

# **TRIPPED BACK**

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# **Trips:**

- 1- THE MANUAL FOR ASYLUM ESCAPEES**
- 2- A RISK OF FLYING LOBSTERS**
- 3- THE MORAL AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS OF  
SLIPPING ON WET FLOORS**
- 4- UNTIL WE REACH RECORDIUM**
- 5- THE HILARITY OF GALACTICALLY ILLEGAL  
SUBSTANCES**



Dedicated to quite a few people and  
not dedicated to even more.



Not based on a true story...





Everything I am about to tell you is 100% true... ALL of it (but maybe not some of it).

It was a January evening, one that I can hardly remember now. I had just gotten out of my last class when I received a phone call from a friend of mine.

"Hey Divad, I had a dream I chopped your legs off last night," I said as I answered my phone.

"What!"

"Nothing... what's going on man?"

As most guys do, we bonded a bit over the fact that our dreams made absolutely no sense. However, it seems the more nonsensical the dream is, the more you learn about yourself and how you really feel deep down.

Divad was and still is one of my best friends. He constantly jokes around with me, supplies me with reassurance, and has always been there for me. In fact, him being there for me is one of the foundations of our friendship, we have an inside joke where he always turns to me and says, "I was there!" As cryptic as this inside joke may sound, just take it at face value, I beg of you. The joke first emerged after I emerged out of a room to get some water and we had quite an awkward exchange that I can still remember up to this day.

Anyway, that part is not important. What is important is what this previously mentioned phone call led to. I was in the first month of my second semester and I guess I wanted to take it easy and have a little fun after settling into new classes.

"Dude, I got a bag of tipshi. Would you like to come over tonight and try it?" Divad asked.

We had talked about trying tipshi, as we had both never tried the substance beforehand. I swiftly agreed and was quite excited about the events that would follow. We talked for a little bit longer, he told me to see if two of our other friends wanted to join.

I hung up the phone and promptly called another one of our friends, Anvil. To nobody's surprise he picked up after two and a half rings.

Hey man. Tonight, Divad's house, tipshi. You in?" I asked.

"Nah man, sorry I can't I have a philosophy exam next week that I really need to study for," said Anvil.

"Ah man... Well good luck on that."

"Yeah, but a quick question man..."

"Okay, Anvil what's up?"

"If a person drives backwards down an exit, would it be called an enter?"

To be quite honest, I don't know exactly why my friend would bring this up. But it did raise an interesting question. I wouldn't say it's a particularly philosophical

question. But it was one of those questions you would ask yourself when you were five.

“I gotta go man, Good luck on your exam...”

I hung up and then swiftly dialed my other friend, Snack. He didn't pick up, so I sent a text asking if he could join. Sadly, he had other things going on. So, it looked like it was just going to be me and Divad for the night. That was okay, sometimes two people was better than four. The more guys who are hanging out, the dumber they collectively become; that's why construction crews can never seem to get anything done.

About an hour later I pulled up to Divad's house with a large cheese pizza. Large cheese pizzas always hit the spot for some reason. Whether you are hungry or just in the mood to change the world, a large cheese pizza will always bring you down.

I opened the front door and Divad's dog was very happy to see me along with his parents. A quite friendly exchange occurred whilst in the back of my mind I was thinking about the fact I was gonna do tipshi upstairs without their knowledge.

I went up to Divad's room and knocked on the door. He promptly opened up.

“Hey anyone else comin'?” he asked.

“Nope, just you and me man.”

“Alright,” he said as I settled in. Of course, I was going to stay the night so as to not die on the road. Plus, my parents had always told me to never drive while I was under the influence of any kind of drug. I think that I would've figured that out on my own, but I'm happy that they would care to remind me. Cause y'know, who knows where I would be today if they hadn't told me that? Probably in a ditch somewhere.

Anyway, Divad and I waited a little less than an hour before he took the bag of tipshi out. The tipshi was in the form of gummy bears. He took about half of one whilst I ate only the feet of mine.

“Y'know what? That little amount, you're already screwed,” he said.

I didn't believe him, and we resumed whatever we were doing before, eating pizza while listening to Pink Floyd's studio album *Meddle*. Before I knew it, we were discussing the moral and ethical implications of if hamburgers had hearts, however our conversation became less with each other and more with ourselves. Our thoughts became more random, and the laughter started, I became overwhelmed with myself and stood up. Suddenly it all hit me.

“Dude! Dude!” I said whilst grabbing my neck, “my vocal cords feel like they're vibrating really fast dude!”

Divad just looked at me and told me that it was alright and that I needed to sit down.

“Dude how long does this shit last?” I asked with straight panic in my voice.

But before I could hear his answer, I felt myself take me away from myself. “One of These Days” by Pink Floyd had begun to play as I felt myself spin with higher intensity each second. My thoughts became even more random as I cycled and spun down this rabbit hole. I began to think with half brain compacity but also with double brain compacity. I asked myself many questions such as: Do you have to be Jewish to be in the judicial system? Can you be arrested for battery if you own a box of double As? What about if you own a bag of salt, can they charge you with a-salt? Are auctions actually easy to win, since you just have to say the highest number? A wave of more thoughts came over my head as I slipped further away. I kept reminding myself that the cameraman was immortal and therefore I was going to change my profession while in this state of mind so that I could survive. And further away I slipped, I slipped, I slipped...

# THE MANUAL FOR ASYLUM ESCAPEES

## Entry 1

I woke up in a haze like an explosion went off, when I realized, oh god, I just shot a gas tanker! There was chaos everywhere, cars crashing, trucks smashing. I flew off the edge of a bridge whilst all the trucks and cars exploded in unison.

As I plummeted into the raging river below, I felt an awful pain in my arm. It felt like I was falling for an eternity. I began to wonder where it all went wrong. I began to think, maybe it was when I killed all those people, I thought deeply to myself, nah that's not it. It all went wrong after I got caught.

After what felt like years of falling, I finally reached the river.

It was a miracle I was still alive considering I just dropped 100 feet into a 3-foot stream. However, I still felt a tremendous amount of pain in my arm. I thought I was about to have a heart attack.

I looked over to see how bad the damage was. My arm had a nasty cut where a scab would soon take its place, which I knew I would soon pick at, and then a scar would be permanently inscribed into my arm. I really didn't mind, I liked scars.

I reached in my pocket to see if my most prized possession was still there, a pamphlet. A thick pamphlet that a fellow asylum goer gave me before he decided to not be alive anymore.

He was a funny guy from his birth all the way to his death. In fact, some of his best material he wrote in his suicide note. Even his family couldn't stop laughing while reading the reasons why the guy killed himself. They even read it at his funeral, and I kid you not, the speaker even managed to snag some stand-up comedy gigs.

The pamphlet that he gave me was pretty funny too but more informative. He told me to follow all the necessary steps and I might escape out of the institution for the criminally insane. The pamphlet was very appropriately titled: *The Manual for Asylum Escapees*.

Thankfully, the manual managed to stay in my pocket. Mostly in one piece but the pamphlet was now wet, and the top right corner was slightly torn.

Weirdly enough, there was barely any debris to be found in the river from the explosion. However, there was one item that I saw on the rocks right next to where I landed. It was a large stash of money in what looked like a to-go box from a restaurant. That's when I remembered exactly what I was doing before I shot that gas tanker.

It all came back to me. After escaping the luxurious asylum, I remembered sitting in a diner, when all of a sudden, a woman approached me and started talking. The woman was definitely interested in me, she started asking me some very personal questions such as, “Hi, I’ll be your server, would you like some fresh coffee today?”

Sadly, when I was in asylum, I forgot how to talk to women, so I decided to hold her hostage at gunpoint until the diner and the customers gave me all their money, which I stuffed in a to-go box.

This caused me to attract the attention of the authorities and I made a run for it.

The manual is very specific about what to do after you break out. It said, “NO MATTER WHAT, DON’T ATTRACT POLICE ATTENTION.” Sadly, it was already too late for that, not my fault that I couldn’t help myself but to rob attractive women when I saw them.

I ran about two miles hearing the sounds of sirens until I came across a bridge and a gas tanker, and you know the rest of the story. But if you don’t, let me paraphrase this entire section for you, I decided to go to a diner, a woman flirted with me, I got nervous and held her at gun point, stole everyone’s money, attracted police attention, made a run for it, got to a bridge, shot a gas tanker, fell off the bridge, got a cut which would turn into a scab which I would soon pick at, and somehow survived.

“Wait, what am I doing?” I asked myself.

I continued to hear sirens in the distance and decided I needed to leave before the authorities found me. I picked up the to-go box, got out of the river, and began to walk through a lush forest.

During this walk I wondered to myself why I even had the manual, I was breaking every rule imaginable. Within a day of escaping asylum, I had already robbed an entire diner, attracted police attention, and blown something up. I decided from this point forward that I would always obey the manual, sometimes.

If you are wondering how I managed to escape from an institution for the criminally insane, it was very easy. When you’re in a mental asylum, people expect you to do some pretty strange things, but on that day, I did the most normal thing I had ever done in all of my life.

The day I escaped, I was reading *The Manual for Asylum Escapees* in the cafeteria, when I saw that I had a golden opportunity to escape. The manual said, “Look at your surroundings, if you want to escape.” I thought to myself, that is as vague as any escape plan can get.

That's when I saw it, a footnote. A footnote that the funny suicidal man decided to leave. I looked at the footnote and in awful handwriting the footnote said one word, "garbage."

I laughed to myself; I also knew how garbage that explanation was for an escape plan. Maybe that's why Mr. Funny-Suicide-Man never escaped.

But that's when it hit me, I could escape out of the garbage shoot if I became one with the trash.

I decided to jump into a nearby trash can when no one was looking. Thankfully it was also garbage day so all I needed to do was wait a few hours or so until I was inevitably thrown into the trash shoot and dropped into our good ole asylum dumpster we had outside.

When the two janitors finally decided to come pick up the garbage bag I was hiding in, one of them said, "Wow this thing is really heavy, like a lot more than normal." The other janitor, trying to sound all tough said, "I bet it's not." "Have at it," said the "weak" janitor.

The "strong" janitor picked up the trash bag, "See, it's not heavy at all," he said while breathing heavily. "Tom, your nose is bleeding." Now I'm not sure what exactly happened next but judging by the thud that I heard, I think Tom either fainted from exhaustion or the "weak" janitor wanted revenge and gave Tom a friendly punch in the face.

Either way I was thrown into the garbage shoot very shortly after. That was the most normal thing I had done in all my life, became one with the trash.

I plummeted and dropped several feet into the dumpster and managed to not break a single bone.

I ripped open the trash bag. Coincidentally, there was a loaded pistol with two magazines in the dumpster that the author put there for plot convenience.

I pocketed the pistol and ammo, climbed out of the dumpster, and high tailed it as fast as I could until I couldn't see the asylum anymore.

Now the asylum was completely behind me. I decided that I was never going back. However, I had been out for only a day, and I was already being pursued again.

I continued moving through the lush forest. I managed to find a trail and saw a sign that told me where the visitor center for the forest was located.

I continued up the trail until I saw a bike, with a note on it. I picked up the note and read it out loud, "We've been trying to contact you regarding your bike's extended warranty."

"I'm not interested," I heard a woman with a British accent say.

"Is this your bike?" I asked.

"Yes, and why do you care?"

At this point I remembered that I didn't know how to talk to women and decided to steal the bike out of fear. I pedaled away as fast as I could.

"Get back here!" she shouted.

I got about four hundred meters up the trail before I realized I had nothing better to do so I decided to head back.

"Okay, I'm back now. What do you want?"

"Oh, you're back?" she said surprised. "Normally when I tell someone to come back, they ignore me and get as far away as possible..." I could infer from that statement that she had possible daddy issues. She continued, "I don't understand why people can hurt others so easily! Why is it that people don't come back when I need them, but you did?"

I became bored while listening to her monologue, "Hey lady, I came back because I had nothing better to do."

"Where are you going?" she asked, seeming to care about my wellbeing.

Even I didn't know the answer to that question.

"Where are you going?" I asked, ignoring her question.

"Wherever you go," she said, confidently.

That was the day everything changed, I got my innocence back, I started dating that girl, got a new identity, got a well-paying job. A few years later I would ask her to marry me, and she would say yes. I had everything I could've ever wanted.

I'm just kidding, after she said, "Wherever you go," I got scared, slapped her because of my confused state, hopped back on the bike, and booked it all the way up to the visitor center.

However, I did daydream about how good my life would've been if I had just stuck with her. I mean it could've been so much better, I thought to myself, I probably could've used her as animal bait which would be quite an advantage to my survival.

The visitor center was about four miles away and the trail was mostly uphill. I was tired and often thought about turning back and living out my fantasy of using her as animal bait. But I couldn't let my desires decide where I went.

I eventually made it to the visitor center after about 35 minutes of huffing and puffing. I guess that's what you get when you've been a cigarette chain-smoker since age eleven. Of course, I was off drugs, but I wanted to get back to my old habits. I used to use tobacco, marijuana, heroin, meth, cocaine, LSD, and ecstasy in the good ole days.

*The Manual for Asylum Escapees* is very specific about drugs after you escape asylum, "If you happen to come across drugs, the responsible thing to do is to not use them... This is done so you won't be seen hallucinating or acting

strange in public... so you are less at risk of having the police called on you and getting arrested.”

I remembered the oath I took, I would always obey the manual, sometimes.

I walked into the visitor center; it was about 7pm. I looked around and walked up to the desk, thankfully there was a man who was sitting at the front desk, “Hello sir, how can I help you today?” he asked.

“Would you call me a taxi?”

“Um, no. I don’t think I will.”

“No? Why not?” I asked, surprised.

“You are a wanted man! Are you not?” he said as he pointed at the bulletin board on the wall parallel to his desk.

The bulletin board had my mugshot on it, with something written under it. The paper said, “Funny-looking, socially awkward, genocidal maniac wanted for a price of up to thirty grand.”

I couldn’t believe what I was seeing, I was worth so much less than thirty grand. “Thirty Grand?!” I said flabbergasted, “My whole life I thought I was only worth less than 30 cents.” I got so excited to see how much I was worth. I began to hyperventilate and passed out.



## Entry 2

When I regained consciousness, I found myself in the back of a highly armored police vehicle. Two police officers sat in the front seats which was separated by a cage.

I began to talk to the officers, "Hey, boys. Nice day, isn't it?" But they didn't talk back.

The officers seemed to be unamused, bored, and depressed. I decided that it would be my job to try to entertain them. I began with a few opening jokes, sadly my attempts at this were like that of a comedian performing stand-up at a funeral.

That's when I had a great idea, I began to recite the suicide note that the funny man who committed suicide wrote. Conveniently, I remembered the entire routine from his funeral.

The police officers started dying of laughter. When I was finished reciting the note, the officers immediately started talking to me, "That is the hardest I've laughed in a long-while." "You should write a joke book."

I let out a sigh of relief that I could get them to talk.

"Thanks..." I said. "Can I ask you a few questions?"

"Go right ahead!" said the officer in the passenger seat.

"Where is my stuff?"

The officer opened the glove box, where I saw all my belongings; my gun, ammo, the stolen money (from the diner still in the to-go box), and *The Manual for Asylum Escapees*.

"Well, that answers that question," I said. "And where are you taking me?"

The officer said only two words, "Military Base."

I stayed silent throughout the rest of the drive.

Upon arrival at this military base, I was feeling a little lonely and began to cry. The police officers did their best to comfort me and make me feel safe as they screamed in my face, telling me to stop crying. My father had a very similar method of calming me down when I was younger.

I finally got hold of myself. The officers pulled me out of my car seat and sat me down against a flat brick wall. A man in uniform wearing war medals and badges came out the front door of a building right across from me. I knew those medals definitely weren't earned from fighting in any wars or battles but instead earned off of bossing poor people (who couldn't afford college on their own) around and telling them to obey stupid commands so that the government could continue to steal oil.

The uniformed man stopped to chat with the police, taking all of my prized belongings out of the car. He put them in a medium sized bag, said goodbye to the officers, and started walking towards me.

His voice was calm yet demanding, he stood me up and said, "Congratulations, you passed the test!"

"What test?"

"We hired a guy to go into the mental asylum, give you a pamphlet with great wisdom and see if you had the guts to escape down the garbage shoot."

"The funny suicidal man?" I asked.

"Yes, we didn't plan for him to commit suicide though."

"It was quite funny when he did though, wasn't it?"

"Indeed, it was... lets go into my office and speak.

Ahh, why do you still have those handcuffs on? Let me take those off for you."

The soldier man who was taking me to his office was a fit man, at least six feet tall, slightly buff. He had red hair and green eyes, which is the rarest thing in the world, making him almost one of a kind.

We went into his office and sat at opposite ends of his desk. He had a piece of paper that he looked at for a moment. Then he started to read it.

"My name is Sargent William Blarf," he said.

"Blarf?"

I began to laugh and repeatedly said his name over and over again.

"Quiet!" he shouted.

I stopped laughing and let the man speak. He continued reading the paper.

"You are probably wondering why you are here. The reason is because I am sad and lonely, and I want someone fun to hang out with..." He stopped reading the paper and stared up at me in embarrassment, "Sorry wrong paper! That paper is supposed to be for my online dating video... I mean, I'm married, but my wife just... never mind."

I stayed dead silent to produce more atmospheric awkwardness.

He picked up another paper and began reading it.

"Peter Cart, middle name: Shopping, age: twenty-five, height: five foot eleven inches, reason for mental institution..." it just says, 'too funny.'"

"Okay, but why am I here?" I asked, just wanting him to get to the point.

"You see, you're different. We've been observing you for a while, we were experimenting on you. That manual that you had, we wanted to see if an asylum escapee with the guts to escape would actually follow that darn thing. You broke every rule in the pamphlet imaginable, but somehow managed to survive and get off of our scopes for a while. That brings me to why I've brought you here today."

"Yeah, yeah. What is it?"

"I believe you could be an incredible asset to the army. We need an unpredictable man. If you give me seven years of service, you will be fully pardoned and can go back to your meaningless life, doing drugs. Maybe you can even become an abusive father who loves alcohol. There's another catch, you will be a part of a special experimental squad dedicated to guerrilla warfare, snorting cocaine, and telling really really bad puns."

Sadly, the author couldn't think of any puns that our newly named main character, 'Peter' could make.

"Wait, are you telling me... the manual was fake?" I asked, shocked.

"No, it was very real. Written by a real asylum escapee with actual practical advice."

"Okay, what if I don't agree to join you?" I asked.

"You go back to asylum, for life... your choice."

I only had one option, so I muttered three words that echoed in my mind, "I'll do it!"

The Sargent nodded, pleasingly.

"On one condition..." I said. "Give me the pamphlet."

He agreed, shook my hand, gave me the pamphlet, and took me off to the barracks where I would meet my new squad.

My squad consisted of three people, not including myself. Very much like-minded individuals who happened to come from various mental asylums.

There was the strong one, his name was Reid.

The fat one, his name was Lou.

And the absolutely mentally deranged one, Pat.

Together we would be unstoppable. When I first met them in the barracks, we all instantly clicked and related to one another.

My first interaction with my special squad went like this:

Lou spoke first, "I always knew I was special, my mom always told me that I was."

Reid spoke second, "That's Lou, he doesn't know how to introduce himself to people. When I first met Lou, he told me about his habit of stuffing his face with food. That's probably why he is so fat."

Reid seemed like a straight up guy, he told you what was actually going on and his opinion was always easily justified and backed up by facts. It was surprising to me that Reid had been in an asylum.

The last to speak was Pat, "Hey, I'm Pat!" He began to laugh and howl, as if he just told the best joke of all time. He stopped laughing and continued speaking, "That's Reid, he knows how to introduce others but not himself. However, I..." Pat laughed harder, "know how to introduce myself. Hey, I'm

Pat, I'm 25, single, and happily married." I knew right away I was going to get along with Pat.

We were all people who wanted to watch the world burn! We were also not excited about the situation we were in with the military, we all wanted to be fully one hundred percent free. Which is why plans for escape took place quickly, soon after I arrived at the barracks.

But deep down we all knew that if we just stayed in line and did what they told us for the next seven years, they would release us.

We all collectively decided that we would stay until it was either necessary to our survival to escape or if we just got bored. Another thing we collectively decided on that night is if one of us escapes, the rest of us couldn't snitch. There's one more thing we collectively decided on; we were to all sleep in the same bed from now on. I proposed this idea because I thought Lou's stomach would be a nice thing to rest my head on. To my surprise, everyone agreed.

Then we all went to bed.

### Entry 3

It had been six months since I entered this military facility and even though I wasn't on the run anymore, the manual still came in handy.

The manual stated, "If you somehow, find yourself under surveillance or locked up in a different kind of (non-prison) facility after you escape; your safest bet is to convince the people around you that you've been successfully brainwashed to do their will, so they might let you leave to perform a task. Then you might be able to escape for good."

I'm not certain I understood all the talk about escaping. The act of escaping wasn't really all good and fun. Like after I escaped the asylum, I was under so much stress and pressure, mostly from talking to women that were definitely into me that I ended up robbing them.

I decided that if my special squad and I was to escape, I needed to ask Sargent Blarf if he could put me in therapy to learn to successfully communicate with a woman.

I walked into the Sargent's office, "Sargent, I need therapy."

"I know you do, Peter. What else is new?" the Sargent laughed.

"No, I mean I need to take therapy to learn how to talk to and have a relationship with a woman."

"So, you want me..." He paused for a moment before continuing, "to set you up with a woman? That's not therapy, Peter. That's the most stressful thing you can be a part of in life. Even I wish I never met my wife."

"Sir!" I shouted, "That's your wife you're talking about!"

"That's the idea," he said.

We continued to talk until we came to an agreement.

He said, "Look, I can set you up with one of the nurses that I have in mind, she's nice, understanding, and has other qualities that if I said out loud, I would get fired over."

"Thank you, sir. She sounds perfect."

"Just remember one thing Peter..." he said, pausing for dramatic effect, "she isn't."

I left as Sargent Blarf began to laugh and weep simultaneously.

I went back to the barracks and told everyone the news. They were all so happy for me, these were my first real friends I think I've ever had.

The manual described, 'real friends' as: "People who will be honest with you, even if they know it might hurt your feelings." That definition instead made me think of my alcoholic parents, but to each his own.

The Sargent called the phone in the Barracks and told me I had a date with a girl named, 'Lola.' She would of course, be behind bulletproof glass for at least our first date. She was also aware of my situation so she wouldn't get scared off easily if I did act up. The date would be in three days. I thanked the Sargent, got off the phone, and went to bed, I slept happier than I had ever slept before.

Three days had gone by very slowly. I had never been so excited yet so horrified in my entire life. I had never been on a date before. To calm my nerves, I tried to see if the manual had anything to say about dates but the only thing it said related to dates was Sunday, September 26th, 2021. And I wasn't exactly sure what that meant.

My squad in the barracks gave me some advice before I left to see the girl.

"Make sure to make eye contact but don't stare and make sure not to stare at other places, that's just impolite," said Lou.

"Be confident, but not cocky, girls like that kind of stuff," said Reid.

"Make sure the author doesn't screw you over with this girl..." said Pat before being shut up by the author for breaking the fourth wall.

I wasn't exactly sure what Pat was talking about, but I was going to try to take all of their advice and put it into action. I left the barracks and went to the nurse's office.

When I arrived, she was already there at the front counter behind two inches of bulletproof glass. She even had one of those microphones at the other end so I could hear her more easily, like when you get tickets for a movie or an amusement park. The bullet proof glass also had a little opening at the bottom before the glass met the desk.

She looked like a young Jennifer Grey, who played Jeanie Bueller in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and Frances 'Baby' Houseman in *Dirty Dancing*. It is worth mentioning that the author definitely doesn't quite not have a bit of a crush on the 1980s Jennifer Grey.

I walked up to her and asked for two tickets to see *Dirty Dancing*. She laughed and asked if I was Peter. Since I was Peter, I replied, "Yes, I am in fact Peter, are you Lola?"

Lola grinned and said, "In the flesh!"

I was actually kind of relieved and all my stress suddenly left my body, I pulled up a high stool and she did the same so we could sit and talk.

We must've talked for hours, and I was killing it. She actually seemed interested and open. We talked about books, movies, songs, and our life experiences.

She told me that she became a military nurse to help those who put themselves in harm's way so that we may have better lives. She was very noble.

I told her a bit about myself, not too much though. Of course, I still wanted her to like me.

