



*Martian*

The open headed professor guided Margaret across the hot containerless deck of the Divine Vessel, towards the bow of the ship, where Captain Pekka Pimento was waiting for them. Margaret noticed the Russian whore that she had seen earlier operating the crane and she noted with disgust the weeping skin lesions all over her long white legs, the discharge a mixture of mucous and blood. The prostitute addressed them as they passed, 'Good morning Commander.'

The professor replied 'Good morning soldier, good work last night, I hope that new body's working out for you.'

'Yes sir,' the hooker replied peeling a long crusted scab from the side of her face.

As they joined the captain at the bow two Chinese deckhands wheeled out a large cardboard box control panel and positioned it in front of them. The main body of it was clearly made from the packaging for an upright fridge freezer. The top of the box had been cut and bent downwards to create a sloping lectern like surface. Along the bottom edge of this surface were four sauce bottle top buttons, each a different primary colour. In the centre of this otherwise empty surface was a large joystick made from a ping pong bat tied to a knitting needle with mauve wool.

'Good morning...Commander,' said the captain to the Professor, struggling to get the words out in between painful laboured breaths. 'Everything is ready and we are approaching the catch zone... Shall I open the hold and raise the highly technically advanced catcher module for the intergalactic catapult?'

'Make it so,' replied the Professor, though he too had begun to struggle to get his words out between terribly swollen lips.

The captain took up his position behind the fridge freezer packaging control panel and depressed the yellow flip top mayonnaise button. Both the captain and the professor maintained their rigid military stances, and held their breaths. Nothing happened. Then, accompanied by a sigh of relief, the pair saw the huge horizontal metal hold doors in front of them begin to slowly concertina upwards.

Margaret turned towards the professor and, putting her hand on his forearm, asked, 'Is it really necessary for me to be here George? It certainly looks like you have been busy, and it's all very nice but, you see there's this jigsaw puzzle I...'

'Mrs McKlusky,' the commander boomed, its flopped rabbit working its peddles and joystick quickly to generate the words through the now cracked and bloody swollen lips of the professor. 'I don't think you quite comprehend the situation. You, out of the entire human race, have been chosen by myself, the commander of the merciless elite invading armies of the mighty scarlet planet, to witness the landing of the said elite invading armies. After which point I will probably kill you. If you have no wish to sit back and enjoy this spectacle then I can arrange to have you killed this instant. The choice is yours, but for my ego's sake I would ask you to stay with us just a little bit longer. And once again, please call me Commander.'

Margaret chose not to reply to this loud man. But she did feel somewhat flattered to have been asked, after all, he had said he'd chosen her out of the entire human race. Well, she could spare another half hour or so, but she didn't want to be too late for lunch, but who would cook her lunch now that the steward had a fork in his throat?

As Margaret's mind whirred with the problems of lunch, knitting, and the Readers Digest, the catcher module for the intergalactic catapult slowly rose out of the hold and up to deck level. It looked of a similar design to the strange inter-planetary communications module that the Martians had used to communicate with Control back on Mars a week earlier, only this machine was many many times larger. Like the previous machine

it also had a funnel like devise, though this one was more the size of a whale than a walrus. It was made from long rolls of metal sheeting that had been hammered over a framework of scavenged copper water pipes. Its movement was controlled by a powerful looking armature built from the dissected arms of Japanese heavy plant machinery originally destined for New Zealand. At its narrow end, the tail of the whale, it was connected to a long snaking tube made of empty tin cans, their lids and bottoms removed, covered with an outer skin of women's stockings. The pipe fed through an ex-passenger's suitcase, attached to which was a modified television screen that currently displayed the tally of 'Zero Martians'. After passing through the suitcase the pipe fed into a hole in the side of a forty foot orange refrigerated container. Pointing towards the container with the index finger of Professor Morello the Martian commander explained to Margaret.

'After being neatly caught in the catcher module the Martians will pass along the post landing transfer passageway into the initial reception zone. In here we have our technicians ready to fit each Martian with their own made to measure bunny suit. As the Martian passes the Martian identification and counter module,' at which point the Professor's finger was adjusted to point at the suitcase, 'their identity is sent automatically ahead to the technicians in the reception zone. They then find the bunny suit allocated for that specific Martian and inject it with the serum that will wake the rabbit from its extended slumber. The rabbit's brain is then sucked out and the newly arrived Martian is free to climb right in. And so within a minute of landing on Earth they find themselves safe and sound, protected from Earth's atmosphere and gravity within their very own bunny suit. That conveyor belt,' the Professor's finger was shifted slightly to indicate the rigged up toilet rolls and torn strips of bed sheet, 'carries the brave soldiers to the second reception zone,' with which the pointing finger moved across to indicate a line of open blue refrigerated containers that contained row after row of hundreds of human bodies, hanging by their collars from hooks,

their faces expressionless, the tops of their heads open. 'Where they are allocated a pre-prepared and ready to go human vessel. And so... Oh excuse me one moment.' The professor's rabbit manipulated his hand into his pocket to retrieve a neatly folded polka dot handkerchief with which to wipe away the squished banana like discharge that had just spewed out of his now split swollen lower lip. 'And so you see we are unstoppable. First my red army will take New Zealand, and then the world.'

