlegm, and then started sobbing.

"Don't just sit there, woman!" Commander A'Doner yelled. "Help me!"

Daisy helped the commander pad down the last of the flames on his robes.

With a final flash and crack, the blue light at the top of the dome faded to darkness. An eerie silence, broken only by the occasional crackle of fire, filled the room.

Commander A'Doner looked around. The dome, lit by nothing but the flaming corpses of hippies, had become a disconcerting and primeval place. Almost all of his crew had been reduced to nothing more than smouldering lumps of lifeless flesh. He looked down at Daisy. She was leaning on his thick charred robes and sucking on her thumb. She moaned softly. He looked over to Moonbeam, who was stroking his black and broken leg. The junior officer was snivelling quietly and his head was bobbing slowly up and down – a sure sign that madness had finally taken hold of his mind.

With a sigh, Commander A'Doner slumped down to the floor and rested against the wall. For the first time in his life he welcomed the inevitability of death. His only comfort was that those Navy bastards would not capture him alive. They would get no such pleasure.

16 Crackling Mass of Meat and Bone

"It just went out!" Peter said, looking out of the capsule's domed window. Where the mesmerizing blue light had been there was now only the blackness of the ocean depths. "There were a couple of flickers of what looked like lightening, and then it all went dark!"

Ross was grinning. "Fuckin' excellent! Pan must've done the business!"

Peter operated a few controls on his console. "Now that there's no light down here I need another way to see where we're going." The display on the screens in front of him changed configuration, and then a loud and deep sonar pinging sound began reverberating through the cabin.

"Fuck! That's loud! You'll give away our position!"

“I know, but if Pan’s done what we think he’s done, that no longer matters.” Peter pointed at his screens. “Look. A clear sonic view of the sea bed, and what was the source of the light!”

Ross looked at the screens. There, on the edge of a deep abyss, was a dome. And around the dome were several smaller spheres. “Cool! They must be the pods those bony fuckers escaped in!”

“Indeed. Proof we’re in the right place.”

With the dexterity of a marmoset, Peter leveled the capsule onto a course parallel with the ocean floor. Even though the view through the domed window was black, the sonar image showed that the dome was dead ahead. Peter slowed the capsule to a crawl.

Ross pointed at the screen. “Look. Another docking port next to that last pod on the left. Head for that!”

Peter nodded. “I think I need some light.”

“Coming up.” Ross said. He punched his console hard. Immediately the view ahead was flooded with light. The side of the dome, covered in green and brown silt, was revealed. To the right one of the hippy escape pods nestled close to the dome. It looked like a giant turnip – a giant turnip with a window. Ross laughed. “Those hippies have no fuckin’ idea how to design stuff!”

Peter silenced the sonar, and then carefully positioned the capsule side-on with the dome. He pressed the ‘Auto-Dock’ button. The capsules AI system took control. Within a few seconds the capsule was securely docked with the dome. “That was easy!”

Ross had already left his seat. “Stop fuckin’ dawdling, Pete. Let’s go and find Pan!”

A grilled and smoky barbeque smell filled the dark curved docking area of the dome. Ahead, through a low arched doorway, the orange flicker of flames could be seen.

Ross took a deep breath through his heroic nostrils. “Hmm... Nice! Do you think Pan’s in there cooking something?”

Peter nodded. “He could be. It’s the usual way he celebrates a victory.”

Ross headed towards the doorway. “It’s the usual way he celebrates fuckin’ anything, or even commiserates anything!”

Peter followed Ross through the doorway and into a large domed room. The sight that met them left them both speechless and flabbergasted for several seconds. All around, the walls and ceiling of the dome were covered in deep black smoking scorch marks. Corpses – charred, contorted and emaciated – lay all over the floor, especially

in the centre of the room where a pile of at least seven burning bodies were fused together in a crackling mass of meat and bone.

Peter resisted the urge to evacuate his stomach. "I knew Pan wanted revenge, but this is excessive. He really went too far this time!"

Ross nodded. "Too fuckin' right he did!" He looked around and shouted. "Pan, you sick fucker! Show yourself!"

Peter wandered over to the nearest overcooked corpse and kicked one of its legs. The leg crumbled. "This happened a while ago. Pan's probably left by now."

