

**Earplug Adventures**

**WORSTWORLD**

**Volume  
Two**



**Tooty Nolan**

**The Fourteenth in the Series**

# Earplug Adventures: Worstworld (Volume Two)

Tooty Nolan

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## Prologue

*The Museum of Future Technology's sole star ship - Ship Number Fifteen...*



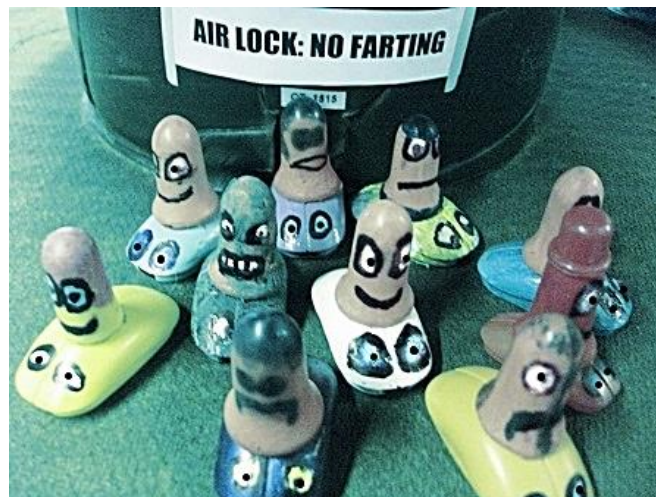
*... had become lost in space during it's ascent from the surface of Mars, where it was attacked by pirates from Hyperspace...*



*The huge vessel survived the attack, but runaway engines carried it deep into uncharted space. Discovering a new world, Captain Horatio Noseblower ordered the ship land there...*



*Scouts were sent out to explore the planet; meet the inhabitants; and find something to eat...*



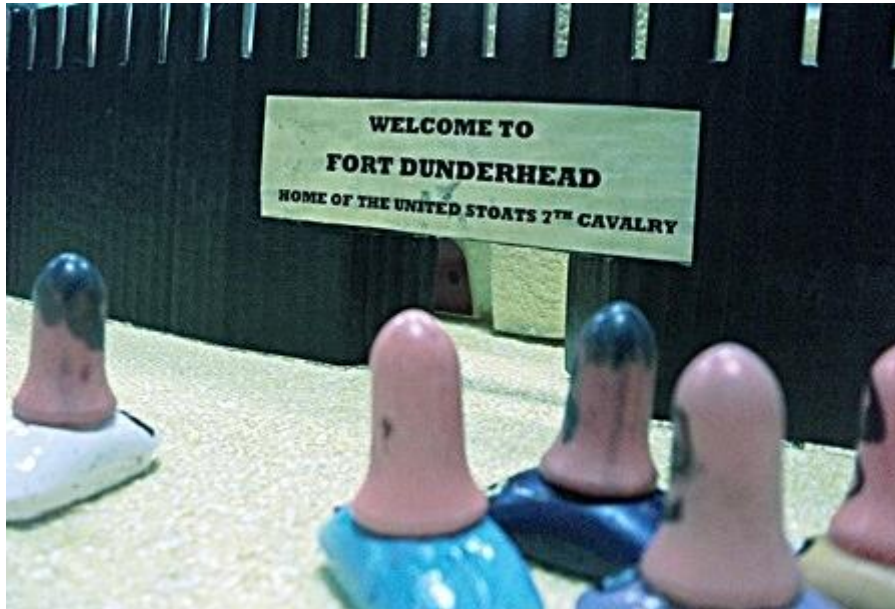
*They discovered that the sun was likely to go nova, and that nearly everyone now lived below ground. The Scout Craft had also been flight-tested, where upon which it encountered (and defeated in battle) an End Cap Pirate Attack Ship...*



*The tale continues...*

## Chapter 1

Whilst the brief aerial battle had taken place, down below and far away, the Earplug Brothers stumbled upon a huge wooden stockade...



"It says '*Welcome to Fort Dunderhead*'." Rudi observed. "I'll take that as an invitation."



But once they had entered, the Seventh Cavalry troopers thought that the brothers were delivering a fresh posse of Plugmutts. So, despite Rudi's assertions to the contrary, assuming that they were Army property, the cavalry placed them in a corral with their own...



**"That hardly seems fair." Magnuss complained.**

**"Do not concern yourself, brave fellow." A young officer addressed him. "If it is later proven that they are indeed your Plugmuts, you shall get them back. So, for now at least, please shut your cake hole."**



**Magnuss was mollified by this, but he still wasn't smiling...**



But he cheered himself with the thought that the establishment was run by the military, and at any other time the five brothers might well have been shot for being very stupid spies.

Darkness had fallen by the time the gate was next utilised. Floodlights now illuminated the interior and exterior of the stockade. A troop was just returning from yet another pointless patrol...



**"Well boys," their commanding officer, Major Leftfoot Badger, announced. "here we are - all safe and sound after a gruelling patrol that asked, nor received, any quarter."**



**"Now you common-or-garden troopers go and have yourselves a lovely plate of beans on toast, a vast mug of hot tea, and perhaps a slice of lemon drizzle cake; whilst I have a nice chat with my junior officers about what didn't happen today." He said, as they entered the parade ground...**



**But it took a while for them to come to a dead stop because their exhausted Plugmutts were walking on a combination of adrenaline and auto-pilot...**



**But after circumnavigating the parade ground a mere seventeen more times, the troop were finally able to dismount. As they did so Major Leftfoot Badger was surprised to find some new Plugmutts tied up outside of the Officer's Quarters...**



**"What the devil are Plugmutts doing tied up here?" He bellowed. "They're liable to poop all over the place. Lieutenant Sixsplodge; I want answers, and I want them now."**

**Fortunately the weary Lieutenant Sixsplodge spotted a hand written note that had been affixed to one of the saddles with a length of double-sided sticky tape. He read it out: "No subcutaneous identification chip found. Must conclude that these are not property of the United Stoats Army, and can be released into the care of their rightful owners - the Earplug Brothers."**

**Badger 'harrumphed' loudly, and then made for his office...**





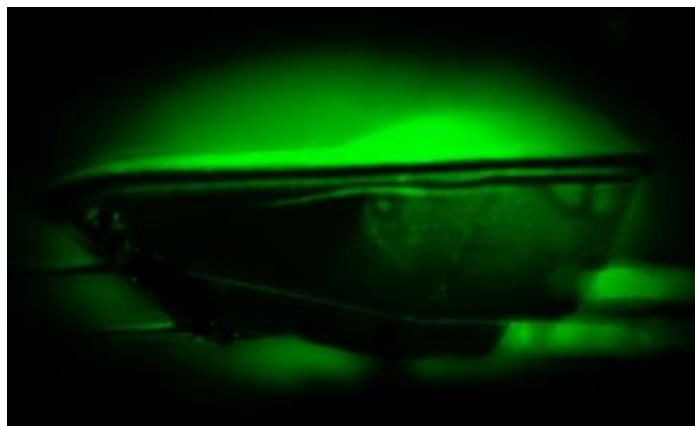
Upon entering, he was somewhat surprised to find the Earplug Brothers waiting for him...



"Hi." Rudi said as the others smiled. "We're the Earplug Brothers. We're here to do lucrative business with the army."

## Chapter 2

Night had also fallen where Quentin and Atcherly were continuing their maiden flight of the scout ship...



**"I can't see where I'm going." Quentin complained. "The interior light is too bright. All I can see is our reflections in the canopy. And this night vision gear is absolutely ghastly. I'm afraid we might bump into a mountain or something."**

**"There doesn't seem to be a dimmer switch." Atcherly replied. "We need to light the path ahead. Try firing the atomic cannons."**

**It was a brilliant idea; so Quentin did...**



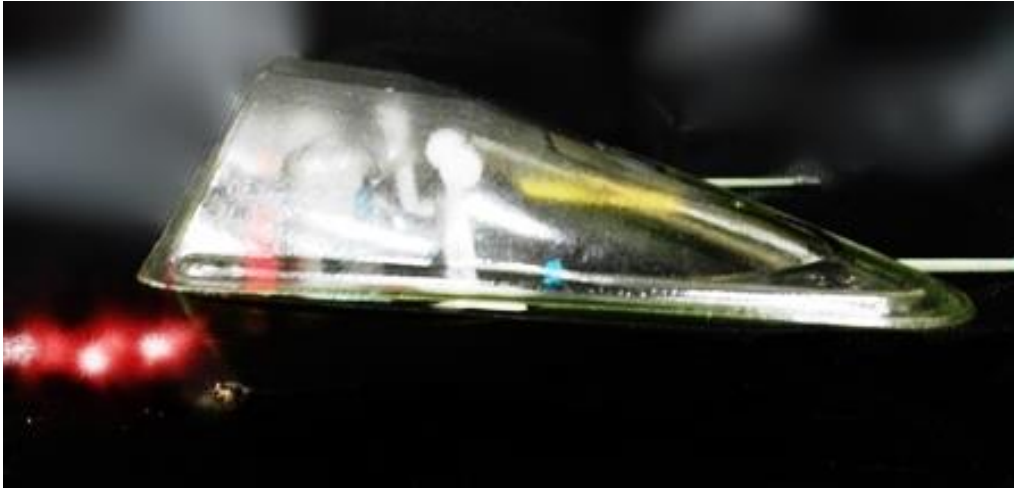
**Perhaps it was a loose wire or a dodgy servo, no one knew for certain: but when the recoil of the cannon shook the scout ship, something appeared to complete an otherwise incomplete electrical circuit, and suddenly they had the biggest bloody headlight in all creation, and could see almost to infinity and back...**



**But they kept firing the cannons because they really liked the sound...**



**Unfortunately this unprofessional behaviour drained the battery so badly that the engines began to misfire...**



**...and they came very close to crashing into the mountain that Quentin had mentioned earlier. So they decided to settle the craft down upon a rocky ledge before disaster struck...**



**...and hoped that the battery would revive by morning.**

**"Do they have toilets in the mountains, Atcherly?" Quentin asked his co-pilot. "I'm dying for a poop."**

**Meanwhile Major Badger had been joined by Lieutenant Sixsplodge and the troop's NCO - Staff Sergeant Wetpatch Wilton...**



**"As you know," Rudi was saying to the assembled soldiery, "my bros and me have been here for several hours. Well, after all that time, it's pretty clear to us that you guys are suffering severe funding deficiencies. You aint got enough Plugmutts to start with. You only go on patrol because it saves water and electricity. Heck, even your floodlighting is solar-powered, and switches off after midnight! For guys like you lot...well our offer is un-refusable."**

**Major Badger found himself intrigued, but he didn't want his officers hearing the intimate details, so he sent them to stand out of earshot...**



**"Right then," he said as he took off his hat and leant over the table, "give me the gen."**

**Rudi too leaned closer, and whispered: "We have a huge spaceship that's full of passengers. They're a greedy bunch of bleeders, and have eaten the galley larder empty. Likewise the water supply. If you can re-fill the victuals store with locally produced**

fodder, and divert a river so that we can refill the water tanks, we'll give you a huge bag of gold, some uranium, our Sunday-best Cossack hats, some black and white pictures of K'plank the Space Wanderer's backside, and a thorough clean of all your underwear courtesy of our ship's washer-woman, Vanilla Redbush."

Major Badger nodded thoughtfully. In a low voice he asked: "This gold you mentioned: can I have it in a brown paper bag? A really strong one?"

Rudi smiled: the deal was as good as done. So before long the brothers were being reintroduced to Staff Sergeant Wetpatch Wilton...



"Wilton will be coming along with you." Lieutenant Sixsplodge explained. "He'll take notes - like how much grub you need, and what river to divert. He can also check the authenticity of the gold. He has very strong teeth, you know. Oh yes - and we're keeping your Plugmutts too."

A short while later Staff Sergeant Wetpatch Wilton and the Earplug Brothers were on their way...



...where they were surprised to meet Sheriff Sinclair Brooch...

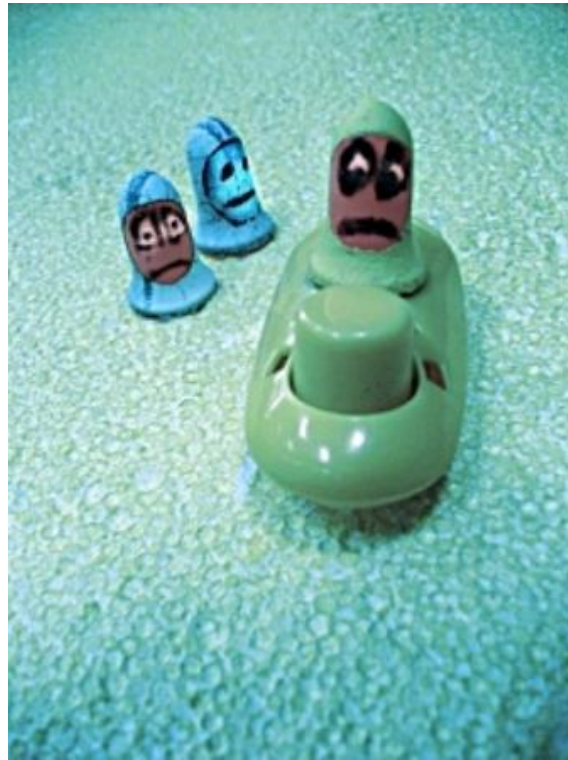


"Howdy, partners." He said. "Just thought I ought 'a tell ya; there's a canyon up a ways that aint exactly what you'd call safe. It's one of them *box* canyons..."