'Commander,' wheezed the captain from beneath his limp silver moustache. He was now forced to prop his failing body against the control panel just to remain standing. 'The time is very near...in a few minutes we shall be at the equator and in the catch zone.'

The professor's flop eared rabbit pushed two levers forward and pressed a indigo button, and the professor took hold of the pair of binoculars that had been hanging around his neck and raised them to his rabbit's sore and swollen eyes. Looking up towards the sky, and carefully adjusting the focus, the rabbit made the professor exclaim, 'There they are, the dastardly elite invading army of our mighty red home. I can see the first ones now, they are coming in fast, range ten miles. Start the machine Captain, and turn her to twenty degrees.'

The captain lifted a bloody finger, large flakes of skin falling off to reveal the raw flesh beneath, and depressed the red ketchup lid button. The great whale sized catcher gave a tremendous shudder and let out a long groan as its controlling armature sprang into life. Mustering all his fast disappearing strength and with a huge effort the captain grasped the ping pong bat with both scabbed and bloody hands. By twisting it and angling it forward he made the huge catcher pivot round and angle itself at twenty degrees.

'No, no bring it round some more Captain,' ordered the commander, the sticky yellow discharge forming strings of mucous between the professor's top and bottom lip. 'No, right, right, I said right, no, that's the wrong way. What the hell's going on.'

Taking his tiny red rabbit's eyes away from the binoculars he saw exactly what the problem was. The captain

had now lost control of his limbs and his arms were jerking in every direction, sending large chunks of skin, blood and mucous flying all over. One hand still had hold of the ping pong joystick, causing the silver catcher to wave around wildly above the deck, its mechanical armature groaning as it struggled to keep up.

The commander looked down the deck of the ship in horror and found the rest of his comrades suffering from the same symptoms. They grasped at their throats unable to breath, and staggering randomly across the deck. His Chinese technicians had burst out of the reception zones, the grotesque swellings across their faces pouring blood and bile over their bodies.

There was a blood curdling scream and the commander looked up to see Oddbjorn Ballengrud, his fiendish chief scientist, stagger from the bridge. The huge swelling on the side of his face had burst leaving his eye dangling from its socket. The Martian driver made a last ditch attempt to eject, but it was too late. Oddbjorn's body spasmed out of control pitching him over the railing and tumbling the five stories from the bridge down to the main deck. His head exploded as it hit the deck and his rabbit tumbling out, its paws twitching and shaking wildly, blood flowing from its ears and eyes. From the rabbit's crumpled right ear the Martian chief scientist tried to drag himself, its tentacles shooting out to grip onto the hot painted surface of the deck. But it was already too late, its phosphorescent sack had been punctured by the fall, and its liquid insides flowed from it slowly spreading out in a puddle across the deck. Its pulsing red yolk began to pulse slower and slower and dimmer and dimmer until eventually it lay still and lifeless.

The Russian whore and the Korean dog walker sprinted from opposite sides of the main deck on a collision course, their legs moving like pistons beyond their control. They crashed head on sending each other spinning onto the deck where their severely scaled and swollen bodies twitched and leapt like fish out of water. Inside each of their heads the Martians fought hard to regain control, but it was no good. Their rabbits were

suffering the same symptoms as their human vessels, and they too jerked and shook uncontrollably. The rabbits' little paws smashed against the insides of the humans' skulls until they were no more than bloody stumps. Their cute bunny heads whiplashed backwards and forwards against the control panels, joysticks piercing eyeballs and levers shattering teeth, until there was no life left in either the bunnies or their unfortunate female vessels. The lifeless body of the hooker lay spreadeagled on the deck, her face contorted by the horrific pain of her final moments into an orgasmic death mask. Whilst the dead Korean dog walkers expression remained hidden, her face buried deep into the other lady's muff. The two street walkers lay locked together in a grim girl on girl tableau.