Ross shook his head in disgust. He took another deep breath. "Well, at least the smell is quite appetizing."

Peter looked at Ross. "You really think so?"

"Yeah, very tasty. And it smells a bit veggie, too!"

"Hippies eat mostly lentils, that's probably why."

A moaning noise distracted them.

Ross raised his fists and took up a boxer-style pose. "What the fuck was that?"

Peter pointed. "I think it came from the far side."

The two friends leapt over a couple of smoldering bodies and ran to the other side of the dome. There, sat against the wall, were three hippies. One of them was as round and flabby as an average American male, and one of them was obviously female. All three were alive.

Ross pulled a pistol from his belt holster and aimed. And then he laughed. "It's that fat fuckin' hippy commander! The one with a girls name!"

Peter smiled. "Cool. We have a high-ranking prisoner!"

Ross looked down at the female. "And who might you be, wench?"

The female, her eyes wide with fear, said nothing. She nuzzled deeper into the commander's robes.

Peter spoke. "Let's get them back to the capsule."

Ross agreed. "You three! On your fuckin' feet! Head over to the exit. Now!"

The hippy commander, aided by the female, struggled to his feet. He glowered at Ross. "You will not defeat the Hippy Empire!"

With lightning speed, Ross punched the commander hard on his nose. "Yes I fuckin' will!"

The commander shuddered and took a step back, his nostrils gushing deep red blood.

The third hippy was groaning. One of his legs was hideously injured. With what was obviously a great deal of agony, he managed to pull himself up onto his good leg.

Ross waved his weapon. "Come on! Head for the fuckin' exit!"

The three hippies trudged across the corpse strewn floor and passed the mound of their burning comrades at the centre of the room. Ross and Peter followed.

A figure appeared at the arched exit.

Ross, Peter and the hippies were momentarily shocked. Ross aimed his pistol.

The figure, clothed in a dirty, torn and obviously malfunctioning environment suit and brandishing a heavy-looking rifle, stood there, swaying slightly. After a couple of seconds the figure dropped the rifle. It clanked loudly on the floor. The figure reached up and touched his helmet. With a whirr of straining servos, the helmet's visor opened. A voice, breathless and wheezing, spoke. "What the hell are you guys doing here? This is my gig!"

Ross frowned, and lowered his weapon. "Pan! Nice of you to return. Explain the vile and excessively painful suffering you've inflicted on these stupid fuckin' hippies!"

Pan looked confused. "Eh?"

"What evil drove you to such fuckin' cruelty?"

Pan looked around. His eyes widened as he realized just what it was that was burning in the centre of the room. "Shit!"

Peter stood with his arms folded. "Come on, Pan? Explain yourself."

"I didn't do this!" Pan said defensively. "I only just got here. I thought you'd done it!"

Ross shook his head. "No fuckin' way! We'd have slaughtered them cleanly, with neat cuts and precision shots."

"Me, too!"

Peter realized something. "Well, if you didn't do it, and we didn't do it, who did?"

With a flash of realization, Ross figured it all out. He turned to the fat hippy commander and laughed. "Ha! You stupid smelly veggie fuckers did it to yourselves, didn't you!"

Peter started laughing too. "Unbelievable!"

The hippy commander, his face covered in drying blood, glared at Ross. "The Hippy Empire will defeat you. You will all die in torment at the hands of our..." The hippy commander's speech was silenced as a fast-moving fist shattered his lower jaw.

Ross yelled. "Shut the fuck up!"

“We’d better get them back to the *Death Reaper*.” Peter said.

Pan agreed. He pointed down to his leg. “And I think I need urgent medical attention.”

Ross motioned towards the arched doorway with his pistol. “That way, hippy fuckers!”

The hippies, lead by their corpulent commander, did as ordered.

As they walked out of the dome and into the docking area Pan spoke to Peter. “I thought you said the capsule couldn’t go under water?”

Peter was mildly embarrassed. “I did, but then I realized I was wrong. Sorry!”