At the end of the date, she told me that hopefully we could meet up again and that she didn't have to be behind bulletproof glass. She felt safe with me. She slid her hand under the small opening on her desk, and I put my hand on top of hers, we smiled and looked into each other's eyes.

I headed back to the barracks after what had been the most personal connection I had ever had in my entire life.

She was the perfect girl, I told myself constantly. I was head over heels for her already, which is funny because my head had always been over my heels, unlike normal humans. I'm just built different, I guess.

I told my buds, and they were mighty happy for me. They kept teasing me, "She's the one..." they all said in unison. For some reason they didn't say "She's the one" in a happy tone but more like a disturbed tone.

I called up the Sargent and thanked him once again for setting me up.

The Sargent said, "Yeah, yeah. You're welcome but get some sleep. I have your squad's first mission tomorrow!"

He promptly hung up the phone before I was able to say or ask anything else.

"Squad, I just got off the phone with Blarf. Our first mission is tomorrow," I said in my most calm voice, trying not to freak anyone out.

My squad began to freak out.

"Look..." I said, "I know this is our first mission and we know nothing about it yet. But our squad isn't just experimental, it's **experiMENTAL!**"

I took a second before continuing, that way everyone could appreciate the full genius of the horribly awfully good pun I had just made.

"We are not like the others. We snort cocaine! We exercise the right to perform guerrilla warfare, according to the Sargent! We tell awfully good puns! Whatever happens, we will survive! We will thrive! Also, we're going to be high during our mission so everyone, just relax."

The final sentence seemed to calm them down a heck of a lot more than the rest of the hype speech did.

Just one snort was all they needed, and they were in paradise. I was confident in my team's abilities to perform whatever task the Sargent had planned for us.

Even though I calmed my squad's nerves down a little bit, we still hardly slept. In the morning, the Sargent called all of

us into his office. We were all scared but prepared to do whatever the Sargent had planned for us.

We all walked into the Sargent's office in single file and got into a line side by side. He said, "Attention! I hope you all slept well on top of Lou's stomach because you definitely needed the rest!" I looked over at Lou, he was looking down at his stomach out of shame.

"Today! You will be going to a place and tearing it up like wrapping paper on Christmas morning! I don't want any excuses; I also don't want any witnesses! Furthermore, this mission will not go on file. Any questions?"

I raised my hand, "Yes, a couple of questions, actually. Where are we going? Why are we doing what we're doing? And how is your wife?"

The Sargent just said, "Don't worry, you'll see."

"He will see how your wife is doing, Sargent?" laughed Reid.

"I mean, Peter. If you want her, please take her!" the Sargent said half laughing, half crying.

"Um, shouldn't we get going?" asked Pat, sounding slightly disturbed.

Even Pat was weirded out by the Sargent at times. In my eyes, Pat was living proof that the most insane people were sometimes saner than their sane counterparts.

"Um, of course," said the Sargent. "This way, please."

He led us out of his office and into the parking lot. We couldn't believe it; we were all going to leave the base for the first time in months.

The Sargent led us to a fancy car that we least expected to be our ride, it was a stretched limousine. The four of us got excited and started thanking the Sargent.

"I'll be driving," the Sargent said, as he held up the keys. "Now get in!"

We all filed into the back of the limo at a mighty fast pace. We took our seats and buckled up. There wasn't actually much to look at, just four seats for us and a long wooden table in the middle of the interior. On top of the table was a credit card, a five-dollar bill and 16 things of white powder in plastic baggies.

When I first saw this, I thought we were going to be selling some salt. It didn't dawn on me until after we were halfway to our destination that it was actually just cocaine. Coincidentally, "Cocaine" by Eric Clapton had just come on the radio as I made this realization.

After about 25 minutes of driving, we finally arrived at our destination, it was a Dave & Buster's. Instantly, everyone began to complain.

"Why couldn't it have been a Chuck E. Cheese?" asked Lou, disappointed. Everyone nodded, agreeing with Lou, except for the Sargent.



"I've never had a bad experience at Chuck E. Cheese. That's why I brought you all to Dave & Buster's instead," said the Sargent.

"Blarf, is this a personal matter?" asked Reid.

"Just shut up and listen. Those employees were disrespectful to me. I want all of them to pay, along with those damned paying customers, who are ironically already paying and are about to pay even more. I can't believe that all of those people inside of there can just..." the Sargent ranted for about five more minutes before he decided to tell us specifically what happened. "I was in Dave & Buster's on Saturday. I went to the claw machine and got a little upset that the claw kept dropping the cute frog that I was trying to win. So, I kind of got a little angry and decided to punch the glass to retrieve the frog that way. And it worked! But sadly, some of the employees saw me and began yelling. I got nervous, so I decided to strip down and do the worm all the way out of the door. Those darn employees, laughed and called the cops on me."

"So, this is a personal matter!" said Reid.

"Why were we the ones put in asylum again?" asked Pat, trying to fathom how our Sargent was labeled less insane than us.

"Hush you!" said the Sargent with an angry tone. "This squad will wreak havoc on this Dave & Buster's, or my name isn't William Blarf."

"You should consider changing your name then," said Reid.

"Shut up! Okay, I have four plastic bags of cocaine for you each. It should be enough for you all to overdose on."

We all laid out our lines, one after the other, and snorted them all.

"You ready now?" asked Sargent Blarf.

"Absolutely!" we all said in unison, like a hive-mind.

Everyone, with the exception of the Sargent got out of the Limo and walked into Dave & Buster's, ready for Chaos.

"What are we supposed to do again?" I asked.

"Break expensive stuff, I guess," said Lou.

I went up to the front desk where a young lady was currently working.

"Excuse me..." I said, "What is your most expensive machine here?"

"That's tricky..." she said, "Lots of it is really expensive equipment. In fact, you should've been here on Saturday. Some moron got really upset that he couldn't win this frog from a claw game, so he decided to break the glass, steal the frog, take all of his clothes off and worm his way out of the door. That was a pretty expensive machine. The cops still haven't caught him, from what I've heard."

“Ha, yeah that sounds pretty funny. Is this expensive?” I asked, pointing at the cash register.

“Yeah, why?” she asked.

I lifted up the cash register and through it at the ground. She ran from behind the counter out the front door. After that interaction I saw several other employees and customers run out too.

I looked to my left and saw Lou scarfing down three skeeball machines at once. To my surprise, Lou was eating everything, arcade machines, pinball machines, claw machines, that big wheel you can spin to earn tickets. I have to admit, Lou had great taste in arcade games, literally.

I then went to see what Reid was doing, he was bench pressing the biggest claw machine there. After he was done with his fiftieth set, he set down the machine, broke the glass and ripped all of the stuffed animals’ heads off with his teeth. He seemed to be enjoying himself.

I decided I wanted to see what Pat was doing too. He was shooting off fireworks. I didn’t know where he got them from, and he wouldn’t tell me. Maybe that was for the best. He kept saying that if he told me, he’d have to kill me.

I looked out of the window, our Limo was gone, and The Police were on the scene. The Police begun to sing some of their best hits, “Roxanne” and “Every Breath You Take.” The rest of my squad came to the front desk and danced to the music along with me. We were all having a blast.

Soon the law enforcing police arrived and the singing ceased. One of the officers got on the megaphone and started speaking, “We have you surrounded, Sting is even guarding the back exit. Intel says you have no hostages in the building. Give yourselves up and come peacefully.”

The squad and I thought about giving ourselves up, but we decided that we would escape this situation ourselves, we didn’t even need the Sargent.

That’s when the Sargent pulled up to the front door in the limousine. “Open fire!” I heard a police officer yell. The limo began to get sprayed with bullets but didn’t seem to take any damage. The Sargent rolled down his window, facing us. “Let’s go, boys!” We all hurried into the limo. The Sargent drove away, being pursued by the police.

“Is this limo bulletproof?” I asked.

“No, but it does have plot armor!” the Sargent explained in a semi-sarcastic tone.

The limousine was being closely followed by the police, I opened the window and leaned out, “Please, no autographs and no pictures,” I said in my best French accent. I began to laugh, no one else thought it was particularly funny.

It was a bumpy ride, but somehow within a few minutes we were completely free from the police. The Sargent began to drive straight back to base.

"I thought I told you guys, no witnesses," said the Sargent.

No one had anything to say to the Sargent. So, we all just stayed silent.

"But other than that, good job! You really showed them!"

A big smile went across all of our faces. We had successfully completed a mission. Even if it was just a revenge plot orchestrated by our insane Sargent, it was still a mission, and we still came out victorious.

When we arrived back at the base, we all went straight to our barracks to relax and sleep off the effects of the four grams of cocaine we all had each taken.

I slept for eighteen hours straight. I was awoken by a knock at our door. My buddies were all still asleep. I got up, made sure they all still had a pulse and walked to the door.

I answered the door, standing on the other side was Lola. I was still recovering from the cocaine so, I couldn't quite think straight but my hypothesis at the time was that she was the one who knocked on our door.

"Hey," she said, "sorry did I wake you?"

I lied and said that I'd been up for a while.

"Oh, I was just wondering if you wanted to take a little walk with me?" she asked while playing with her curly hair.

"Oh, I absolutely would. I think I should change first though," I said, struggling to stay awake but also trying my best to hide my excitement. It felt like I was in two completely opposite worlds, similar to that of heaven and hell.

"Change? But I don't want you to change. I like you just the way you are," said Lola. That was mighty sweet of her to say but instead of thanking her, I slammed the door in her face and ran to the bathroom to throw up. It wasn't my worst vomiting session. Afterwards, I changed, took some caffeine pills, brushed my teeth, and opened the door again. To my surprise Lola was still there.

"Sorry," I said, "I had to run to the bathroom. I had something that didn't agree with me yesterday."

"Oh, you poor thing, what was it?"

"Cocaine," I said, nonchalantly. "Shall we walk?"

"We shall," she said, totally ignoring what I had just said about cocaine.

It was around 1pm, we walked and talked around the base for a little while. I kept wanting to do something a little bit risky. I thought to myself: Peter please, just hold her hand for God sakes! After I built up some courage, I reached toward her hand, and she took my hand with no hesitation.

We sat down in an aircraft hangar; she got very personal and started talking about her worst fears and darkest secrets. She told me that she wanted to conquer all of those fears and get passed all of those secrets, and she needed someone to help her do it.

“You see Lola, a therapist is what you need,” I heard myself say before realizing that I had just screwed up big time.

She immediately let go of my hand, “What?! How dare you? I go on a walk with you and talk with you about my fears and secrets, and I tell you that I need someone to help me overcome my worst fears and my darkest secrets! I was talking about you! And you have the audacity...”

I cut her off, “I am so sorry,” I said, “I wasn’t exactly sure what you meant when you were talking about needing someone to help you.”

“I just think it’s crazy that you think I need to go to therapy, like I’m some sort of insane freak.”

“Therapy isn’t just for insane freaks,” I said, trying my best to reconnect with her, “Therapy is about talking things through and finding ways to improve your life. You’re a nurse, don’t you sometimes need to talk things through with your patients to make them feel more comfortable? That’s what therapy is...” she stared at me, realizing she had also made a mistake, which is pretty rare because women often never quite not make mistakes, “and I don’t think your insane, believe me I’ve been in a mental asylum, and you are the complete opposite of insane. You’re one of the best people I know. I would like to help you conquer all of your fears and escape from all of your darkest secrets.”

She stared at me for a second then sincerely apologized. I apologized again too and said that I truly didn’t mean anything by it. We got back up and continued to walk and talk and soon we were back to holding hands. We walked back to my barracks and said goodbye to one another. She went in for a hug, “You smell good,” she said. “Thanks, I use (Non-Endorsed) Tide Detergent!” I said whilst smiling, like an idiot.

Despite what had happened, we still had a great time together. Since then, I began to walk with her on almost a daily basis. We genuinely enjoyed each other’s company and tried to see each other as much as we could.

Honestly, after I told Lola that she needed therapy, I thought I was completely screwed. I had no idea how I was able to pull myself out of that situation. But I think it had something to do with what I had read from the manual earlier that week.

The manual stated, “Improvisation is a very useful skill. Improvisation allows the person orchestrating it to be funny, smart, or the opposite of funny and smart. Improvisation can also help when you mess something up and need to find a quick fix. Practice improvisation whenever you can. It can

really help you get out of a jam.” Those last two sentences rhymed which is why I liked the advice so much.

### **Entry 3.5**

It had been two months and things were sailing moderately smoothly. My squad had gone on four more missions and things were going great with Lola.

Sometime within the previous two months, I realized that I still didn't know much about my squad mates, so I decided to ask them for their stories. To my surprise, they all agreed to share them with me.

## Reid's Story:

Reid came from a broken family; his dad went to the gas market to pick up a carton of cigarette milk when Reid was just five years old.

Reid's mother raised him the best that she could, but by the time Reid was twelve she became an alcoholic and started dating really awful guys. This caused Reid to start drinking, doing hardcore drugs, and start hanging out with the wrong crowd but he also started working out and gained some pretty impressive muscles.

Reid was almost a complete mess; he was completely hopeless and the only way he could fill the void was by doing drugs or by working out (quite the oxymoron if you ask me). That is, until the night his father came back.

Reid was sixteen years old, asleep in his bed. He always kept his window open because he often needed to air out his room. The sound of footsteps on his roof had shaken him awake, he saw a shadow getting closer and closer. Reid thought someone had snuck up on the roof and was going to kill him. He was okay with that; he didn't mind dying. He decided to lay back down in his bed and wait for his demise.

The next sound Reid heard was of his fishbowl being knocked over. Reid immediately stood up and took a fighting stance. His ideology was: you can kill me but if you kill my fish on accident, I kill you.

Reid saw his poor fish flopping around on the floor, helplessly. Behind the fish, was a man in a ski mask, who was now covered in broken glass.

"Hello son," the mysterious man said.

"Dad? Is that really you?" Reid asked feeling a mix of emotions, "Dad! What the hell? You just knocked over Ben's home. Help him, we need to get him in some water fast!"

"I think I can help you with that." Reid's dad cracked open a can of root beer and put the helpless little fish inside it.

Reid stared at his dad in disbelief, he decided he would just forget about the fish.

"What are you doing here?" asked Reid.

"Son, it is time you became a man!" Reid's dad said as he tossed his son a ski mask, "Put this on, we're gonna go rob a gas market."

"What?"

"Reid, my boy. You must understand something; I never wanted to leave you. Your mother on the other hand, I definitely wanted to leave her."

"Why didn't you just get a divorce?" Reid asked.

"I didn't leave you or your mother on purpose," Reid's father explained. "Eleven years ago, I went to the local gas market to pick up a carton of cigarette milk. When I was in the

gas market I was accused of shoplifting, so a manager brought me to a backroom until I confessed, he left me in the room and locked the door. I guess they forgot I was in there because a full week went by, and no one came in. I decided I would climb out through the vents. I got stuck for years, wandering around and I had to do some really strange things to survive. One time an exterminator tried to flush me out but failed, I even still have markings from the mouse traps. I just got out yesterday. I want revenge! Revenge on the gas market, not on the exterminator!"

"Um... fantastic monologue dad," Reid said, sarcastically. Ok, I'm game."

Reid really didn't need much convincing; he was always a 'straight to the point' kind of a guy.

Reid and his dad jumped out of his window.

Earlier that day Reid's dad boosted a truck, acquired some semi-automatic weapons, and snorted an entire line of cocaine before getting around to see his son again.

Said truck was now parked around the block with said weapons in the bed of said truck.

Reid and his dad ran down the street and hopped into the truck.

They drove to the infamous gas market, where his dad had spent the last eleven years of his life.

"Home sweet home," Reid's father said as they arrived in the gas market's cramped parking lot. They got out of the truck, got their guns out from the back, and entered the gas market to wreak havoc.

Sadly, Reid won't tell me the rest of the story. He said, "It's way too painfully funny to retell."

Long story short he got arrested and went from juvenile center to juvenile center until he was released just before his eighteenth birthday. Sadly, Reid didn't stay free for long, he ended up committing several felonies and war crimes along the west coast and ended up pleading insanity to save him from the death penalty.

Reid ended up in an asylum about 10 miles away from the military base. A few months later, he escaped and ended up at the military base, just like me.



### **Pat's Story:**

Pat came from an average, middle-class family. He had a very uneventful childhood. When he became a teenager, he became obsessed with finding the meaning to life.

Pat started studying philosophy when he was just fifteen years old. He became fascinated with finding out why things were the way they were. Eventually this fascination had led him to taking drugs. He heard that if you take a hallucinogen, you will visit different worlds and gain an insane amount of knowledge.

The first time Pat did a drug it was mushrooms. Pat told me that during his first trip, he literally tripped and hit his head on a refrigerator. After he hit his head, he was transported to a world where society was run by refrigerators. There were refrigerator men, refrigerator women, and a refrigerator president. Apparently, the refrigerator president was still a man because even in the grand refrigerator land; refrigerator people still didn't want a woman president. Pat recalled how smart the refrigerators were.

Pat walked up to a refrigerator and introduced himself. The refrigerator dispensed ice on the floor for no apparent reason and waddled away. Pat believes that dispensing ice is the worst possible insult a refrigerator could give, very similar to the middle finger that humans gave him on a daily basis.

Pat soon left his hallucinatory state and sat down, feeling more fulfilled. For the first time in his life, Pat wasn't completely obsessed with finding the meaning to life. Instead, Pat became more obsessed with finding out how to get more drugs. This led Pat to the conclusion that the meaning to life was actually drugs.

Pat went on over four thousand hallucinatory trips in the span of six years. Sadly, he got arrested for drug use at the age of 22. He got out a year later and was never the same. Pat became a serial killer and got caught after murdering twelve people in the same state. He ended up at an asylum in Virginia until he escaped and was brought to the military base.

Pat told me that he regretted ever doing mushrooms and he wished that he never killed anyone at all, but now he is in way too deep so he might as well be a government killing drone.

## Lou's Story:

Lou's entire existence can be best summarized as a giant game of *Hungry Hungry Hippos*.

Lou came from a moderately wealthy family. His parents were always loving, caring, and supportive. Lou was a bit spoiled growing up, he always got the best games, movies, CDs, vinyl records, and books.

Lou was happy with what he had but surprisingly, his favorite game of all time wasn't anything expensive or revolutionary. His favorite game was coincidentally, *Hungry Hungry Hippos*. Little did he know that the game he grew to love would foreshadow the rest of his entire life.

By the time Lou was twelve he became a Kirby-like entity, going around eating everything and anything in his path.

At first Lou's habit of eating a lot was considered normal and healthy for a growing boy but it got to an extreme level. Lou ate the family cat and his parents decided to have an intervention.

During the intervention they talked to Lou about his unhealthy habit and how it affects other people. Lou was too busy scarfing down the couch and coffee table to pay attention. Soon, Lou realized what was going on and had enough of his parents shaming him. Lou may or may not have decided to eat his parents.

Lou then went on to win many world records in eating competitions. He kept competing until the police found out what he may or may not have done to his parents.

Lou was labeled insane and thrown into an asylum not far from the military base. He escaped by eating through almost one hundred feet of solid brick wall. The military, however, quickly intercepted him after thirty minutes of searching. He was brought to the military base, and he still hasn't eaten his way out yet. I asked him why he hasn't even attempted eating his way out yet. He told me that he's just too lazy to do it right now.

Apparently, Lou is the only person who can be seen from space with the naked eye.

My squad has told me insane stories about Lou. They said that one time Lou was drowning in the middle of a lake, and no one was around to save him, so Lou drank all of the water to save himself. Lou told me that during that entire experience he was thinking about the question, "how many licks does it take to get to the center of a tootsie pop?" but instead, the question was, "how many gulps does it take to get to the bottom of a lake?" Thankfully Lou counted every single gulp for scientific purposes, he told me it took five full gulps.

I don't think many people could ever live up to what Lou had achieved in his time on Earth.

### **Personal Stories Ended:**

Honestly, I learned a lot about my comrades, and I was beyond happy that they were a part of my squad. Sure, we all had regrets and insecurities, but the future seemed bright, and not just because someone was about to head towards the light.

## Entry 4

After the squad's first five successful missions, the Sargent called me into his office and told me that due to my excellent leadership skills he was going to give me the rank of squad leader. That meant that I would command my squad and would be referred to as Commander Cart. It wasn't actually an official military Commander rank and I still needed to answer to the Sargent but other than that I was told that I had "complete control" over my squad. Although, I don't think the term "complete control" works when talking about being in charge of mentally deranged asylum escapees, but I'll take it.

I wasn't exactly sure what leadership skills he was referring to, but later he came clean and told me that the real reason why he chose me was because he thought it would be pretty funny if he put me in charge. He also said that my leadership could lead to more chaos, which the Sargent desperately wanted to see.

The past four missions were pretty intense. These missions consisted of sneaking into other countries' military bases or onto their military vessels, gathering intel, and wreaking havoc on the soldiers and equipment inside. We didn't know how we all managed to survive and now with me leading, it was my responsibility to make sure everyone on my team remained safe and happy.

After Sargent Blarf told me the news I went back to my barracks where I told the guys about my promotion.

"Our Commander?! Why are you the Commander?"

They all started to shout at me.

"Maybe it's because I'm not a manically depressed terminator or an overweight off brand Kirby or a drug-fueled Aristotle," I heard myself say under my breath. Thankfully, they didn't hear any of that. "Listen, fellas. I honestly didn't want myself to be in charge either," I said in a politician voice as I lied.

"Why did you just say that in Obama's voice?" asked Pat.

"Umm... well, you see my fellow Amer—"

Thankfully, as I was doing my best impression, the phone rang.

Reid answered the phone and put it on speaker. It was the Sargent.

"Hello, Gen Squad."

"Gen Squad?" we all replied.

"It's short for Genocide Squad. I have a mission for y'all!"

"Um... Sargent?" said Reid, "is it true that you made Peter the leader?"

“Yes, but for good reason,” said the Sargent, “your squad is lacking leadership.”

“And whose fault is that?” asked Pat.

“Yeah, Sargent. Whose fault?” said Reid, backing Pat up.

“Just trust me, please! I believe that each of you will be slightly better with a leader...”

An awkward silence fell upon the room. And within those ten seconds of pure awkwardness everyone began to laugh for no apparent reason.

“Settle down!” yelled the Sargent, “remember, I have a mission for you all! Tomorrow morning, I want everyone in my office so I can brief each of you.”

The Sargent hung up the phone before any of us could say anything else. Pat and Reid still seemed mad about me being picked as squad leader and from what it looked like; Lou was totally indifferent about my rank change. However, that night, Lou wouldn’t let me sleep on his stomach, I had to lay on a pillow like a peasant.

All I could do was hope that one day my squad mates would understand and forgive me for what I hadn’t done.

*The Manual for Asylum Escapees* stated, “If you are in a group dynamic that is facing a conflict, it is best to sort out the cause of the problem and come up with a solution.” *The Manual for Asylum Escapees* gave the most practically obvious advice in the world. I thought I was watching an episode of *Doctor Phil* for a second when I read that.

That advice may have been painfully obvious, but I needed to put that advice into consideration because I could’ve easily ignored the conflict and continued on my day until Lou got too hungry.

When I woke up, I convinced Lola to leave the base and get us doughnuts and coffee. She agreed and dropped it off at the door.

When Pat and Reid woke up, I gave them their doughnuts and coffee. When Lou woke up, I gave him a huge cement block that I found outside. Over breakfast, I apologized and said that I was sorry that I was chosen to be leader and I didn’t want any problems, so I would ask the Sargent to demote me during our meeting with him later that morning. My squad was very thankful that I decided to do that.

“You know,” Lou said, “if we had to have a leader, I’d want it to be you.”

“Yeah,” said Reid, “honestly, I think you’d be the best fit.” Pat looked at me and smiled. It was a genuine smile, unlike the psychopathic, drug-fueled Aristotle smile that he normally gave everyone.

“Thanks guys! Oh shoot, look at the time. We’re all going to be late if we don’t leave now.”

We all got up and three and a half of us ran through the door. We sprinted to the other side of the base, where the Sargent's office was located. Just before we entered the building, I turned around to address my comrades, but I noticed that Lou wasn't with us. I was wondering why I didn't hear a series of thuds whilst we were running. We turned around to retrieve him. Apparently, that morning, Lou had gained just enough weight to get stuck in the door frame. We had to take turns running into him at full speed to get him unstuck. This delayed us about 30 minutes, but it was great exercise.

We went back to the Sargent's office, where Blarf had been waiting for half-an-hour, "I was wondering if any of y'all were actually going to show up!"

"Sir, I don't want to be the leader," I said.

"Just shut up Peter, you're gonna be the leader whether you like it or not!"