Some folks say that it's haunted. Others reckon that it's aesthetically displeasing'. But either way, there's some real mean and nasty bandidos runnin' about the range; and there aint nothing a mean bandido likes more than a box canyon."

**Whilst Wilton and the boys assimilated this information, Byron Whipsnaid was finally beginning his quest to fetch help for the virtually helpless prospector colleagues...**



**"Bye." He said as he twisted the throttle of Finlay's salt flat scooter. "I may be gone some time."**

**In next to no time he'd placed a little distance between himself and the others...**



**...and he was getting a good 'feel' for his mighty steed. He also felt reasonably certain that he could remember his way back to Busted Gut and the nearby entrance to the underground city...**

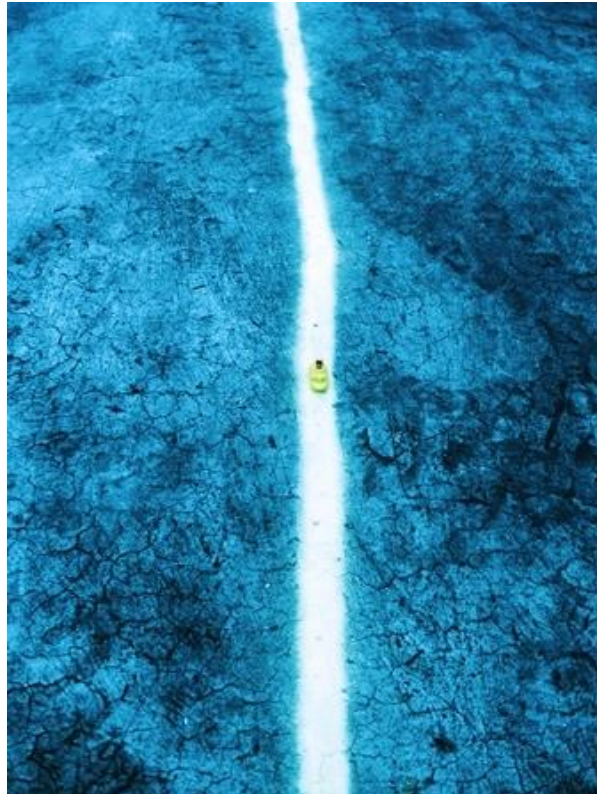


**But as the road grew ever longer...**



**...doubts began to form in his mind. And as the road seemed to stretch out for ever in front and behind him...**





**Those doubts began to solidify into a dreadful certainty that he had taken the longest, *wrongest*, road in the whole wide world....**



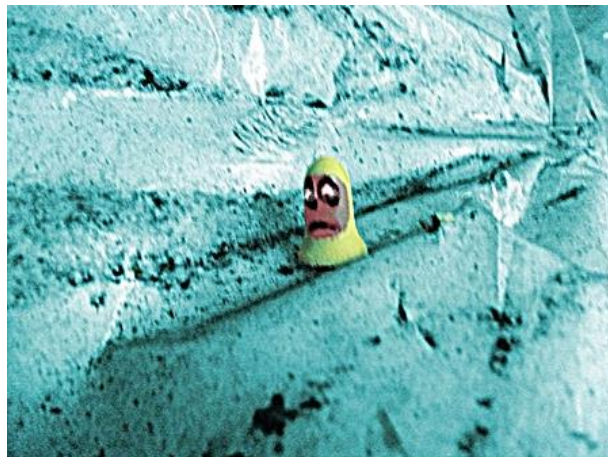
**In fact it was so wrong that Byron was forced to stop by a rare hedgerow, and take a leak...**



**Then the road began its climb into the mountains, where Byron's scooter ran out of juice. But he didn't really mind because he knew that his life plans lay in tatters upon the plain below anyway...**



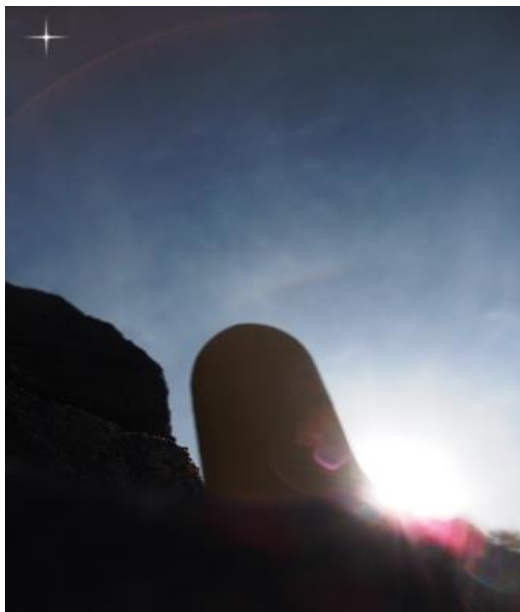
**But when the road became a path; then degenerated into a precipitous ledge...**



**...his doubts returned with a vengeance. And when he finally saw the sun directly again he knew that he must be approaching the summit of the mountain range and was now walking a path that looked strangely artificial, and possibly earplug-made...**



**And when, finally, he dragged his chilled, exhausted, poorly oxygenated, body to what he prayed was the pinnacle...**



**...he discovered that the setting sun couldn't disguise a huge tubular vent that spewed a warm, invigorating breeze...**



...that firstly made the end of Byron's nose tingle so much that he thought he might have contracted nasal thrush; then travelled throughout his body - making it glow and sparkle with a mystical energy that made him feel whole again and full of *go-go-go*. Moments later a diffuse and inviting light shone upon him, which provoked a remarkable, double-barrelled breaking of wind...



As his eyes adjusted to its gentle brilliance, he noticed a vast, high wall...



...upon which he found a sign that read:



**Below it he discovered a glowing device...**



**"Hooray," Byron cried out with joy, "a toilet!" But it only turned out to be a mystical butt-warmer, which Byron enjoyed anyway - before proceeding into a nearby conurbation, where he chanced upon an establishment named Lilac's...**



**By now his desire to defecate was all-consuming. "If I don't go soon," he whimpered, "my bowels will explode in an exaltation of filth!"**



Unfortunately a lovely female chose that moment to step into the doorway, thereby barring his way...



"Hi," she said, "I'm Lilac Earthdamsel *nee* Binsmell: I'm the proprietor of this place: would you like to come in and look around?"

Byron didn't need a second bidding...

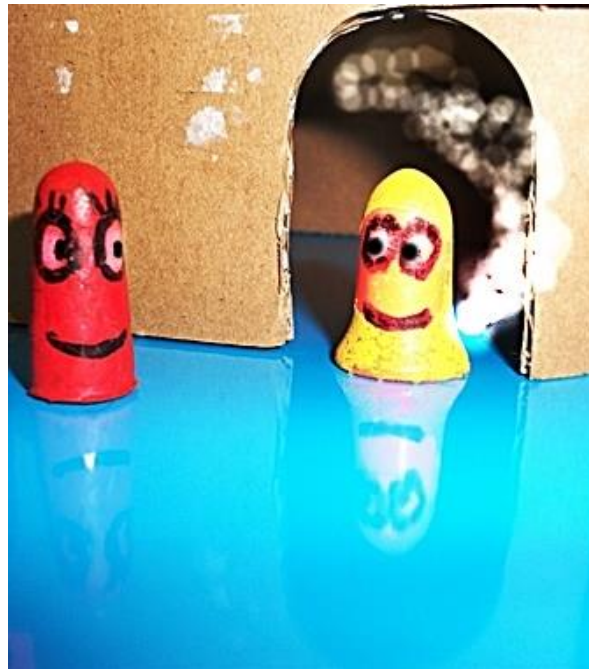


Such was his haste that Lilac felt compelled to jump out of the way.

"Your toilet." Byron roared. "Where is it? My underpants are stretched beyond their design parameters, and my sphincter is on the verge of disintegration!"

"Oh my God." Lilac squealed. "Quickly, over there - in the corner. There's a mop and bucket behind the door if you don't get there in time!"

Five minutes later Byron emerged from the lavatory...



"Thank you, that was lovely." He said.

Lilac smiled and tried to ignore the vile stench that followed her new guest into the bar. But when she tried to interest him in her dance troupe, Byron's reaction made her smile fall away...



"Sorry," Byron apologised, "but I'm a prospector for Slobomite and Bumholium, which has caused physiological changes to occur in some of my vital organs: I don't do that sort of thing. Dancing makes me feel sick."

Lilac hadn't been doing particularly good business of late, and had been forced to lay off some of her lousier dancers – particularly the ones with two left feet. In desperate need of Byron's loose change she called her most gorgeous barmaids from the saloon bar...



But still Byron wasn't interested. He explained the problem thus:

"I come from a good God-fearing home." He said gently. "As a result alcohol just doesn't do it for me. I promised my dear mother that if I was ever going to allow a scalding liquid to pass my lips, it could only be mocha flavoured coffee that had been reheated in her microwave oven. I do hope you understand."

Lilac understood all too well: she just couldn't believe that she'd found a male earplug who felt the same way as her about coffee; She was actually quietly thrilled. So she invited him for a stroll around the town...

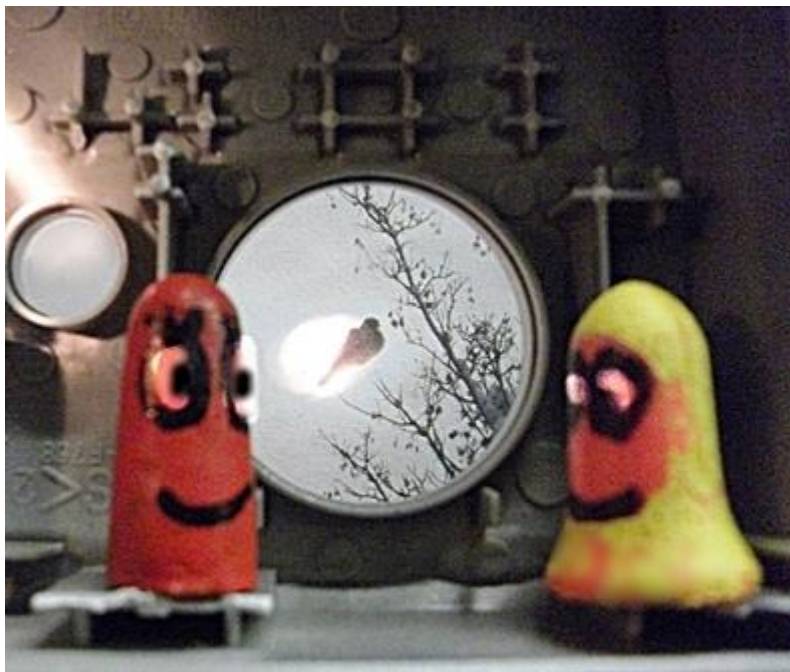




**...leaving her 'girls' to enjoy a high-kicking contest on the top of one of her sturdier tables, to a funky mystical mountain kingdom groove...**



**The walk that Lilac took Byron on was long and circumbendibus. Byron knew that he should have been weary after the ascent to Kah-Ki-Pu, but reasoned that the air that was being constantly replenished by the huge vent on the edge of town was still reinvigorating him. So he relaxed, and enjoyed the company. They chatted about this and that. About their past lives. Their hopes for the future. Eventually though, Lilac drew to a halt beside a circular window that was recessed into a spectacularly hi-tech wall. Through the window, Byron could discern a huge bird that rested upon the branch of a moon-lit tree...**



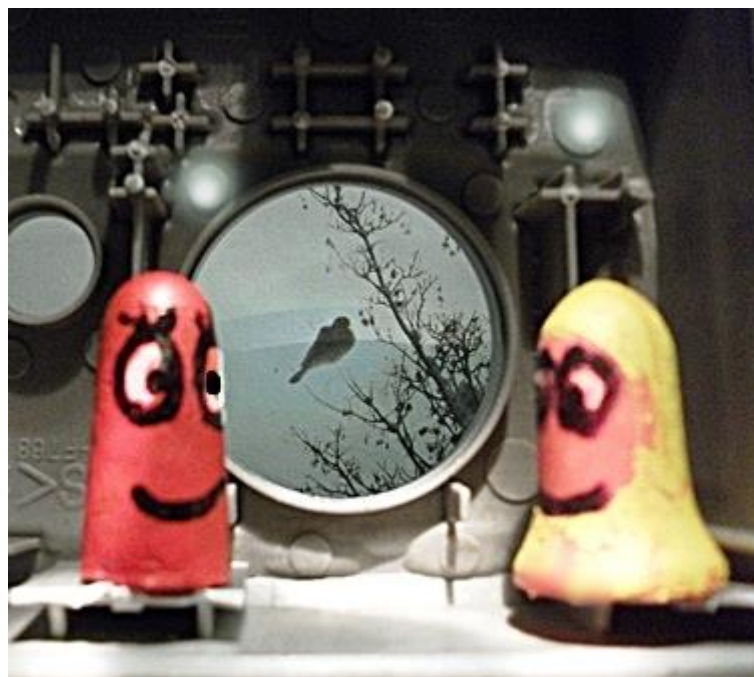
**"It's the magical Love-Pigeon of Kah-Ki-Pu." Lilac explained. "It is said that if its light were to fall upon a couple of earplugs, they would be bound to fall in love forever."**