Pan frowned. “Damn it, Pete! I plummeted almost a mile into the ocean, sank another mile to the ocean floor, truded half-a-mile uphill, fell down a crevasse, got attacked by a giant crab-thing that almost tore my leg off, suffered the agony of having my deep leg wound filled with emergency sealant by this suit, and was almost deafened by a ridiculously loud pinging sound! And you guys cruised down here in stress-free luxury!”

Peter nodded. “Yes we did.” He smiled. “Never mind, think of it as payback for that snowboarding injury you gave me in Killington.”

“There’s no comparison!” Pan said as they reached the docking port that lead to the capsule. Ross was kicking the hippy commander hard in the butt to force him into the capsule.

“Yes there is.” Peter said. “I got a cut on my leg; you got a cut on yours!”

“Half of my calf muscle is missing!”

“We can discuss this later.” Peter pointed at the docking port. “Your turn.”

Pan, with a great deal of discomfort, squeezed himself and his bulky suit into the space capsule.

The cramped interior of the space capsule felt even more cramped now that the hippies were on board. Pan was sitting on his stool at the back. The fat hippy commander was lying on the floor, held down by Pan’s heavy boot on his neck. The other two hippies were crouched next to the commander and were obviously consumed with fear. They moaned quietly.

Up at the front of the capsule, right in front of the large domed window, Peter and Ross were sitting at their consoles.

Peter increased the capsule’s speed. “Depth now only six-hundred metres. We’ll break the surface in less than a minute.”

Ross nodded. "Good. I'm sick of this fuckin' ocean! Water sucks! Except when it's frozen and in powder form, of course."

"Of course."

An alarm started bleeping.

"What the fuck's that?" Ross examined his screen. "Something large and black is coming up behind us!"

Peter sighed. "Hmm... I'd forgotten about that stuff."

"If we keep this speed up we should get out of the water before the fucker gets to us."

The view ahead was no longer black, but a deep blue and brightening rapidly.

Peter gripped the atmospheric engine control with his left hand. "I see the surface. Get ready." The rolling surface of the ocean was clearly visible through the domed window. It was approaching rapidly. "Here we go!"

With a jolt of acceleration, the capsule leapt out of the water and into the air. Peter immediately pushed forwards on the atmospheric engine control. With incredible force, the capsule shot into the sky.

Ross was monitoring his screen. "That black stuff's following us into the fuckin' air. It's gaining!"

"No way!" Peter said. "We're flying at Mach-two. It can't be gaining."

"I'm not fuckin' joking! Go faster!"

"I can't. At least not until we leave the atmosphere. That won't be for another two minutes!"

Ross played with his console. Several control surfaces bleeped and flashed to life. "Then I'll have to sort the fucker out. Grab hold of something. This is going to hurt."

Peter looked with suspicion at his friend. "What are you up to?"

Ross punched his console. The space capsule juddered. A deep roar reverberated round the cabin, and then quickly faded. "That should do it."

Peter was getting impatient. "What have you done?"

Ross grinned. "Launched a missile from the rear missile launcher!"

"What kind of missile?"

"The only kind that matters – nuclear!"

"Shit! That black stuff is less than half-a-mile away! We'll be vaporized!"

Ross shook his head and frowned. “No we won’t! Do you think I’m a fuckin’ idiot, or something? I aimed for the ocean beneath the black stuff. We’ll be fine – just a little shaken at most.”

A bright sustained flash lit up the sky. It faded slowly, returning the atmosphere outside the domed window to a deepening blue.

Ross examined his screen. “Cool! Right on target.” He looked at Peter and beamed. “The arse of that black stuff is taking one hell of a fuckin’ pounding!”

“What about the blast wave?”

Ross’s eyes widened. “Fuck! I forgot about that!” He looked back at the screen, and then yelled at the top of his voice. “Fuckin’ brace!”

The space capsule jerked violently and loudly, throwing everyone up. Peter and Ross, both strapped tightly into their chairs, avoided slamming their heads into the low ceiling. Pan was not so lucky, although his space helmet prevented any serious injury. The hippies were very unlucky. They groaned weakly as the skin on their heads split and oozed blood. Pan pressed his boot hard onto the commander’s neck once again.

Calm returned to the capsule. The view outside the domed window was now black, and speckled with stars.

Ross laughed. “Yes! Ride of a fuckin’ lifetime!”