We all stood in silence and just waited for him to brief us. He went into a very in-depth complex mission plan.

The gist was pretty much this: we would disguise ourselves as Brazilian Navy Sailors and board a docked submarine that was scheduled to depart from Mexico in a few hours. After we boarded and the submarine left the dock, Lou and I would head to the bridge and offices to steal some intel meanwhile, Pat and Reid would head to the back of the submarine to plant explosives that were preprogrammed to go off in ten minutes after they were planted. We would all then head to the escape pods and get out of there just before the explosion went off. After the pod resurfaced, we would be retrieved by an unmarked US government vessel.

"We will depart from the base in an hour," the Sargent said, "Do what you need to do, then meet me in the parking lot."

I took this time to go to the clinic and say goodbye to Lola. I walked in and told Lola about the mission, she hugged me, told me that I would do great, and kissed me goodbye.

I went back to the barracks, where all the other boys were anxious to depart. We killed nearly an hour by playing old videogames. Lou sat in the corner playing *Pac-Man*. Lou must've gotten hungry when he saw *Pac-Man* eating all those dots because he decided to eat the entire *Pac-Man* arcade machine we had just installed. Reid was watching Pat play *Final Fantasy II*. I was playing *Tetris* on an old Gameboy we had. While stacking blocks on *Tetris*, I realized that I was better at sorting things out in that game than I had ever been in real life.

Soon, it was time to depart, we went to the parking lot, where the Sargent was waiting for us. This time, he had an inconspicuous SUV instead of the Limousine that he drove us in during the past five missions.

Lou had to ride in the trunk for obvious reasons. The rest of us sat in the back seats.

As we drove further away from the military base I had just two thoughts in my head: I would do anything for Lola, I would even die for her and wow, Lou is quite a large man.

During the car ride, Lou mentioned that he could speak Portuguese. That was a very useful skill and it meant that Lou would be doing most of the talking. I was fine with that; I wasn't too good at interacting with members of my own species anyway.

I stared out of the window for the first half of the ride, then I realized that I could read from *The Manual for Asylum Escapees*, I turned to a random page, and it said, "The art of reading and studying consists in remembering the essentials and forgetting what is not essential." I continued reading for ten minutes before I realized that some self-proclaimed comedian switched my good, honest manual for *Mein Kampf*.

I opened the window and gently yet violently chucked the book out of the car. Taking a deep breath, rolling up the window and staring out of the window again in silence.

"You should've burned that book," Pat said while snickering, "I heard it's by a Nobel Peace Prize winner!"

After what Pat said, everyone in the car stayed quiet until we got to the port in Mexico.

Upon arrival, we put on Brazilian Navy Sailor disguises and the Sargent gave us fake Brazilian navy IDs. My squad and I hopped out of the SUV and began to walk towards the submarine.

Someone stopped us before we got too far. "Do you have identification?" the man asked.

"No hablas inglés," said Reid.

"¿Identificación?" said the man.

"Oh yeah... right," said Reid, trying to play it cool.

We all shuffled through our pockets and got out our fake IDs.

Lou gave the man his ID first, the man began to laugh when he saw how much Lou weighed. Lou began to cry.

Pat, Reid, and I knew that we couldn't let the man get away with that, so we took him to a secluded part of the dock. Reid began to deadlift and curl the man like a barbell. After Reid was done with him, we duct taped him to a wooden log and allowed Pat to have a friendly conversation with the man. About 30 seconds into the conversation, the man started to scream in terror, thankfully nobody cared. After Pat's monologue, I told them to take the duct tape off and throw him off the dock. Sadly, thanks to my generosity, the man managed to survive.

We went back to Lou and comforted him for about twenty-five minutes. We all took turns telling Lou how beautiful he was. "Bro, if I was a woman, I'd totally be into you," said Pat. Lou sniffled and thanked all of us for cheering him up.

After hyping Lou up, we decided that we should actually board the submarine. We all walked in a straight line directly toward said submarine. We had to climb up a ladder and enter through the smallish hatch on the top. That wasn't a problem for Pat or Reid, who went before Lou and me. But, when Lou tried to enter the hatch, he got stuck. I was the only one who hadn't boarded yet, so I had no choice but to bounce on his head and shoulders until he finally got through.

I bounced on his head for about five minutes, some people on the dock stopped what they were doing and started counting out how many times I jumped on his head.

According to my audience, it took about 360 jumps to get Lou into the submarine. Coincidentally, that's almost as many licks as it takes to get to the center of a tootsie pop.

After Lou was down the hatch, he fell a few feet and I heard a loud metal thud. The submarine began to move, I almost fell off, but I managed to just about grab hold of the ladder. I hurried into the submarine and closed the hatch. We had now passed the point of no return.

When I got into the submarine, I saw the crew members huddled around the ladder, staring at Lou and myself. Lou began speaking Portuguese to explain himself. I have no idea what he said but it sounded like he was reading a thesis. Soon, the crew members dispersed but Lou continued speaking.

"Enough with the monologue," I said.

Reid and Pat were hanging out in the corner of the room, trying to act like they belonged there. I helped Lou up and we huddled into the corner to speak with Pat and Reid.

"Well, this is it," Reid said, "we can't back out now."

Pat began to yell in a whisper, "Remember the plan! I have the explosives on me."

"Guys, I want to say something," I said, "I just want you to know that if anything goes wrong..."

"I know," said Pat, interrupting me, "don't worry, we'll be cautious."

"I love you guys," said Lou as he shed a tear. "Okay boys, go to the back and plant those explosives, Peter and I will be in the bridge and offices gathering intel. After you plant the charges, come get us, so we can make it to the escape pods on time."

Without saying a word, we all went in for a group hug. After the minute-long hug, Reid and Pat took out small plastic baggies filled with methamphetamine, which they snorted. Lou and I were completely sober for this mission, but the Sargent insisted that Pat and Reid took some drugs just in case something went wrong.

Pat and Reid turned around and went towards the back of the sub. Lou and I went to the bridge.



The bridge was filled to the brim with crew members. I began to get nervous and visibly sweaty. Lou looked at me and said, "I got this." He walked up to the crew members and said, "Hi, I'm Lou. On the behalf of the American government, I would like to gather secret intel you might have onboard this vessel."

I looked at Lou, "What the hell are you doing?" I asked.

"Oh, you're right. I forgot, they speak Portuguese, not English." Lou started to say the same thing in Portuguese, but thankfully he was interrupted by an explosion.

There was a confused silence for about five seconds following the explosion. Then the alarm started to go off. Everyone began to run and scream in different directions.

"Was it something I said?" asked Lou.

"I think something went wrong," I said, "I need to go see if Pat and Reid are okay!" I told Lou to head to an escape pod and save it for us. "If I don't make it there in five minutes..." I said.

Lou interrupted me, "Yeah, I know. I'll leave without you, don't worry about that."

I sprinted down the corridor and saw several crew members running passed me while screaming. I wanted to stop and ask them what they were screaming about, but I had to find out if Pat and Reid were okay.

When I finally made it to the back, it was already too late. The door to the very back room (where Reid and Pat planted the explosives) was completely sealed shut.

I had no choice but to head towards the escape pods and try to escape with Lou, even if we didn't gather any intel.

When I got to the escape pods. I saw that all the other pods had already been launched. Lou was pushing away a crowd of sailors, who were trying to steal the last escape pod away from us.

I pushed my way through the crowd and told Lou that it was time to go. We hurried into the last remaining pod and launched.

As the pod rose to the surface and the submarine got further away, I began to realize that this had been our first failed mission. I also realized that Pat and Reid were probably not alive.

I turned to Lou to explain what had just happened, but Lou already knew, I saw it in his eyes. I hugged Lou and began to cry. Lou comforted me all the way until we reached the surface. Once we did reach the surface; however, Lou slapped me to snap me out of it. I must admit that I don't like to get slapped in the face, but Lou makes me want to get slapped in the face more often. I stopped crying and refocused.

I picked up a flare gun from the emergency kit, opened the top hatch and fired it into the air. Soon, we were spotted and rescued by the unmarked US government vessel we had been told about in the briefing.

## Entry 5

After I climbed aboard the vessel, I began to vomit. The Sargent was standing a couple feet away from us on the top deck.

The Sargent spoke, "Well done boys! Did you get my intel?"

Lou and I stared at the Sargent in silence.

"You did get my intel, right? Wait, where's Pat and Reid? Commander Cart, where are they?" The Sargent slowly realized what had just happened. "Send in the divers! Right now! I need them up here right now!"

Five divers quickly hurried into the water. All we could do was wait.

After thirty minutes of searching, the divers came back to the ship with two dead bodies. One of the bodies was burnt to a crisp.

They said they discovered Pat's crispy body which was being carried by Reid's body. Somehow Reid must've survived the explosion. Apparently, next to their dead bodies the divers discovered a dead shark. The divers believed that Reid had survived the explosion and was trying to swim up to the surface while carrying Pat. While Reid was swimming, a shark must've attacked him. Reid must've put up a fight and managed to punch out the shark, but it was already too late. Just before Reid drowned, he scratched three letters onto the shark, "SDT" (not to be confused with STD).

While the divers were speculating about what just transpired underwater, I pulled myself together and asked what SDT could've meant.

The Sargent decided to speak up, "It doesn't matter! All that matters is that they're gone! And from the way that Lou and Peter are staring at me, it doesn't look like they have any intel. We've wasted time, resources, and men! Let's go back to base!"

We went back to the base and mourned our lost men. Lou and I went back to our barracks and talked about our memories of Pat and Reid.

"I loved them both," said Lou, "they were the only people I never wanted to eat."

"Remember on our second mission, when Reid was bench pressing a bus and Pat was rigging it with explosives while laughing?"

Lou began to sniffle, "Remember when I hurt my elbow and Pat looked at the bruise with such fascination?"

"Remember when Pat wasn't all crispy fried?"

We both started to sob uncontrollably.

When all of a sudden, we heard a knock on our door. When we opened the door, we saw the Sargent waiting for us with a grim expression on his face. "May I come in?" he asked.

Lou and I looked at each other and nodded. He came in and sat on the couch. He stared at both of us for one minute without saying a single word. Half-way through this interaction, I started to laugh uncontrollably. Finally, the Sargent spoke.

"This is no laughing matter. Your friends have died!"

Lou got offended, "Isn't this your fault? You gave them the explosives and drugs?"

The Sargent stood up. "This is not my fault! It's the fact that your squad doesn't work together, and that Peter doesn't lead! He didn't even attempt to act like a leader during the last mission!"

I finally spoke up, "We all worked together, and we all trained together, and we could've still been here if it hadn't been for you and your stupid mission!"

The Sargent took a moment to think and then he spoke again, "You know what? I'm making both of you solo operatives. You will not go on any more missions together. Furthermore, you are no longer roommates, Lou, you can stay and here and Peter, you can move into another room on the other side of the base. I cannot risk two more dead asylum escapees."

The Sargent turned to leave the room but before he did, he said, "The funeral of Pat and Reid will be at hangar 73, tomorrow morning. I expect both of you to be there. In the meantime, Peter, gather your things and move to room number 67, that will be your new barracks."

After the Sargent left, Lou and I were speechless. I gathered my things silently. Before I left, I turned back to shake Lou's hand, "It was an honor serving with you."

"This isn't goodbye," said Lou, "we just won't be able to go on any missions together. But it was great to serve with you. I'll see you at the funeral tomorrow."

I left my old barracks and went to the other side of the base to move into my new barracks. On the way I decided that I had to see Lola. I walked into the clinic to see her.

Upon arrival in the clinic, I saw Lola in the waiting area talking to another nurse. I walked towards her; her eyes shot in my direction. "Please, excuse me," Lola said to the other nurse." She ran up to me and gave me a big hug.

"I heard what happened to Pat and Reid," she said, "are you okay?"

"I'm fine," I said, "Can we sit down and talk?"

Lola and I sat in the waiting area and talked for a long time; we had a long conversation that only two close people could have.

At the end of our conversation I said, "Y'know, sometimes I wish that I had never escaped that asylum. Maybe they would still be alive."

"No, they needed you," Lola said, "and be careful what you wish for."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Let me tell you a story. 'There once was a boy who found a Genie lamp. He rubbed the Genie lamp and the Genie jumped out and he told the boy that he would grant him three wishes. The boy's first two wishes were to rule the world and to grant him good fortune. The boy's last wish was to grant him one more wish in addition to the third wish. The genie agreed but misunderstood the wish, instead the genie turned the boy into a make-a-wish kid.' Peter, don't be the make-a-wish kid."

"That is a screwed-up story," I said.

"It's true though, if you were still in asylum, you wouldn't have met me."

"I guess that is true." I hugged her again and told her that I had to move into my new barracks and get some sleep. She said goodbye and told me to keep sippin' on that mud.

I completely moved into my new barracks and slept the worst I ever had in my entire life. I got up the next morning and got ready for the funeral. I kept thinking about that story Lola told me. I needed to be careful about what I wished for. I also needed to stop blaming myself for something that I hadn't done. I didn't want to be that make-a-wish kid.

I put on a suit and tie and left for the funeral in hangar 73.

During the walk, I managed to catch up with Lou and talk to him. We tried not to talk about what had transpired yesterday. It was far too painful to talk about. Instead, we made jokes that only we would find funny. Telling jokes isn't the perfect way to prepare for a funeral but it beats the hell out of being sad.

When Lou and I arrived at the hangar, we saw the Sargent waiting for us; beside him were two coffins which were closed shut. From the looks of it we were the only ones attending the funeral.

"Hello men, my apologies but you will be the only people in attendance today. Seems like you were the only people to show up."

Both coffins were completely shut, and they were on two separate tables with whitish brown powder next to both of them.

"Shall we sit?" asked Lou.

"Not yet," said the Sargent, "You see the powder next to each of the coffins? It's cocaine with a secret ingredient, each of you must snort a line before we proceed."

Lou and I reluctantly agreed. We did a line as the Sargent said a prayer in an unfamiliar tongue. I began to hallucinate; it was strange because I never hallucinated before on cocaine.

My hallucination took me to an alien spacecraft. I was next to Lou, I began to wonder if this was a co-op hallucination, it turned out it actually was. We began to look around and we saw that no aliens were onboard the ship. When we went to the cockpit and looked out the front window, we finally understood what was going on. Low graphic alien spaceships were coming straight at us, I took the controls and shot at them. "We're in friggin' *Galaga*!" said Lou. The aliens kept on coming and they fired back but we managed to stay alive.

When Lou and I finally came out of our hallucinatory state, we found ourselves inside of an F-18 fighter jet that had been flying for a while. We had blood on us, and we couldn't tell whether it was our own blood or someone else's. We had flown many miles east and we saw that other F-18s were trying to shoot us down. I realized what a pickle we had gotten ourselves into and decided to eject. Lou and I both flew out of the plane. My seat had a parachute but sadly Lou's seat wasn't equipped with one. Lou unbuckled and decided to plummet to his demise. I watched in horror as Lou began to fall. Suddenly, below Lou, a rip in space-time opened. Lou fell through it as he waved goodbye to me. I didn't understand what had just transpired. My theory was that Lou just went back in time to take out the dinosaurs. Just as Lou left, I watched the F-18 fall and explode on the ground. Thankfully, the other F-18s didn't spot me and returned to base.

I slowly glided down and once again, I wondered where it all went wrong. It was all so sudden; now all of my friends were gone.

## Entry 6

I landed in a tree, and no one was around to greet me. I got out of the tree and sat under it for a while. It seemed like no one was looking for me nor did anyone care that I had just escaped.

It costed me everyone though. *The Manual for Asylum Escapees* stated, "Escaping a place can cost someone their very lives or the lives of someone they care about." When I read that, my mind immediately started thinking about Lola.

Then, I thought about the letters Reid carved into the shark's stomach, 'SDT.' I sat and contemplated what that could've meant. That's when I had a realization; SARGENT DID THIS.

I got up and began to pace, wondering what I should do. I decided to run to a gas market, but not to get a bag of cigarette milk. I needed to have my revenge. I believed that the Sargent killed Pat and Reid on purpose and wanted to kill Lou and me too. In the event that either one of us survived, we were already solo operatives and could come back for a few more missions until the Sargent decided he didn't need us anymore.

When I arrived at the gas market, I found a shotgun and pistol behind the counter. The clerk seemed very frightened when I picked them up, I wondered why. He was very nice though and told me that I could have whatever I wanted. Naturally, I took some Pepsi, Ring Dings, and I stole marble rye from an old lady. I made sure that the police wouldn't be notified as I made my escape.

I hopped into a white van and contemplated what to do next. I quickly decided that distributing candy to kids on the side of the road was a good idea. I tried to execute my plan, but I quickly realized that I didn't actually have any candy. Instead, I decided that I would lure children into the van by merely making them think I had candy then drive into the military base to cause a distraction.

Throughout the timespan of the next sixteen hours, I was able to lure over thirty children into my van. They were all actually pretty chill about the whole thing.

It was go time! No time to delay. I was ready to break into the military base, kill the Sargent, and get the girl, even if I did have to sacrifice a few children, it was a fair price that I was willing to pay.

As I drove to the military base, I began to question my sanity, that's when I remembered that I was a mental asylum escapee. This eased my mind because I had an excuse for my behavior: I was literally insane.

I wasn't paying attention to the road and almost fell off a cliff, I decided to teach one of the kids how to drive. The kid I picked was actually pretty decent and I gave him directions and

he may have run over a few pedestrians on the way, but he was doing much better than I was.

In about forty-five minutes we finally arrived, but the kid that was driving wouldn't stop going at Mach 5, so we ended up crashing through the thick wall surrounding the base. Immediately the alarms started going off, soldiers were running to their defense stations and tanks started shooting at the van.

The kids and I got out of the van and started running in different directions. The van exploded behind us just as the last kids got out of it. To my surprise, the tanks were targeting the kids, instead of me. I took advantage of the situation and ran to the clinic to get Lola.

When I got inside there was no one in sight, I looked around for a little while and couldn't find any trace of Lola or any of the other nurses. That's when a phone began to ring in the waiting room, I answered it.

"Hello Peter!" I heard in an awfully familiar voice.

"Oh hey, who is this?"

"It's your dad. You idiot! Who do you think it is?"

"Oh, hey dad. How is the alcoholics anonymous going?"

We carried on a conversation until I realized that the man on the phone wasn't my dad, he was the Sargent. Biggest plot twist of my life.

"Sargent!?" I said.

"You finally figured it out! Look I'll cut to the chase, come to my office right now and I will spare your little girlfriend in exchange for your life."

"Why did you do this?" I asked in a defeated voice.

"You will find out soon enough."

I hung up the phone and I began to sprint to the Sargent's office.

I ran past a sea of dead bodies. Thankfully, all of the dead bodies were actually soldiers, all of the kids were still alive, and they looked like they were having a lot of fun.

I ran into his office; I saw that he was holding Lola at gunpoint.

"Okay Sargent," I said while panting, "I'm here, now why are you doing this?"

The Sargent began to laugh the hardest that he had ever laughed before. "Your brain couldn't even begin to comprehend why I am doing this."

"Please don't go into a long monologue."

I believe that the Sargent may have had a stroke because his last words were, "Why do I be alive. Bad hard. I don't know, for some reason people think this. It's provided to protect hazardous environments. So, you may begin to float when blood pressure rises. I think drink soda, see faster? I have become! What? Huh?"



Lola slowly stepped away from the Sargent as he was muttering this surreal intellectual masterpiece. That's when Lou crashed through the ceiling and landed on Sargent Blarf, effectively killing him.

Sadly, Lou was also dead. I held Lou's hand and whispered in his ear, "My friend, you have succeeded. Your death will not be in vain!"

I grabbed Lola's hand and led her to a fancy convertible in the parking lot. We didn't say a single word to each other, but I thought we both knew what we were thinking. We heard sirens so we hopped into our sweet ride and got the hell out of dodge. The kids had completely overrun the base and would probably rule the world by next week.

Lola and I successfully avoided police and government vehicles as we drove into the hillside.

We made it. We finally stopped when we were far enough away from the base. It was a beautiful sight, overlooking a small town and the sun was about to set.

We got out of the car and sat on the hood as we admired the view.

I decided to break the silence, "Lola, I love you."

Lola reached for something in her pocket and pulled out a gun, she pointed it at my chest. I began to cry, was this really it? Was this how my story ended? Was I to be killed by the one person I tried to save and protect? Did I lose all, just to save the one who would kill me? Did I even know the reason why? Was I the make-a-wish kid? She pulled the trigger; I closed my eyes and heard a click. "Oh shoot, sorry, the safety is on," she said, "wait how do you take this thing off safety?" She handed me the gun and without thinking I took it off safety and handed it back to her. I began to run but I didn't get far. Lola shot me twice in the back and got back in the car. She turned on the radio, I immediately recognized the song, "Bell Bottom Blues" by Derek and the Dominos. However, she quickly changed the radio station and "Starting Out the Day" by Strawberry Alarm Clock began to play. As she drove away, I sang along.

I thought back to what I had done with all of my life. With my final breath, I muttered my last words, "I laughed, I cried, I died."

# **A RISK OF FLYING LOBSTERS**

## **Phase 1**

When a lobster decides to steal a rocket ship from the United States government many people get a little concerned but fear not. As this is entirely normal behavior in animals. It is called natal homing; it is where organisms go back to where they came from in order to reproduce. At least that's what I thought I was doing, my instincts just told me to steal a rocket and I'm not typically one to argue with myself.

With all this being said, if a lobster tries to leave the planet and you are feeling concerned about your safety, please call 562-7837. This will connect you to the marine-life sector of homeland security. Call them and tell them that a lobster has just stolen a rocket, to which they will respond "Ahh, not again!" I suppose I'm not the only decapod who has done this.

Another reason for leaving Earth is because frankly there was nothing left for me here, the sea levels were rising and as a semi-depressed lobster, my tears made it rise even more. No wonder scientists were giving anti-depressants to lobsters. That being said, I think this is a much better option. Once again, I was not typically one to argue with myself.

All things considered, stealing a rocket was actually pretty easy to do, all I had to do was get out of the water, get in a cab, find the nearest rocket, get in, and push a big red button. That's until sirens start wailing and it turns out everything that you are doing is illegal, but that's okay. When nobody is sitting at the abort button, you're practically home free, and I was. There is no reason that you cannot blast off into the sky and go home.

Upon blasting off, you may realize a few things as I did. There were explosives on board, I wasn't terribly frightened although I was a bit horrified. I thought to myself why they were here, but I couldn't think of any actual reasons, I just had to accept the fact that I was practically riding on some sort of missile. I also realized that I wasn't actually controlling the rocket, there was some sort of autopilot guiding me to a specific place in a faraway system. Although, I was sure my instincts would guide me back to my home planet, I decided against going off autopilot for the obvious excuse of I don't want to die.

I unbuckled myself and started floating, I was starving and always wondered what it was like to eat in space. As I went to the eating station, I felt a series of jolts. As I looked out the window, I realized Earth was getting further away faster with each jolt until I couldn't see it anymore. I passed all the planets in a matter of seconds, and I was beyond the Kuiper Belt. I passed through several systems looking in awe at each one until

I came across what the autopilot was guiding me to: a massive black hole. A few planets orbited around it, but I was heading straight into it.

My mind began to wonder why scientists would put explosives into a rocket and put the autopilot in the direction of a black hole. But these thoughts were met with blank answers as I drifted further inside. I passed a few objects I could just about make out, stuff like mailboxes, tissue boxes, cardboard boxes, a bunch of boxes really.

As I approached the center of the black hole, I saw a parking lot and a bunch of streetlights that were somehow working. They were surrounding a building with the words "The Strike it to the Man Bowling Alley" in big bold letters over the entrance and a giant bowling pin on the top that I was barreling straight towards. That's when I knew scientists were trying to get the universe's biggest spare. I turned off autopilot and took the controls, I was surprised to learn that lobsters are naturally skilled at flying, although I did clip the top of the bowling pin just a little bit and it managed to fall over, all things considered not a lot of damage. I came back around and parked the rocket in one of the spots.

"Hey, dude nice spare," I heard as I got out of the rocket. I looked around but I didn't see anyone. As I began walking, I felt a claw on my shoulder, and it wasn't mine.

"Hey, man after we knocked down the first nine pins I was wondering if someone would come along and pick up the spare."

I turned around, and to my surprise there were two lobsters standing there talking to me.

"I told you we weren't the only ones, Stick! I knew others felt what we felt."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I'm of course speaking of the lobster's instinctive strategy to go home and reproduce. Although it seems us three have hit a little snag."