**Byron would have scoffed, but then this happened...**



**"Would you look at that." He exclaimed. "A lover's moon!"**

**A split second later a shaft of Lover's Moonlight fell upon them...**



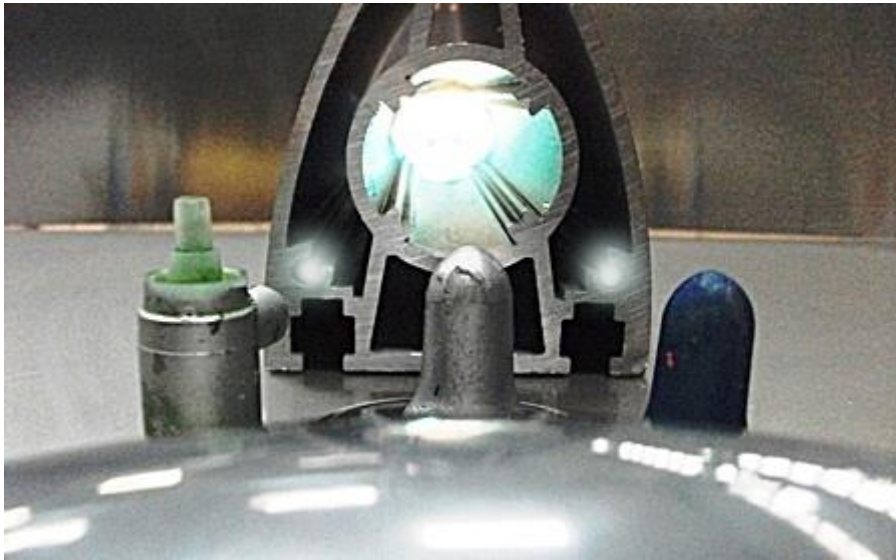
**"Oh, Lilac." Byron bellowed. "You may be a rubbish bar keeper - but I love you with all my heart!"**

**"And I love you too." Lilac wailed uncontrollably. "Despite your propensity to wear silly yellow prospector's one-piece suits!"**

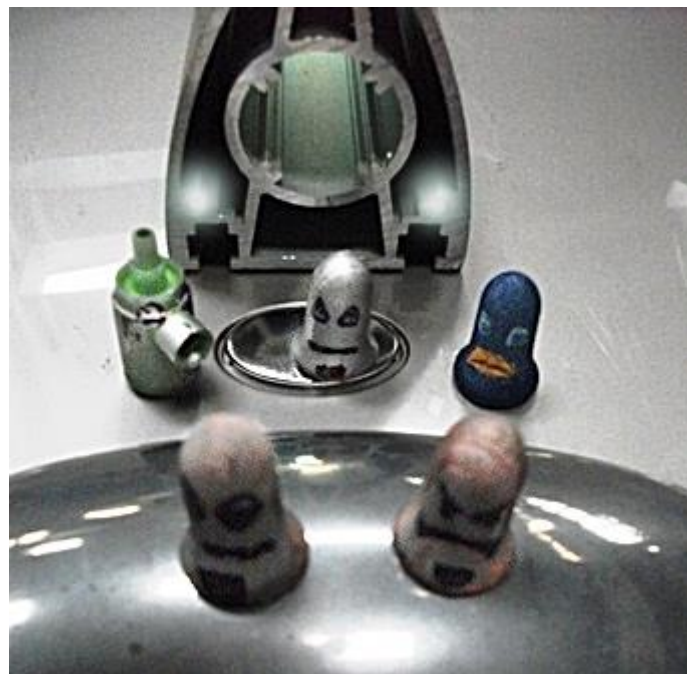
**"Coo." The Love-Pigeon of Kah-Ki-Pu said when it heard...**

### Chapter 3

But whilst relationships were progressing nicely in Kah-Ki-Pu – back on Earth, inside the Museum of Future Technology, events were about to take a nasty turn, because Mister Zinc had begun the process of thawing out two of his cryogenically frozen thugs...



It was a slow process, but eventually the Cryogenic Chamber released its willing inmates...



"Ugh?" They managed. "Who am I? What am I doing here?"

Then Zinc spoke with his stentorian tone...



**"I'm here, you idiots. Behind you. Stopping gazing introspectively and listen. I have a nice little job for you. I think you're going to like it - you evil swine."**

**So, a while later...**



**The Avatar, Angel with a Huge Nose, Dan Down'n'out, and the Stenchlingers were strolling along the main thoroughfare, when their forward progress was thwarted...**



**"Going somewhere?" Zinc inquired.**

**But, of course, he knew better. He was being rhetorical. He knew exactly where they were going – even if they didn't. He was just being awkward and showing off to his henchmen. Later still Zinc's mob invaded a zombie disco in the cemetery...**



**"I'm so sorry, boys and girls," The Cemetery Avatar said to the vaguely surprised zombies...**



**..."but I'm afraid the party's over. Resistance is futile. We're all prisoners of that nasty Mister Zinc again."**

**Past experience should have taught the zombies what to expect next; but they had short memories, so they were duly surprised when they were installed upon Mister Zinc's Suspended Animation Wall - along with everyone else...**



**"Blast!" Said the museum's Avatar through her painted-on smile...**



**..."And I was just beginning to enjoy the peace and quiet of an abandoned museum too!"**

By chance, Plopper, Hermi, and Benjamin had been invited to the disco; but because they'd become trapped in an elevator for over an hour, they arrived late - to find the cemetery deserted...



"That's weird." Benjamin said. "The party should be in full swing by now. Where are all the drunks pressing their naked buttocks against the window?"

"Yeah." An aggrieved Hermi complained. "I was supposed to do a karaoke version of *'What Becomes of the Broken Winded'*. Now I won't be able to. I was really looking forward to that. Someone's going to pay for my disappointment."

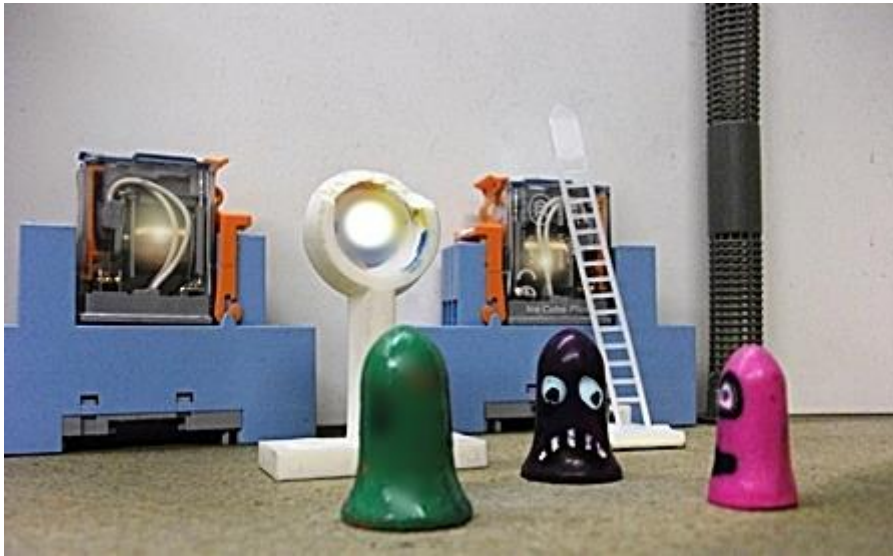
It was Plopper who noticed the unusual footprints in the recently disturbed soil.

"One of them looks like they belong to a robot." He said. "And there's evidence to suggest that at least two people have had icicles recently detach themselves from their nasal passages."

Hermi didn't waste a second. Two minutes later all three earplugs stood in the security suite, where they played back security footage captured by the museum's CCTV cameras...



**"This is bad." Plopper said when they saw the results. "Does anyone remember what happened next the last time that jumped-up wally, Mister Zinc, tried to take over?"**



**Of course neither of them could. Benjamin had lived in an alternative dimension; and Hermi had buried herself away in her house watching videos about modern architecture. So Plopper told them – at length.**

**"We need help." Hermi said when the purple earplug had finished at last. "And I know just where to find it."**

**So before long, Hermi, Plopper, and Benjamin snuck back along the main thoroughfare inside the zombies' borrowed Cone of Invisibility...**



**...after all the last thing anyone needed was for them to be captured too!**



**It took a while as they crept about clandestinely; but eventually they made their way to Anton Twerp's gallery...**



**At first none of them recognised Twerp's new scary visage. In fact, when she first spotted him in the shadows, Hermi screamed lustily like the full-blooded female she was. Fortunately Twerp was able to calm her down by slapping both cheeks and kicking her in the shin.**

**"What do you want?" He demanded.**

**When they told him all about the mass abduction, Twerp was furious. "The ungrateful git." He fumed. "He put me into suspended animation last time he attempted a coup too. It took a week to regain full control of my bladder. I was close to changing my name to Anton Dribbles. Come on," he said, let's get the so-and-so!"...**



Neither of the three chums had the first idea what Twerp intended to do; but it was plainly obvious that the artist most certainly did. Little time had passed since he'd altered his appearance and despatched his imaginary followers into non-existence, utilising (in both cases) nothing more than intense will power. This knowledge gave him supreme self-confidence; so when he arrived at the Suspended Animation Wall inside the Cone of Invisibility, he didn't care if Zinc and his cronies could see him or not...



...because, using his remarkable talent for altering situations and switching people around, he simply exchanged Zinc and Blue for a pair of similarly coloured Plugmutts from a nearby Plugmutt re-homing facility...



Zinc's thugs were astounded; but Slavemaster One was in rhapsodies.

"I aint never seen nothing like it!" He yelled eloquently. "I don't know who did this, coz they's invisible; but boy, am I gonna be *your* Slavemaster One from now on. You're the tops, man. Now I'm getting the heck outta here – before he does the same to me. And I don't wanna get sent back to no eleventh century Irish peat bog too!"



**This amused Twerp. But it didn't stop him getting on with his task. Within a trice, he had released the captives...**



**"I shall see to it that you receive a knighthood for this." The Avatar informed Twerp. "Also a life-time membership of the 'I Love Café Puke Club', which means you can have a free cup of coffee at the Café Puke every morning until the day you die. Isn't that fab?"**

**"And I'll give you a big kiss." Angel with a Huge Nose added. "But not necessarily on the lips: you're a bit too scary-ugly for me"**

**"What about us?" The zinc and blue coloured Plugmutts inquired.**

**"You're Plugmutts now." Twerp all but snarled his reply. "Do Plugmutt kind of things."**

**"Yeah." Angel sided with her (soon to be) knight in shining armour. "Go tinkle up a lamp post or something equally disgusting."**

**And as regards to Slavemaster One: his 'blarney' got him exactly nowhere, and soon he and Zinc's thugs found themselves ensconced upon the Suspended Animation Wall once again...**



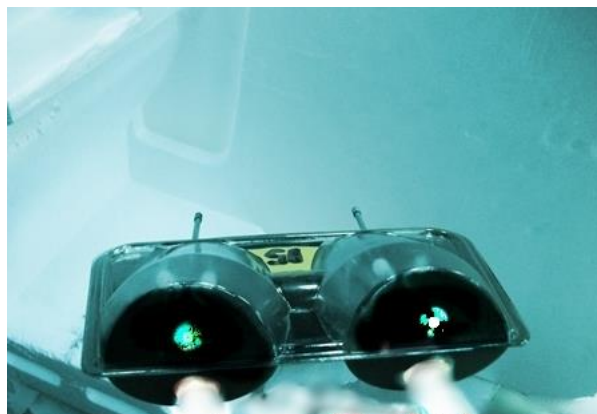
**"Bugger." They said in unison. "That was a short-lived conquest." Then all thoughts ceased as the nasal icicles reformed.**

#### **Chapter 4**

**Meanwhile, upon a planet ever so far away, Quentin Hearthrob and Atcherly Speekin were once again aloft in the Scout Craft...**



**...on a heading that should take them to the blue planet's northern magnetic pole. Whilst over-nighting upon the rocky ledge, they had decided to circumnavigate the globe via the poles. But now that they had arrived, they were somewhat surprised to find an artificial structure in the snowy wastes...**



**"Look at that!" Quentin spoke with a tone of incredulity in his voice. "It looks decidedly earplug-made."**

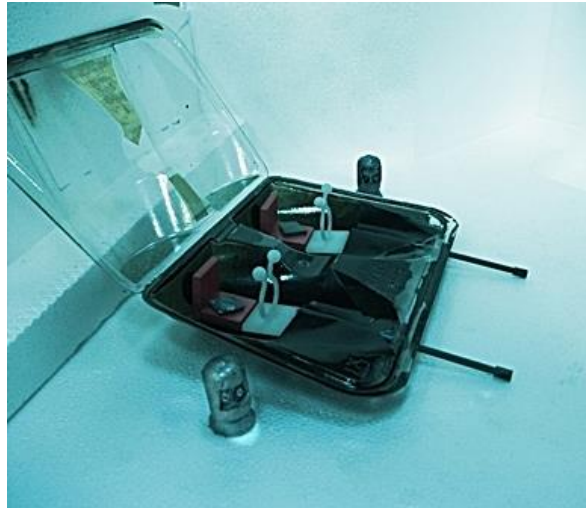
**Turning the scout ship gently in the frigid air, the silver-blue earplugs passed over a vast, strangely corrugated glacier...**



**...which had, at its centre, a huge steam volcano that sent a gigantic spume of super-heated water vapour high into the air, where it condensed in an instant and fell as snow...**



**But despite the immensity of this natural wonder, Quentin thought that it was as boring as heck, and so guided the craft back to the unnatural structure...**



**...where, despite the chill air, and their lack of thermal underpants, they landed and got out for a look around...**



**"My nose is dribbling horribly, Atcherly." Quentin said as he shivered and listened to his knees knocking together. "Do you also have an intense desire to pee?"**

**But Atcherly was more interested in looking around the huge edifice than discussing his personal problems. And what he found didn't so much astonish him...**