The commander lifted the binoculars again to his rabbit's eyes and checked the range of his fast approaching Martian army. There wasn't much time! Captain Pekka Pimento had collapsed over the control panel and the top half of his skull had fallen away. His rabbit's fur was matted and crusted, the flesh around its eyes had swollen and closed over them, its little body gave a violent tremor as the last spark of life left it. From the dead rabbit's ear a glowing tentacle shot out, and finding purchase on the cardboard control panel the Martian began to pull itself free from the now useless bunny suit. As it teetered on the threshold of the rabbit's ear canal it lost its grip and slipped from the ear and fell with a plop onto the deck below. It lay there stunned and useless, death just moments away.

The commander made to push the captain off the cardboard control panel, but found he had lost control of his own arm. His rabbit fought furiously with the professor's levers and dials, but was finding it hard to see out of its own eyes now. Its paws had begun to wildly punch the air, and inside the rabbit's head the commander struggled desperately to make the rabbit's body obey his wishes. His flop eared rabbit's head jerked up momentarily and he saw through its eyes his Martian army beginning to rain down upon the ship. The wide open mouth of the catcher module for the intergalactic

catapult was crashing uselessly against the deck, its controlling ping pong bat joystick flattened against the control panel by the captain's dead body. Without the catcher module the Commander's comrades began to fall from space all around him, hitting the ship with a thwump or a splat, bouncing a few inches off the ground, before coming to rest after their long journey. Some clung uselessly to the windows of the ship before slowly curling up like stickers that had lost their glue and falling to the decks. Other's whizzed past the dying crew members into the ocean, some skimming the calm waters and bouncing several times, before sliding into the depths.

Andre Valov rushed from the ship's engine room and began to try to catch some of these intergalactic Frisbees, but they were moving too fast. He finally stumbled to the deck, exhausted by his minuscule effort, the cruel disease that had taken possession of his body dragging him down to his death. His Martian made a final attempt to save itself, and with huge effort managed to get the flailing paw of his bunny to hit the bright red button on the inside of Andre's skull. A split second later tiny charges exploded around the circumference on the Russian's cranium and the top of his head flew off. Similar explosive charges detonated around the smaller cranium of the white rabbit inside milliseconds later. As the top half of the bunnies head span off tangentially into the sea the Martian shot out of the hollow head, propelled like a small red amorphous cannonball from a white furry cannon by the mini explosion beneath its ejector seat. However the Martian's desperate act of self-preservation was in vain. It whizzed through the air at a tremendous rate, and the impact of its collision with the glossy mimosa yellow base of the crane was so great that the red core of its body, strobing red with fear in its last moments, splattered like an over ripe beef tomato against it.

The commander made one last lunge for the control panel to try and regain control of the catcher module. One of the intergalactic Frisbees struck the professor on cheek, it's gloop leaving a greenish sheen, as it fell

dying to the deck. The eyes of the professor and his Japanese rabbit were all but useless now, the swellings around them pushing them closed, and the heavy magnolia yellow discharge gluing them shut. The professor's body was no longer able to draw breath, his lungs collapsed full of fluid. As the commander manipulated the professor's jerky leg one step closer to the consol it fell upon the dying body of Pekka Pimento's Martian. Slipping on the alien banana skin the body of the professor performed a backwards flip and twist, falling to the deck with a crunch, never to get up again.

Margaret stood in the middle of the carnage. The bodies of the Martian crew lay strewn across the deck of the ship, a few twitching with the last signs of life. Some of their rabbits had ejected from their human vessels but their own bodies had suffered the same despicable virus. The jelly like Martians continued to rain down upon the deck of the ship their little bodies omitting terrified yelps the split second before hitting metal. Their broken bodies lay squirming on the red hot deck, under the equatorial sun, and gently cooked.

Finally, the extra terrestrial downpour ceased, apart from the occasional slow coach landing here and there. The giant frying pan, The Divine Vessel, lay covered by the Martians' remains, their jelly bodies now turned white and their red yolks cooked a deep crimson, their edges all crispy. As Margaret brushed a couple of the Martians from her shoulder and disentangled one from her frizzy hair something stirred near her feet. She looked down to see the collapsed and broken body of the professor, bloody and spent. With the final ounce of strength left in his wobbly body the commander was able to make his rabbit punch out the simple sequence of peddle combinations that produced the word from the professor's cracked and bloody mouth, 'Why?'

'Well, that's simple, why didn't you ask earlier?' chirped back Margaret with great satisfaction. 'I used to be a vetanery nurse don't you know. It looks like a nasty case of myxomatosis to me.' And with that the commander died.

Margaret retrieved her knitting needle and carefully,

trying to avoid the dying aliens, dead bunnies and deceased humans, made her way back to her cabin. Behind her the elite invading army from the red planet sizzled on the scorching pea green deck of the Divine Vessel like a thousand bloody fried eggs.