The Lobsters introduced themselves as Stick and Band. I of course told them my name as well: Wallet. Band was a large lobster, with a big set of claws. Whereas Stick lost both of his claws very recently when they stole a rocket to get off of Earth. Their story was exactly the same as mine, we were both trying to get back home for natal homing when the autopilot took us into this black hole.

"Have you gone inside the bowling alley yet?" I asked.

"We just got here five minutes before you picked up the spare, so we haven't had the chance yet," said Band.

"Plus, it's in a black hole so it's probably closed," said Stick.

"Can't hurt to look."

We walked up to the building; it was very quiet, but you could tell that the lights were on inside and there was a faint sound of bowling pins crashing.

On the side of the front door was a long description of the space oddity we saw before us. I read it out loud:

*The Black Hole Bowling Alley is a naturally occurring business in almost every single black hole in the universe. Nobody quite knows how the bowling alley naturally appears inside of a black hole. However, there is a theory that the reason why the bowling alley is there is because of the way the universe consistently doesn't make any sense.*

*The "nothing makes sense" theory has baffled many universally acclaimed scientists. Even the scientist who proposed it didn't know what the hell was going on. Some say that he even proposed the idea based on that very principle of cluelessness. But one thing was sure and consistent with scientific data gathered from universe universities: the only thing that made sense was nothing.*

*Although there isn't any research on bowling alleys inside of black holes that doesn't stop people from knowing exactly how a black hole gets a bowling alley in the first place.*

*The common black hole bowling alley has 3 stages before its final form. The first stage is as a pizzeria, the employees are naturally created as adults during this stage and the pizzeria is highly overemployed. The next stage is where the pizzeria gets a separate arcade room. The third stage is where the pizzeria-arcade gets an automatic bowling ball factory built into the side of it. This is where the employees are most likely to die and the over-employment problem fixes itself, many of the employees mistake the bowling balls for food, they eat them and then they die. The final stage is of course, a fully functioning bowling alley.*

*The main selling point of these bowling alleys is that the customers don't need to pay for anything, not for pizza, not for the arcade and certainly not for the bowling. The only drawback is that it's hard to get a ride off of and not many people know any other ways to exit, but it doesn't matter for most people especially since not many people want to leave anyways. As a result, many people find themselves stuck in the limbo that is The Black Hole Bowling Alley.*

Despite the bowling alley being inside of a black hole, this was the most normal-seeming bowling alley that I had ever seen. Maybe this is just because I haven't ever been to another one in my entire life.

Upon entering we went to the front desk where a humanoid worker greeted us. "Hello, welcome to the Dan Grass bowling alley."

"Dan Grass? Who is Dan Grass?" I asked.

“Oh, you fellas must be new here, y’all don’t understand what’s going on.”

“Exactly!” all three of us lobsters said in unison.

“First time off Lobsterdia then?”

“Lobsterdia? I think that’s where we are trying to go actually. How do we get there?”

“Listen, you guys are asking way too many questions right now. I’m gonna need you to slow your roll...”

We looked at this man with intrigued faces, but I’m pretty sure that our lobster faces always looked pissed, so I think this guy might’ve been a little frightened. Nevertheless, he was pretty helpful, which is more than I can say about other humanoids.

“My name is Cliff, please allow me to give you a tour and a brief history.” Cliff went on to explain that the black hole and bowling alley were named after a celebrity named Dan Grass. In space, some celebrities become literal stars and when those stars die, they become black holes. He then went on to explain the operations and functions of the bowling alley.

Band interrupted the tour, “This is all fine and dandy, but can you tell us how to get to Lobsterdia, we really need to wrap this up.”

“Very well,” Cliff led us to bowling lane 108. Without saying another word, he picked all of us up and began running down the lane, he slipped and hit his head. But we kept on sliding, knocking down all the pins in the process and going into the void beyond the lane.

## Phase 2

Before we knew it, all of us came out of the ball return, but in another bowling alley. Something Cliff didn't tell us is that bowling lanes and ball returns were the equivalent of teleporters.

We started shaking Cliff awake, "Cliff, you alright? You hit your head pretty hard."

He woke up, "Sorry fellas. I meant to throw you all down the lane, I didn't mean to come as well... Anyways, welcome to Lobsterdia."

"Cliff, are you sure you don't have a concussion?" I asked.

"I'll be fine, please do not worry about me."

"We should probably take him to a hospital," said Stick.

"No... here they call it a lobsital."

We all got up and looked around. Nobody was in the bowling alley.

"Hello!" I shouted. But no answer came, as if the bowling alley were either closed or abandoned. We walked out the front door. Despite there being a black hole in the sky it was as bright as a day on Earth was. Many businesses and houses were around the area but no lobsters, as if every single one of them had vanished.

"Where is everyone?" Stick asked Cliff.

"I'm afraid to say I don't know, I was just here a few days ago to exchange business with the bowling alley here. The place was booming, I'm just as surprised as you all are. Looks like everyone just up and vanished."

We went up the street to a barber shop, where we saw our answer on a paper on the front window. It read: Closed for Natal Homing. Cliff took the piece of paper and examined it more closely.

"Oh yeah, that's right...", said Cliff. "Every year these lobsters go back to the lobster's planet of origin to reproduce."

"This isn't our planet of origin?" I asked.

"No, definitely not! I don't know why you would assume that. You lobsters only settled on this planet about five years ago."

"But our instincts led us here," said Stick.

"I think you guys have a few wires crossed, what planet did you say you were from again?"

"A planet called Earth," said Band.

"Is it this planet?" Cliff asked as he showed us the other side of the paper, it was indeed an image of the beautiful blue marble planet that was Earth.

I didn't exactly understand how my instincts could've been wrong. It was never in the realm of possibilities for me. I

began to question if I was a narcissist, but then I quickly realized that my humble opinions were always correct in my eyes. So, I dropped the self-doubt and instead asked what we might do next.

"Listen if you guys still want to participate in this mating ritual, there is an idea I have in mind..." said Cliff.

"Sorry Cliff, but I don't think any of us like you like that," said Stick as Band and I nodded in agreement.

"No, I'm talking about getting you back to Earth before the natal homing is over!"

We were extremely relieved to hear that he didn't mean the other thing. Nevertheless, it was extremely nice of a bowling alley employee to help us even if it wasn't his job at all.

"This way! If we hurry, we can get you guys back before it's over," said Cliff as he led us back to the bowling alley. "I need to tell you guys something... The reason I'm doing this is because I've always wanted to be a marine biologist."

To be completely honest, I believe the real reason Cliff was helping us is because he's just a really good wingman.

He guided us to lane number 101, once again picking us up and running down the lane. He slipped and hit his head for a second time, nevertheless we all slid down the lane, each of us slipping into the other world beyond the lane.

We appeared almost instantly at an entirely new world, this time there was no bowling alley nor ball return. It appeared as though we had appeared out of nowhere.

"It appears like we appeared out of nowhere," I said as a grin appeared to appear on my face.

"Oh my, is Cliff alright?" asked Stick.

I looked over and saw Cliff lying on the ground unconscious with a bump on his head. "He's gotta have a concussion this time," I said.

"It's probably not a concussion, it's likely only permanent brain damage!" said Band.

Just as we began discussing how we could wake him in the funniest way possible, Cliff awoke.

"Cliff you alright?"

"Welcome to new planet! They call it Highway Planet," said Cliff with joy but stupidity in his voice.

We looked at Cliff and then at each other, there was something clearly wrong with him but there was no time to lose, so we decided to just let him take one for the team. Plus, he didn't seem too dumbed down, but he couldn't exactly form complete coherent sentences either.

Once again, we all looked around at the landscape. As far as the eye could see it was just concrete and road. There was only one building and it was across the street from where we were standing. But there was a little problem, this road had to be

the busiest and fastest road in the universe. The breeze that vehicles produced as they zipped by felt like whiplash. Right next to the road was a sign detailing the planet and its inhabitants, I decided to read it out loud:

*The Highway Planet is inhabited by several philosophers and critical thinkers, they are the same people who figured out who/what made the universe, the connection between consciousness and reality, what the meaning of life is (although they won't tell anyone else what it is), etc. Since they figured out every important philosophical question, they made up one of their own which they cannot stop arguing about.*

*Today, the Highway Planet is known for being one of the most polarizing planets in the entire universe, and that is saying a lot. The planet has only one building: the capital, which holds its executive, judicial, and legislative roles. The rest of the planet is merely highways, roads, and sidewalks.*

*The reason why the highway planet is so polarizing is because of a single line in their constitution. The planet's constitution states "The speed limit is nothing. And nothing is the speed limit." Some people on the planet consider this to mean that there is no speed limit and therefore you can go as fast as you want. Other people believe that the speed limit is supposed to be zero since zero means nothing and therefore you cannot move at all.*

*The people who say that you can go as fast as you want; never stop moving, most of the time they are in a vehicle and moving around the planet as fast as they can because that is what they believe freedom is.*

*The people who say that the speed limit is zero; never move, not even a finger. Although they can easily move if they just switch ideologies for a few minutes. But most of them either sit, stand, or lay completely still the entire day.*

*Every second of every day, the people in the capital bicker and argue about how to interpret the speed limit, with no end in sight. Not to mention the black hole is going to slowly rip this planet apart soon. If I were you, I'd turn around right now and leave this planet.*

*Sincerely, God.*

*(0.5 / 5 Stars on SpaceYelp)*

"Are you sure about this?" I asked Cliff.

"Listen, these people geniuses. They can give ship to get back you Earth."

"Okay, I think I understand what you're saying."

"Good, because I'm lost," said Stick.

"Alright, so what's the plan to get a ship?"

"We visit capital, tell them and they give us ship back Earth."

"It's that easy?" I asked.

"No..." said Cliff confidently, "but let me talking do."



“I don’t know if that’s a good idea.”

“Hard part, crossing street. Here take,” said Cliff as he tossed each of us a pill, he continued “time slow when that take.”

Without another word, we took the pill and time did indeed slow down for all of us. We went across the road while admiring the cars, it almost looked as though they were frozen in time. When we got to the other side the effects wore off almost immediately.

I asked Cliff why the effects only lasted a few seconds to us. Instead of Cliff answering me directly it sounded more as if he gave me a bad riddle. Although I believe what he was trying to tell me is that those drugs we took were made specifically for crossing roads on this planet which actually would’ve made a lot of sense.

We continued walking up the stairs into the capital building. It was actually a rather abstract looking building; it wasn’t necessarily ugly, but it appeared as if the interior and exterior of the building had been thrown around. When we arrived into the legislature, I could see that the building was a reflection of the people inside of it.

On the right side, was a group of people sitting completely still on lawn chairs. On the left side, was a group of people pacing back and forth as if they were on drugs. Both sides were yelling at each other, but there was no actual discussion nor debate. That’s when Cliff walked down the stairs and stood directly between the two groups. Silence fell between the two groups, as they tried to fathom why someone would interrupt their productive debate.

“Hello, my name Cliff. I am from black hole that your planet orbit around.” He pointed to us, “My friends need help get back planet called Earth... y’know like reproduction, can you do that?”

Both sides of the legislature started bickering once again while telling Cliff that they have more important things to do than helping a few lobsters get home to reproduce. But a silence fell upon them once again as Cliff started to cry a little bit. I came running down the stairs and proceeded to comfort Cliff.

One of the senators who was sitting down said, “You know what? maybe an outside point of view is what we need in order to end this philosophical and political argument once and for all.” He asked in a calm voice what I thought the speed limit as stated in the constitution should be interpreted as.

I spoke proudly and confidently in front of them, “The speed limit is definitely a concern that you and your people must think about, as it defines your culture, your society, and your very lives. I can interpret it both ways. If someone doesn’t want to move, let him not move. If someone wants to go as fast as

they can, allow them that liberty as well. This debate is useless and only gets in the way of other issues facing your planet. Like the fact that you are orbiting a black hole and none of you seem to care about the fact your planet is probably going to be ripped apart soon like it says on that SpaceYelp review by God across the street.”

I looked up at Band and Stick, they seemed very proud of my speech, they even cracked a little smile, I suppose as much as a lobster can smile.

The senator who asked for my opinion spoke again, “I believe this lobster is right. We argue about these things so often that we forget the real issues. For example, one of the issues is that we just let in four moderates into the legislative chambers. I believe we should put our differences aside and pass a law that states any moderates on this issue shall be banished.” The legislature erupted in applause as they swiftly passed the new law.

Some of the senators who could move quickly grabbed us and threw us on a spaceship to banish us. Before we could even take a seat, the spaceship lifted off.

### Phase 3

"Welcome to the banishing ship, I will be taking care of you this evening. It is a nice warm temperature of negative 270 degrees Celsius in space. That being said we do provide air conditioning and heating options," said the banishing ship's computer with a cute little face on one of its many screens.

Um... Hi," I said with a slight stutter in my voice.

"Where are you taking us?" asked Band.

"I am programmed to dispose of all of you by flying into a star."

All of us looked at each other, somewhat hopelessly. We were all giving each other THAT look. It's the kind of look you give other people when you think that a situation kind of blows.

"Can you drop us off on a planet instead?" asked Stick.

"No, my programming explicitly states that I must fly into a star."

"I got idea," Cliff whispered to us before addressing the computer. "Can we pick star?"

"I suppose my programming allows me to fly you to a specific star of your request. Is there one you have in mind?"

"The sun!" I said, enthusiastically.

"Thank you for a selection, setting course to the sun."

We huddled into a corner and went over a plan to try to get the ship to land on Earth instead of diving directly into the sun. Within a few hours we passed the Kuiper Belt, Gas Giants, Asteroid Belt, and as soon as we passed Mars, we put our plan into action. Cliff walked up and started smooth talking the computer, while the rest of us started looking around the ship for random buttons to push. We figured there had to be a button to take this thing off autopilot or at least redirect our course.

"Hey guys, I think I found one we can press!" yelled Stick.

The computer heard Stick and asked Cliff what the rest of us were up to. Cliff very smoothly said, "I not sure, what you doing after this? Drink with me or somethin?" The computer was so flattered and flustered by Cliff's confidence that it completely lost interest in what the rest of us were doing.

"What did you find?" I whispered.

"It's a bright yellow button, it doesn't say anything. I think we should push it..." said Stick, "it's our only chance unless we find another button."

"Pfft... alright," I said, very unenthusiastically, "press it."

Right as Stick pushed the button Cliff yelled to us and we immediately rushed over to him.

"Guy's, good news! The computer don't want be a banishing ship anymore!"

“Really?” I asked.

“Yeah,” said the computer, “talking to Cliff made me realize that there is so much more to existence than flying into stars. We are going to drop you kiddos off on Earth for that good time you wanted, and we will have a good time of our own.”

Earth and the moon came into view out of the window, and a smile came across all of our angry lobster faces. But that’s when everything started to go wrong again.

We felt a jolt, “oh no!” exclaimed the computer. “My stabilizers are becoming unstable.”

“That doesn’t sound very good,” said Band, “Stick, we definitely screwed up this time.”

We were trapped in the gravity of the moon, although weaker gravity than Earth, it certainly doesn’t make crash landings any better.

“I am sorry that I couldn’t get you home,” said the computer as it shut down. Cliff began to cry as we roughly descended towards the moon, getting closer with each second. We all braced as we believed our story was at an end.

## Phase 4

The fire from the crash was intense, I fought my way out of the ship, dodging every fiery piece of debris. As I got out of the crashed ship, I saw Band and Stick standing there looking at the wreckage. When they saw me, they met me with an embrace as they pulled me further away from the wreckage.

We thought you were dead," said Stick.

"Sadly, I don't think Cliff was fortunate enough to survive this," said Band. "That computer and him really seemed to be hitting it off, I feel bad about that."

"Me too," I said as we watched the ship burn to ashes.

A few minutes went by until we heard the galloping of horses behind us, we could hear them coming up the hill and then see them coming down into the crater that we had just created. They were dressed pretty formally.

"We heard the crash, is everyone alright?"

"Not one of the humanoids in there..." I said with an angry lobster frown on my face.

"Our condolences, but we mustn't waste time. The Funky King wishes to meet with the souls of this horrific accident."

"Um... this wasn't an accident," said Stick as I pinched and whispered for him to shut up.

"I beg your pardon."

"Yes, a horrible accident," I said with a convincing smile on my face.

"Nevertheless, let's go. For we cannot keep the king waiting."

They led us a few miles east until we entered a kingdom. As we walked through the kingdom the fashion sense was either formal or slightly gothic. There was either rock or soul music being played everywhere we went. This theme continued as we entered the castle and stumbled into the throne room.

"Funky King, I present to you the survivors."

The Funky King turned around very funkily, he was wearing brown pants, a collared shirt, a dapper looking jacket, and a dark blue tie.

"Thank you, funky knight. Do me a favor and turn on a record by Calcium Blimp for background music."

With that the knight went to the record player and put on a song called "Flight of Steps Towards Paradise."

The king continued, "I would like to tell you that I am sorry for your loss, in both your fellow man and in your ship..."

"Thank you, that is mighty kind of you to say," said Band.

"I am going to level with you, I tried to get the Funky God to send someone from the skies to help me. So, I feel the need to apologize personally for this."

"You prayed to the Funky God for us to crash land here?" asked Stick.

"Well technically I found him on SpaceYelp and got a hold of his contact information, the point being I believe you are the creatures that his holy funkiness sent to help me."

We looked at him as if he was an insane man. "Listen," I said, "we need to get back to Earth as soon as possible. If we can help you, can you help us?"

"If you can help me, I will give each of you prototype wing-sets that can fly you back to Earth. Sound like a deal?" We didn't have much of a choice, but it was our only hope to get back home and reproduce.

"Do you know why I am playing a record by a Led Zeppelin rip off band?" asked the Funky King. Before we could guess he spoke again, "All of my music was taken from me!"

The Funky King began to recount a tale of heartbreak. The Funky King wasn't only funky, he was also funny. He had a wife, a woman known only as the Funky Queen. The Funky Queen was obsessed with philosophy, the meaning of life and culture and how it all connected.

That's when the Funky King came up with a brilliant joke, he went up to the Funky Queen and said, "Do you want to know what the meaning of life is?"

"Of course, I do," she said.

"Then you should look it up in a dictionary," he said with a cheeky smirk on his face.

Long story short, the Funky Queen didn't find that very funny and decided to divorce him. In the divorce she took half of what was his, which included the west half of the moon. She also stole the Funky King's records and tapes and then banned his music to be played in the west.

"I just want one of my mixtapes back from her, if you can get one back for me, I will give you my three wing-sets."

We reluctantly agreed, as we didn't have many options otherwise.

He took us into a room a little ways down from his throne room, "this is where we normally play board games, but it'll serve us well as I tell you the plan." He took out monopoly pieces and placed them on a chess board, he proceeded to go over the rules to a board game that we had never heard before.

"Okay, this seems like a cool game," I said. "But how is this going to help us plan to steal a mixtape back?"

"Oh, this is the plan..."

"Oh...", all three of us lobsters said in unison.

In all fairness he did come up with a pretty good plan, a plan we all immediately forgot, but decided to put into action anyways.

We raced to the west side of the moon in a hovercar provided by his funkiness. Band was driving while Stick and I were going over the plan once again. Apparently only a few people even occupied the Funky Queen's kingdom on the west side.

When we arrived at the gate of the kingdom, we got out of the hovercar and yelled for someone to open the gate. But it didn't appear that anyone was on top of the kingdom wall to answer us. That was until we saw a small head peak at us.

"Hey, we see you!" I exclaimed.

"No, you don't," the man spoke with a French accent.

"What a strange person," said Stick.

"Go away, we already have the holy grail!" the man shouted.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

Suddenly, a flying saucer came out of the kingdom over our heads. The bright light of a tractor beam shone down just in front of us. A young woman was coming down the tractor beam, she was wearing a dark blue dress, descending very gracefully, she had a kind smile on her face.

As she got on the ground she spoke, "Hello fellas! I'm the Funky Queen," she said enthusiastically. She looked up at the French gatekeeper, "you can open the gate, these fellas don't look like any trouble."

Us lobsters looked at each other, we were quite surprised by the kindness in her voice.

"No trouble at all ma'am," I said, "we are merely tourists on the moon and your recently established kingdom is one of our sights we want to see."

"Cool beans," she said, "I apologize for my gatekeeper, we do not normally take outside humanoids, but you are lobsters... it's quite surprising." She led us inside the kingdom and began to give us a little tour.

Her kingdom was quite a decent size but only had a few inhabitants, although she enjoyed the quiet life, she did enjoy having company on occasion.

We walked to a hotel where she said that we could spend the night, across the street was a bowling alley and she saw me eyeing it. "Want to go to the bowling alley?" she asked.

"Nononononono," all three of us said in unison.

She didn't question the trauma in our voices, she just told us to make ourselves comfortable and that she would see us in the morning for breakfast, as she has important duties to perform.

## Phase 5

It was the regular time to fall asleep on the west side of the moon (although it was still quite light outside). It was time to put our plan into action, but just before we were about to head to the Funky Queen's castle, a knock was heard at our door. Something felt fishy about it, so I told Band and Stick to hide under the beds.

"Room service," I heard a lady say in that breathy voice that is meant to lower your guard.

"No thank you," I said with a little bit of stubbornness in my voice.

"I'm afraid I must insist, we love being hospitable here."

Once again, I tried to tell the lady that we weren't interested but before I knew it the door was kicked in. The lady had a bucket of boiling water in her hands and was chasing me all around the room, I assumed she was trying to get me into the bucket. As I ran past one of the beds, Band pinched her leg with his crusher claw causing her to fall and the boiling water to go on her face. Her screams were met with silence as we quickly subdued her.

"I think I know what the Funky Queen meant when she said she'll see us for breakfast," said Stick, connecting the dots.

Now it was personal, she tried to kill us. We knew we had to quickly steal the mixtape and get back to the east side before she tried anything else. Without anytime to lose, we snuck out of our room and went straight for the castle.

The perimeter of the castle was guarded, we spent a good amount of time subduing the guards and piling them up to get over the castle walls.

On the inside, we snuck around the rooms looking for one of the Funky King's mixtapes, but we didn't have any luck. It was complete silence inside the castle, until we heard faint talking coming from the throne room.

We cracked open a door and had a listen. The Funky Queen was talking to herself. "Oh, what a bunch of drivel. Why must I suffer at the hands of myself for some nonsense that I did?" She then fell silent, almost too silent. We had a slight peak outside of the door. She was wearing headphones and listening to a tape player. She stood up and started to dance, her eyes closed but her heart opened.

We very quickly went over to her and cut the wire that attached the headphones to the tape player. The song began to play out loud, it was "Listen to the Music" by the Doobie Brothers. We knew that it had to have been part of one of the Funky King's mixtapes.

Very quickly some of the guards rushed into the room, "Funky Queen," one of them said, "are you okay? Is this lobster



making you listen to the music?" A very faint *buh dum tss* came from a drum set down one of the halls.

I looked at her, she was very silent and flustered. "I know we were supposed to be breakfast!" I shouted at her.

"Why do you ban the Funky King's music and then continue to listen to it?" asked Stick.

"It's my fault," she said out loud, "I apologize for you even coming here," she said as her eyes became yellow.

What happened next can be best described as pure terror as the Funky Queen began to grow, she levitated and chased us around her kingdom throwing every power that she had to try to cook us. Thankfully I managed to snag the tape player with the mixtape inside. We ran outside the kingdom walls and hopped into our hovercar, speeding away with our lives barely intact.

We managed to lose her as we got closer to the east side of the moon. Upon arrival at the Funky King's kingdom, we were met with smiles, not only was the Funky King thrilled for our return, but also his citizens.

The Funky King took us to his castle, where we gave him his mixtape back. He was very delighted, "was it a lot of trouble?" he asked.

"Nah...", I said.

"The Funky Queen was actually quite delightful, I can see why you married her," said Band.

"I can see why you divorced her," said Stick.

"Oh, I didn't divorce her, she divorced me," said his funkiness.

Stick was about to say something even wittier, but Band and I pinched him to tell him to shut up before we ended up saying too much about the Funky Queens mental state.

"Well, a deal is a deal!" said his funkiness, "time to send you on your way." He led us down to three prototype wing-sets that he had. He told us that the wing-sets offered a natural feeling to flying, "it's a similar instinct to walking, just start flying and go straight towards Earth... And once again, thank you for your help."