**...instead it sent both pilots scurrying back to the scout ship - where they were menaced by a Polar Plugmutt...**

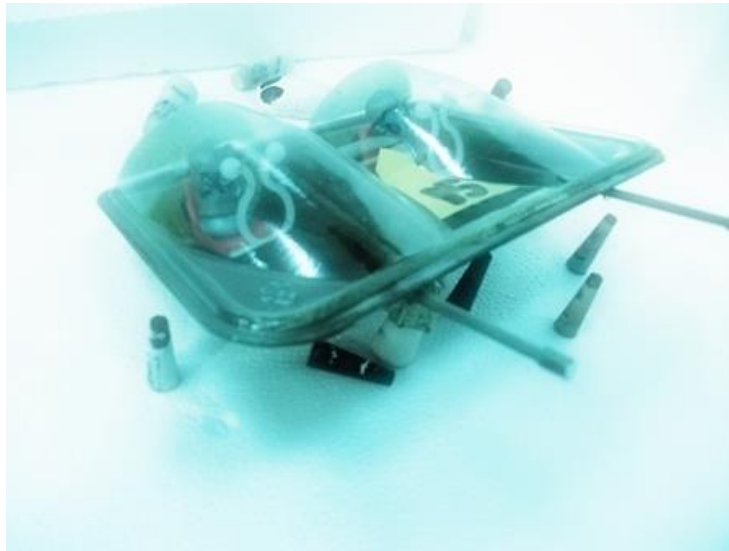


**...and intimidated by Eskibungs...**



**"We're fed up living in the ice and snow of the polar region." The Crown Prince of the Eskibungs bellowed at them through the transparent canopy that separated them. "We want to escape in your flying machine. If we don't get it, you are in deep, deep, kaka. Now hand over those ignition keys this instant - I command you!"**

**Because of the scout ship's poor battery condition and the intense cold, its pilots had left the engines idling quietly. Now, panic-stricken, Quentin jabbed repeatedly at the 'Go Forward' button...**



**“Ow!” Several Eskibungs cried out as the scout ship slid forward and mowed them down and scattered them like ten pins. “No need to get leery: we just want a lift!”**

**But it was too late to placate Quentin. He didn’t hesitate to attempt a near-vertical climb from a standing start that succeeded only in snagging the ship upon a rocky overhang...**

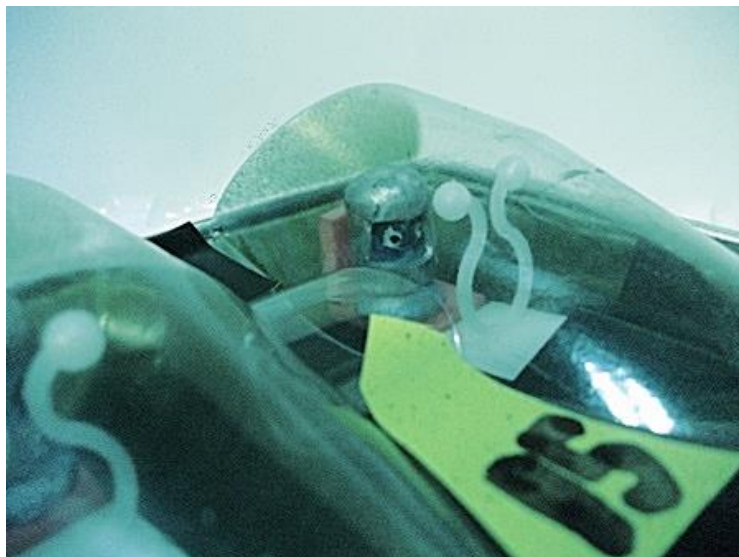


**But the application of twin afterburners quickly launched the tiny ship skyward in a charming cascade of ice crystals - leaving the bunch of Eskibungs to fume angrily in its wake...**



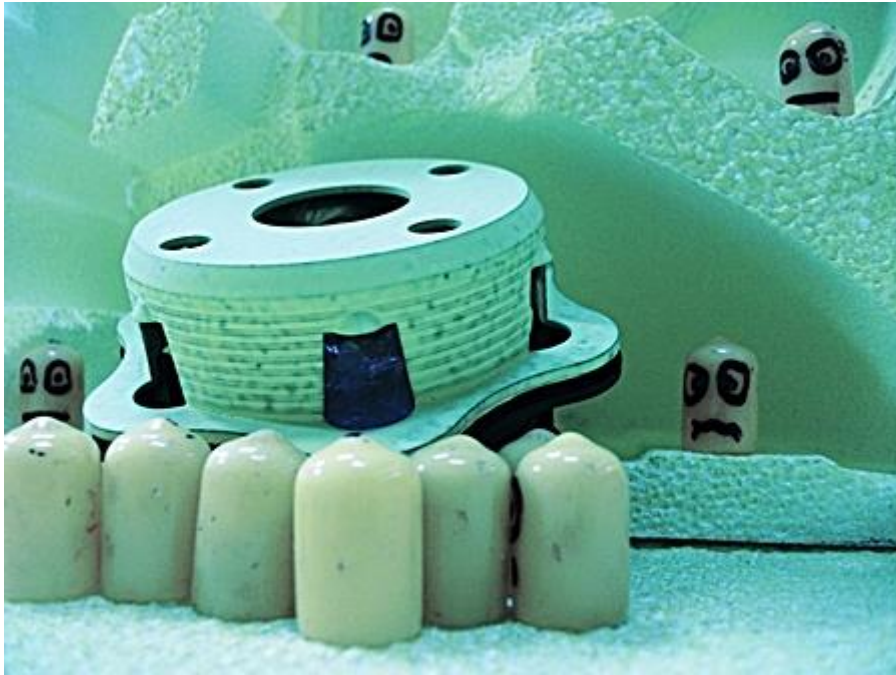


**"Sod this pole-to-pole malarkey." Atcherly said, once they'd gained enough altitude...**



**..."I vote we fly straight back the way we came."**

**This decision was to have unforeseen consequences, because shortly after returning to the salt flats area, the sneaky hyperspace pirates were found to be in the process of hiding their final attack saucer in a secretive cave...**



**Atcherly had spotted them when they'd landed for a quick pee, before flying on to Ship Number Fifteen. Against his better judgement, Quentin had agreed to help Atcherly 'spy' on the End Caps. So they parked out of sight, and crept forward for a close-up...**



**Hiding behind a boulder, Atcherly said: "Looks like a covert operation. Let's be really heroic and get a bit closer."**

**Quentin wasn't keen. In fact he said 'no' in seventeen different languages and regional dialects. But when Atcherly reminded him that heroes always received more than their fair share of plaudits from pretty females, he changed his mind...**



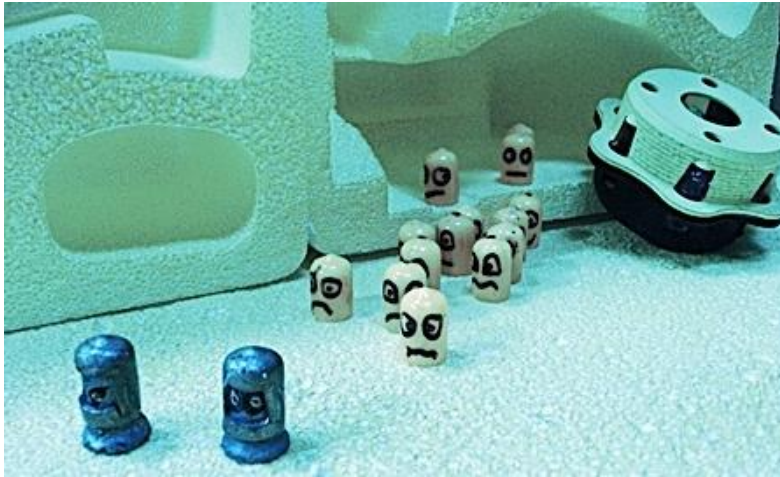
**But unfortunately the salty surface upon which they trod...**



**...made a loud crunching and cracking sound, and soon they were spotted.**

**"Earplugs - with hats on." They heard the rallying call of the pirate guards. "Attack. Destroy. Steal their shiny helmets!"**

**Quick as a flash, the two pilots made a break for the open salt flats...**



**But as nippy upon their feet as they were, the angry horde of End Caps began closing upon them...**



**"It's no good." Quentin gasped. "We're too slow. I blame all that sitting around in the cockpit: we've lost our match fitness."**

**"We're too heavy." Atcherly tried yelling, but only wheezed. "Quick, lighten the load upon our slender bodies."**

**So, in desperation, they did what no pilot ever wants to do: they shed their flying helmets, and tossed them over their shoulders...**

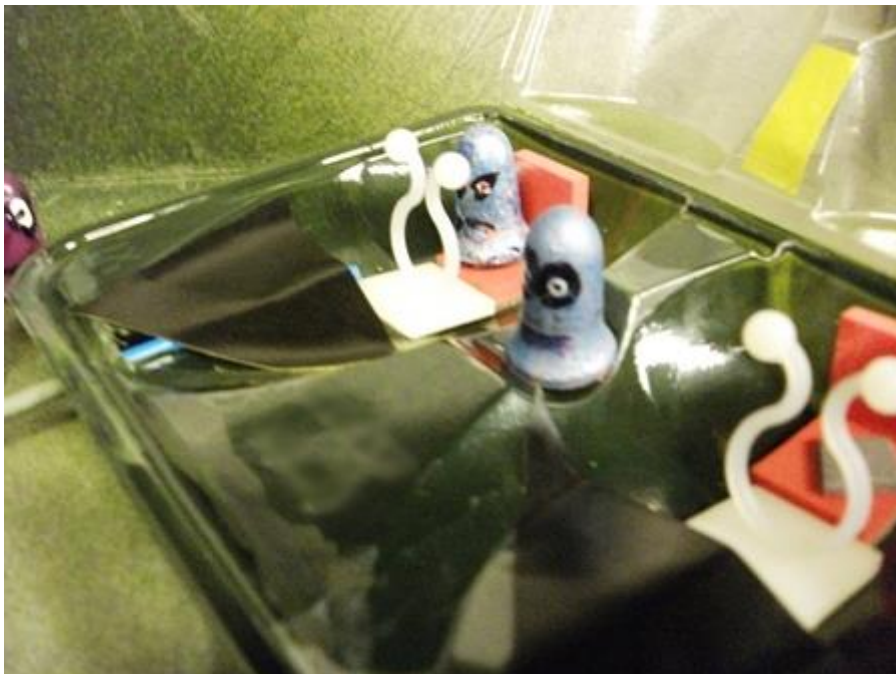


**...and left the confused End Caps eating their salty dust!**

**Being consummate professionals, Quentin and Atcherly had called ahead to inform the crew of Ship Number Fifteen of their imminent arrival. As a result of this Captain Noseblower, and a curator - in the shape of Barcode Betty - awaited their return...**



**But when the canopy lifted, and their naked craniums hove into view...**



**...the watching crew-plugs blanched, and the Captain broke into a tirade...**



**"How dare you leave advanced Earplug technology behind on the planet's surface!" He roared with a combination of indignation and rage. "Now the End Cap pirates will know which frequency we use for communications. They aren't entirely stupid: from that they might possibly deduce the energy recycling frequency of our electro-magnetic defensive screens. The next time we meet them in battle, our vessel could be blown to smithereens by their first volley! You pair of total losers: place yourselves under arrest for being complete twits!"**

**But little did the Captain suspect that the complete and unabridged tale of their maiden flight had become common knowledge to everyone aboard; and now many of those female passengers - and crew - worshipped the brave duo; and, at that very moment, were making their way to the shuttle bay...**



**As they entered, Quentin and Atcherly thought the girls might be a lynch mob - come to string them up and grind their faces against the bulkhead...**



**But when they fawned all over them...**

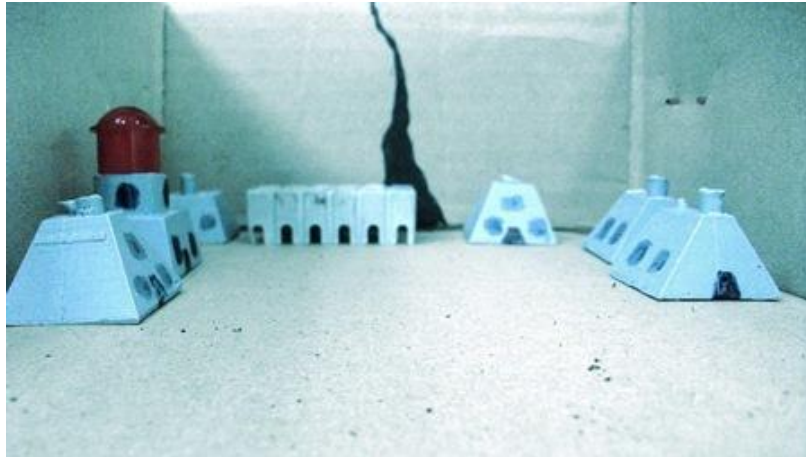


**...and tried to kiss them, pull out their meagre hair, and tear off their shoulder epaulets, they realised that they were being hailed as heroes.**

**"Golly." A relieved Quentin shouted to Atcherly above the throng of excited female chattering, "No one's ever tried to ruin my flying suit before!"**

**"Yeah." Atcherly replied as he failed miserably in his attempts to fight off the attention of two members of Las Chicas De La Playas. "I told you this would happen. And now the Captain can't have us arrested too. Good, isn't it!"**