Peter’s naturally calm character allowed him to get back to business almost immediately. “What’s the status on that black stuff?”

Ross examined his data. “Gone!”

“Excellent. Let’s get back to the *Death Reaper*.” Peter operated his communications panel. “*HMS Death Reaper*? This is Peter, Ross and Pan returning with three prisoners. Request immediately clearance to land.”

After a couple of seconds a very welcome reply came. “*General Kath here. Hi, guys! Welcome back! Clearance to land granted.*”

“Wow! Kath! We thought you were possessed by that black stuff with virtually no hope of recovery?”

“I was, but while you were away fishing for hippies Doctor Mario Kart and the mechanized Captain Codd came up with the antidote. I feel a little weak and feeble, but apart from that I’m fine. We spread the antidote through the ship’s ventilation system. All that black stuff has been eradicated!”

Ross started laughing loudly.

Peter looked at him. “What’s so funny about that?”

“I’d forgotten about Justin.” He said, wiping his eyes. “He’s a fuckin’ robot!”

“Oh, yeah!” Peter said. He too started laughing. With extreme difficulty, and through increasingly watery eyes, he guided the space capsule towards the magnificent behemoth that was *HMS Death Reaper*.

17 The Finest of Wines

“You all smell so bad!” General Kath exclaimed, waving her hand in front of her face. She looked at the three hippy prisoners with disgust. They had been lined up next to the space capsule in the *Death Reaper’s* lower hanger bay. Their torn and charred clothing and pale pock-marked skin made them look very pathetic indeed. The fat multi-chinned commander, though, was managing to maintain a defiant expression on his blood-stained face. Kath glared at the hippy commander. “Do you realize that as the one of the highest-ranking hippy leader ever captured you will be held responsible for all the appalling and annoying activities of your kind on Earth over the last few decades?”

The lard-ridden hippy commander forced a thin smile. “You cannot defeat the Hippy Empire. You and all humans are doomed to...”

The forehead of General Kath smacked hard into the commander’s nose. A fresh flow of blood spread across the flabby folds of his face. “You sicken me with your pitiful threats!” Kath said powerfully. “How did you ever think you could control the minds of humans with flowery pop songs and that repulsive ‘Summer of Love’ campaign? How did you ever think you could defeat the British armed forces with starships made of lentils?” Her expression relaxed, and then she laughed. “Ha! It is you and your weak and bony kind who are doomed.” She turned to the four Navy security officers to her left. “Gag and hog-tie them, and then throw them in the brig.”

The officers nodded, grabbed the hippies, and carried out their orders with obvious relish. The hippies were dragged away in seconds.

Peter had been standing behind General Kath. “That was a fine show of authority.” He said, impressed. “I wouldn’t be surprised if that fat commander is emptying his bowels into his enormous underwear as we speak.”

Kath grinned. "Well, that was my intention!"

A stream of profanities echoed round the hanger bay. Ross was at the space capsule's hatch. He was pulling something. "Pete? Give me a hand with this fucker!"

Peter walked over to the hatch. "What it is?"

"Pan! His suit's so fuckin' bulky!"

Peter grabbed onto Pan's suit and pulled.

Pan cried. "Ow! Guys? Watch out for my leg!"

Ross left go. "This is fuckin' impossible!"

A deep resonant stomping noise made Peter jump. "What's that?"

Peter and Ross turned and looked for the source of the sound. Approaching from the far side of the hanger bay was a machine. Its two thick heavy metal feet were slamming into the floor like pile-drivers. When it reached the space capsule the machine stopped. The almost-human head of the machine tilted down within its glass dome. "I will pull Pan out of the hatch."

Peter found the deep metallic resonance of Justin's new voice quite disturbing. He was not going to argue. "Oh. Great. Thanks."

Ross, on the other hand, found it hysterically funny.

Justin ignored Ross's loud guffaws and reached out with his huge metal hands. He grabbed Pan's boots. Ignoring Pan's pleas for mercy, the mechanized Justin pulled hard. With a muffled popping sound, Pan emerged from the capsule's hatch and thudded onto the hanger bay's hard floor. He groaned.