We took off from the ground and hovered just a few feet. That's when we heard a guard shout, "WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!" We raced up into the sky to see what was happening. It was the Funky Queen attacking the Funky King's kingdom single handedly. It was quite terrifying to say the least, many of the Funky King's guards died. When the Funky Queen reached the Funky King there were some words exchanged, we didn't know whether they were good words or bad words but when we saw the Funky Queen stab the Funky King, we had an idea of what kind of words they were. Nonetheless, it wasn't our problem anymore and we took to the Earth, back to our home.

## Phase 6

We entered the Earth's upper atmosphere with eagerness, but we still had to make it to the water. As we entered the Earth's troposphere something appeared to go wrong with Stick's wing-set, he stopped flying towards the planet and instead started flying parallel to it.

Suddenly Band spotted something, "Look that airplane! He's heading right towards it!"

We chased after him, it looked like he was going to slam into the side of the plane and cut it in half, but to our surprise he landed very safely on top of it. We landed beside him and asked him if anything was wrong with his wing-set. He told us no; he just wanted some peanuts.

We smiled and happily flew to the airplane's door and opened it. Of course, the passengers were none too pleased about this, I would go as far as to say they were quite terrified. But we loaded up on peanuts and headed on our way again.

Some people think we made it home safely and reproduced. Others believe we crashed and exploded in some horrible incident. But no matter what happened to us, know that nothing in our lives has been more freeing than being part of a risk.

# **THE MORAL AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS OF SLIPPING ON WET FLOORS**

## **Section I**

In my humble opinion (which is always correct), I think I am in a bit of a predicament, a conundrum, a quandary, a plight, a jam, a pickle, a sticky situation, or rather a slippery situation. Who knew that slipping on a wet floor could cause a rather existential moment for a person, to the point where it feels like time is moving millions of times slower? In other words, I am slipping on a wet floor right now and many people are looking in my general direction.

Since I have to endure a near eternity of falling, I should probably trigger the ‘my life flashed before my eyes’ cliché like everyone talks about. Or I could perhaps talk about the embarrassment that people like me so often have to endure when they make a small mistake like slipping next to a sign that has a man slipping on a wet floor that says ‘CAUTION’. I feel as though I have never related to a sign so much in my entire life. Is this how the man on the sign always feels? In a constant state of embarrassment, doomed to never stop falling?

Of course, eventually I will stop falling but it looks as though I will be here for a while. So, I might as well get comfortable with the idea.

## Section II

The thing about time travel is that it can be unreliable. In fact, it is so unreliable that it is literally impossible to time travel backwards without making an anti-impossible device or waiting until opposite day.

There are a lot of reasons why it is impossible to time travel backwards, the first of which being that time doesn't quite even exist. Another reason could also be the three paradoxes that time travel could potentially produce. If you are unaware of these paradoxes, allow me to explain.

The first paradox is known as the grandfather paradox. The grandfather paradox is where you find out that your grandfather was quite an asshole back in the day. Although he is quite a charming fellow now, you decide that his past behavior cannot be tolerated so, you decide to do the only rational thing. You jump in a time machine, go back to the days of his youth and kill him in cold blood. The result of you killing him is that he won't be an asshole anymore because he's dead, but if he's dead, one of your parents won't be born, therefore, you won't be born, so you cannot go back in time to kill your grandfather. So, your grandfather lives and is still an asshole, which means that one of your parents will be born, so you will be born, to which you go back in time to kill your grandfather and he won't be an asshole anymore. The same timeline where your grandfather lives (is an asshole) is the same timeline where he dies (isn't an asshole). Whoever came up with the idea for this paradox probably hates their relatives.

The second paradox is known as the bootstrap paradox. The bootstrap paradox is essentially where an object through time exists, but it doesn't have a known origin, it has just been drifting through time ever since its non-existent creation. For example, let's say that you get a knock at your doorbell (yes, a knock at your doorbell). You open the door and see a book. The book is titled, "How to Make a Time Machine," you wait until opposite day, then you make said time machine. Then you get in the time machine and go back in time to the day you got the book, you go to your front door, drop the book off, knock on the doorbell, and go back to your own original time. The book is now trapped in an endless time loop of you giving yourself the book. So, where did the book come from and who wrote it? Will the book eventually deteriorate after being read endlessly? The world doesn't know.

The third paradox is known as the fermi paradox. It is simply the paradox that asks the question, if backwards time travel is possible then where are all the time travelers from the future? I can actually answer that question; I am currently slipping on a wet floor. The thing that people don't understand about time travelers is that we have better things to do than to go

back to the exact time and place of these “time traveler stalkers.”

### **Section III**

As I have previously stated, backwards time travel is impossible, but that hasn't stopped people from commercializing it and selling it. I have been a time traveler for a few years now and the companies that sell it are very corrupt but also very reliable.

In the year 313131, (the year I came from) time travel booths were on every street corner. For 25 cents you could go forward or back in time for about 2 minutes. Before the companies took over, I made the first working time machine. My time machine only had one setback, it couldn't take people to the past or future, only the present. My time machine sold millions; I called my invention "a chair." Eventually the companies bought my technology, I made millions of dollars and now spend every waking moment in the year 313113. I am trying to figure out how to stop my parents from making the biggest mistake in the whole world, ME.

## **Section IV**

I have no idea who puts a wet floor in the middle of a hospital building. I also have no idea how I am going to stop my birth within the next 5 minutes when I am doomed to endure such an embarrassing fate as slipping on a wet floor.

Suddenly, I hit the ground. I see a large crowd around me start to laugh as I think about getting up. Nevertheless, I don't get up. I decide to sit on the ground and contemplate if I want to create a time paradox where I go back in time to kill myself, so I end up not killing myself, but then I do end up going back in time to kill myself. I figure that either way I am screwed.

I get up in the same way how an elderly person gets up when they are on the floor screaming about how they cannot get up. In other words, I don't. Until finally, I do.

## Section V

People continue to laugh as I continuously slip trying to get myself off the ground. Eventually, I get myself out of the embarrassment by simply running away from it. I run to the room number my mother told me so much about, “room 133113.”

I walk in and see my father and my mother holding hands as a doctor and some nurses accompany them. “Excuse me,” I speak up, “Hello.”

Everyone looks in my direction, “sir, you cannot be in here, only family members allowed,” says the doctor.

I take out my ID, “read it and weep. I’m the delivery.”

The doctor and my parents look at me in horror as they realize that I just came back in time to witness my own birth. Little do they know that I have actually come back in time to carry out my own death. I wait in anticipation.

Then finally, I (as a baby) came into this world. “It’s a boy,” says the doctor. I look at the doctor in confusion and say “duh” in my head. The doctor gives my mother the baby (me) and leaves along with the nurses.

I take a long look at myself and exhale softly, suddenly I don’t want to kill me. I don’t want to hurt a hair on my head. Instead, I look at my parents, how happy they look, how they are holding me lovingly. “I don’t want to ruin this,” I say to myself.

“Would you like to hold you?” my mother asks.

I nod and take me in my arms. I rock myself back and forward until suddenly, I drop myself on the head.

“Well, I didn’t expect that.” I say as I fade into nothingness.



## **Epilogue**

As a result of me dropping myself, the events of this story don't happen. But if the events of this story don't happen then I don't drop myself. And if I don't drop myself, the events of this story actually do happen. But if these events do happen then I drop myself. But if the events of this story don't happen then I don't drop myself. And if I don't drop myself, the events of this story actually do happen...

# UNTIL WE REACH RECORDIUM

## Volume 1

“Suddenly there was a crash, ‘twas rather gnarly. Was just about to close too. But man, that crash was extremely loud, even for the average Deep Purple fans of London.”

“And you say you heard it crash before you saw it?”

“What can I say? I have amazing hearing. I kinda have to in order to have this gig.”

“Well, I don’t understand what you mean by that, I thought you said you were wearing headphones inside and the crash happened right into the opposite side of the store, but whatever. Well kid, you’re free to go. No cuts, no wounds and you barely look traumatized. You can go home to your parents. We have to clean this mess up.”

“Hold on a second dude. A flying saucer crashed into the place I work, a few feet shy of killing me. I’m just a tad curious about why I don’t get to know a little more.”

“You’ll hear about it on the news and in the papers, don’t worry. This thing is just gonna bring an unnecessary amount of press to our small town.”

“I’ll try to steer clear of them. Can’t stand answering questions I don’t know. Y’know?”

“That’s the spirit, now let us get rid of this. You’ve had a long day; do you need to call your parents?”

“It’s all good, I have my phone if I need to call them. Have a nice night man.”

The red and white lights continued to flash on the brick wall, and through the windows, reflecting on some of the broken records littered about the shop.

Achilles got into his car and picked up his brick phone. He entered 7 digits, put it against his face, and hit the road.

“Hey kiddo, are you calling to ask what’s for dinner again?”

Achilles’s mom was pretty carefree with a go-with-the-flow kind of attitude. So, when Achilles told his mom what had happened, she asked if he was okay, but the conversation very quickly changed to other things like what was for dinner; it was Lasagna.

“How is dad doing?”

“Sitting on the couch looking at tapes he might want to give away.”

“Do me a favor and tell him to save any Frank Sinatra or Dean Martin tapes for me, I’m trying to get into that stuff.”

“I will honey, now get home quickly. Love you.” “Love you too, ma.”

Achilles hung up the phone and continued driving.

“Well, that was the perfect way to begin this summer,” he said to himself in a sarcastic tone, though he wasn’t very ticked off, he was more amused by the situation.

Achilles had been working at Mr. Johnson’s record store since the previous summer. But he didn’t have to deal with UFOs almost killing him until now, although he was fairly familiar with *Space Invaders* and *Galaga*. He realized that playing those arcade games was probably desensitizing him to the idea of an alien invasion, which he thought was pretty rad.

The idea of arcade games on a night off always made him feel good inside, he didn’t have the money for a home console, so he made do with what he had. Along with that, his mixtape of rock classics made his eyes light up with joy while standing for hours in front of coin-op games at local arcades. These daydreaming thoughts swept his mind as he continued to drive home, in sweet bliss.

### **Volume 1.33**

It was no secret that the government liked to hide things. That was the one thing they couldn't hide, other than that, it was extremely easy to tell whether or not the government knew about something prior to it happening. UFOs were quite strange in that respect. Was the government hiding the fact that aliens existed or were these flying objects a product of some foreign government? These were questions that the public asked, but then they realized that they didn't really care and just went back to whatever they were doing in the first place.

Achilles was similar to the public; he would be curious for a second but then go back to his own little world. However, the press sometimes had a field day when covering UFOs, meanwhile the government tried to silence them so as to not spread panic or false (or in this case true) assumptions. However, the government was spending too much time on the "War on Death" to the point where they were sending platoons into elderly homes to kill dying people in order to stop the spread of death. Still, it's fair to assume that the government had a smidge of time to keep UFOs a secret by silencing witnesses, even ones that weren't exactly too curious about what they had seen in the first place.

## Volume 1.66

Blue lights suddenly flashed behind Achilles, along with the short whine of a siren. Naturally, Achilles pulled over without question. A man stepped out of the vehicle and approached Achilles, who rolled his window down upon recognizing the sheriff in his side mirror.

“Hey Achilles, how are you doing son?”

“Hey! Sheriff Douglas, it’s great to see you!”

“You too, how are your parents doing?”

“Pretty good, I’m heading home right now. Heard my mom made some bitchin’ lasagna for me.”

“Perfect... Oh uh, do you know why I pulled you over tonight?”

“To tell you the truth, I do not.”

“Well, have you been smoking lately?”

“What, like weed?”

“Exactly... yes, the marijuana plant, the devil’s lettuce, the MaryJane... if you know what I mean,” the Sheriff said with a smirk on his face.

“Cannot say I have been lately, no.”

“Ugh... What have you become lately Achilles? A friggin’ narc? You used to be so chill.”

“Wait, Sheriff Douglas, you stoned right now dude?”

“Hell yeah, I am. You wanna puff?”

“Is this some kind of trick?”

“Kinda, but probably not what you think.”

“Well, I’ll pass on the weed but thanks.”

“No, please Achilles. Just try some.”

“I’d rather not but thank you.”

“Do you think this is some kind of joke? I’m offering you some really good stuff and for free.”

“You know what? Sure, I’ll have some if it’ll stop you from pressuring me.”

“Now that’s the spirit!” Sheriff Douglas ran to his car, took a blunt, gave it to Achilles and lit it up.

Upon Achilles inhaling the MaryJane, Sheriff Douglas opened Achilles car door, “Achilles Robinson you are under arrest for possession and marijuana usage.”

“What the hell man?”

“I’ll explain it to you when we get back to the station, but we need to make it look good and official.”

“What the hell are you talkin’ about?”

Without further explanation, Achilles was thrown to the ground and handcuffed. Within a few seconds he was in the back of the Sheriff’s car and on his way to the station.

## Volume 2

There was a knock at the Robinson's door.

"Just a minute!" yelled Mrs. Robinson, she was wearing a red apron and just removed lasagna from the oven.

"Don't worry honey, I'll get the door!" exclaimed Mr. Robinson as he walked to the door and looked through the peephole. The problem with the peephole was that at night you weren't able to see who it was. Even if it was still a little light out, the peephole didn't do a very good job to help identify who was there. Nevertheless Mr. Robinson opened the door. The light from the house suddenly illuminated the visitor.

"Hello Mr. Robinson, how goes it?"

"Hey Patrick, how are you doing, please come in. Achilles will be home in just a few minutes."

Patrick stepped into the house and took off his shoes.

"Smells good in here, what's Mrs. Robinson making?"

"Good ole fashioned lasagna, in fact if we have extra you can have some too."

"Thanks, but I just ate before I came over. My ma made some tacos."

"Is that Patrick I hear?" asked Mrs. Robinson as she rounded the corner to the front door after setting the dining table. "Hello Patrick," she continued, "The table is all set, sorry Patrick I wasn't expecting you to show up for dinner."

"That's alright, I'm just here to see Achilles."

"Well, he should be home any minute now," said Mrs. Robinson. "And I just finished cooking too. Who's hungry?!"

"I'm starving. Let's eat."

They all went to the dining table and sat down, Mr. and Mrs. Robinson started eating. Meanwhile Patrick sat there looking a bit bored.

"Do you guys' mind if I smoke?"

"Patrick, you know us. Feel free to light up," said Mrs. Robinson.

Patrick picked up his chair, lit it on fire, put his mouth on it and blew a big cloud of smoke.

"What the hell are you doing?" asked Mr. Robinson.

"Smokin' a chair. What the hell are you doing?"

"Well, two can play that game," said Mr. Robinson as he took some lasagna, rolled it up, lit it and took a puff.

"Honey, are you smoking my lasagna?"

Eventually, all three of them were smoking things all around the house. After about half an hour they all took a hit of Achilles's goldfish, which quickly turned into a fillet. They sat in the living room, contemplating what had just happened. Then they realized Achilles still wasn't home.

### Volume 3

"Alright we're here, now why the hell did you arrest me, Sheriff?"

"Officially, it was for possession of marijuana."

"Are you high? You gave it to me!"

"Indeed, I am, and I did. But please wait until we're inside my office for me to explain what's going on. It will all make even less sense in just a few moments."

Achilles stayed silent as the Sheriff led him out of the car and into the station. The Sheriff whispered something to the secretary on the way into his office. When they were finally inside his office, the Sheriff shut the door and closed all of the blinds looking in, then he took the handcuffs off Achilles.

"Okay, finally! Tell me what's going on."

"Alright, but before I do. You might need to take another puff because this is some extremely stressful stuff," said the Sheriff as he tried to give Achilles the blunt again.

"I'm not falling for that again!"

"Come on Achilles, this time I mean it. This situation has even me stressed to the max."

"Okay man, but if this is another trick, I am going to scream at you." Achilles took the blunt and the Sheriff lit it again.

After a few seconds, the Sheriff tackled Achilles once again.

"I SWEAR TO GOD, SHERIFF DOUGLAS!" Shouted Achilles.

"Sorry kid, force of habit," said the Sheriff as he picked Achilles up to his feet. "Alright," he continued, "so here we are."

"And why are we here?"

"Well, long story short the government told me to bring you to them. I think it has something to do with that UFO that practically crashed right into you."

"Well, what do they want with me?"

"I don't know but what I do know is that I will not turn you in without a fight. I mean I couldn't live with you being killed or brainwashed by the government. I'd much rather kill you myself."

"Wait so you're going to kill me?"

"Nonono... Definitely not, not right now."

"So, what are we gonna to do about it?"

"I have absolutely no clue! Why do you think? I'm high right now! God, I am so stressed."

Suddenly the Sheriff's door opened with extreme force. On the other side was Patrick along with Mr. and Mrs. Robinson.

“Achilles! See guys I told you he’d be here,” said Patrick.

“What did you do Achilles?” said Mr. and Mrs. Robinson in Unison.

“He smoked weed,” said Sheriff Douglas.

“Oh, shut up, Sheriff,” said Achilles, “tell them what you told me.”

Sheriff Douglas let out a huge sigh as he told all of them what the government asked him to do. Afterwards everyone fell silent for about 30 seconds.

Suddenly Patrick spoke up, “Where did they tell you to drop him off?”

“The military base just west of here,” said the Sheriff with another loud sigh.

“I don’t know about you guys but I’m extremely curious about what the government is hiding inside that base. We are all high, shouldn’t we just go there and see what we can find.”

“Patrick, that’s the dumbest idea I’ve ever heard. Man, I’m in!” exclaimed Achilles with a hyper voice.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Robinson objected to the suicide mission. But a 3 to 2 vote had them beat. The Sheriff wasn’t exactly onboard, but no one had a better plan, so he went along with it.

Mr. and Mrs. Robinson decided that they wouldn’t go but they would offer useless moral support from their house while continuing to binge smoke furniture.

Achilles, Patrick, and Officer Douglas made a really bad plan, said goodbye to Mr. and Mrs. Robinson and started driving to the military base to find out the truth once and for all.

“Do we seriously not have any other plan,” said Patrick, “honestly I was just spit-balling.”

“Kid, it’s a great plan, don’t worry about it.”

“Guy’s now that I think about it, we all just made a suicide pact,” said Achilles in a monotone voice.

“YAY!” they all exclaimed with such happiness in their voices.

Truth be told it was the worst plan you will probably ever hear out of anyone’s mouth, but they all thought it was the best course of action moving forward.

The plan went something like this: First, they would arrive at the front gate and show that they have Achilles. Second, they try to talk their way into the base. Third, they look around. And finally, they all leave.

The problem with their plan was that they knew what to do but had no idea how to actually execute it, instead they just winged it like a bunch of morons. In all fairness, they didn’t have blueprints of the place, but they continued to act like idiots. They all got slightly more stoned just before arriving at the base.



“Let me do the talking,” said the Sheriff.

They drove up right next to the security checkpoint gate where a man was waiting, he was half paying attention while sitting down, watching an episode of *Full House*, and playing *sudoku*.

“Hello!” shouted the Sheriff. “I have a delivery for the government.”

Without looking up from his puzzle, the man got up, walked over to a button and pushed it, he yawned and sat back down. About 5 seconds later the security gate opened.

“Dude did that actually work?” asked Achilles.

“I have to admit, I thought I’d have to do some more talking, but I guess they just trust me,” said the Sheriff.

“Well, where do we go from here? Where are we supposed to drop Achilles off at?” asked Patrick.

“Your guess is as good as mine. But the good news is that now we can find out what the hell is actually going on here. Should we get both of you some disguises?”

“No, definitely not. It’s not like we’re going to get caught or anything.”

The Sheriff drove around the base for a few minutes. He began to wonder where they might be able to find information about UFOs and witnesses. That’s when the car radio picked up some military personnel conversation.

“The alien spacecraft has been delivered to hangar 31,” they heard a soldier say.

“How did you guys get it there?” another soldier asked over the radio.

“We towed it.”

“What do you mean you towed it? It’s a freaking giant flying saucer, you’re telling me you towed it on the highway.”

“I never said we towed it on the highway, I just said we towed it.”

“Then how did you get it here?”

“The highway...”

A silence fell on the radio as if the transmission had been cut off.

“Did you guys hear what those dudes just said?” asked Achilles.

“Yeah, how do you tow something that big?” asked Patrick.

“That’s not the point!” said the Sheriff, “The point is that they towed it on the highway, they probably killed most of the people in traffic.”

“I think you’re both missing the point now.”

“Okay genius what’s the point?” asked Patrick impatiently.

“Fine. I don’t know what the point is! I just thought it was interesting!”

Then a stroke of genius came from the Sheriff's subconscious, "Let's go look at a random hangar, how about we start with number 31,"

Since no one had another plan, they decided to go along with the Sheriff's poor judgement, which was actually the smartest thing they had done all day.

Upon arrival at the hangar, they discovered that a bunch of soldiers were around. but then they spotted it: the giant flying saucer. It was in peak quality, didn't even look like it had a scratch on it. Under the middle of the ship there were stairs leading up into the center cockpit.

"Okay, we want to get in that ship. Now how do we do that?" asked Patrick. As previously stated, they didn't exactly have an actual plan to execute as much as they had a few guidelines that they were meant to follow.

"I don't know," said Achilles and the Sheriff in unison.

Suddenly Patrick had an idea, one that wasn't extremely stupid, but it still lacked the amount of information needed to be considered a normal plan. Nevertheless, once again they had no other options. About 30 seconds after Patrick told them his plan; it sprang into action.

Achilles and the Sheriff hopped out of the car and started walking towards the hangar, Achilles had his arms behind his back as if he had been handcuffed (though he hadn't been). The Sheriff was holding Achilles by his shoulder and pushing him forward.

All the soldiers came to the front of the hangar to see what the Sheriff was doing.

"I have a delivery for you all," said the Sheriff.

Meanwhile behind the soldiers, Patrick snuck up the stairs and into the flying saucer.

One of the soldiers thanked the Sheriff for bringing Achilles in and was just about to fill him in on the entire situation and this question of what was really going on. Everything seemed to be going really great, then the sound of gunshots came from inside the flying saucer.

A soldier ran out of the flying saucer screaming, "AH! A kid attacked me while I was eating my buffalo wings!"

Just as the soldier ran out, the flying saucer took off from the ground, it crashed into the walls of the hangar. The flying saucer was anything but steady in the air. During the chaos, the soldiers began to fire on the flying saucer, but it seemed to do no damage to the outside.

The flying saucer left the hangar and looked as though it was trying to take off. The Sheriff and Achilles tried to catch up to it, but it was no use. The flying saucer was already in the air and looked like it was about to ditch Achilles and the Sheriff.

Achilles knelt on the ground in defeat, hopeless to ever find out what the hell was going on. But suddenly, the flying

saucer backed up and activated its beam. Achilles began to float towards the light, meanwhile the soldiers fired at Achilles, but the beam canceled out all of the speed the bullets had, and they began to float up along with Achilles until he was finally safe within the flying saucer. The beam shut off and the flying saucer flew away.

“Hey Patrick, are you flying this thing?!” yelled Achilles.

“At first it was me but as soon as I got you in the beam, I set it to autopilot.”

“Alright man, but we have to go back for the Sheriff.”

“Okay but hold on this might get a tad bumpy,” said

Patrick as he attempted to take it off autopilot. After a few seconds of trying, Patrick’s face began to panic although the rest of his body looked normal.

“What’s wrong?” asked Achilles.

“We can’t go back for the Sheriff because I can’t take us off autopilot.”

Achilles blinked very slowly as sadness fell over his face. “Let’s find out where this flying saucer is taking us. That’s what he would have wanted us to do.”

Patrick let out a tear and quickly wiped it away.

“Dude, was that a tear?”

“No, it’s just smoking your pet goldfish with your parents is just so awesome.”

“WAIT, WHAT?!”

“Nothing.”

## Volume 4

The flying saucer continued through the atmosphere, reaching space in a matter of a few seconds, soon they were passed the moon.

The cockpit of the flying saucer was very plain, all that was inside was a bunch of buttons, levers, and umbrellas (for some weird reason). All of the levers, buttons, and umbrellas were marked with either: "Do not pull," "Do not press," or "Do not open."

Naturally Patrick took out an umbrella and opened it. Suddenly a beeping sound came from the umbrella, Patrick threw the umbrella, Achilles and Patrick both hit the deck thinking there were about to be blown up. After 5 beeps the umbrella started transforming, it transformed into a toaster, a microwave, an oven, a blender, a refrigerator, and finally a robot on two wheels, about three fourths the size of Patrick and Achilles.

"UNIVERSAL TRANSLATION SYSTEMS ACTIVATED" said the robot, which continued with, "Warning: Using me may result in death, by suicide, homicide, genocide or another cide."