**Many hours distant from Ship Number Fifteen, the Earplug Brothers and Staff Sergeant Wetpatch Wilton were still travelling across country - when they chanced upon a box canyon...**



**"Wow," Chester cried out with delight, "would you look at that: an abandoned town. A ghost town even. Let's take a look."**

**"Whoa there, fella." Wilton called out, "don't ya recall what that sheriff fella told us 'bout a box canyon?"**

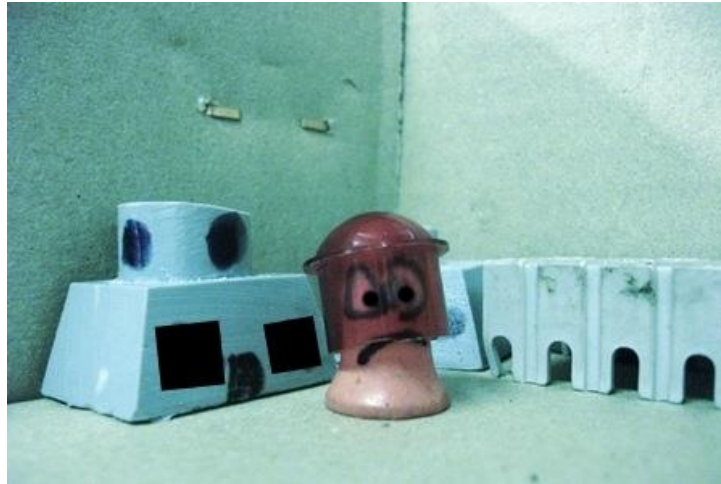
**Common sense and logic would not be allowed to dissuade Chester. "Oh come on." He said...**



**..."Sheriff Brooch was obviously talking about a different box canyon. He never mentioned a ghost town. I'm sure he wouldn't have left out a little detail like that. And anyway, there's a huge fissure in the rock that's big enough to drive a wagon train through; so it's not a proper box canyon at all: there's a back way out."**

**Miles thought that his twin's argument made at least two valid points, so, with a degree of reluctance, they all followed Chester in. But when they reached the opposite end of the canyon, they realised that it wasn't real, and that everyone's depth perception was all to hell...**





**"Flip me over and slap my bottom with a ping-pong bat!" Chester exclaimed. "These houses aren't real. It's a model village. I can fit this lighthouse top over my head. And the huge fissure is of the *painted on* variety!"**

**"And isn't that a staple holding the whole place together?" Miles added.**

**Then, to their horror, they discovered that not only was the canyon fake, but it was also a trap. This was made most obvious to them when El Feo and one of Los Dimbaticos stepped into view from behind a false rock wall...**



**"Empty your pockets, Gringos." El Feo growled, "Or Los Dimbaticos will open fire."**



**"Los Dimbaticos?" Rudi queried. "As in Dimbatico plural? But I see only one: where are the others?"**

**"In the hospital." The sole Dimbatico replied. "They were all beaten up by a creature that called itself Nature Beast."**

**"Silencio." El Feo snapped at his compadre. "Do not give them a tactical advantage."**

**To the Earplug Brothers he said: "Never mind that now, Gringos: we have guns: you do not. So hand over all your loot."**

**"No guns, huh?" Staff Sergeant Wilton said from where he stood with his back to the fake fissure.**

**Everyone turned to see a Chichester Seventy-Three repeating blast rifle in the grizzled cavalryplug's hands...**

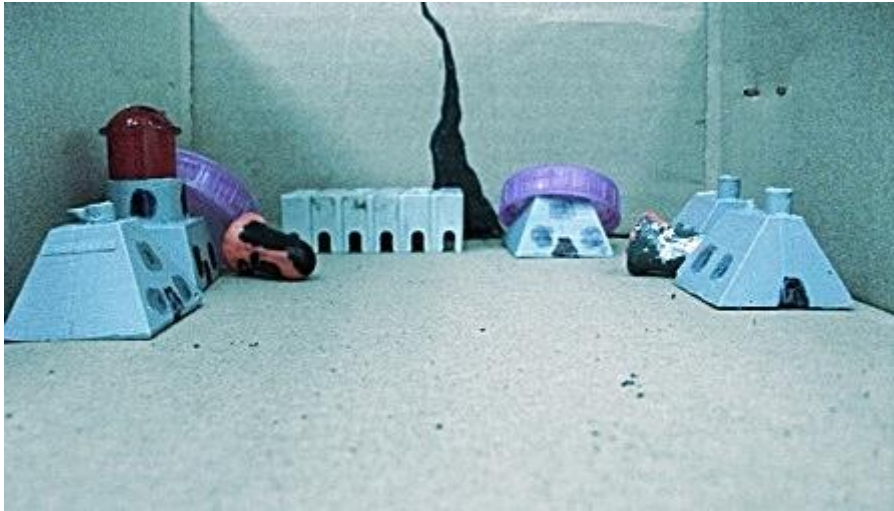


**"Okay, drop 'em." He said to El Feo and his solitary Dimbatico. "Pistolas y bragas, por favor."**

**Well that pretty much brought the ambush to a close. And because they really couldn't be bothered to take El Feo and his sidekick prisoner, they decided, instead, to take a leaf out of Nature Beast's book and knock off their sombreros, and beat them senseless...**



**...and depart, leaving them both wallowing in their painful misery and nakedness...**



**"Hey, El Moron," the battered Dimbatico said through a portcullis of broken teeth, "is it alright with you if I quit now?"**

**The Earplug Brother's subsequent journey to Ship Number Fifteen was uneventful, and so the highly toxic blue sun still shone brightly in the sky when they arrived at the airlock...**



**Staff Sergeant Wilton was unimpressed by the signage above the door: "No farting?" He howled in disbelief. "Are you all prudes or something? Can't ya even stand the smell of your best buddy's gas?"**

**The boys shared his sentiment: they'd just never put it into words so eloquently.**

**Once inside, Wilton was introduced to the curators, Winston Gloryhole and Montagu...**



**"It's a fine ship ya have here." He said to them. "Are you the two nancies who pinned up that sign above the door?"**

**Then, as part of the brief tour of the huge vessel, the Staff Sergeant was shown the shuttle bay...**

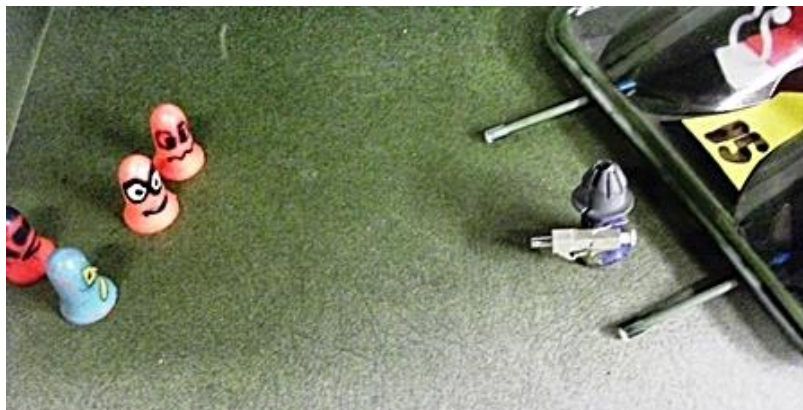


**This might have been a mistake, because when the troop leader's gaze fetched up against the scout ship, his eyes became moist, and for a moment he blubbed.**



**"Aw, shucks." He managed as he looked adoringly at the svelte vessel, "you aint got no idea how sad that makes me feel. In the old days - before the sun started acting up and setting our technologically advanced society back two hundred years - I used to be a fighter pilot. This little beauty is so like my Gloria, it makes my heart bleed. I just can't believe it. It makes me feel young again."**

**Then he did something that, in retrospect, shouldn't have come as a surprise...**



**Yes, he whipped out his Chichester Seventy-Three blast rifle for the second time in one day. Unfortunately he pointed it at the nearest earplugs, whose response was this...**



**...and a series of nervous squeaks and gurgling noises that might have originated deep within their midriffs.**

**"Open the shuttle bay doors." Wilton instructed a watching engineer. "And throw me those ignition keys: I'm going for a spin. Don't expect me back any time soon: I'm done riding about on dull-brained Plugmatts until my ass is sore. I'm a pilot: I was born to fly!"**

**By chance Vanilla Redbush was passing by the window...**



**She paused to look in...**



**"Ooh," she said, "I do like a male earplug in a dirty uniform. And the sight of that huge Chichester Seventy-Three repeating rifle has me in its thrall!"**



**So she did what any high-class washer-woman with the hots for the soldiery would do: she hopped through the window like an Olympic high-jumper, and introduced herself to the Staff Sergeant...**



**"Hi," she said, "they call me Vanilla; how'd ya like some clean underwear?"**

**Well after a few more sweet nothings, all thoughts of flying the scout ship fled the cavalryplug's mind like bats before the sunrise, and together they departed in the direction of Vanilla's laundrette...**



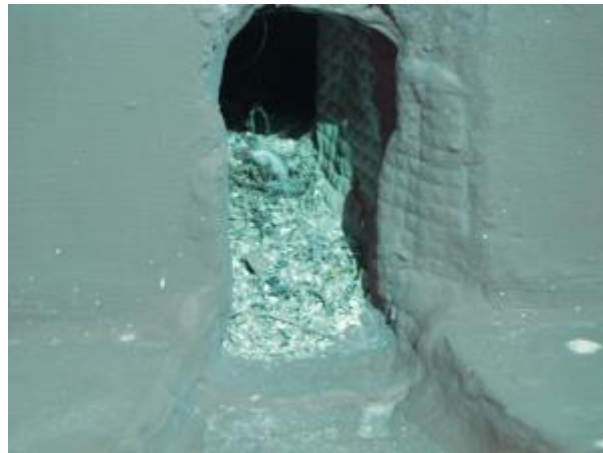
**"Nice gun." Said Magnuss. "And the hat's not bad either."**

## Chapter 5

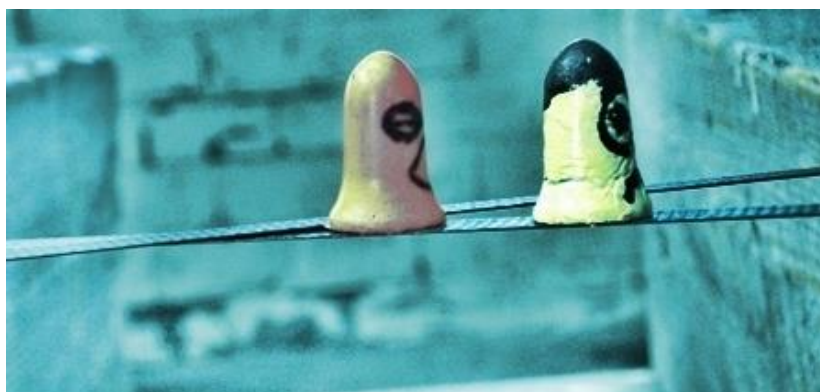
Back in the Museum of Future Technology, the museum's Avatar and some of the other remainers were keeping an eye upon events as they unfolded upon the distant planet known as Worstworld via the Omnipresent Scanner...



They spotted an unusual cave. One that appeared to have been hewn from the rock by earplugs of an earlier era...



The mouth of the cave was crammed with detritus, but they didn't mind, and soon the Omnipresent Scanner was peering into the interior, where it discovered...





**...Magnuss Earplug and Yabu Suchs taking a brief diversion across a gorge, via a tightrope. The watchers were impressed by the virtuoso balancing act and pure unadulterated bravery. But not half as impressed as they were with Rupert Piles and his 3D TV camera following behind...**



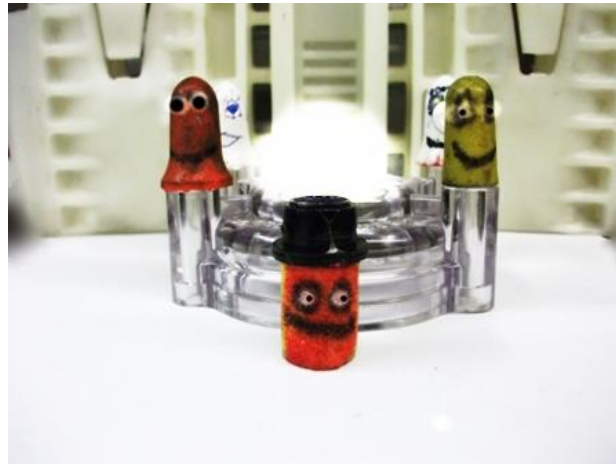
**And they positively doubted the trio's sanity when they stepped from a warm cantina in order to face the onslaught of wind so violent that it could strip the tarmac beneath their feet of the endless cigarette butts and chewing gum that had been thrown down by the cantina's patrons throughout the years...**



**And the sight of a group photo with the visiting Sheriff Sinclair Brooch warmed their collective heart...**



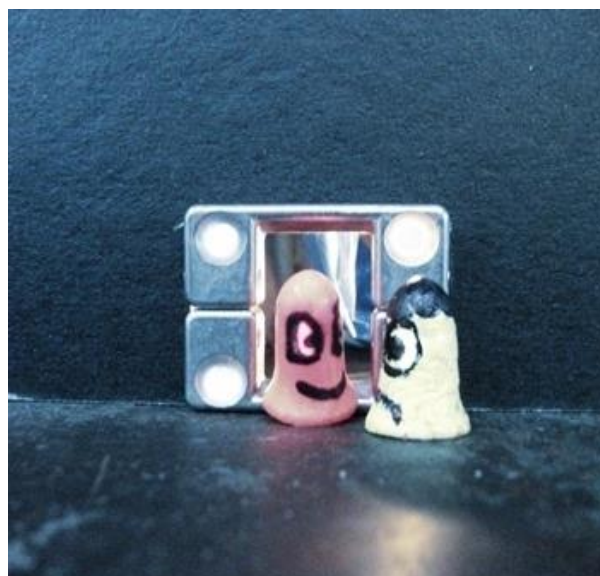
**Even the Robot Ticket Collector, who had managed to struggle past all the solidifying lava that blocked the corridor linking the foyer with the museum proper, was moved...**



