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There was a soft knocking at Ruby and Seth's cabin door.

'Seth, you hear that?' whispered Ruby from her bed.

'Who the hell do you think it could be? It's nearly midnight.' Seth whispered back from his.

'Dunno. What if they've come to get us? We could be in real trouble now. You think we should answer it, Seth?'

'Just pretend to be asleep, pumpkin. Perhaps they'll go away,' whispered Seth, not believing himself.

Ruby crept out of her bed and got in besides Seth. They sat together staring at the door through the dim light of the cabin. They had spent a very tense evening inside their little laminated room, with the door locked, trying to work out what they were going to do. They both felt very anxious as they had explored every conceivable explanation for what they had seen in Yokohama. They simply couldn't come up with a plausible excuse and now that they were heading off into the Pacific Ocean they had no means of escape. The knock came again, faint, three together, then a gap then another three. Ruby squeezed Seth's hand, his breathing had become a little faster and louder. 'Seth, they'll hear you.'

'What?'

'You are breathing too loud'

'Ruby,' Seth replied 'you are talking too loud.' The knocking came again and the pair immediately fell silent. This time Seth held his breath.

'Hello, my dears. I know you are in there.' A quite voice came from the other side of the door. 'There is no need to worry, it's only me, the Professor.'

Ruby looked at Seth and saw he had the same puzzled look on his face as she must have. 'Professor?' said Ruby to the door.

‘There is something I think you should see my dears.’ The professor’s voice crept under the door into the cabin. ‘I think it will help you understand.’

‘But what Professor?’ Ruby said as she slipped out of bed and slowly edged towards the door.

‘It is better that I show you.’ The professor replied ‘Are you coming?’

‘Where are you going to take us?’ asked Ruby, her face right next to the door now.

‘The roof, my dears, to the roof.’ The Professors words filled the dim cabin. Ruby looked over to Seth, who shrugged his compliance, and then turning the lock she opened the door.

Professor George R. Morello climbed the final rungs of the ladder to the flat roof above the bridge. Seth followed the Professor onto the roof and waited uneasily at the top of the ladder as Ruby came up. Seth was surprised to see Captain Pimento and Oddbjorn, the chief officer, there, but they paid no attention to the new arrivals. They seemed to Seth to be finishing the construction of some peculiar rambling machine that was approximately the size of a small donkey. It reminded Seth of the things he used to build in the school holidays when he was young. It was made from all the odds and ends you find in the kitchen and around the home, fixed together with glue and string and sellotape. Egg boxes and empty bottles of washing up liquid were attached to various cardboard boxes. There was the bottle of Tabasco sauce that Seth had been unable to find earlier that evening at dinner, now pumping up and down out of a hole in a green bucket. Cutlery stuck out of cardboard boxes at various angles, with occasional sparks flying between them, and a fish slice was connected to a glowing marrow by a series of fuse wires. A Cornflakes packet seemed to form a control panel with knobs and dials improvised from bottle tops and lids, and these seemed to light up and spin around of their own accord. A piston made from a mop and a saucepan lid moved up and down attached to the side of a box of oranges. The machine made soft scrapping and chinking noises like a

table full of quite diners, giving off an occasional belch like the impolite guest. The chief officer was struggling at the far side of the roof with what looked like an old fashioned earhorn, only this was nearly two metres long and skilfully constructed from silver foil. It too had a variety of bottle top controls down its side, and was connected to the main body of the machine by a flexible snaking tube of empty toilet rolls sellotaped end to end.

Ruby reached the top of the ladder and grasped onto Seth's hand. 'What the hell's going on here?' she whispered into his ear. 'Is it some kind of joke?'

'It is no joke my dear,' replied the Professor, who had somehow heard her despite being some distance away inspecting the machine. 'In fact we are very serious. This is why we have to eliminate all risks. It is a shame the pair of you have had to become involved, though I feel that it was more than bad luck on your own part.'

'What on Earth do you mean?' demanded Ruby, trying to sound brave and confident, but her high pitched squeak betrayed her.

'We know that you have been spying on us. Prowling around on deck late at night, looking at things you shouldn't.' Seth looked to Ruby in bewilderment. She still hadn't told him, but from her expression now Seth realised that they may be some truth in what he was saying.

'But what has it to do with you? Surely you have only just joined the ship. You're a music professor from America,' squeaked Ruby. There was no conviction in her last statement, the bulge on the Professor's forehead that she had noticed at dinner had grown and been joined by a second. They now moved and pulsed across his forehead, stretching and compressing his features as they moved. One side of his face would grin maniacally as the other drooped and scowled before changing again.

'Commander, we are ready to transmit. It's nearly time.' Captain Pimento interrupted the Professor before he could reply to Ruby.

'It looks like it's about time for the show to begin, my dears. I think you will enjoy it and I am sure you will find it most enlightening. Please, save any questions for

the end,' said the Professor to the couple and Ruby squeezed Seth's hand tight with fear.