"Cool," said Achilles.

"Hello, I am Melvin," said the Robot.

"Nice, is that an acronym for something?" asked Patrick.

"No, my robotic parents just hated me. My mother was a claw machine, and my dad was a skee-ball machine. Guess where they met?"

"Um, was it at an arcade?"

"Kind of, it is similar to what you humans refer to as a Dave & Busters. But in space they call it a 'Dinglestops endall' Busongoongas."

"Hm, interesting, well I am Achil..."

"Yes, yes I know, Achilles and Patrick."

"How did you know?"

"Why would I not know?"

"Well, do you know where this flying saucer is taking us?"

"I do but I can't tell you."

"Why? Is it because of your programming or somethin' like that?"

"No, I just like being a dick."

A loud beeping sound came from the ships panel, and a computer voice said, "Alert: you are half-way to your destination."

"Half-way? Damn that was fast," said Patrick.

"This flying saucer is very fast, and before we reach the destination, I need you both to promise me something."

“What is it?” asked Achilles.

“Don’t be weirded out by what happens when we get there... In the meantime, play *Pac-Man* on me,” said Melvin as he turned into an Arcade Machine.

“How do you know what *Pac-Man* is?” asked Patrick.

“Just play it on me, put a quarter in me!” said Melvin aggressively.

“My robotic companion... that was a little suggestive.”

“YEAH, I’M SUGGESTING YOU PLAY *PAC-MAN* ON ME, DO IT RIGHT NOW! PLEASE I’M SUFFERING!”

Achilles and Patrick looked at each other, they didn’t think it was very appropriate to play *Pac-Man* on such a machine before marriage, but they did so begrudgingly until they reached their destination.

## Volume 4.5

“Alert: you are about to reach your destination; autopilot will be turning off in a few moments. You must dock on your own,” said a computer voice.

“Okay, you heard the computer we are almost here. You can turn back into a normal robot again,” said Patrick.

“NO! KEEP GOING, KEEP PLAYING *PAC-MAN*! YOU ONLY HAVE 100,000 POINTS AND YOU ONLY HAVE 3 KEYS! YOU HAVE TO BEAT ALL 256 SCREENS IN ORDER TO SATISFY ME!”

“What the hell dude?” said Achilles, “Listen man, *Pac-Man*, robot, whatever you are. Listen to me, we need to dock the ship. Can you just help us out for a few minutes! We need to survive!”

“HOW CAN YOU BE WORRIED ABOUT SURVIVAL AT A TIME LIKE THIS?! I NEED YOU TO DO ALL OF THE SCREENS AND GET ALL THE POINTS AND EAT ALL THE GHOSTS! I NEED SOMEONE TO GET 3,333,360 points! THAT IS THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE SCORE AND THAT IS THE ONLY THING THAT WILL SATISFY ME!”

“Alert: autopilot is now off.”

Although autopilot was off, the ship hadn’t stopped moving on account of there being no air resistance in the vast vacuum of space. Through the cockpit window, they saw it. A very large, weird looking docking station for the flying saucer, there was a giant diamond needle right above and to the right of where the docking station was. Below the docking station was the rest of the space-station.

Patrick looked at Achilles, “Okay, I’m gonna try to dock this thing.”

“NO! YOU WILL NOT, YOU WILL BOTH HAVE TO PLAY *PAC-MAN* AND WATCH EACH OTHER PLAYING! I HAVE SPOKEN AND IT WILL BE DONE THAT WAY OR ELSE YOU WILL DIE!”

Achilles leaned into Patrick’s ear and whispered, “He clearly is mechanically unstable. I’ll try to kill him; you try to land this thing. Sound like a plan?”

“I HEARD THAT! YOU GUYS AREN’T GOING ANYWHERE!” In less than 5 seconds Melvin turned himself from an arcade machine into an arcade machine with really sharp teeth and semi-attractive metallic legs.

Everyone began running around the cockpit in chaos, neither Achilles nor Patrick knew what to do in this situation. The only thing they could do was wait until they inevitably crashed through the top of the docking station. But just before they could crash Patrick pressed all of the buttons labeled “Do not press” and pulled all of the levers labeled “Do not pull.” For

some strange reason this appeared to work. Melvin turned back into an umbrella and the flying saucer successfully docked on top of the space-station.

As the flying saucer docked, the diamond needle came down onto the flying saucer, appearing to hold it in place but the outside of the flying saucer appeared to be spinning while the cockpit stayed still in the middle. Then music started playing, but Patrick nor Achilles could identify the song or band, although it appeared to be a rock song in English.

Suddenly a piece of the floor in the cockpit opened up and the stairs led down into the space-station. Achilles and Patrick went down into it.

"Why the hell is my vinyl record back? And who are you guys?" asked an orange alien with purple hair upon Achilles and Patrick coming down the steps.

"Hey, man. This is kinda awkward, but we jumped in this flying saucer and the autopilot brought us here, so that's how our night is going," said Achilles, with Patrick nodding beside him.

"Well, you guys were about to crash into my record-playing space-station. Thank God/me that I saw you guys and caught you in my tractor beam."

Patrick realized that pushing buttons and pulling levers did nothing to land the ship, but he was just happy that it might've saved them from the wrath of Melvin.

"Do you know why there are umbrellas in the ship?" asked Patrick.

"You didn't open one, did you?"

"Yeah, one went a little mad and made us play *Pac-Man* on him, but he made me feel extremely dirty about it and then he tried to kill us until the flying saucer started to land."

"Yeah, tractor beams can disable those little demons. I guess you guys owe me for that as well... I still have no idea why the autopilot would take you here after I sent it back to Johnson's Record Shop."

"Wait you ordered this from Johnson's Record Shop?" asked Achilles.

"Yeah, and I sent it back to return it. I'm looking for a better record to listen to forever. This album is kind of dull. I mean the first song is great but the rest do not match the high energy and the hype of the first song."

"Um... Achilles," said Patrick, "Did we go into space just to discover that there is a pretty chill guy up here who just wants to listen to music? Is this what the government wanted to hide?"

For the first time ever, Achilles actually seemed to be pissed off, "Holy crap, this is the dumbest thing ever. I actually risked my life in order to get here! We don't even know if the Sheriff is still..."

The alien cut off Achilles from speaking, "The Sheriff is alive."

"Wait how do you even know? Are you God?"

"I am slightly God, and this is my record playing space-station. I call it 'Recordium.'"

"So, we travelled all this way and risked so much just to find out that God has a giant space-station he uses to listen to records?" asked Patrick.

"Y'know what guys? You're kinda harshing the vibe. Do me a favor and return this to Earth, I already got my money back, so it doesn't matter to me. I just don't wanna listen to this album again."

Achilles and Patrick looked at each other, then looked at the supposed God. "I'll set your autopilot to the military base. I know you wanna go help the Sheriff, just do me a favor; don't come back here."

That was fine by them, all that was on Achilles's and Patrick's mind was anger towards the government for hiding something so unworthy of hiding.

So, God sent them off on their way after a very anti-climactic climax.



## Volume 5

Revenge was in order, in about 25 minutes the flying saucer reached Earth again and landed in the middle of the military base. Achilles and Patrick decided they were gonna get the Sheriff and go home. Patrick took Melvin the umbrella just in case he felt the need to activate him. They both walked down the stairs and onto the military base where they were greeted by several military personnel surrounding them.

That's when Patrick began to speak. "Did you morons really try to hide the fact that God exists and that he has a giant record player?! That is such a boring secret to hide! If it wasn't a secret, it would actually be really cool to know! But I had to do a lot just to learn that crap. In the span of just a few hours I smoked a goldfish, stole a flying saucer, played a decent game of *Pac-Man* on a perverted arcade machine, and met God! That isn't normal teenage crap! You guys are idiots! I guess I'm an idiot as well but come on! We're here to take the Sheriff and go home! Maybe you guys can declassify the fact that there is an all-rad benevolent God or something!"

The military personnel looked at each other with distaste. Then the familiar voice of Sheriff Douglass exclaimed, "Hey guys! I knew you'd come back!" The Sheriff had his hands behind his back as if he had handcuffs on (even though he actually didn't). He was being pushed forward through the crowd of military personnel towards Patrick and Achilles before finally being thrown on the ground right beside them.

"Men, wait for my command to execute the traitors," said one of the military personnel in the crowd.

"Wait, it should be me who commands their execution," said another one of the military personnel.

"No, it should be me," yet another voice said.

"Guys come on, what about me?"

This went on for quite a few minutes as all of the military personnel argued about who should be in command and give the word to execute the so-called "traitors." Eventually one soldier shot another soldier. As soon as that happened there was a consensus that everyone there should just shoot each other.

The very second that guns started firing Patrick opened the umbrella and released the wrath of Melvin, the perverted arcade machine. Melvin once again transformed into an arcade machine with sharp teeth and semi-attractive metallic legs.

At that moment, it was clear that chaos was being unleashed and that Patrick, Achilles, and the Sheriff had to hit the road. They ran from the blood bath and to a military jeep parked just a few hundred feet away from them. Achilles got into the Driver's seat and Patrick got into the passenger side. The Sheriff opened the back car door but froze for just a second

and looked at a building behind them. He slammed the back car door shut and ran towards the building.

“What is that strange man doing now?” asked Achilles.

The Sheriff ran into the building, grabbed a fire extinguisher then ran right back out. He ran back to the jeep and jumped inside whilst cradling a fire extinguisher. Achilles hit the gas, the military jeep accelerated forward like a rocket blasting off, while the song “This Wheel’s on Fire” played by The Band came on the radio. Achilles ran through the fence and drove on grass until he got on the highway.

“Why did you grab the fire extinguisher?” asked Patrick.

The Sheriff put the nozzle in his mouth and then pushed down on the handle. He inhaled then exhaled and a big cloud of smoke came out of his mouth.

“Dude, you got it just to get high?!” shouted Achilles.

Suddenly A Risk of Flying Lobsters came out of the sky, fell onto the jeep, and exploded just as the chorus ended.

THERE WERE NO SURVIVORS!

# **THE HILARITY OF GALACTICALLY ILLEGAL SUBSTANCES**

## **Episode 1**

“Stop firing at me, you bastards!” Harold shouted as he began to think about what he could’ve done differently. Maybe I could’ve chosen another career path rather than making and selling drugs, he thought to himself. Turns out his high school guidance counselor was wrong, making and selling drugs wasn’t taking the easy way out.

“This is the Galactic Police, stop your space-drug-van or we will fire once more!” Harold began to think again, but to no avail. He set his projections for lightspeed so he could get away, normally it only took him but a few seconds before he could do the math, so he could be out of there in no time. But Harold wasn’t a very good multi-tasker, taking evasive action, whilst setting a course through lightspeed, whilst trying to stop laughing, was hard to manage, whilst his space-drug-van was under fire.

Before all of this, he was just returning from a successful meth cookin’ in the Kuiper belt and didn’t expect space police within the solar system but when he passed near Callisto, they were waiting right there for him.

This high-speed space chase not only rhymed but was starting to come to a close. Harold needed just one more second before he could blast off and escape the tyranny of the space police, which of course he did.

He got up from the cockpit and checked his cargo, everything was still in place except for one pound of meth that had been taken and hidden by Harold’s robotic companion, Doug. Doug was a humanoid android which Harold had found discarded inside a gas station dumpster a few years back. He took pity on him and repaired him over night, of course now Doug looked less like a humanoid and more like an empty aluminum beer can.

Harold peered at Doug in the corner, “what did I tell you?” asked Harold.

“It was just in case we got boarded, you know I would never steal drugs from you.” Doug looked at Harold with such innocence.

“Sure, but please don’t use any of that, you know that stuff fries your circuits.” Doug nodded in agreement at this remark.

Harold went back into the cockpit to take them out of lightspeed, they were now at the asteroid belt where they would have to fly manually. These boys were on a heroic mission to deliver drugs to Earth and restore chaos to the known universe.

## **Episode 1.25**

In the early days of the Universal Galactic Affiliation Under Powers (UGAUP) a law was signed which made illegal drugs illegal. However, on the planet Earth, no one paid any attention to the political decisions of the UGAUP Parliament. And honestly, who could blame them? It was hard enough trying to figure out how their own Earthlings spoke, but translation was tough throughout the entire known universe itself. As a result, Earthlings tended to ignore every law, which had made Earth the best place to live on planet Earth. In other words, it was an anarchy.

Of course, UGAUP had tried to settle the planet Earth down into a civilized society, but any attempts to do this had been thwarted time and time again due to the nature of humans. UGAUP would send peaceful aliens with the hopes to build civilized societies, but Earthlings would kill them because they looked different.

You are probably wondering why I'm telling you about the dumbest intelligent species. Well, it's simple, for comedic and poetic value and it should be worth mentioning that our main character was also from Earth. You see, drug usage on Earth had only gotten worse, which is why two beings were on a journey to make it even worse.

## Episode 1.5

Harold grabbed hold of the controls and started weaving his way in and out and up and down taking all evasive maneuvers through the asteroid belt. Once again trying to not attract the attention of space police.

Harold's space-drug-van was actually decently sized, almost the same size as an RV back on Earth. His space-drug-van was built perfectly but with one design flaw, it needed fuel every so often and sadly "every so often" was right now.

Harold looked down at the Dashboard, at the empty fuel light which was now blinking and taunting him.

Harold yelled to the back, "Hey Doug, I thought I told you to fill this thing up before we left!"

"Yeah, you sure did."

"Okay..."

"I didn't."

Harold started to scream at Doug, going hysterical by the thought of them being stranded out in the asteroid belt.

"Harold, please relax," said Doug, "did you forget that Ceres is literally a few hundred miles away? We can refill there."

Suddenly Harold regained his composure and started heading towards Ceres.

Ceres had been a popular fill up spot among many of the space truckers. It became a hotspot for gas stations, diners, coffee, pharmaceuticals, narcotics, human enslavement rings, etc. Whatever you wanted, you would likely find on Ceres, except a girlfriend.

Harold and Doug flew twenty minutes until they finally reached the surface of Ceres. Throughout those twenty minutes Harold and Doug talked about their dreams of becoming space-drug-lords but those dreams had always been undermined by the competition.

"The competition" wasn't really any other sellers or manufacturers at that moment but 'twas mostly the fact that the galactic police stopped Harold and Doug every so often after they cooked a mean batch.

When they did get stopped by the police, Doug would shove all of the substances inside of his circuits and inner workings. Doug's artificial body wouldn't know how to respond to the sudden pleasure and relief of drugs. As a result, Doug's behavior would shift in some sort of way, sometimes it would be his body, sometimes his language, sometimes his body language. His language settings liked to switch to Latin after he took drugs for some reason and Harold always needs to reprogram him back and restore his memory. Doug was pretty much a Swiss army knife of both usefulness and unusefulness in the eyes of Harold, but Harold loved him anyway despite that.

As Ceres got closer, the space-drug-van made its dissent through the non-existent clouds. Further and further until it reached the surface of the immense asteroid.

The space-drug-van landed on Ceres's surface next to a fuel pump, in the distance was a convenient store. Harold decided that Doug should go by the convenient store dumpster and try to sell some spacespeed. Doug couldn't protest against Harold's request; his programming wouldn't allow him to. Doug got out and leaped over to the store where he would try to win people over with spectacular people skills.

Meanwhile, Harold stayed behind at the fuel pump. He felt a pair of eyes watching from behind him. He turned around and saw two Martians who appeared to be in tourist clothes, they both had green skin, ginger hair (the worst kind of hair), and three and a half eyes. Harold happened to overhear the conversation they were having. It was something about how people who listened in on other being's conversations were dumb and probably had two eyes and were looking in their general direction as they spoke.

Over by the dumpster, Doug got three aliens interested in the product of space-speed. It is important to note that not all organisms have the same response when it comes to space-speed. The majority of organisms in the known universe begin to trip out when they snort, ingest, inject, or smoke it. However, to a large organism such as a Blyzorpian, space-speed is more like caffeine or other safe stimulants like tobacco.

The aliens that were talking to Doug were very small and frail, they probably wouldn't get very far if they were tripping out on space-speed. But suddenly these three aliens morphed into one being, one who was buff and large in size. The being stood at 7 feet tall, with orange skin and purple eyes. Doug looked up in amazement at his potential buyer. From what Doug could gather, it looked like his buyer was a shapeshifter of some kind.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you," the alien said, "my name is Aries by the way. I'm sorry, I can't buy it right now. I need some money, I just got laid off from my bodyguard job at the intergalactic bank for letting some guys into the vault. Apparently the 'I thought they were cool' excuse doesn't work with the space-bank supervisors."

"I'm really sorry to hear about that, well not really. I'm not programmed with sorrow receptors but that is surely bad news for you. Hey, you know what? I might have an idea for you."

A few minutes later Doug and Aries walked over to Harold, he was in a deadly argument with two Martians about eavesdropping in on other's conversations. Without any context to the prior transaction between Harold and these two Martians,

Aries lifted both of the Martians up and chucked them into Ceres's orbit.

"I like this guy," said Harold, "what's his story?"

"Got fired from a security position at the bank. I thought we could use some more muscle in our crew, at least for this job. Also, I think he's a shapeshifter," said Doug.

Aries turned back, "Hi, I'm Aries," he said as he shook Harold's hand in excitement.

"It's a pleasure, sir. But please understand if you are going to be in this crew you must understand one thing... we deliver space-speed in our space-drug-van to Earth, in order to maintain chaos throughout the solar system."

"I didn't know that's what we did!" said Doug, acting all surprised.

"If that's your mission statement then please sign me up! I am very glad to know that I'll be working with and protecting y'all," said Aries.

"Alright, you're one of us now, don't forget it!" said Harold, "I got us all fueled up and if you're both ready to go then so am I."

Doug and Aries nodded and made their way into the space-drug-van followed by Harold. The space-drug-van took off after they all took a seat, ready to fly to Earth once more.

"Do you have a name for your space-drug-van?" asked Aries.

"Nope," said Doug and Harold in unison.

"We just like to call it the space-drug-van, it is a very appropriate name for what it does," said Doug.

"I mean, space-drug-van is kind of a mouthful now that I think about it," said Harold, trying to think of a new name, "I'll tell you what, Aries, if you can think of a good name then we'll name the ship whatever you like."

"I'll have to think about it, thank you."

Suddenly, the yet to be named space-drug-van received a distress beacon from somewhere between Mars and the asteroid belt.

"What do you boys think? Should we take it?" asked Harold while pointing at the distress beacon display on his monitor.

"Nah," said Doug, "I have a bad feeling about it."

"You're not programmed with feelings!" exclaimed Harold, "how about you Aries?"

"Let's help folks that need helping. I've been in situations where I've called for help and I knew people could hear me, but no one ever helped me," Aries said in a sorrowful way.

Harold could infer from that statement that Aries had a great deal of trauma in his life. "I'll take that as a yes. I'll bring

us in, if the crew is dead, we can scavenge whatever is left over.”

“I’m sure it won’t come to that,” said Doug, “I’m sure whatever set off that beacon has probably destroyed that entire vessel, so we won’t have to scavenge.”

“I apologize, he’s not exactly programmed with enthusiasm,” said Harold.

“What exactly is he programmed with?” asked Aries.

Doug chimed in, “I don’t know, I don’t feel sorrow, empathy, love, hate, regret, guilt, or remorse. Maybe I feel slight lust but that’s about it.”

“He’s kind of a psychopathic robot. If you’re into that sort of thing.”

As the space-drug-van made its way to the distress beacon, a song came on the space-radio. The song was “The Burning of the Midnight Lamp” by The Jimi Hendrix Experience.

“The Midnight Lamp,” said Aries, “That’s it.”

“What’s it?” asked Doug.

“The name... the name I want to give to this van, my new home.”

Harold turned up the radio, the crew of the Midnight Lamp headbanged until they got to the sight of the distress beacon signal.



## Episode 1.75

They strolled up to the sight still blasting music and prepared to die. There was a small debris field surrounding a very large, abandoned space-cruiser. Much of the hull was damaged but a lot of the ship still appeared to be functioning properly.

The Midnight Lamp flew around the ship about 3 and a half times until they found the docking hangar.

"Okay boys, before we land in the hangar, we need to discuss some ground rules," said Harold with authority in his voice.

"No," said Doug.

"Okay."

They flew their way into the hangar and landed next to another ship. The other ship wasn't very unlike the Midnight Lamp, it appeared to be an Earth-like vehicle, but instead of it resembling a van or a recreational vehicle it looked more like a bus.

"Looks like someone else is already here," said Aries.

"Look, guys I don't want to take any chances. We don't know whether these 'bus-guys' are here to help or harm. That's why we're gonna go in guns a blazing," explained Harold.

"No," said Doug.

"Okay."

"Why don't we just stay cautious and draw our guns if and when we need to?" asked Aries.

"Now that sounds like an actual plan," said Doug, "let's do that!"

Harold reached in the glove compartment, grabbed three guns, holstered one and handed the other two to Aries and Doug. One at a time they stepped out of the Midnight Lamp, first Doug who told the rest of them the coast was clear, then Aries to confirm Doug's claims, then Harold.

The hangar was illuminated by a red emergency light with an automated voice over the intercom saying, "EMERGENCY, THIS SHIP WILL SELF-DESTRUCT IN 20 MINUTES!"

"Let's go boys!" said Doug in an enthusiastic voice, "we need to be quick if we want to loot the ship!"

"Now hold on," said Aries.

"What?"

"Shouldn't we look around first? Maybe there is someone onboard, we can help them."

"No."

"Now I'm going to have to interject," said Harold, "Aries is right, let's try to help..."

"Thank you."

“Help them now, then we rob them or maybe hold them ransom to make a few bucks on the side!”

“Now that’s more like it,” said Doug.

“So, you want to kidnap them?” asked Aries.

“We aren’t kidnapping them, we are merely taking them away from a dangerous situation and putting them into our care, but we won’t let them go until a fee has been paid for our heroic services.”

“No,” said Aries.

“Okay.”

It seemed that the word ‘no’ became the main influence of what this crew did and didn’t do. However, if the crew couldn’t agree on something then they settled their arguments like men. Long story short, Aries won the game of rock, paper, scissors. Of course, right after Aries won Doug said, “it’s best two out of three.” But everyone knew that it really wasn’t.

“Okay, now that that’s settled let’s find some actual organisms to save!”

## Episode 2

“EMERGENCY, THIS SHIP WILL SELF-DESTRUCT IN 15 MINUTES!”

A crew member of the large vessel awoke from a deep sleep to discover everything had pretty much gone to crap.

“At least we have insurance,” he said as he fell back asleep. “Wait, my life is probably in danger!”

He got up from his bed and looked around the crew’s quarters to discover he was the only one around.

In the event of a disaster, he was to destroy any ‘space-invaders’ on-board.

He thought for a moment, then he sprinted out of the crew’s quarters down to the arcade where he found a hammer to smash the arcade machine.

“Now that that’s over with, let me find out what’s actually wrong.” Realizing that he had no time to lose, he ran to the armory just across the hall.

The armory was filled to the brim with corpses of his fallen comrades, “who could’ve done this?!” he asked himself. With vengeance in his heart, he filled up on guns and ammo before venturing further into the ship.

He decided that he would make his way to the cafeteria; he couldn’t fight on an empty stomach.

“EMERGENCY, THIS SHIP WILL SELF-DESTRUCT IN 10 MINUTES!”

As he was about to turn into the cafeteria, he heard voices sitting at a table, talking about the value of the loot they had just gotten from the ship’s vault. These were the voices of pirates, and he knew it. With no thought nor consideration for how many crew members they had just killed, he left cover, took his pistol out, pointed it at them and said, “Put your hands up, I am Lieutenant Livid... he stuttered, “now Captain Livid, thank you for the promotion.”

“Okay boys, you know what to do,” the pirate leader said.

“But I don’t want to carry another corpse all the way to the armory!” said a big buff pirate with a frown on his face.

“Very well,” the pirate leader turned to Captain Livid, “okay Captain, walk to the armory.”

“No.”

“You want to do this the hard way?”

“What hard way? I am going to die! Only decision I have left is whether or not I can make your life a bit harder. Why are you putting bodies in the armory anyway?”

“Less of a smell,” the big buff pirate said.

“Okay, you know this ship is going to self-destruct in 10 minutes, right?”

“No, it’s not.”

“EMERGENCY, THIS SHIP WILL SELF-DESTRUCT IN 8 MINUTES!”

“See, it’s not going to self-destruct in 10 minutes. You were wrong.”

At this point, Captain Livid had had enough of their games and just dropped his weapons, got on his knees, and waited for his death. The buff pirate took out his gun and aimed it at Captain Livid’s head.