**They even witnessed some very contented young females who were on their way to the Café Puke for a refreshing mug of vile coffee and a stale blueberry muffin after chasing the scout crew members all the way to the gent's lavatory, where they both now hid inside a cubicle together...**



**They also watched as Magnuss tried to tempt the innocent young Yabu Suchs into an art exhibition...**



**"No," Yabu cried, "it has a hex upon it. All art galleries do!"**

**But the promise of some very detailed charcoal drawings of female earplugs in bikinis finally tempted him inside...**



**"Oh, that Magnuss," the Avatar chuckled. "He's a lad, isn't he! If I had a son, I'd like him to be like Magnuss Earplug."**

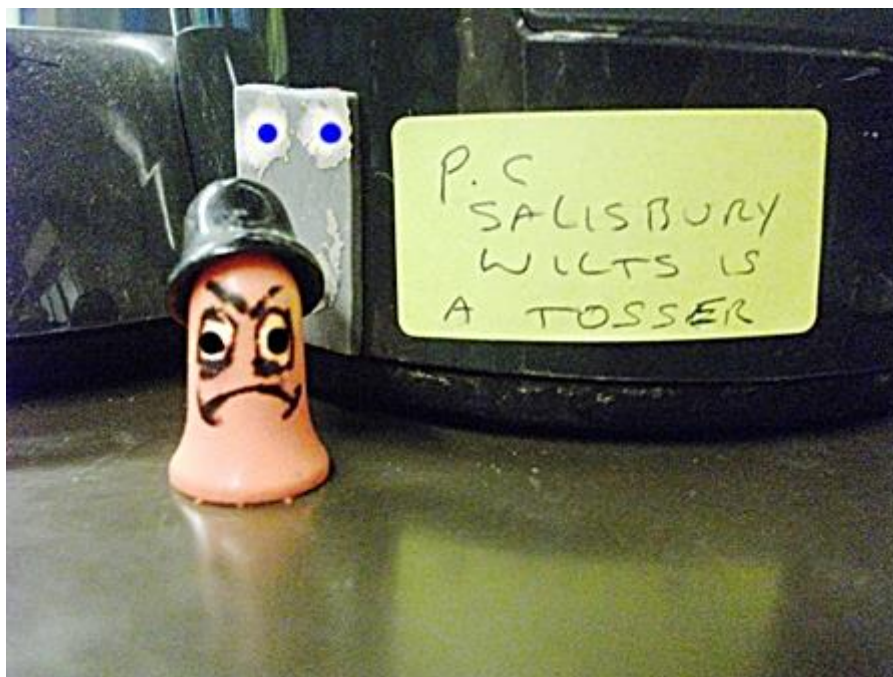
**But she changed her mind slightly when the scanner followed the two male earplugs inside the exhibition. Yabu was very disappointed because there were no charcoal drawings at all. Not only that, but there was a really scary face exhibit that even Magnuss found disturbing...**



**There was also an amateur end cap T.W.I.T operative exhibit that was truly amateur...**



**But everyone was amused by the witty work of some unknown graffiti artist - even if Police Constable Salisbury Wilts wasn't...**



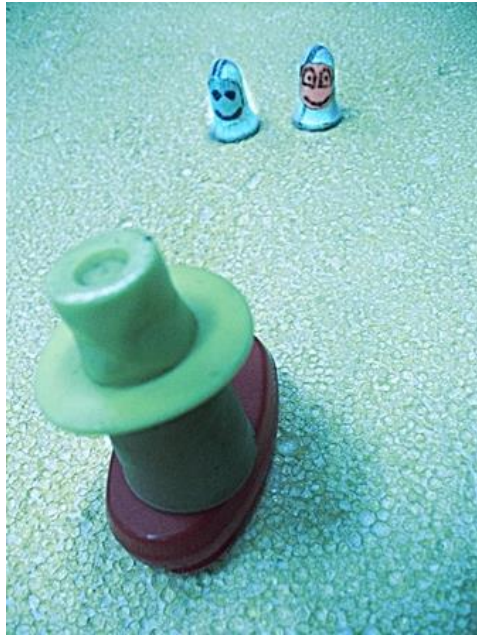
**Meanwhile, out on the salt flats...**



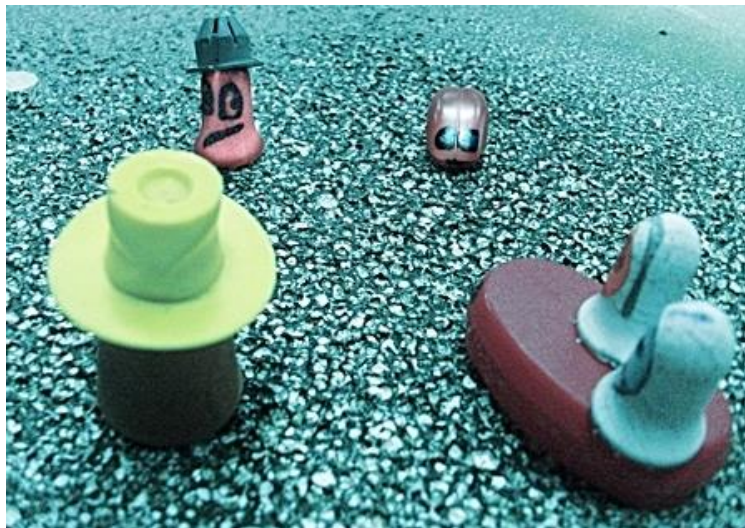
**...Sheriff Sinclair Brooch came upon the prospectors, Finlay Watersnaik and John-Douglas Plectrum.**



**He was shocked by their plight when they told him that Byron Whipsnaid had gone looking for help, but so far hadn't returned. So he made them a kind offer...**



**...which was a ride into town upon his huge Plugmutter. En route to Busted Gut they encountered the eager explorer, Adam Binsmell, who asked the way to Kah-Ki-Pu...**



**Sinclair remembered Adam from their first meeting...**



**"Nice hat." He said. Then he pointed at the distant mountains. "They say that Kah-Ki-Pu's thattaway. Just keep riding towards the sunset, and you'll find it eventually."**

**So, a while later Adam and his Plugmutt, Pegasus, were clip-clopping their way towards the mystical mountain kingdom...**



**Adam was so thrilled at the thought of seeing his long-lost sister again that a smile remained fixed upon his face, even when he was confronted by the magnitude of the task ahead...**



**It even stayed in place upon the mountain track...**



**But he did concede that there was potential for falling to his death, so he chose to dismount and lead Pegasus along the narrow sections that made his bottom repeatedly bark with fear...**



**Naturally he passed by all the landmarks encountered by Byron Whipsnaid previously - until he too chanced upon Lilac's...**

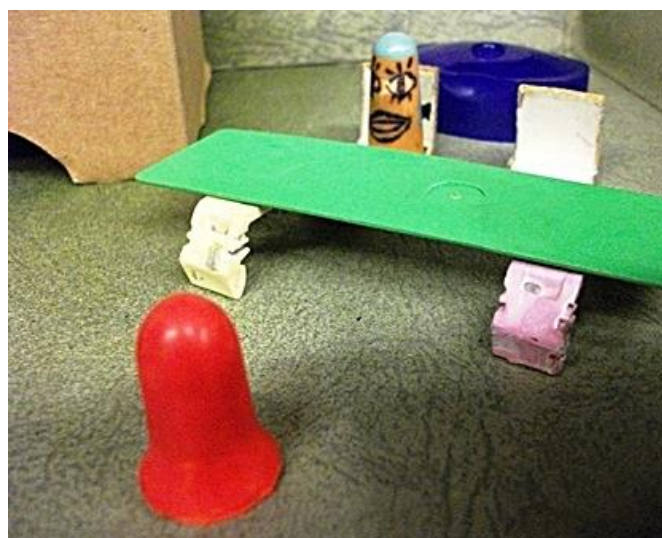




So, after tying Pegasus to a handy rock...



...Adam entered - to find only one person at home....

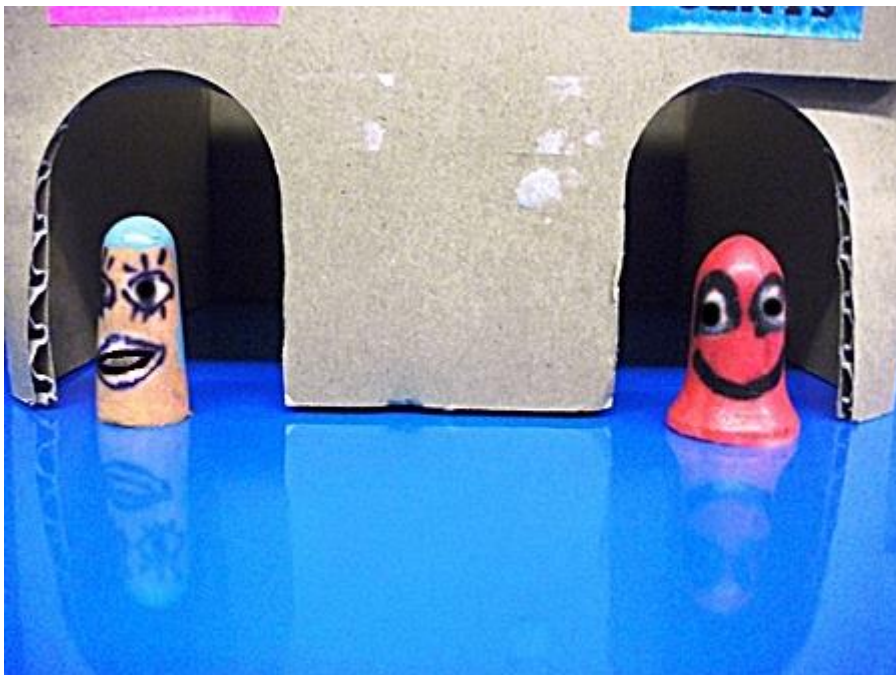


**Her name was Freda Bludgeon, and she knew exactly what a weary traveller most needed - after a visit to the toilet, of course...**



**"I like beer. It's the flavour mostly." He said. "But really I'd rather to squeeze a tube of moisturising cream first: I'm a little saddle-sore, you see. My thighs: they're a bit...you know..."**

**It was many hours later when Freda and Adam emerged from the Bar...**



**"Gosh," He said. "A full belly and some bandages for my bum. I feel ready for anything now!"**

**So, after he'd paid his dues, Adam allowed Freda to lead him outside once more...**



**"I don't know this town well." He said as he looked along the blue-washed deserted street...**



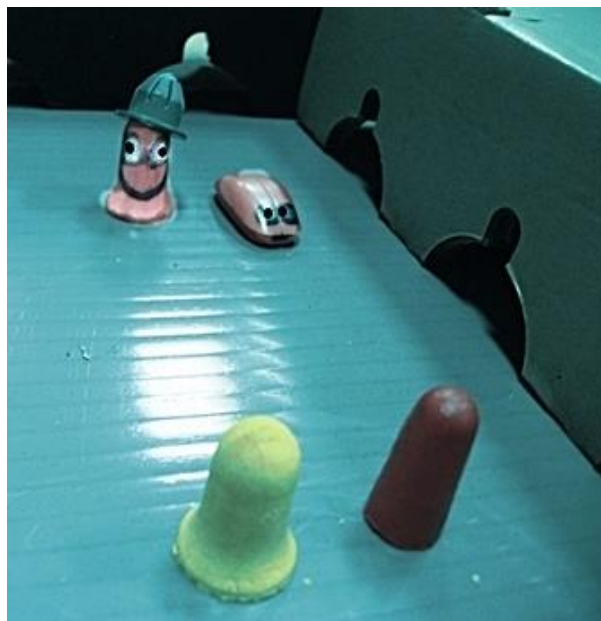
**"In fact I don't know it all - having never been here before in my life. Would you kindly agree to be my guide?"**

Well, as it happens, Freda had grown rather fond of Adam as they'd whiled away the hours together, chatting; singing little songs; showing each other significant rugby tackles through the ages; and, of course, the consumption of many differing kinds of brewed hops from all over the world. So she happily agreed. So it was together that they found Lilac with Byron down a pleasant side street...



"Who is the guy in the stupid yellow one-piece suit?" He asked Freda as they approached.

Freda, recognising a difficult moment ahead, told him, then retired to a nearby bar...