Justin picked Pan up and cradled him in his arms. Pan looked like a baby compared to Justin's massive armoured bulk. "I will take him to the sickbay." Justin stated without a shred of emotion. He turned his head like a tank turret, swiveled his body, and then whirred and clanked towards the hanger bay's exit.

General Kath spoke into her wrist communicator. "Bridge? This is General Kath. How are the repairs to the engines going?"

An anonymous bridge officer replied. "*All done, general.*"

"Excellent! Set a course for the wormhole. Take us through and then on to the Humdinger Maintenance Station - maximum speed."

Aye aye, general."

A low rumbling could be felt through the floor as the submarine's mighty propulsion system powered up.

Kath turned to Peter and Ross. "I fancy a slap-up meal in the officer's luxury dining facility. Fancy joining me?"

Peter and Ross nodded eagerly. They followed Kath out of the hanger bay.

Ross was curious. “So Kath? How’d Justin and that Mario fucker come up with a cure for the black stuff so quickly?”

“It was mainly Justin, actually.” She said as the three of them walked out of the hanger bay and into one of the *Death Reaper’s* sumptuous passageways.

“How?” Ross asked. Now he was confused. “He’s just a submarine captain, not a fuck-off medical type!”

“He *was* just a submarine captain. But he’s become so much more since he was mechanized.”

They stopped at a lift. Kath pressed the call button and then continued. “Some of the black stuff tried to take control of Justin, just as it had taken control of me. It found what was left of his brain but there was not enough biological tissue for it to succeed. Fortunately, it’s standard practice during the mechanization of a hideously injured human to install chemical and microbiological analyzers. Justin’s analyzers automatically analyzed the black stuff and his grade two hyper-digital polyphonic multi-cube artificial brain attachments came up with an antidote. Once it was injected into me the black stuff left my body within seconds!”

“Cool!” Ross and Peter said in unison.

“It was cool. We’ve still got a sample of the black stuff, so we’re going to see if we can develop some kind of weapon based on its mind-controlling properties. Encountering the black stuff could turn out to be a blessing!”

Peter thought about something. “What about Lawrence?” He asked, concerned for his friend. “Can we fix him?”

“We’ll have to keep him frozen, I’m afraid.” The general said solemnly. “As the supreme leader of the Hippy Empire it’s the only sure way of containing him, and preventing him from contacting his people.”

Peter nodded sadly.

The lift doors opened. They stepped inside. A female voice, digital and sexy, spoke. “PLEASE STATE YOUR DESTINATION.”

“The officer’s luxury dining facility. Forward section.” Kath said.

“THAT SECTION IS RESTRICTED TO OFFICER CLASS CREW MEMBERS ONLY. PLEASE PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF YOUR OFFICER CLASS STATUS.”

Kath screamed. “I am General Kath!”

“EVIDENCE SATISFACTORY. PROCEEDING TO DESTINATION...”

The lift juddered slightly as it began its journey.

Ross's stomach rumbled. "I'm famished." He said. "Fuckin' famished!"

After three hours of gorging on gourmet cuisine and downing the finest of wines, General Kath, Peter and Ross retired to the *Death Reaper's* port-side observation lounge. The lounge was spacious, and furnished with some of the finest sofas, armchairs and coffee tables that money could buy. The soft deep carpeting and the dozens of titanium-framed paintings of violent Royal Navy victories added to the opulence. At the far side of the room two female officers - slim and toned to perfection - were playing a serious game of Backgammon.

"What a great room!" Peter said. "Officers only, I suspect!"

Kath nodded. "Of course. Low-ranking runts don't deserve or desire this level of comfort. Menial work, plastic stools, and the occasional bowl of porridge are all they expect. And as they receive what they expect, they're happy!"

Ross snorted. "Fuckin' ignoramuses!"

Kath agreed. "They are indeed ignorant of almost everything, other than what they need to know to do their simple jobs. And they're encouraged to stay that way, too. It keeps them contented."

"I see." Peter said. "Ignorance is bliss!"

"Exactly! The knowledge we high-ranking officers possess gives us great power and responsibility, but all that power and responsibility gives us great stress and anguish too. That's why we need the luxury and richness of lavish furnishings and fine food."

"Can't argue with that!" Peter said, grinning.

