



*Lana*

# 16

Andre stood on the main deck of the Divine Vessel pissing over the side into the rolling ocean. He had had an unusually good nights sleep, and had waken feeling refreshed and reflective. He stared out at the sparking deep blue of the passing water, and at the rushing turquoise areas of small air bubbles created by the crashing of the ship's hull. Twenty metres away he saw a single fish leap out of the water and glide for a good ten seconds through the air before disappearing back under the waves. Tropical two-wing flying fish, *exocoetus volitans*, thought Andre instinctively.

Taking another drag on his cigarette he stumbled slightly with the roll of the ship, not having a spare hand to hold onto the railing with. Keeping the cigarette in the side of his mouth he finished below and zipped up. The water continued to rush by, always at the same speed, fourteen knots at present, and one hundred and twenty rpm from the engine.

He had waken that morning thinking of Lana, his wife, and he thought about her now. Normally he'd call her once a week when he was on the ship, their conversations invariably about her domestic worries. But this time it had been several weeks since he had left Russia and he still hadn't called her. His reason was a mixture of the argument they had had the night before he left, that business with the blackout, and his embarrassment of not being able to remember whether or not he had said goodbye to her. Also, his mind just seemed to be too occupied with other things. Today though Andre was feeling extremely positive, a rare state for him, and he decided to make the call to Lana immediately. It was still early in the morning where Andre was in the world and he reasoned he should still be able to catch her before she went to bed.

Andre took the lift from the main deck up to the forth deck. The satellite phone was on the bridge, and he had to take a flight of stairs up the fifth floor. As he reached the top of the stairs he paused to wipe his brow, sweaty from the exertion of climbing two dozen steps. The door to the bridge had been left ajar and he heard Captain Nemo's voice from inside. Slipping quietly through the door Andre saw Captain Nemo speaking into the satellite phone on the far side of the bridge. Remaining as quiet as his wheezy breathing would permit Andre listened to the captain's conversation.

'Yes sir, I appreciate that I am scheduled to leave the ship in Yokohama tomorrow, but I would really like to extend my contract on board the ship for another six months.' There was a pause as the captain listened to the voice at the other end of the line.

'Well, that's right sir, personal reasons, yes.'

Pause.

'No, I can assure you I will be one hundred percent on the job now... no, all that is behind me now.'

Another long pause.

'Yes, I do appreciate that my replacement...Captain Pimento, yes...is already in Yokohama ready to join the ship...yes I understand...but if I might suggest sir, the company's sister ship the Nautilus is only two weeks behind us, and if I am not mistaken their Captain...yes, that's right Captain Kirk...is waiting for a replacement...yes...yes...Why that's an excellent suggestion sir...Captain Pimento can replace Kirk on the Nautilus instead.'

Pause.

'So it is ok for me to extend my contract?...Excellent, thank you sir...Yes, one hundred percent, you won't regret it...Sorry, what's that?...Regards to my wife...you're too kind. Goodbye sir,' and with that the captain hung up, and Andre slipped out of the room and down the stairs. His call home would have to wait, his mind was occupied with far more important things, again.

Andre headed straight to Oddbjorn's cabin after hearing Captain Nemo's conversation, knowing this

change could effect their plans, badly. Andre passed the two Filipino able bodied seamen in the corridor to Oddbjorn's cabin. He gave a quick knock and walked straight in without waiting for a reply. Inside a sweaty naked Oddbjorn Ballengrud was doing push ups.

'Grrr, seventy nine...grrr, eighty. Oh yes.' Oddbjorn jumped to his feet, and greeted Andre with a cheeky wink. He reached over to his crumpled bed for the pair of white pants that lay amongst the sheets. 'How can I help you Chief Engineer?' he asked pulling the underwear on.

'We might have a problem with the plan' replied Andre. 'Captain Nemo is no longer going to leave the ship in Yokohama.'

'Oh, why's that?'

'He's extended his contract for another six months, probably because he doesn't want to go home, I suppose.'

'Ya, it is that fax business. Wives eh? What a pain in the arse they are, who needs them?' Oddbjorn's right hand instinctively went to the indent in his skull, beneath the skin of which movements had suddenly begun. His left settled on his crotch. He was clearly deep in thought. Finally he said, 'It is imperative that our Captain Pimento is getting on board in Yokohama. It's the last port before we heading for the equator, and without the new captain we won't have the only person who can be operating the galactic catapult on board.'

'Exactly,' replied Andre 'So?'

'So, we need to be ensuring that Captain Nemo will be leaving the ship in Yokohama.'

'But the 'company' has agreed that he can stay on.'

'But what if Captain Nemo was unable to be rejoining the ship? He's been very sad recently, right?'

'I guess so.'

'What I am thinking now is what if whilst on shore he decided to be taking matters into his own hands, so to speak. Leaving our Captain Pimento to gallantly step into the deceased Captain's shoes.'

'You mean fake his suicide?' asked the astonished Andre.

‘You read my mind,’ said Oddbjorn, a broad smile spreading across his face and then across Andres. Oddbjorn’s left hand left his own crotch and made it’s way over to rest on Andre’s.

‘Fuck off,’ said Andre pushing the other man’s hand away.

‘Oh well, it was worth a try,’ shrugged the still smiling Oddbjorn.