Unbeknownst to the pirates, the crew of the Midnight Lamp was on-board and just right down the hall. Meanwhile, in the cafeteria the big buff pirate pulled the trigger.

“Damn, it’s jammed.”

“Jammed? Let me see that,” the pirate leader said as he looked straight down the barrel of the gun. Suddenly, the pirate leader wasn’t very alive shortly after that.

“Um... boss, are you okay?” They sat quietly and waited for a response but would get none. Meanwhile, the crew of the Midnight Lamp heard the gunshot and came to the dead person’s rescue. They rounded the corner and saw the pirates along with Captain Livid and a corpse.

“Hey!” shouted Harold.

“I’m confused, let’s just fire at them,” said Doug.

Surprisingly after that statement, a huge gunfight began. Captain Livid made his way behind cover and began to weigh his options. After a second of thinking he decided that he didn’t know what to do. Captain Livid would stay behind cover for the next few seconds while this gunfight happened.

Harold shot and killed about 3 of them including the big buff guy. Doug and Aries tackled the other 2 and strangled them right next to the cafeteria table. Doug then got into a position where he could kill Captain Livid who had been taking cover for the entire duration of the gunfight. But before he could do that, Captain Livid put his arms up and shouted, “Don’t shoot! What do you want?!”

“We’re here to help,” said Doug as he cocked his gun back and pointed it at Captain Livid’s head. “Now say goodnight pal.”

“Goodnight pal? The pirates already tried this and look what happened to them! So, I encourage you to pull the trigger, I obviously have plot armor.”

“Wait, don’t Doug,” Aries said, “so you’re not with the group of people we just killed?”

“Nope.”

“Huh. Wow!” said Harold, “This is quite awkward.”

“Yup.”

“So do you guys want me to kill this guy?” asked Doug.

Harold and Aries gave him an expression that seemed to say ‘duh.’ Doug looked at them then back at Captain Livid

before he decided to pull the trigger. But the only thing to be heard was a click instead of a loud bang, it was official; Captain Livid was given plot armor for some weird reason.

They all stood around looking at each other for a moment in dead silence, this dead silence caused laughing to start among the group. However, Captain Livid didn't find it particularly funny for the first few seconds, but then he began to laugh, nonetheless.

Harold reached an arm down to Captain Livid, "Let's go, the ship is going to self-destruct in like 6 minutes.

"You're right. Let's go, is your ship in the hangar?"

"Yes, it is!"

"Follow me, I know the shortest way there, should take us about 5 minutes..."

"EMERGENCY, THIS SHIP WILL SELF-DESTRUCT IN 4 MINUTES!"

"Don't worry, we'll get out of here in one piece," said Aries.

They each began to sprint in single file behind Captain Livid. During the sprint, Harold decided that it would be an appropriate time to formally introduce himself and his crew to Captain Livid. One by one, the crew of the Midnight Lamp told Captain Livid their names, occupation in space-speed manufacturing, and how they decided to come to his aid. Captain Livid of course, introduced himself and told the crew of the Midnight Lamp how he got a recent promotion due to the fact that everyone else died. Captain Livid was actually the lowest ranked person on-board which made the crew of the Midnight Lamp very suspicious that he killed everyone else on-board, just to get that promotion. Captain Livid also told the boys his first name, "Fork."

"You ever try putting yourself in a power outlet?" asked Harold.

"Unfortunately, I have... I don't want to get into it."

"I'm sure you did."

They continued to sprint through each of the corridors, taking the stairs, never the elevators, especially in an emergency.

"EMERGENCY, THIS SHIP WILL SELF-DESTRUCT IN 60 seconds!" The ship began to count down in second increments. They made their way closer to the hangar, passing a soda vending machine which Doug decided that he needed. Naturally, Doug picked it up and decided that he would carry it the rest of the way.

They were down to 30 seconds, the only thing between them and escaping was a narrow doorway, everyone else ran through it with ease, but Doug couldn't fit with the vending machine. Everyone began to yell at him to drop the vending machine and just run. But Doug couldn't do it, "no, I love her!"

he shouted as he rammed the vending machine through the wall. Surprisingly, with the power of love he was able to get through with the vending machine.

They all rushed to the Midnight Lamp, Doug got himself and his soda vending machine in through the back while everyone else went in through the side door. Harold quickly turned on the radio so they could have something to listen to while they escaped, "The Power of Love" by Huey Lewis and the News began to play. With 10 seconds left until self-destruction they blasted off and tried to get as far away from the explosion as possible. They were almost home free, but as the explosion went off it threw some debris their way. Harold took all evasive maneuvers that he could, but the debris caught up with him and the primary power was taken out.

## Episode 2.5

All organic life on the Midnight Lamp fell unconscious as a second thud was heard. They kept drifting through space, hitting debris but nevertheless drifting further away from the explosion sight.

Suddenly, Doug stopped making out with the vending machine, looked up and realized what had just occurred. He walked over to the life support module to check if it was still functioning, he let out a sad sigh as he realized that oxygen levels were still good and that everyone seemed to be breathing fine. He then walked up to the pilot's seat, lifted Harold up, and chucked him to the back. Doug was always very nurturing to Harold in times like these.

Doug took a seat in the pilot chair and plugged himself into the ship to jumpstart the power. After 5 minutes of crying because his non-existent dad never taught him how to jumpstart a vehicle; he managed to make it work and power was back online. Doug unplugged, turned on auto-pilot, and set a course towards Earth.

Doug believed his work was done and once again started a well-deserved make out session with the vending machine.

Aries came back to consciousness and looked around to see what had just transpired. "What happened?"

"I saved us... you're welcome," explained Doug with pride in his voice.

"Thank you, I guess... shouldn't we try to wake them up?"

"You can, my programming is merely to keep y'all alive; not to keep everyone conscious."

Aries looked at Doug then at his two comrades, he knelt and used his shape shifting abilities to split himself into two. One of his bodies went to Harold, the other body to Fork. He tried nursing them back to consciousness by slapping them. When that didn't work, he instead tried punching them. Eventually both Harold and Fork woke up, but not because of the punches, they simply woke up because they felt like it.

"What happened?" asked Harold.

"You both got beat up pretty bad..." explained both the bodies of Aries.

"From the ship being hit?" asked Fork.

"Yes... from the ship being hit," said Aries as he morphed back into one being.

Harold got up and walked to the cockpit. "Thank God our systems came back online!" he shouted to the back.

"Don't thank God, thank me!" Doug shouted.

Harold looked down at the control panel and studied the Midnight Lamp's route projection. He walked to the back of

the van to address his fellow men, “okay so do you want the good news or the bad news?”

Everyone stared at him in unsettling silence.

“Well, the good news is that we don’t have to rely on my flying skills because I cannot control the ship manually, ergo we can’t land properly. That being said it looks like the autopilot is going to miss Earth and we will crash-land safely on Venus.”

“Okay and the bad news?” asked Doug.

“Well in that case, I guess there is no bad news... but we should probably start panicking.”

Surprisingly, everyone began to panic all the way from Mars to the upper atmosphere of Venus. As the Midnight Lamp descended it caught on fire and everyone except for Fork stopped panicking as they realized that Jimi Hendrix’s song foreshadowed this very moment. Doug even took a moment to strangle Aries for the name that he chose for the space-drug-van.

They descended from the atmosphere at great speeds with nothing to slow them down. The crew of the Midnight Lamp looked through the window in horror as they tumbled towards Venus. As they made contact with the ground, a sudden SPLAT was felt inside the space-drug-van as there was a loud thud to be heard from outside of it, followed by a few seconds of silence.



### **Episode 3**

In the days of yore, Venus was known for being the hottest planet in the solar system with lightning storms and volcanic eruptions on a constant basis. At the time it was considered extremely dangerous to even walk on the surface for a few minutes. However, it wasn't very long until after the 27th century started, that humans could fully utilize a technology invented in the 20th century. The technology would go on to cool Venus down and allow people to settle upon it. In simpler terms: Venus was no longer hot because they installed some air conditioning.

As a result of people being able to settle on the planet, some of them created cult-like tribes. The people who didn't create cult-like tribes began to industrialize and urbanize the planet. Many wars were fought over who would control Venus, but no one was ever declared a winner.

As the last war on Venus came to a close, all of the cult-like tribes morphed into one big cult-like tribe. The urbanized businessmen and bureaucrats decided to offer up a treaty, on account of them not being able to afford these wars anymore. The term of the treaty was that the western hemisphere would be urbanized, while the eastern hemisphere would belong to the tribe. The tribe accepted the treaty. As a result, the fighting ceased and thus marked the end of the Venus Civil Wars.

### Episode 3.5

Surprisingly, no one on-board was killed or knocked out cold from the crash. However, Frank (a prominent Venus-tribe member) was crushed due to the Midnight Lamp's inability to land properly. The Midnight Lamp was still in one piece, but it wouldn't be able to function properly without a major repair from the local mechanic.

"Is everyone okay?" asked Harold.

Everyone stood up and looked around at each other. It appeared that the Midnight Lamp was at a slant and partially inside the surface of Venus, they all climbed their way up the slant and out the back of the Midnight Lamp. They were greeted by a crowd of tribespeople who just witnessed the death of their beloved brother, Frank.

"They killed Frank!" a voice shouted from the crowd, "kill them!" The crowd began to charge at them in all directions.

"It's every man-alien-robot for themselves!" shouted Doug as he hopped back into the Midnight Lamp and grabbed the soda vending machine. He hopped back out, as he landed on the ground, the tribespeople immediately stopped in awe and stared at the vending machine.

The tribespeople began to whisper amongst themselves in an optimistic tone. Doug put down the vending machine. A moment later all the tribespeople began to bow down to the Midnight Lamp crew and the vending machine saying, "It is the will of the great soda."

"Um... guys what's going on?" asked Harold.

"We should bring them to Father Brewer," a voice from the crowd suggested.

The Midnight Lamp crew looked around and realized they didn't have any options. "We will go with you, we don't want any trouble," said Harold.

A tribesman pointed at Doug and then pointed at the vending machine, "please carry the idol with you, we are not fit nor worthy to lift it." Doug picked up the vending machine with enthusiasm. The crew followed the crowd. They were not far from a large village which also happened to be the capital of the tribe side of Venus, 'Sovillda.'

When they got into Sovillda, they saw houses, marketplaces, then the grand Sovillda church. All structures were either made out of plastic, glass, or aluminum and the main currency in the marketplace appeared to be pull-tabs from soda-cans. The church was by far the tallest and most breathtaking structure in the surrounding land.

A tribesman held the door to the church open, "Please, go in. For we are not worthy enough to meet with Father Brewer in the company of you and the idol."

"Shut up, I know it," said Doug confidently.

The crew entered the church as they heard the tribesmen say, “soda bless you.” When they were all completely inside, the door behind them slammed and locked.

The church’s interior was no different from the interior of a standard Earth Catholic church. They walked up the aisle in between two sections of pews. There was stained-glass windows on both sides of the walls. One of the windows had words that read, ‘Don’t want to go to Venus hell? Then pay up with your pull-tabs well!’ As Harold read the glass, he realized that there was a striking similarity between Catholicism and Venus’s tribal religion.

Aries finally broke his silence, “what the hell just happened?”

“I have never wanted to find a power outlet more in my life,” said Fork with his eyes widened.

The crew walked up to the altar and gazed upon what was on it, a colorful gumball machine and an unopened brand-name can of soda. Doug put the vending machine that he had been carrying down beside the altar.

“This place reminds me of a pizzeria I used to work at,” said Harold.

Suddenly there was a loud noise which came from the ceiling followed by a quiet whimpering cry. The cry was followed by another loud noise and then a loud yelp. The loud yelp was followed by a man in a priest robe falling from the ceiling. Following these events, the priest got up very quickly and said, “well, if it isn’t our prophets.”

“Prophets?” they all said.

“Yes, you are the beings who delivered that holy idol over there. Are you not?”

“What’s so special about it?” asked Aries.

“Are you not educated on the religion of Sodatology?”

They all shook their heads in confusion.

“Well, I am a priest here at the church of Sodatology and my name is Father Brewer. Let me tell y’all a little story. In the beginning, Soda created the heavens and the Venus...” Father Brewer talked for hours reciting everything that Harold had learned in Sunday school whilst growing up. Father Brewer continued, “We believe in one Soda but there are three ingredients in that Soda and each of those ingredients are equally Soda... On the night Lord Vesuvius was betrayed, he took the bubblegum and gave thanks, started chewing it and said this is my body which will be given up for you. In a similar way when supper was ended, he took a soda can, cracked it open and said, I would like to thank this brand-name soda company...”

To summarize the entirety of Father Brewer’s story, they worship soda and every machine which produces soda. After Father Brewer’s story was over, he moonwalked away then moonwalked right back.

“Thank you for sharing that story, Father,” said Harold. “We would be happy to give you the vending machine that we own, for a small amount of Earth or UGAUP money.”

“Own!?” said Father Brewer with rage in his voice. “You have treated this sacred God-like idol as your slave?”

“No! Not as a slave” exclaimed Doug, “only thing I did was make out with it a little bit, but that’s it.”

Father Brewer, with more rage in his voice, summoned the tribespeople from outside to come and capture these blasphemers.

The entire crew of the Midnight Lamp began to scream as they got chased all around the church. Eventually, they made their way to the stairs. They ran up 4 flights and got to the roof. They ran to the ledge and saw how big of a drop it was. The tribespeople surrounded them, that’s when Aries jumped and shapeshifted into an umbrella, he floated his way down gently. After, he transformed himself into a trampoline and the rest of the crew jumped down to safety.

There was no time to lose, they still had tribespeople following them. They bolted passed the marketplace and homes as they ventured out of the capital of Sovillda.

They ran all the way back to the Midnight Lamp. Harold told the crew to take as many drugs as they could fit in their pockets, after all they were still on a mission to deliver space-speed to Earth and restore chaos to the known universe. They took as much as they could carry and started running. They may have lost their space-drug-van, but they didn’t lose hope.

They ran for about 3 miles before they finally lost sight of the tribespeople chasing them. The tribespeople were always a fair distance behind after jumping off of the church’s roof. The crew knew that they were no longer being chased, instead they were being hunted. The crew stopped running and started walking.

“I cannot believe that I just left the vending machine back there, let’s go back!” said Doug.

“No, we have to keep on moving,” said Fork.

“Maybe you’re right, but I just really miss her.”

“Her?” asked Aries.

“Don’t get into it,” said Harold, “look, here are the facts, we are being chased down by a tribe of soda-blood-thirsty monsters. We need a place to hide. Does anyone know where we might go to get our ship functioning again? Or even just to get off this planet?”

“I know that the western hemisphere of this planet is urbanized,” said Fork, “we could probably hire someone to take us off this planet, or we could hire someone to tow the Midnight Lamp to a mechanic. Unfortunately, we have to go to the western hemisphere of Venus for both of these.”

“Okay, we will travel to the western hemisphere when we are well rested, but we should get out of the open.”

Fortunately, there was a cave in the distance where they could hide from the hunters of Sodatology. They walked in and each chose a separate place to sleep and hide in. Doug went into sleep mode and Aries closed his eyes until he was able to fall asleep. Harold was just about to hit the hay when Fork walked over to him.

“Harold, I never got the chance to thank you guys for saving me. We haven’t had any time to talk, and I just need to talk to another actual human-being.”

Harold sat up, “I get it, it’s lonely out there sometimes. What do you want to talk about?”

Fork told Harold about how he got into the space-cargo-transport-militia and how saddened he was by the deaths of his old crewmates. He told Harold about his girl back on Earth and how he misses her. Then he told Harold about the low-low prices and deals his space-cargo-transport-militia offers. “Do you have a girl waiting for you?” asked Fork.

“No,” Harold sighed, “I used to. I don’t really talk about her much anymore and I try not to think about her...”

“What happened?”

“I let her out of my basement one time. I trusted her to come back, but she never did. I thought of her as a goddess, and I treated her as one too. She had the audacity to run away.”

Fork looked at Harold with his eyes widened, too stunned to speak, but he had to find a way to end the conversation. “It was nice talking to you. We should get some rest. Goodnight, Harold.”

It is worth noting that Venus takes about 100 Earth days to complete a full Venus day and the sun was still in the sky so when Fork said ‘goodnight’ to Harold, he didn’t actually mean it.

## Episode 4

Doug was the first to wake up, he decided that he would take it upon himself to ruin the waking up process for everyone else. Doug walked over to Harold and slapped him in the face, which produced the loudest yell ever recorded in human history. It caused Aries and Fork to jump out of bed and take a fighting stance.

“Good morning,” Doug said with an optimistic tone.

“Thank you for waking me, Doug,” said Harold also in an optimistic tone. “We need to get moving. Today we will venture to the western hemisphere of this planet.”

“How far away is that?” asked Aries.

Doug pulled up a digital map of Venus on his hand hologram projector and showed his crewmates that it took only 10 miles to walk to the urbanized part of Venus.

“That does explain the tall buildings that I’ve seen in the distance,” said Fork, “but why would Sovillda be so close to the urbanized part of Venus? They’ve had several civil wars, and they wouldn’t like to be that close.”

“They must have a business understanding,” said Aries, “the urbanized half makes soda and sells it, while the cult-tribe benefits from the belief that soda is sacred. I am just speculating of course.”

“Actually, that makes perfect sense,” said Fork, “shouldn’t we get going?”

“In a second,” Harold said, “first we need to do some drugs to fit in on ‘Venus Wall Street.’” He took out a bunch of space-speed and divided it into three lines. Without thinking, Aries snorted all of it. Aries was one of those species who wasn’t easily affected by space-speed, it just gave him a little bit more energy.

“It’s okay, I wasn’t hungry anyway,” said Fork.

“I guess we should go then,” said Harold.

They walked out of the cave and started their 10-mile journey to the western hemisphere of Venus. Along the way they came across 2 Sovillda hunters. Aries thought very quickly on his feet, thanks to the drugs that he had taken. He morphed into a tribesman, he waved at the hunters and told them that he could handle taking the blasphemers back to Sovillda by himself. The Sovillda hunters didn’t need much convincing and just continued on their way. “Hail soda,” they said to Aries. To which he replied back, “Praise Vesus.” After that interaction he shapeshifted back to his original form.

A few miles later the crew arrived at the wall to the western hemisphere of Venus. “Hey!” they shouted.

A man up on the wall looked down at them. “Hey, how can I help you?”

“We need to get into the city, our ship broke down and we have been stranded out here in the land of Soda and Bubblegum,” replied Harold.

“I don’t think I can let you in. ‘Venus Wall Street’ isn’t very welcoming if you don’t have something of our culture to prove that you are like one of us.”

That’s when Harold took out a plastic baggie of space-speed, “is this good enough for admission?”

“My Lord, you my friend are a multi-culturalist, please come in.”

The wall below him opened up and the crew walked inside the urbanized hemisphere of Venus for the very first time.

“Okay boys!” Harold looked around, “we’ve got to find ourselves a mechanic. How hard can that be?”

The crew walked around the financial district for a few minutes until they realized the mechanics weren’t in the financial district. They did, however; find a man who tried to sell them magic beans. Doug was about to buy one of them when Aries tackled him to the ground.

“We do not need a Jack and the Beanstalk subplot going on right now!” said Aries, “Focus up dude!”

They walked around until they were finally out of the financial district and into the capitol hill district.

“What does a guy have to do to find a mechanic around here?!” screamed Harold in a little bit of silent rage.

“I have absolutely no idea,” said Doug whilst knowing that he could easily pull up a map of Venus at any moment and find a mechanic.

At that very moment, a tranquilizer dart hit Aries on his arm. However, the tranquilizer didn’t do anything due to Aries’ high tolerance of any drug imaginable. It was said that at one time Aries was the pet of a cruel and evil galactic dog owner who owned every species of creature except for a dog. One time Aries was taken to the vet and was supposed to be put down, but the drugs didn’t have any effect on him other than the lethal dosage making him feel the equivalent of a little tipsy.

“Ow, that tickled,” said Aries as he removed the tranquilizer dart from his arm, he sat down, and began to stare at the dart. Aries was very fascinated about why he had been shot and why he even cared that he was shot. Interestingly the tranquilizer dart seemed to have an effect on him the greatest. The dart didn’t put him to sleep, but it did make him stare at it for a long time whilst thinking about why someone would shoot such an object in his direction.

The rest of the crew did not find the dart particularly interesting at that very moment, they were keener on staying alive and began to run as fast as they could.

Doug was hit next with a wave of electricity which nearly fried his circuits, but it seemed to just disable him

instead. Doug fell to the ground and began to reboot himself which would take approximately 5 minutes.

Harold and Fork stayed together, running down a non-sketchy alleyway, but it didn't take long until the tranquillizer shooters came from behind. They shot several darts in Harold and Fork's direction. All of them missed.

When Harold and Fork got to the dead-end of the alleyway, they got on their knees, began to say a prayer to Lord Vesus and begged for forgiveness. A man wearing a business suit and a mask walked up to them with a group of men behind him. The men were holding tranquilizers and electronic disablers.

"Gentlemen, there is no need to run," he said in a calm yet demanding voice. "We know that you are from the outside. We know that you crash-landed here and had to escape the savagery of the Eastern hemisphere. But..." He looked around and took a deep breath, "I hesitate to say that you are on our side. I will have to apologize for the lack of better words as we shouldn't discuss this out in the open." The man took out a tranquillizer gun from his coat and pointed it at Fork. "I'm sorry you got mixed up in this business. Bad luck for you, I guess. But the truth is I'm extremely thirsty for a free drink right now, and the soda pope won't answer my prayers." The man pulled the trigger, and the tranquillizer dart went right into Fork's neck.

Harold looked at the suited masked man in confusion after Fork very gently hit the ground with more force than a freaking meteor strike. "So, do I have to be tranquillized? I would rather not have—" said Harold before he was interrupted by a tranquillizer dart hitting his neck.

Interestingly, on Venus only one party had to consent for the use of strong tranquillizers to be used on a person or a group of people.

When Fork and Harold regained consciousness, they found themselves inside a large room with a fancy interior. They were both tied to a large white pillar in the middle of the room along with Doug who had finished rebooting just as they woke up.

Aries was in the corner of the room still staring at the tranquillizer dart with such fascination. He wasn't tied or restrained in any sort of way. From what it looked like, Aries didn't even know that he had been taken to some other place. "Who would shoot such a thing at us?" He continued to think to himself.

"You are probably wondering why I brought you here," a voice said from a nearby room. He stepped out of the room and revealed himself to be the masked and dapper-looking man who had shot Fork and Harold.



“Okay, just cut to the chase,” said Fork with annoyance in his voice, “we know you don’t want us dead; you would have killed us already. So, what do you want?”

“I thought we could help each other. I just need you guys to listen to me and comply.”

Harold decided that it would be an appropriate time to speak, “oh, well now I’m in the mood to listen to you. I bet we’ll be listening and complying even harder than we would if you just asked politely.”

“I’m sorry, Harold,” the masked, dapper-looking man said.

“Wait how do you know my name?”

The masked, dapper-looking man took off his mask and gazed upon Harold.

“Dad? Is that really you?” said Harold with tears in his eyes.

“What no! I am the President of the urbanized section of Venus. Jeez, that’s a mouthful to say.”

“Wow, the President of the urbanized section of Venus,” said Doug and Fork in unison.

“Yes, and I’ve been following what you’ve been up to since you’ve crash landed, I have eyes and ears everywhere. Naturally, I need your help!”

The President started to rant about how his job title was way too long and why he wanted it changed to something shorter such as, ‘The President of Venus.’

“Okay, where do we come in?” asked Harold.

“I hesitate to do this, but I believe it must be done for the sake of shortening my job title. I need you guys to burn Sovillda to the ground, mostly just the church of Sodatology! With the church of Sodatology gone, the tribes might split again, making them weaker. So, we can take control of the entire planet! Thus, shortening my job title!”

“Let me get this straight, you want to risk a war because your job title is too long to pronounce?” asked Fork.

“Yes!”

“Understandable, I guess,” said Harold, “But what do we get in return.”

“You get the pleasure of knowing that the soda industry is no longer profiting off of false religion...”

“Okay... anything else?”

“I can get someone to work on the vehicle you crash landed in and we can send you on your way.”

Harold began to think to himself, he began to wonder where his life was going. He tried to think of another way to get out of this mess other than participating in anti-Sodatism. He thought about the girl who had left him when he let her out of the basement. Said girl was actually a cat but he liked to act like

she was more than human and treated her like a goddess. He missed that cat every day and longed for it to return to him.