The Professor moved into the very centre of the roof and, spreading his legs slightly, took up a commanding posture. Reaching behind his head he pulled back a small flap of skin at the bottom of his hairline. Under the flap was a button, pulsing with a blue glow, which clicked as he pushed it. For a moment there was silence and then a hissing and the sound of the clicking open of catches. Seth and Ruby were paralysed with disbelief as they watched the Professor's head slowly split in two along a line that ran neatly from above his brows, round above his ears, joining at the back of his skull. The hissing grew louder and was accompanied by small puffs of smoke that appeared from the widening gap that was developing between the two halves of his head. The top half of his head rose an inch away from the lower, and then smoothly hinged backwards until the upper half hung down the back of his neck. Ruby couldn't work out what it was that filled the inside of the Professor's head at first, just a large lumpy shiny brown form, but then there was a twitch from it, then a shake and a shudder and a stretch as it relieved its restricted limbs. Two long ears unravelled themselves, one brown one white. A nose, then a face and then a whole head rose out of the hunched form. Two eyes that glowed like red hot coals shone out at the couple. It pulled itself up in the chair in which it was sitting, and used its paws to smooth out its crumpled fur. It was a large brown and white flop eared rabbit and it was sat strapped into a deep seat in front of a flashing control panel full of buttons and dials. Set into the control panel a monitor displayed the scene in front of the Professor's eyes; the peculiar machine with the chief officer at the Cornflakes box controls and Seth and Ruby standing wide eyed at the edge of the roof. The rabbit reached forward and pulled back two levers and small blue pulses ran through the cables that went from the control panel to small remnant of the Professor's once impressive brain. The Professor's arms rose from his sides in response, stopping when they were horizontal with the palms facing towards the night sky.

Captain Pimento walked over to the Professor. He had in his hand a long thick cable, made from numerous pieces of string, wool, spaghetti, rolled pieces of silver foil, a shoe lace, and the stripped down electrical cable that had once belonged to a toaster, all twisted together and terminating with the silver top of a salt seller. The new captain reached over and inserted the salt seller end of the cable into a circular slot located on the control panel in Professor Morello's head. It clicked in perfectly, with the three prongs at the bottom of the slot sliding inside the three holes in the lid. The other end of this cable ran across the roof and into the machine, and as soon as the connection was made the machine let off a startled belch and the lights on its Cornflakes control panel all flashed on and off at once. The flop eared rabbit, still sat comfortably in the Professor's head, took hold of the joystick in the centre of his control panel, and by manipulating it dextrously whilst pumping a series of organ like peddles with its feet made the Professor's mouth say, 'The machine you see before you is a highly advanced inter-planetary communications module. Now that he is connected, the mouth of your Professor Morello acts as both a microphone and a speaker for the machine. Whatever we make him say will be transmitted, and whatever transmissions we receive will be spoken from his mouth.'

'But...' stuttered Ruby close to fainting, 'but, you are a rabbit?'

The flop eared rabbit wiggled his joystick frantically and stamped on the peddles. 'No, you foolish Earthling,' was the booming result from the Professor's mouth. 'Why would a stupid rabbit need a highly advanced inter-planetary communications module, huh? The bunny suit is just a protective covering, a bio suit, that stops us drying out in your oxygen rich atmosphere and enables us to move around in your heavy gravity.'

'So, what are you?' Ruby managed to squeeze out in a tiny voice.

'Aliens you idiot. Extraterrestrial. Martians,' shouted the Professor as the bunnies legs pumped furiously. 'Anyway, I said no questions until the end.'

‘Commander it is nearly time,’ said the Chief Officer as he consulted his control panel of blinking bottle tops. ‘It is time to adopt the final transmission position.’

The flop eared rabbit manipulated its controls and the Professor said ‘Let’s make it so.’ The fiery glow quickly faded from the rabbit’s eyes and it made a series of wild jerking movements before its body went completely limp like it had just suffered some horrible stroke. Seth gasped and Ruby accidentally let out a little urine as they caught sight of glowing jelly like slime pulling itself out of the rabbit’s ear. The jelly like substance itself seemed clear, but it was contained within a thin elastic membrane that gave off a faint green phosphorescence that increased when the membrane was stretched. Thin red tendrils shot out from the centre of the clear jelly stretching out the membrane into long glowing vines. These tendrils attached themselves onto the fur and features of the rabbit, and enabled the creature to slowly pull itself out of the animals ear hole and up on top of the rabbit’s head. Seth and Ruby could see it more clearly now and stared with disbelieving eyes. The flexible membrane contained a sac of clear jelly and at its centre was what looked very much like the yolk of a chicken’s egg in both shape and size. The surface of this yolk, made up of a hundred changing hues of red, seemed to be constantly swirling and shifting, an optical illusion that transformed this roughly spherical object into a void of immense depth. There was a moving area on the surface of this yolk, no bigger than a penny, where the reds became so concentrated and deep that they appeared black, and at the very centre of this optical hole shone a pin prick of light, as bright and as blinding as a laser, and it was with this that the creature surveyed its surroundings. Sometimes the surface of the yolk would appear to boil and a crimson red tendril would shoot out. These tendrils would stretch through the clear jelly and push out the membrane, creating temporary limbs to pull itself along with, or in its own lighter atmosphere to walk on. The Martian was able to contract these temporary limbs back into the yolk when they were no longer required. The jelly itself was also amorphous,

able to shift and change its shape at whim, but in the Earth's heavy gravity it found it hard to maintain definition, and drooped and sagged inside its protective membrane like a donut around the firmer central yolk of the creature.

The creature, or Martian as it had earlier called itself, settled itself on the rabbit's head between its ears, its tendrils anchoring it to the spot. The bright pin prick of light at the centre of the Martian's yolk swivelled around and lifted upwards until it was pointing straight up into the sky. It seemed to be ready.

Seth looked up following the Martian's gaze, if that's what you can call it. The night sky was completely clear, not a cloud. The moon had not yet risen, but the stars shone at their brightest. Directly above them, exactly where the Martian's gaze fell, was a star that shone brighter than all the rest, and it shone with a pulsing orange glow. Seth knew immediately what this was, he knew it wasn't a star at all, he knew it was a hot and dusty red planet. 'Mars,' he said under his breath (see cover illustration).