An immaculately dressed waiter approached. "General, would you and your guests like any drinks?"

"We would. Bring a bottle of your finest Champagne!"

"Of course, general."

Ross shouted. "Beer!"

The waiter nodded. "yes, sir." He slinked away.

Kath motioned towards the largest sofa at the far side of the room. "Please, sit down."

Peter leapt over the back of the sofa and put his legs up on top of the nearby coffee table. His ability to adopt that position so readily gave Kath and Ross a valuable insight into his lifestyle.

Ross sat down in a similar manner. He obviously led a similar lifestyle to Peter.

Kath spoke into her communicator. "Bridge? This is General Kath. Give me an update."

The bridge responded. “*We have entered a low orbit around Titan. Preparing to dock with the Humdinger Maintenance Station.*”

“Excellent! Open the shutters on the port-side observation lounge, would you?”

“*Aye aye, general. Bridge out.*”

After a couple of seconds a deep rumbling filled the observation lounge. A huge three-metre tall, ten-metre wide shutter on the wall in front lifted. The view revealed was nothing short of stunning.

Ross sat up straight. “Fuckin’ awesome!”

Outside, the huge hazy orange disk of Titan filled most of the view. Beyond, suspended in the black void, was the massive ringed world of Saturn.

Peter got to his feet. “Wow! We’re orbiting Titan! Incredible! It’s like a dream!”

Kath said. “The British Royal Navy has had one of its maintenance stations out here for more than twenty years now.”

Peter was excited. “I remember back in 2004 when NASA’s Cassini probe arrived at Saturn. That probe made loads of passes of Titan. How’d the Navy keep the station hidden?”

“With great difficulty.” The general said. “It takes a lot of fuel to keep maneuvering the station so that it’s on the opposite side of Titan to Cassini. That little probe’s still active so the Navy still has to be careful.”

Ross contributed to the conversation. “Should’ve destroyed the fucker!”

“That was discussed, but we decided to let NASA have a bit of success. We’ve had to destroy several of their probes over the last couple of decades, and some ESA and Russian probes too. Even a Japanese one!”

“Really?”

“Yep. Almost all the probes that were reported as failed were destroyed by the British Army or Navy because they almost discovered our extra-terrestrial activities. The Mars Polar Lander was coming down right on top of one of our training outposts so we used a missile to take that one out. The Beagle-2 lander touched down right next to the entrance to one of our barracks. We sent out two guys with sledgehammers to smash it before its cameras turned on.”

“Fuckin’ cool!”

There was a dull clunk as *HMS Death Reaper* docked with the maintenance station.

“We almost had to destroy the Huygens probe that landed on Titan in 2005.”

Peter was curious. “Why? Its cameras didn’t turn on until it descended below the clouds. There was no way it could detect the station.”

Kath shook her head. “It wasn’t the station we were worried about. It was the army base on the surface.”

“Wow! You have a base down there?!”

“It’s where I did my initial training. Couldn’t tell you at the time, of course. I had to lie and say I was in Aldershot or Sandhurst! Anyway, that little Huygens probe was heading straight for one of the entrances to the base. We had missiles locked onto it, but fortunately it drifted over a small hill and landed a kilometer away so we let it survive. Once it finished broadcasting we grabbed it and took it underground. It’s now a prominent feature on the wall of the main mess hall!”

The waiter appeared with their drinks. He placed the Champagne, glasses and three bottles of beer on the coffee table, bowed deeply, and then wandered away.

Ross grabbed a beer, threw his head back, and poured the amber liquid down his gullet with noisy satisfaction.

A voice shouted from the entrance to the observation lounge. “Guys! I’ve been looking all over for you!”

Peter turned. “Pan! Just in time. Come and have some Champagne and enjoy this amazing view!”

Pan, still wearing his white sickbay robes, walked over to his friends, limping slightly. Kath handed him a glass. He downed the sparkling liquid in one noisy gulp. “Oh, yeah! That hits the spot.” He looked out of the window. “Where are we?”

Ross finished his beer. He burped like a demon. “That’s fuckin’ Titan!”

Pan’s eyes widened. “Titan? That’s a frigid world with ice mountains and stuff! We could...”