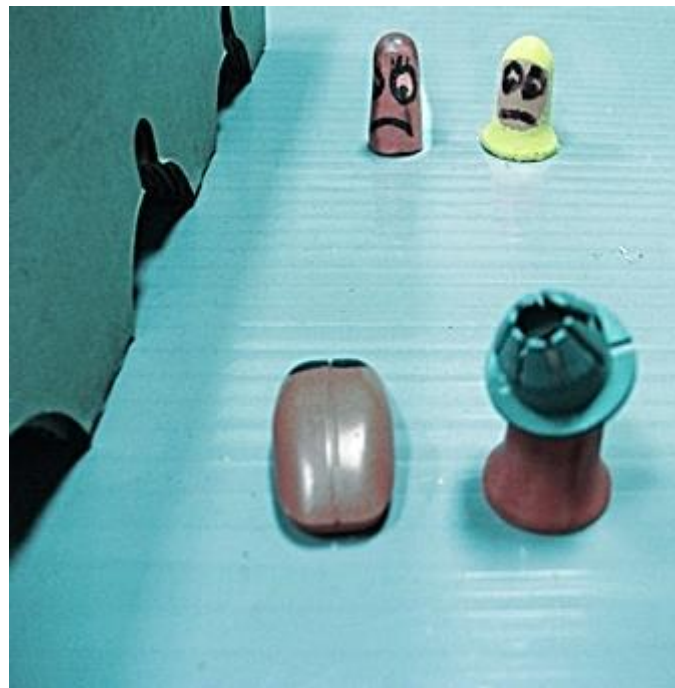
"Lilac," Adam cheered, "I've come such a long way to find you - all the way from Earth, via a space battle above Mars!"

Lilac was mildly pleased to see her brother, despite the fact that she didn't really like him very much because of his proclivity for sucking on her gobstoppers when they were children. In fact she strongly suspected that he'd sucked most of hers when she wasn't looking. She just hadn't been able to find the DNA evidence, so she had no real proof. "Gosh," she said, "all the way from Earth. That must have taken you...er... yonks!"



"It did." Adam replied. "We were marooned between stars at one point. But that doesn't matter now: I'm here to take you home."

This last line didn't sit well with either Lilac or Byron...



**"Oh, right." She said in response. "Well you can sod off for a start. I'm not going anywhere, brother dear. I have a business and a boyfriend: why would I possibly want to leave Kah-Ki-Pu?"**

**Lilac's question was a very good one. One to which Adam had no obvious answer.**



**"Oh," he said in a voice gone timid, "well, if you're sure..."**

**"She's sure." Freda Bludgeon said as she exited the bar; placed Adam's hat upon her head; and clambered aboard Pegasus. "Now where's this space ship of yours? I'm sure there must be loads more guys like you aboard."**

**Adam didn't really know how to react. "Yeah," he said, "I suppose so." With that they set off down the quiet street...**



**...on a long journey back to Spaceship Number Fifteen, which pleased Lilac and Byron no end.**

**A short while later Lilac and Byron were strolling by the condominium where she kept an apartment...**

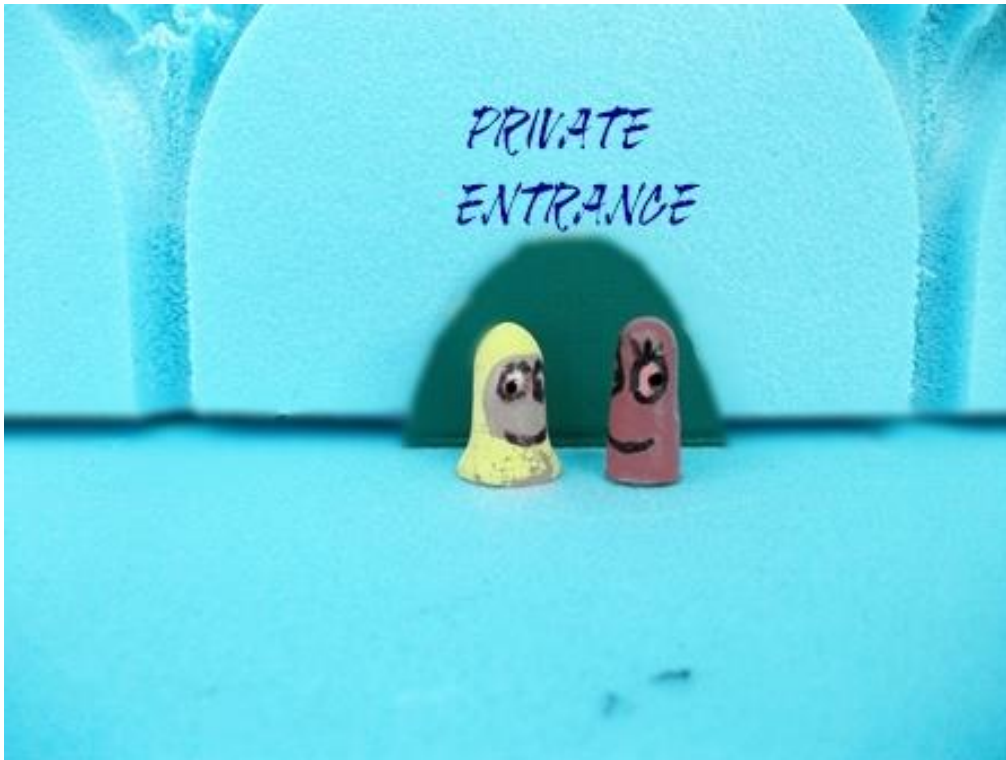


**"I'm kind of sorry that Adam and I had to part on such bad terms." She said.**



**"Yes." Byron agreed. "He didn't seem like a bad sort. I think he'll find Freda a bit of a handful."**

**Then, as they arrived at the main entrance Lilac said: "Talking of handfuls: I've got a couple of swedes and a basket of radishes for tea. Shall we retire inside?"...**



**Byron had good reason to be concerned for Adam because Freda bitched all the way down the mountain and across the desert...**



**Only cheering up when they reached the grassy veldt...**





And when they arrived at the ship itself...



...she was feeling spectacularly flirtatious - going so far as to exchanging hats with Police Constable Salisbury Wilts, and blowing in his ear in passing...



## Chapter 6

It was about this time when Simon Knights-Templar chose to take a little light exercise to ward off the cramp he'd endured whilst riding his Plugmutt all the way from the cantina with Nature Beast and his other fellow explorers...



As he passed by a nondescript porthole, notable only for its pleasant roundness, it seemed to him that he'd been suddenly and magically transported to the cemetery in the Museum of Future Technology on Earth...



His confusion was exacerbated by the apparent arrival of Jessie Windblast, Mister Pong, Yabu Suchs, and a silver guy who might have been either Dave or Barry Dirtbox...



The five of them were about to make exclamations of surprise, when they were joined by Rupert Piles and his 3D TV camera...



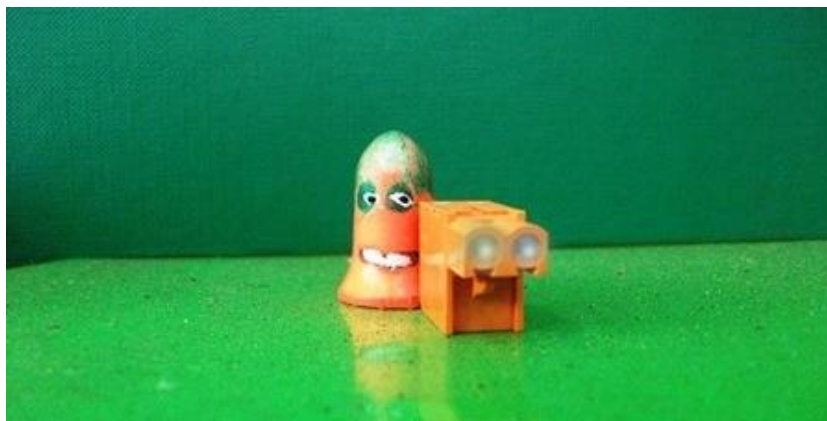
Then, as suddenly as they'd arrived, they found themselves once more back in the corridor aboard Ship Number Fifteen...



**At first consternation abounded and stayed their tongues. But when, following a prolonged period of inactivity, nothing further happened, they all relaxed once more...**



**...and chatted animatedly about their shared experience. The resulting light-hearted conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Rupert Piles, whose camera was already rolling...**



**He then annoyed them by doing a piece directly to camera...**



In it he mentioned two of the most feared words in the earplug lexicon: 'Mass' and 'Hysteria' - in that order, but with the word 'and' missing.

"What are you talking about, you green haired monstrosity, you?" Jessie Windblast yelled semi-coherently in horror at the thought of such an outrageous concept.

The others asked questions, or made similar statements and demands; so Rupert felt obliged to explain that the strange, inexplicable, relocations to other places had occurred in other compartments aboard ship too. Apparently Sir Dodger Muir had been chatting with someone he didn't know at a window, when suddenly the view was replaced with '*Spurned*' by Anton Twerp....



Naturally Sir Dodger had grown furious at the intrusion: flown into a thespian rage; and duly mentioned the occurrence to anyone who would listen, and quite a few who wouldn't. There was one who told him to 'get a grip' and another who said, 'sod off, Sir Dodger; you're getting your knickers in a twist about nothing'.

Amongst those to whom Sir Dodger had told the tale was Cushions Smethwyke. And now that she'd had her worst fears confirmed by Rupert's live TV report, she now visualised herself fleeing before a riot of earplugs gone mad with fear...



So, using deductive reasoning and a Ouija board, she drew the conclusion that it was the blue giant star's radiation that was affecting earplug brains - so badly that they were sharing visions: and (she reasoned) that if she wanted to avoid mass hysteria, the only course of action was to leave the planet and head into deep space as quickly as possible.

## Chapter 7

The timing of this decision couldn't have been worse for Magnuss Earplug and Yabu Suchs. They'd gone in search of the hidden end cap pirate saucers; but instead of finding the potentially murderous scum, they discovered a small town nearby, where teen-aged end caps, who were almost certainly the offspring of the hyperspace pirates, enjoyed themselves fettling home-made single-seater racing saucers...



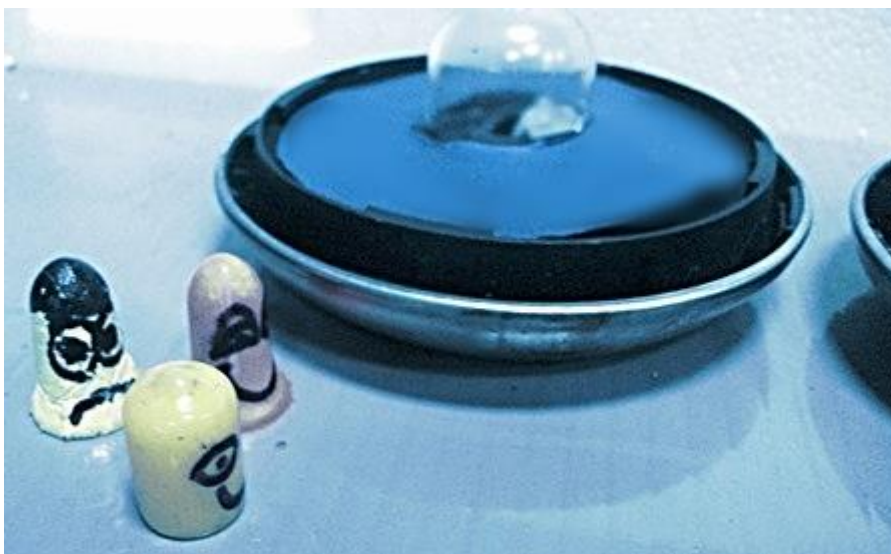
They were a pleasant bunch of lads, and everyone got along famously. But Yabu was horrified when Magnuss offered to enter their next race...



As was a skateboarding end cap...



...who chose to keep his deep-seated hatred of heroic earplugs to himself - though one of his chums did wonder more than a little. A young end cap, by the name of Splontie Hoodung, showed Magnuss a racing saucer up close...



"It uses a rudimentary anti-neutrino drive." He explained. "We found the schematics in a bottom drawer aboard the crashed Earth ship - Number Fourteen. We simplified it for use in our tiny craft."

Magnuss had been doing something else when Adam Binsmell had brought back the news that anti-neutrino drives were fundamentally flawed; so no alarm bells rang inside his head. Yabu was in a similar situation. Ignorance, it seemed, was bliss.