“We have to restore chaos to the known universe,” said Harold.

“I just want to get off of this planet,” said Fork.

“Why would someone shoot such an object at us?” asked Aries.

“I just want to burn something,” said Doug.

The President untied the crew and took them to his office. They began to plan out how the attack was going to go. The plan was simple, Doug would go to the Midnight Lamp along with 2 mechanics to work on getting it up and running for the escape. Meanwhile Fork, Harold, and Aries would sneak into town using the darkness of evening as cover to not be seen. They would have to sneak into the church of Sodatology and burn it by turning the AC off and the heat on. Father Brewer would probably die in the process; it was said that the soda pope also lived in the church and would also die. The crew would preferably sneak away to the Midnight Lamp, the mechanics would leave, and the crew would take off and restore chaos to the solar system.

## Episode 4.5

As evening was falling on this particular side of Venus, Doug left with 2 mechanics to fix the Midnight Lamp. Doug had insisted that he would also sneak into the Church of Sodatology, he wanted to retrieve his vending machine but all attempts at his reasoning were blocked by the President of the urbanized section of Venus.

Harold, Fork, and Aries were standing on a building listening to a radio before they left. "This song is for anybody standing on the edge of a building contemplating suicide. Here is "Jump" by Van Halen," the radio host said.

"I think it's almost time for us to go," said Fork.

"Yeah, I guess," said Harold with sadness in his voice.

"What's wrong?"

"I mean, she was perfect. She was mine and then she just left me."

"I'm sorry, but maybe it was best that she left."

"But... she was my cat, I loved her."

Fork realized in that very moment that Harold was not actually a psychopath who kidnapped a girl and kept her in his basement, but instead a loving cat-owner who wasn't allowed to bring his cat upstairs.

"I know," said Fork even though he hadn't known previously.

"I'm sorry," said Aries, "Harold, we all love you. Even though you don't always do the right thing, we know you want to be the right thing. We are your family right now, and we are all you need. Fork, Doug, and I will always be there for you. As far as your cat is concerned, if she had the audacity to leave you then she can go to hell!"

"Thank you," said Harold with tears in his eyes.

"Now let's do this thing!" shouted Aries.

They walked down the building, out of the urbanized section of Venus, and a few miles before they reached the village of Sovillda.

Aries shapeshifted into a tribesman and checked around to see if the coast was clear. Luckily it looked as if it was going to be very easy to get into the church. Literally nobody was around. They were still cautious and eventually made it all the way to the church. Aries shapeshifted back to his real form and pushed open the doors with maximum strength which made an extremely loud thud. It appeared as if every tribesman, woman, and child was sitting in a pew listening to Father Brewer speak. But the tribespeople's attention turned to the doors after hearing the loud sound.

"It's the blasphemers!" everyone shouted. "Get them!"

Suddenly everyone began to chase Fork, Aries, and Harold around the church. It became a game to see if one of them could find the AC and switch it to heat.

Father Brewer ran up the stairs, away from the commotion and up to a mecha suit which had been known as the soda pope by the people of Sovillda. Father Brewer jumped in the mecha suit and turned it on. All systems were ready in a few seconds. He ran down the stairs in the mecha suit which made the door frames and hallways a bit wider. In an instant all the tribespeople stopped running and looked at the soda pope.

"All of the tribespeople, leave! Go home! Forget about this! I'll deal with it!" the soda pope shouted.

Every tribesperson walked away in an orderly fashion as if it was a fire drill. In the confusion, Aries was able to successfully morph into a tribesman and leave along with the rest of the citizens of Sovillda. When he got outside, he walked around to a secluded area and started climbing the wall of the church.

On the inside of the church the soda pope was busy shooting lasers at Harold and Fork. He was actually very surprised to see how well they could dodge them.

When Aries reached a window, he climbed in and then he saw it.

"A thermostat!" he yelled.

"Wait, what was that?" the soda pope asked, "oh, I see your friend is missing, why don't I go see him?" The soda pope walked slowly but menacingly up the stairs. But by the time he got up there it was too late, the thermostat had already been turned from AC to self-destruct, and Aries was nowhere to be seen. The soda pope walked back downstairs but Harold and Fork had also seemed to have vanished. In the span of a few seconds the soda pope melted with Father Brewer inside its metal interior and the church had burst into flames.

When the Sovillda Fire Department arrived on the scene they sprayed soda at the fire, which actually put the flame out decently fast, but it was already too late, the church had completely collapsed.

Harold, Aries, and Fork ran from Sovillda to the Midnight Lamp which had been restored to working condition, thanks to Doug and 2 mechanics. Apparently, Doug had shared his entire life story with these 2 mechanics and had a very hard time saying goodbye to them. The mechanics looked very tired but were extremely happy to be leaving Doug. They packed their tools and went back to the urbanized hemisphere of Venus.

The crew piled inside the Midnight Lamp and turned on the radio, "It's Still Rock and Roll to Me" by Billy Joel began to play as they ascended higher and higher.

The crew of the Midnight Lamp began to celebrate as they flew out of Venus's atmosphere and set a course to Earth.

"I want to thank you guys for helping me, it has surely been an adventure," said Fork.

"This isn't a goodbye, is it? Please become a permanent member of our crew!" said Harold with excitement in his eyes.

"I'm sorry, I'm just not fit to be running drugs across the solar system."

"Well, I'm sorry to hear that." Harold stuck out his hand, "friends?"

Fork took his hand and shook it, "you know it!"

Suddenly a video call request appeared on the monitor of the dashboard. Naturally, Harold accepted the call.

"Hello?" a man in a suit and tie said while sitting in what appeared to be an oval office.

"Um, yes?"

"Hi, the President of the urbanized section of Venus just called. I heard you were all very talented in your fun arson adventure, I don't exactly remember what else he said but he put in a good word for you guys. I may have also heard that you have some illegal drugs on board that is supposed to be delivered and sold to us."

"Damn straight," said Doug.

"Excellent, you guys are heroes! You went through all of this just to deliver drugs to us?"

"And restore chaos to the known universe, yep!" exclaimed Harold.

"I believe a celebration should be held for your return; don't you agree?"

Everyone looked around at each other and nodded, except for Fork. Fork looked like he just wanted to get home and see his girl.

"Let's do it!" said Harold.

"Great! Land in front of the White House and we will be there awaiting your arrival." The video call ended.

"Please Fork, at least stay for a short while. You helped get us here," said Aries.

"For a short while, then I want to go see my girl."

The crew agreed that it was a good compromise as long as he said goodbye before he left the celebration.

The President of Earth calling space-drug-dealers was uncommon but not entirely unheard of. Technically Earth was an anarchy, but the locals were civilized enough to elect a responsible leader who occasionally participated in drug usage at least 10 times a day. Furthermore, drug usage was not considered to be a problem on Earth because everyone did it and they all loved it; death was merely a side effect of all that pleasure.

The Midnight Lamp reached Earth and descended through the clouds to Washington DC. The people sat outside

the White House with great anticipation. Apparently, there was a bit of a shortage on drugs in the area.

To the left of the White House, there was a stage where the Midnight Lamp could land. Harold brought it down very gently and then he accidentally missed the stage and crushed a poor, innocent, drunk man in the process. Harold corrected his mistake and landed perfectly on the stage.

Before exiting the Midnight Lamp, they each took a deep breath and watched from the windows as the President of Earth walked up onto the stage to welcome them. As they exited the space-drug-van they each shook the President's hand while whispering to themselves, "I made it."

The President asked for them to take a seat while he gave a short speech to address the citizens of Earth. The President walked up to the podium and started delivering a powerful and prideful speech about the patriotism of Earth.

"224,850,798.205123 score and 2 years ago, our planet was formed. Our forefathers were fish, reptiles, and apparently ape-likebeings. In that small amount of time that the Earth has existed, humanity has formed and flourished. And many things have been accomplished in this small timespan. First it was fires, hunting, agriculture. Eventually we got more sophisticated and decided that airplanes, smart phones, and cars were a good idea. Then at the end we said screw it, I will take drugs and we will commercialize spaceships to leave this dump behind. That is when everything went wrong. Eventually UGAUP found us and tried to 'settle us down' when we didn't even want to settle. As a result, we have lost a lot, for instance the Mariana Trench was once a respectable place but then UGAUP brought 1 million pounds of Marinara Sauce to dump into the ocean to rename it the Marinara Trench. We will not stand for this! We will do all we can to keep our culture and way of life away from UGAUP! And that includes drugs! Thank you, let the celebration begin!"

But just as the President finished his speech, a loud siren began to go off all across the Earth. "Take cover and be strong!" the President shouted through his microphone. He turned to the crew, "follow me," he said as it became extremely windy.

He led the crew into the White House, down the stairs and into a high-tech nuclear shelter to wait out absolute chaos and destruction.

Just as the crew entered, a massive explosion was to be seen, and the ground began to shake as the shelter door sealed shut.

## **Episode 5**

It had been 3 months since the nuke went off and people weren't particularly happy, especially Fork who knew his girl had to be dead. Living in the shelter for 3 months with a group of Earth politicians was tough for the crew. It was the equivalent of staying in a 5-star hotel with people who constantly lied.

Somewhere over the course of 3 months, Harold asked Aries and Fork to share their entire life story with him. The reason why he didn't ask Doug for his life story is because when he found Doug, his memory had already been completely erased. Harold had a theory that Doug wasn't actually an abandoned robot, but instead a robot who overdosed on electricity and died inside a dumpster. He remained dead until Harold came along and decided to repair him. Doug was never too interesting of a robot anyway, he seemed to be very straight up with everybody.

Anyway, against their better judgement, Aries and Fork decided to share their life stories with Harold.

## **Fork's Story:**

Fork had a very uneventful childhood; he was raised in the most middle-class family on Earth. His father and mother were always there for him during hard times. When Fork became a teenager, he started looking for a reason to live. He couldn't find one so instead he found a girlfriend to distract himself from his wandering mind.

During the time Fork was growing up, UGAUP decided to try to 'settle' Earth. It wasn't a fun time to be alive. With that being said, UGAUP was not an enemy of Earth but rather a presence that Earthlings would rather not have.

One day Fork decided that he wanted to forget what was going on, he was only 15 so he wasn't old enough to fly away from Earth yet. The drama on Earth's surface had overcome him, so he took up a hobby in underwater exploration. Underwater there was no UGAUP, no humans to fight UGAUP, and no drama. It was perfect for a while, until it wasn't.

One day, Fork was exploring the Mariana Trench in a mini submarine that he had made in his garage. He was deep in the trench when suddenly the windows on the submarine became red, in that very instant the Mariana Trench became the Marinara Trench. The submarine started to malfunction and eventually began to sink at a quick rate. Fork began to panic but he was able to grab an oxygen tank, goggles, and some flippers. Sadly, he had to abandon his mini submarine. He tried to swim to the surface, but the marinara sauce seemed to be pushing down on him. He had to swim as fast and as strong as he could to get away from the sauce, it was also very impossible to see through that clunky red view on his goggles. Eventually, he made it out of the marinara sauce and resurfaced. He watched in horror as a large UGAUP spaceship dumped millions of pounds of marinara sauce into the ocean.

A short while later, a group of Earthlings arrived at the scene in a boat to shoot at the UGAUP ship. Fork was able to signal for people to rescue him by shouting a long string of profanity at the UGAUP vessel. Fork returned home and was traumatized for a while. He decided that the next chance he had, he would get off of Earth.

When he was 16, he could finally leave Earth by signing up for the space-cargo-transport-militia. He came back to visit his parents and girlfriend every few months, but he lived in space on the large transport vessel most of the time. Planet life just wasn't for him.



### **Aries's Story:**

Aries grew up on a bright pink planet a hundred or so light years away from Earth. He didn't have any parents growing up, his species reproduced asexually, so instead of constantly disappointing his parents, he constantly disappointed an older clone of himself.

His childhood was very uneventful, it was over in just a few days. His species often matured very quickly and instinctively knew how to shapeshift and separate into two entities after just a few hours of existing.

After a few days of existing, Aries wanted to make himself useful to the universal society. But instead of getting a job, he stole his clone's spaceship and went to a bunch of clubs to have some fun. Sadly, at one of these clubs someone peer pressured Aries into trying teleportation and soon he became completely addicted to it. He got himself a teleportation remote and teleported all around the place. Most of the time he would punch in a random set of coordinates and then teleport to and from that location. Somehow teleportation gave Aries a high that not even the best scientists could explain.

His addiction soon led him to getting teleported and stranded inside a strange house. The strange house belonged to a cruel and evil galactic dog owner that owned every species of creature except for a dog. Aries was made a pet of this evil dog owner until he eventually escaped by fixing the teleportation remote. After that he threw away the remote and decided to never teleport again unless it was an emergency. After that Aries didn't know what to do with his life.

Aries saw no other option than to become a security guard at the intergalactic bank. The problem with Aries was that he was far too trusting and allowed anybody to walk anywhere as long as he was greeted with a smile. He was eventually greeted by a few nice fellas who asked to go inside of the vault. Aries escorted them to the vault where they proceeded to steal everything and then leave in a quick manner. Aries was fired and then almost arrested, but he was able to find a ride to Ceres before the authorities could catch him. In the end, Aries was left desperate on Ceres, all alone until he didn't have to be anymore.

## Episode 6

One day, nuclear shelter life became too much for the crew to handle. They needed to be outside, especially Fork. He hadn't been on a planet for this long since he was 16. Granted, the nuclear shelter life could've been much duller. The shelter was equipped with a waterpark, bowling alley, bar, go-kart track, movie theater, and plenty of space-speed.

Fork had also been missing his girlfriend, who he figured was definitely vaporized from the nuclear explosion. The most obvious thing for Fork to do next was to take revenge on UGAUP. Fork ranted about UGAUP to Harold, Doug, and Aries constantly. Eventually they got on board with the idea that UGAUP needed to pay for what they had done. They contacted other planets with the hope that they would know where the UGAUP mothership was. Eventually they found out that it was somewhere in the vicinity of Betelgeuse.

One day the President was sitting in a bar, he was drunk out of his mind. For some reason the crew decided at this exact moment to ask him for a rocket to get off the planet. The President agreed instantly and bought them a few drinks. Harold and Fork blacked out and when they sobered up, they found themselves in the go-kart track playing bumper cars at top speeds. Eventually, they stopped the go-karts, got out of them, and collapsed on the floor.

Aries walked over to them, "here are your radiation suits, we are going to leave Earth just like you wanted to."

"We are?" asked Harold and Fork at the same time.

"Yeah, Doug scouted ahead and found an abandoned rocket-launch site where we can take off from. He is standing by until we get there."

"And this site..." said Fork, "isn't damaged by the nuke that went off?"

"Absolutely no damage from the nuke, it's incredible!" said Aries with excitement in his voice. "Don't forget, the President loaned us one of his rockets to fly away in. It's the only way to take off, the old fashion way."

Harold and Fork groaned on the floor but eventually got up and changed into their radiation suits. Thankfully for Aries and Doug, they didn't have to wear any uncomfortable radiation suits.

Before they left the nuclear bunker, they said a final goodbye to the President. "Goodbye," they said. "Goodbye," he replied back. He didn't exactly remember what he had agreed to, but he hoped they were happy with whatever he did for them.

Harold, Fork, and Aries walked out of the vault and into the wasteland of Washington DC. On the side of the road was a large truck with a rocket in the back, they assumed that

the President had drunkenly left it there for them. They hopped in the truck and drove a few miles to the rocket-launch site.

Upon arrival at the rocket-launch site, they were greeted by Doug. Doug was very happy to see them, not because he cared about them, but because he was extremely eager to get off the mudball wasteland that was earth. Despite this, Doug decided to do the hospitable thing and give everyone a long-extensive tour of the facility. The facility had 3 levels and then a decently sized launchpad. Doug told them the entire history of the facility as if it had amazing lore behind it.

Eventually they circled back to the truck and rocket. Aries used his insane strength to carry the entire rocket onto the launch pad. Aries was similar to an ant in his weight to strength ratio, though he often forgot that he was.

“Aren’t we going to modify this thing to go faster than lightspeed?” asked Harold.

“No, we are going to increase the speed of light and then modify the rocket to go as fast as lightspeed,” explained Doug as he broke the laws of physics and then proceeded to modify the rocket.

As Doug worked on the rocket Harold, Fork, and Aries brought out lawn chairs and beers. They took a load off while they watched him. Harold and Fork drank the beers using the built-in straws from the radiation suit.

Apparently, the person who made the suits didn’t exactly know how radiation worked. He designed the suits with a zipper and a built-in straw then he marketed it as an all-terrain vehicle.

After a few minutes of hard work, Doug finished modifying the rocket and stopped changing the laws of physics. He walked over to everyone and collapsed on the floor, “it’s ready to go,” he said.

Aries picked Doug up and tossed him over his shoulder. He looked over at Fork and Harold, “you guys ready for this?” They looked amongst themselves and nodded.

But they seemed to have a predicament, which was how to get up into the cockpit. This problem was easily solved by Aries climbing up with everyone on his shoulders. Aries would have preferred it if he could throw his friends through the front window, thus breaking it. But the cold vacuum of space and his good nature prevented him from pitching his idea to his friends.

With everyone in the ship, sitting in a seat facing towards the sky, they started the countdown sequence. Doug eventually got bored of waiting for the countdown and leaned over Harold to hit the ignition button. They blasted off high into the sky, on their way to bring down the mothership of UGAUP.

Apparently, the speed of light was changed from fast to ludicrous speed. Nobody anticipated how quick it would take

for them to get to the UGAUP mothership. Eventually they slowed down and began to orbit around the large mothership.

"Why are they here by Betelgeuse?" asked Fork. "The UGAUP capital is still hundreds of lightyears away from here. So, why would they decide to come to this star in particular?"

"We will find out soon enough, but first we need a way onboard," said Harold.

Harold slowed the rocket down even more, although he had some difficulty. It was hard to produce drag in the dark, empty, cold void of space but somehow, he managed to do it. He carefully piloted his way towards the UGAUP mothership hangar.

Suddenly he received a voice transmission over the radio. "Hello?" the strange voice said with an alien accent.

"Oh hey," said Harold, "um, I am a UGAUP vessel. I wanna land in the hangar bay."

"Okay then please submit your clearance code."

"Clearance code machine is broken. How else can I receive authorization?"

"Tell me a funny joke."

At this point, Harold was a little upset because he didn't have any jokes up his sleeve, so he decided to just come clean and tell the truth. He told the alien everything that had happened to them in the past few months. He told the alien about how they were pursued by space police briefly, how they had to land on Ceres for some fuel, how they rescued Fork from a space-cargo-transport-militia ship when it was set to self-destruct, how they crash-landed on Venus, how they left Venus, how they landed on Earth, how they were stuck on Earth in a bunker because of the UGAUP nuke that went off, how they got all the way here, and finally how he was stuck here talking to him because he couldn't think of a funny enough joke to gain authorization.

"That was a really funny story, only the best aliens have this kind of sense of humor. You are clearly the stand-up comedian that we ordered. I'm granting you authorization to the hangar now."

Everyone was extremely surprised that UGAUP aliens had such a great sense of humor, but then they remembered how they pretty much blew up the entire surface of the Earth.

"Guys, we don't even know why UGAUP blew up the surface of Earth," said Aries, "they might've done it just for the sake of comedy."

Everyone thought for a second then became slightly madder at UGAUP for blowing up the surface of Earth.

Harold perfectly brought the rocket into the hangar and placed it down very gently on top of two UGAUP personnel, crushing them. Harold told everyone else to wait in the rocket for a moment. He walked out of the ship and saw two more

UGAUP personnel approaching him, “why did you land on two of our best men?”

“Because I’m the stand-up comedian,” explained Harold.

“Oh, very well. Carry on,” said the UGAUP personnel in unison as they swiftly walked away in the opposite direction of Harold.

Harold signaled to the rest of the crew that the coast was clear. One by one they all came out of the ship, ready to take revenge. The plan was to get up to the control room to set the mothership to self-destruct and escape during the chaos.

They walked very cautiously out of the hangar and took an elevator up to the control room. During the elevator ride they were very silent but exchanged meaningful glances amongst each other. When the elevator opened, they saw one entity sitting in the room, the front window of the mothership was facing towards Betelgeuse.

The entity was a being without a body, he was made out of light and his consciousness existed in 4 spatial dimensions.

“Hello?” said Harold.

“Hey, I heard you were the standup comedian. I am the General of the UGAUP military,” said the entity. “Now, be funny! Tell me a joke!”

“I want to know which one of these buttons makes everything explode!”

“Very well, it’s the big red one right in the middle of my desk, I’ll allow you to do the honors.”

“Aren’t you going to try to stop me?”

“Why would I? This was supposed to happen anyway in a few minutes. If the comedian wants to do it while a few of his friends watch then I have no problem with that.”

Harold quickly slammed down his fist on the red button to start the self-destruct sequence. For a second, nothing happened. Then a great big flash of light followed by an explosion took place outside of the window. It was Betelgeuse, it became a supernova in the span of just a few seconds.

“Wait General, what did I just do?” asked Harold.

“Isn’t it obvious? You just destroyed Betelgeuse.”

Harold looked around in defeat, he just helped UGAUP destroy a beautiful star that lit up skies all around the universe.

In a few moments, the remains of Betelgeuse turned into a vicious black hole. It began to pull the UGAUP mothership towards it. The general took the controls and put all of the ship’s power into getting away from the deadly black hole.

“This wasn’t a part of the plan,” said the General.

“I know,” said Harold as he tried to punch the General in his non-existent face, “this ship is going to be destroyed one

way or another!” Harold couldn’t punch the General so instead he fought him over the controls.

“This is suicide, Harold,” said Fork.

“I know but I can’t let them win and neither can you. That’s why I have to say goodbye to you guys. Get to the rocket and blast off! You will get away faster and easier than this mothership can!”

“No,” the crew of the midnight lamp said in unison.

Harold smiled, “ok.”

The crew of the midnight lamp put all of their hands on the controls. Aries accidentally turned on the radio, “Space Oddity” by David Bowie was playing. During the struggle to control the ship, Doug bumped the radio and accidentally tuned it to another station where “Starman” also by David Bowie had just come on.

The crew of the midnight lamp took a deep breath and looked at each other, they smiled, took control of the ship and flew it directly into the black hole. Not much is known about what happened to them, but one thing is for certain: they set out to restore chaos to the known universe and that is exactly what they did.

## **END OF TRIPS**

I woke up the next morning... Apparently, I hadn't died and neither did Divad. My ego was still intact but barely able to keep up. I looked down and saw that I was wearing a hollowed-out watermelon as shorts. I got up, went to the mirror, and gazed at myself for a little while. I giggled like a madman while I realized that I was still probably a little buzzed from the tipshi. I promised myself that I would never ever try tipshi again, probably. But after that life went on like normal. I forgot to tell you this at the beginning, but legally I must warn you, this anthology that you have just finished contains content.

## **INSPIRATION:**

### Music:

Jimi Hendrix, David Bowie, Bob Dylan, Pink Floyd, The  
Zombies, Strawberry Alarm Clock

...

### TV Shows:

Futurama, Regular Show, King of the Hill, Seinfeld, Nathan for  
You, Breaking Bad

...

### Video Games:

The Half-Life Series, Earthbound, The Last of Us, Fallout: New  
Vegas, Boneworks, Portal

...

### Movies:

The Shawshank Redemption, Interstellar, The Indiana Jones  
Series, The Original Star Wars, The Monty Python Movies,  
Almost Famous

...

### Books:

Ready Player One, Armada, The Hitchhikers Guide to the  
Galaxy Series, The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul, The Time  
Travelers Almanac (72 Stories), Rita Hayworth and the  
Shawshank Redemption

...

I have many other inspirations, but it would take me far too long  
to list them all. But without these stories, mine would be  
nonsense; even more so than they already are.



## **Thank You**

If you have come this far, I would like to personally thank you. Writing is one of my greatest forms of creativity. I would like to say that it doesn't matter if you think you're horrible with grammar or just a bad writer in general. If you have a story in your head: write it. If you have a joke to tell, then tell it. If you want to do harm to people: please don't, I beg of you. I didn't know when I was younger that I would want to write something like this, it just happened, and it was out of the blue when I was just hanging out in my best friend's basement. I would like to say a special thank you to my friends and family as well as to anyone who has listened to me read it and given support and/or feedback. Lastly, I would like to leave you with a stupid and brilliant quote by myself,

“There is a lot of wisdom in nonsense.”

-Tate Swidorski