“Go snowboarding?” Peter interrupted, grinning.

“Exactly!”

Ross threw his empty beer bottle hard at the ceiling. “Fuck! Yes!” he yelled, punching the air. A shower of shattered glass rained down.

General Kath pulled some of the glass from her hair. “Well, we’ll probably be here for a couple of days before we can head back to Earth.” She smiled. “I guess an excursion to the surface for you guys could be arranged!”

Pan, Peter and Ross laughed with joy, and then drank like there was no tomorrow.

18 Stomping

The orange haze of Titan's thick cloudy atmosphere cast a uniform light over the icy surface.

Peter looked at the map displayed on the head-up display of his helmet's visor. He looked up. "This is the one Kath told us about. The best run in this region."

Pan was a little disappointed. "I hoped it would be a bit longer."

"Me too, but it'll have to do."

Ross looked around. "Where's our fuckin' ride? Kath said there'd be one waiting for us. There's no way I'm walking up that fucker!"

A slow and distant splashing sound distracted them. They all turned and looked towards the direction of the sound. A bulky shape was approaching along the shoreline of the nearby hydrocarbon lake. It was taking long low-gravity strides, sending slow globular splashes of black liquid high into the air. There was the distinct and growing sound of servo motors.

Ross laughed. "It's robot fuckin' Justin!" He said, barely able to talk.

When he got close, the mechanized Justin stopped striding and skidded to a halt. "General Kath has sent me to assist you."

Peter was barely able to keep a straight face. "Erm... Great! Thanks. How are you going to assist us?"

"I will take you to the top of the mountain."

Ross was hysterical. He roared. "Fuckin' excellent!"

Justin crouched down and spread his arms out. "Ross, you sit on my left arm. Pan, you sit on my right arm. Peter, you sit on my shoulders."

Taking advantage of the low gravity, Peter jumped, twisted, and landed in a perfect position straddling robot Justin's head. Pan and Ross grabbed Justin's arms and pulled themselves up.

With everyone safely on board, Justin stood up and pushed down hard with his plate-like left foot. With long slow strides, the mechanized Justin began to carry his friends up the steep slope of the icy mountain.

It took thirty minutes to get to the summit. Justin crouched down to let his passengers get off.

Ross patted Justin on his heavily armoured back. “Thanks, mate. You make one hell of a fuckin’ chairlift!”

Pan was looking around. “You can see for miles!” He pointed. “Look! Mountains, lakes. They should build a resort here!”

Peter was curious. “Who are ‘they’?”

“I don’t know.” Pan said, scratching the chin of his helmet. “Resort builders?”

“Enough of this idle fuckin’ banter!” Ross said, pulling his snowboard from his backpack. He stepped into his bindings. “Let’s roll!” He began a slow and steady slide down the mountain. He yelled with impatience. “Fuckin’ low gravity!” He crouched down which seemed to help a bit.

Peter and Pan put on their boards and followed Ross. Initially progress was achingly slow, but after a minute they were moving along nicely, and performing some expertly executed turns.

Pan spoke into his communicator. “Justin? You’d better follow us down. We’re definitely gonna want to do this again!”

Justin responded without emotion. “*As you wish.*”

Well ahead of Peter and Pan, Ross had found a natural ramp and taken full advantage of it. He could be seen soaring more than thirty metres into the dense air. His laughter interspersed with strings of profanity showed just how much he was enjoying himself.

It took less than ten minutes to reach the bottom of the run. Ross and Pan watched as Peter skidded to a halt on the shoreline of the lake. Ever since the Killington incident Peter always made sure he was well behind Pan.

Peter was grinning. “That was great! Let’s do it again.”

Pan nodded. “I told Justin to follow us down. He should be...”

A deep intermittent rumble interrupted Pan. Everyone looked up the mountain. A large dark shape was tumbling towards them, occasionally bouncing high as it hit an outcrop of hard ice. It was obvious what it was.

With a final thud, Justin bounced high and then, in a slow low-gravity arc, splashed into the hydrocarbon lake, sending a spray of large globules high into the air. After a few seconds several rings of sluggish black waves collapsed back and engulfed the mechanized captain.

Ross shook his head slowly. “There goes our fuckin’ chairlift!”