**"The seat's very comfortable." Splontie said. "And it has a special gully running down it, so's you can tiddle to your heart's content, and nobody need know, and precludes the necessity of landing for a clandestine wee in the desert. Would you care to try it on for size?"**

**Well anyone who even so much as half-knew Magnuss would have recognised this question to be the ultimate in stupid questions: "I thought you'd never ask!" Magnuss replied enthusiastically...**



**A short while later the saucer's motor 'thrummed' pleasantly beneath the driving seat.**

**Other participants slipped into their cupolas and fastened themselves in...**



**Magnuss then released the ground brake, and the saucer leapt upwards like a startled Peewit...**





**"Wheeee!" Magnus cried with glee.**

**Three minutes later the five racing saucers had gained sufficient altitude to race. This placed them at the very edge of space, and a miscalculation at high-speed could, potentially at least, send a vessel whooshing off into space – probably never to return! But none of the pilots considered this. It was too boring - and only happened to other people. So before long the tiny machines were rushing hither and thither across the sky. Some whooshed by on the left...**



**Others whizzed by on the right...**



**And those with sufficient nerve plummeted from upon high...**

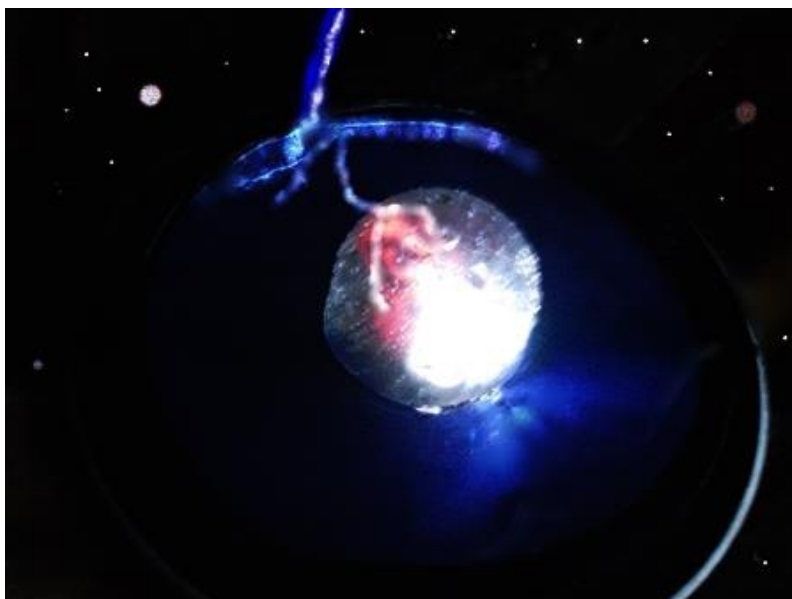


**They plummeted so fast, in fact, that their guts tried to come out through their mouths. None more so than Magnuss, whose pained expression was pressed up against the cupola glass...**

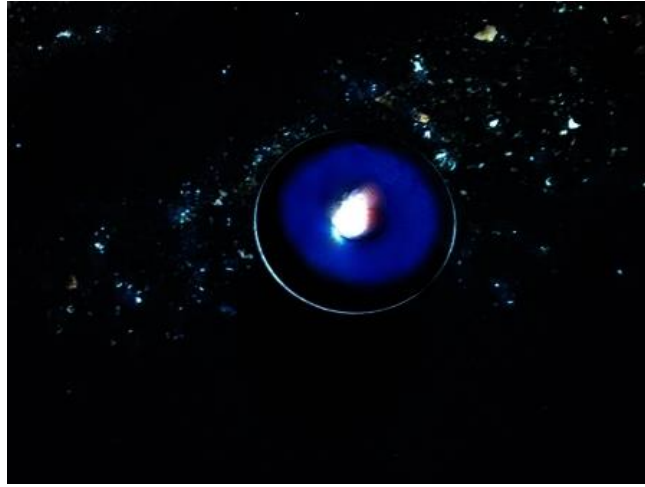


**"Ooh," Magnuss wailed as he hauled upon the control stick, "I don't think I'm in the mood for vomiting right now. If I'd wanted to redecorate the control panel I'd have visited a D.I.Y store first"**

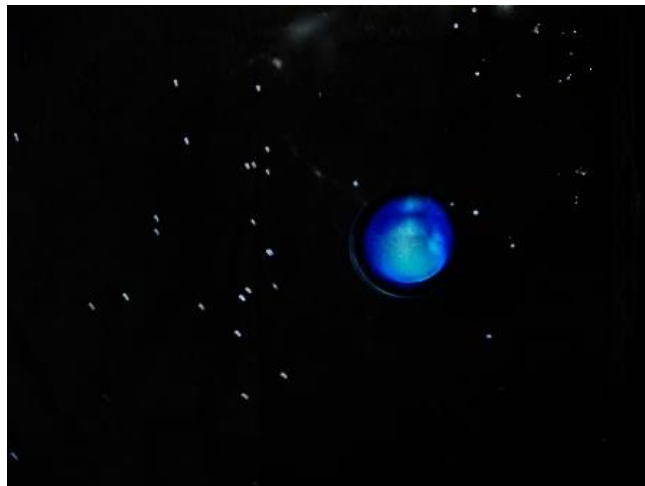
**So he turned his saucer around, and set it climbing heavenward once more. But what he couldn't possibly have known was that the miserable-looking end cap who had felt insulted by Magnuss's presence, had bugged about with the throttle. He'd rigged it to seize the moment that Magnuss's bladder allowed a merest modicum of urine to escape down the special gully. So as Magnuss raced to the zenith of his intended parabolic curve, and his bladder dribbled slightly under the strain, the neutrino drive stuck wide open, and in the split second before Magnuss realised that he was in trouble, and duly slammed his foot on the clutch in a desperate attempt to cut the drive, things went 'fizz' and 'bang'...**



**In that order. And in next to no time at all, Magnuss's saucer had departed the atmosphere – and was only marginally affected by the planet’s gravity...**



**"Knickers!" He yelled as his microscopic world drifted towards ultimate ruin...**



**“How I curse my recalcitrant urinary tract.” Then he started whimpering...**



**It felt awfully lonely - up in space.**

## Chapter 8

Meanwhile, far below upon the planet's surface, the Seventh Cavalry had successfully resupplied the Victuals Department of Ship Number Fifteen. But instead of returning to Fort Dunderhead immediately, the troopers and their junior officers had hung around to watch the huge vessel's departure. But as they did so, a plan was hatched...



The thoughts of further meaningless forays into the desert depressed them enormously. Suddenly the Earth ship seemed very inviting to the braver of them. So whilst Dick Rusty - the temporary door-watching end cap - had his back turned, they sneaked in through the air-lock....



But once inside they began to wonder if they'd made the right decision...



**...because deeper inside the vast craft, the curators were holding a high-level pow-wow...**



**...which was being recorded for posterity by Rupert Piles...**



**It concerned the ship's imminent departure.**

**"We gotta do it before we all go mad!" Cheerful Charlie Chopsticks wailed, "We gotta do it now. My wife's already gone loony. She thinks she's an Olympic pole vaulter. She uses her walking stick to leap over the tables in the cocktail bar. It's a horrific sight, I can tell you!"**

**The thought of Missus Chopstick's madness concentrated their minds. So two minutes later they assembled upon a high gantry in the gymnasium...**



**Below stood representatives of every department of the ship's compliment...**



**"We're leaving." Cushions announced without preamble. "If we don't do it, we'll all lose our minds."**

**"Yeah, sure that's groovy and all that." Former soul singer (and founding member of the Trumptations), Cory Turpentine, said. "But what about our people outside?"**

**Cushions turned to the almost equally toothsome Prince Bucky...**



**"You didn't tell me that we had passengers out and about, you royal louse."**

**"I didn't think you'd care: I certainly don't give a monkeys." Prince Bucky replied. "I'm heir to the throne: I'm only interested in things that affect me."**

**This elitist response didn't sit well with an audience who were only too happy to turn ugly...**





**"Has anyone seen Magnuss Earplug and Yabu Suchs?" Dexter asked as he avoided an unpleasant nervous gaseous discharge from the earplug standing beside him...**

**The answer to this question was a resounding silence, followed by, "They must be outside!" from someone no one knew well and couldn't readily identify.**

**One of the subjects pertinent to Dexter's question was, at that very moment, in the process of rescuing Magnuss. He did so by the only means available to him: the teen-aged end cap's desert chariot, which he stole without hesitation or feelings of remorse...**



**He even drove it past them to show his displeasure of their decision to abandon a rescue attempt merely because it was impossible...**



**The guilty end cap showed no shame and felt no guilt. Instead he stared sourly as his favourite mode of terrestrial transportation was driven away - with his lunchtime sandwiches in the glove box too!**



**This didn't go unnoticed by his buddies, and the vile perpetrator felt certain that retribution was bound to follow. It was the end cap way – and he had to accept that.**

**But Yabu wasted not one second's thought on the subject of end cap mores, ritual, and beliefs - as he left a trail of blasted earth in his wake...**



**Sadly, despite being very intelligent and immensely resourceful, he'd failed all his Emergency Navigation Exams during his years of schooling, and soon he found himself high in the mountains...**



**Hopelessly lost, he miraculously struggled on to Kah-Ki-Pu...**



**...where Lilac and Byron pointed him in the direction of the salt flats. But night had fallen, and away from the artificial lights of Kah-Ki-Pu he flicked on the headlights, and soldiered on without sleep, rest, or water...**



**He was very grateful for the slightly curled up cucumber sandwiches that he found in the glove box, and utilised their nourishment to get him through the long dark night. Then, as morning broke...**



**... he found his way to the desert once more...**



**...upon which he could apply full power to both the drive and hover motors, which meant that before it was time for breakfast he'd arrived and was able to slip inside Ship Number Fifteen before the air-lock closed...**



**From the air lock, Yabu dashed straight to the Captain and delivered the terrible news concerning the fate of the earplug who might possibly be earplugdom's greatest hero of recent times....**



**Sir Dodger Muir overheard...**



**Whilst Captain Noseblower tried to bring his fear-filled stomach under control, Sir Dodger raced as quickly as his wonky knees would allow to the curator's meeting...**



**...where, in their wisdom, they decided that the ship would enter orbit around the doomed planet, and make a daring rescue on the hoof, as it were.**

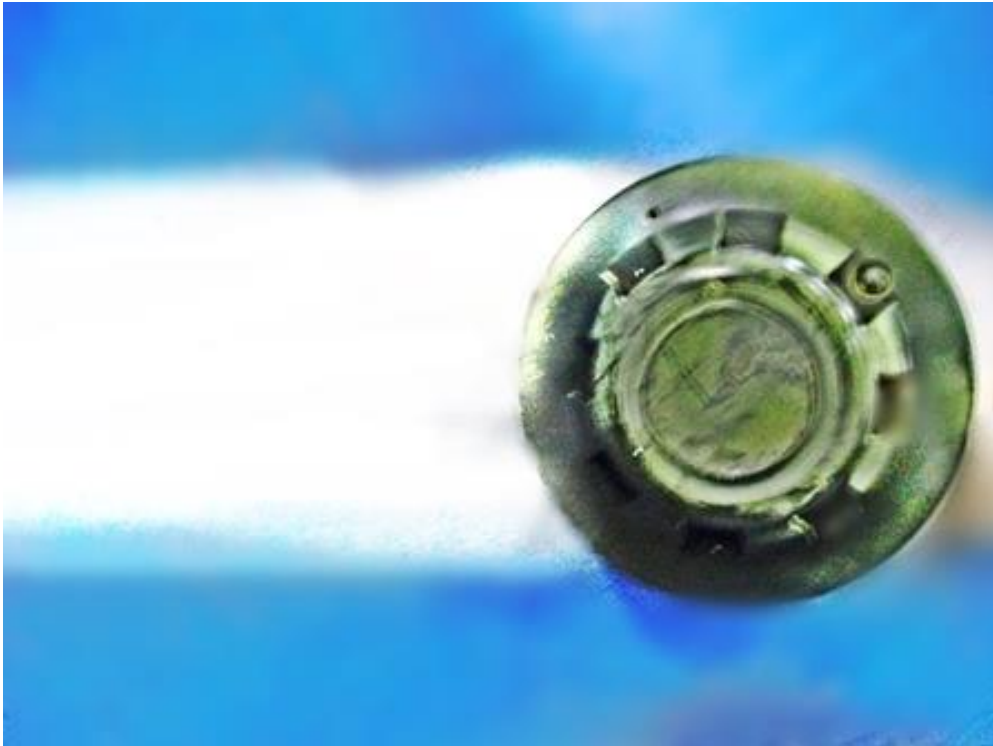
**So, once everyone was strapped in nice and tight, and all the crew had made their way to their correct duty station, Captain Horatio Noseblower hit the 'Go' button as hard as he could. The result of this action was...**



**...Ship Number Fifteen blasting against the incessant pull of gravity with the added power of two huge recently fitted solid fuel rocket boosters.**

**"Yee-hah!" He yelled as he hung on to the steering sticks for dear life.**

**Seconds later the huge craft streaked across the sky...**



**Then, as it burst free of the atmosphere...**



**...it did so with such incredible force that it visually twisted reality out of shape, and made itself look all short and dumpy.**

**Shortly after attaining orbit, K'plank the Space Wanderer...**



**..kissed a worried Auntie Doris, and boarded his personal saucer...**



**He then proceeded from the shuttle bay, and activated his tractor beam, as though it was an everyday occurrence...**





**...which pleased Magnuss immensely, because he was getting very cold, his air was running out, and although he had a special gully for his urine, his racing saucer had no provision for going to Number Twos...**



**Aboard Ship Number Fifteen, Magnuss's brothers and friends joined Captain Noseblower in the shuttle bay...**



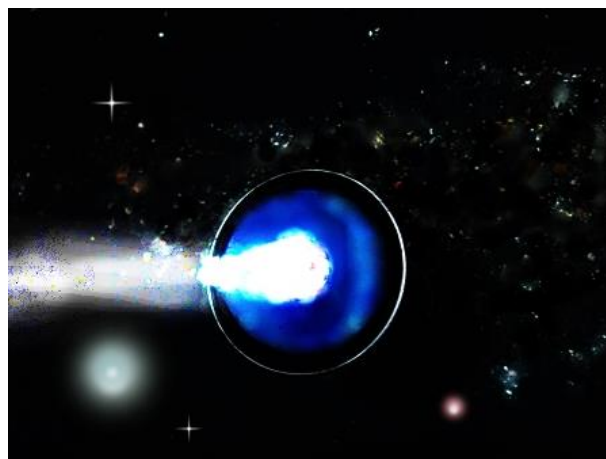
**...just in time to see Magnuss emerge from his racing saucer...**



**As the young earplug returned their cheery waves he thought back to the first time he'd met his saviour - when the Space Wanderer had tried to ride pillion on a space buggy...**



**And he smiled at the irony that might have been, had Rudi managed to kill K'plank or send him spinning off into hyperspace as he'd intended. So it was glad hearts all round. Glad hearts indeed as the ship's engineers fired up the replacement plasma drive, and set course for the stars...**



**...whilst their Martian robot chums stood and waited for their return - until the wheel of eternity ground to a halt if necessary...**



**The End (ish).**

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**The story will continue in the next thrilling book: *Stepladder to the Stars*.**