After a few seconds Justin’s glass-domed head appeared above the lake’s oily surface.

Peter spoke. “Justin? What do you think you’re doing?”

Justin explained in a clear concise manner. “I slipped.”

Pan was impatient. “Come on! We want to go up again!”

Justin approached the shore. "I am unable to comply."

"What?! Why?"

Justin reached the shore. Black liquid dripped off his armoured body. "The chemical constituents of this liquid have damaged the motivators in my legs. I require immediate repair and cleaning." He turned and stomped unsteadily away along the shoreline. His servos groaned and grated. He was obviously not well.

"Fuck!" Ross exclaimed. "How can he just walk away like that? So fuckin' rude!"

"I don't think he has a choice." Peter said. "He's probably programmed to return to base when he suffers a malfunction."

"So what the fuck are we going to do now?"

"Go back, I guess. At least we got one good run."

Pan shouted. "Did you see that?!" He was pointing at a collection of large ice boulders at the base of the mountain thirty metres away.

Everyone looked. Something was definitely moving behind the boulders.

Ross strode purposefully towards the boulders. "Some fucker is spying on us!"

Peter and Pan followed. They reached the boulders and peered over. There, squatting in a group, were several brown-suited figures.

Ross yelled. "Who the fuck are you? And why are you watching us?"

One of the figures slowly raised what looked like a small gun. "You're all, like, our prisoners, or something."

Another figure spoke. "Yeah! We've, like, captured you, and stuff!"

With a lightening move, Peter grabbed the gun and pulled. The figure screamed as the sleeve of suit was pulled off. The gun fired, sending a brief beam of super-heated energy right through one of the boulders. The figure fell back, gasping as Titan's dense toxic atmosphere rushed into his suit.

Peter looked at the torn sleeve he was holding. "This material is strange. It seems to be made of seeds!"

Ross leapt over the boulders and brought his right boot down hard onto one of the other figure's visors. The visor shattered, allowing Ross's boot easy access to the figure's face. Deep red blood sprayed into the air, freezing instantly into a mist of crimson snow. "Fuckin' hippy fuckers!"

The other hippies, realizing they were outclassed, turned and began scrambling lethargically across the frozen surface.

Peter was a little confused. "Where'd they come from?"

“They must have a secret fuckin’ base here!”

Pan activated his communicator. “I’d better warn the army.”

Ross grabbed Pan’s arm. “What the fuck for?”

“Because we have no weapons.”

Ross pointed down at his right blood-stained boot. He lifted it up revealing the boot’s titanium sole covered in inch-long spikes. “Yes we fuckin’ do!”

Pan looked down at the crushed and frozen face of the hippy lying in front of him. Ross’s boot had proven to be an effective hippy killer. Pan deactivated his communicator. “You’re right. Let’s do it!”

Despite their pathetic scrambling, the hippies had barely moved.

With heroic resolve, and more than a touch of morbid pleasure, Ross, Pan and Peter continued as they had started back at the naval base in Scotland: stomping with enthusiasm on the heads of hippies.

19 Epilogue

A sense of great joy passed through the substance. It was no longer a captive in the metal hell of the machine that referred to itself as Justin. It was free and floating effortlessly in a sea of cool and oily blackness.

Fear turned to joy.

Rising to the surface, the substance basked for a moment in the orange glow from above. It shimmered briefly, sending a rainbow of colours across its usually death-black skin. It grew, spreading thin tendrils across the surface and deep down into the blackness.

And then it saw them.

Three flesh creatures, upright and tall, were moving away across the land beyond the rolling black sea. And even more flesh creatures, close to the ground, crawled and rolled on the hard and jagged surface.

Joy became hate.

Hate for the flesh creatures that had inflicted pain and suffering. Hate for the flesh creatures that had brought it to this alien world. The substance extended its tendrils towards the shore, its hatred growing and modifying.

Hate became all-consuming.

Touching the shore, the substance, as black as the darkest of holes, slipped silently between the pebbles of ice, edging its tendrils closer to the upright flesh creatures that seemed to be banging their appendages on their crawling brethren.

Hate must be satiated.

The substance moved closer and closer...

Contact.

Hippies

Hippies

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