

THE ADVENTURES OF CUBE – GALACTIC MESSIAH

Written by Christian J Bennett

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*For all my family and friends who
keep me on the sane side of the fence;
okay at least for most of the time!*

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PREFACE

Born on earth, not far from the Milky Way, Christian J Bennett has grown up with a life effecting illness called Hypochondria. Actually, being a hypochondriac was his latest self diagnosis; before this was social anxiety, agoraphobia and, for most of his life, panic attacks. Some may say it is due to over thinking everything and anything.

Throughout his time on planet earth this condition has induced Christian with many feelings. The main feelings that are a day to day occurrence have now manifested themselves into characters which feature in this book. The world Cube inhabits is indeed real and as you read this, aliens are actually fighting each other, loving each other and laughing with each other.

This book though has not been written for Christian, no, this book has been written for some extraordinary heroes and heroines who battle aliens every day; this book has been written for the most amazing children in our universes!

Cancer and Leukaemia in Children is an emotional ride for those involved. CLIC Sargent is a charity that helps provide invaluable support during, after and beyond treatment. This is why **at least 50% of all book sales will go directly to the charity CLIC Sargent.** Here's to you everywhere who are fighting illness, remember, if you think this world is the only one you are very much mistaken, hopefully this book will prove this fact even further...

Reader warning:

Adults, please note that this book does contain some swear words and adult phrasing, hence if buying this for your kids you may want to read it first.

DAY LOG:

I might as well start this story by telling you that I have aliens in my head. Chucker, one of these aliens, is banging at the door of my brain, yet again. My brain, in non medical terms, is a place these aliens have come to call an "observation post". I've been trying to ignore him for the past half an hour. That goes for all his crazy alien friends as well.

I arrived at the Gare du Nord, Paris twenty minutes ago. It's been a long and drawn out trip from my dad's home in the south of France. My pulsing headache is evidence to this fact.

If I'm going to be Dong, for a moment, from the blubbery and very moody squidgean race, I need to now give you some further information stating that, one, my father's humble place of residence is settled in the centre of a typically French village, and two, the village's wonderful inhabitants are still living in the 1940s and wearing garlic around their necks.

Chucker's still banging at the door. I'm going to have to open it soon. In fairness he's only doing what is routine for his worrying race, the vom. Feeling sick for most of the time, if not all of the time and panicking about the silliest of things.

Scank doesn't help much. Scurrying around, making me even more restless, always wanting to be somewhere else, doing something, anything but this. Dong's just told him to shut up!

I look around the train carriage I stepped into and settled, uncomfortably, quite a while ago now. Finally kicking open the door, Chucker dutifully reminds me that there is a little well known universal law called the "Law of Sod", or reversed, "Sod's Law". You have probably heard of it, or at least experienced it. It is a law which denotes, in this case, that I was the first on board and so you can bloody well guarantee that the beautiful, comforting, priceless, empty seat next to my crunched up form will be occupied imminently.

Thanks to Chucker's cries I now await the Law of Sod to take effect. There is bound to be a last minute passenger and they are bound to be either smelly and or somewhat larger than life.

'Now you've done it!' screamed Chucker, from somewhere. I imagine his neck expanding in length. 'That's bound to encourage a last minute passenger!'

Dong points out the evidence for his alien friend's outburst. 'Look at your watch.' I stare at the double faced watch my dad gave me for my birthday, several years ago. It is clearly showing, twice, that there is only one minute left before the train doors close and we finally pull away from the historic station.

An announcement confirms the time. A French-English accent - can't decide which - states the train will be leaving imminently.

The seconds trickle by, one by one, until at least sixty have taken their toll on my nerves and headache. Have you ever unknowingly smacked your head on a low ceiling, if so, you will know how I was feeling.

'It's moving! The train is moving,' Chucker burps, the nausea lifting like steam from a hot iron.

I wildly imagine Scank is scrambling to the top parcel shelf, above me, with his suction padded paws echoing around my mind and thankfully, as far as I know, not in the other passengers' minds. He settles for a rare moment. Releasing the suctions on his front paws, he dangles from his legs and stares behind me. If the other passengers had the benefit of seeing him, they would note his widening smile.

Chucker's reaction was instant, renewed nausea turning him dark green.

Scank chuckled aloud, 'Here we go, just when you thought the Law of Sod had been overlooked, here comes a late passenger.'

My heart sinks even further as I can hear two voices behind me being asked if the space beside them is being occupied. To my dread, the two asked reply in French and English, 'No, my partner is getting some food from the restaurant'.

Faster than I can recite - *I'm not a pheasant plucker but a pheasant plucker's son and I'm only plucking pheasants until the pheasant plucker comes* - the train judders. As if the hand of god reaches out on my behalf, the late passenger is knocked off

balance and conveniently stumbles into what must be an empty seat just in front of mine.

Not sure whether it was the intensity of the situation but within minutes I feel myself falling into a deep and, soon to be proved, rather productive sleep. The Adventures of Cube, part one, Galactic Messiah has begun.

COMMENCE ANALYSIS...

With her navigational systems activated Cube threw her crew backwards as she thrust forward into layers of surrounding matter. The display on the domed optical screen (now giving the wondrous feeling of one of Michael Angelo's chapel paintings) suddenly filled itself with stars, in much the same chaos as gushing water would enter an opened hatch on a diving submarine. Glistening light flickered across three oddly shaped faces like a strobe light, as they momentarily stared up at its magnificence...

STOP! STOP ANALYSIS ... the beginning, let's start at the beginning...

COMMENCE ANALYSIS ...

In one of the many universes situated far away from our own there is a spacecraft called Cube. Cube is a square shaped vessel whose crew comprises of three aliens; "The Three Wise Aliens" being their proper title. Each of the crew comes from different races. Scank is from a race known as the leetlesheets. Chucker is from a race known as the vom and last but by no means least is Dong whose race are called the squidge. Together they fly around the galaxies they know, and some they don't know, having wonderful adventures. One of these adventures is now going to be told for the first time ever.

It had been for several hours that all three of Cube's crew members had remained asleep.

One after the other they'd woke, each of them with only one thought on their minds. They wanted to tell their comrades what they had just dreamt and there was only one place on Cube where they frequently gathered together, the observation post.

Set deep inside the smooth surfaces of the spacecraft, the post, the heart of the observation section, is like all of Cube's other sections in that it's abnormal in its overall layout. Not at all dissimilar to the making of an ice-cube, a very large ice-cube, the observation post has (instead of water) been filled with organically growing technological equipment suitable for the crew's every need to observe the elements space tends to throw at them. Its shape can be compared to a very low and extremely wide bottle - the bottom is filled with most of the contents - whilst wrapping itself around the smooth (upward curving) neck, like a glorified cork, is her optical screen - the main visual device which displays what ever is worth viewing.

Dong had been the first to seat himself inside the post, Chucker and Scank had appeared later taking up positions not far from one another. Dong was also first to break the silence. 'I have just had the strangest dream. I dreamt god came to me with a message.'

'A message!' gulped Chucker, widening his one and only eye, remembering his own dream.

'Woof ... Yes,' interrupted Scank, scratching his hairy little body with each of his four legs, 'I too had a message told to me ... grrr.'

'About a messiah?' queried Dong, rolls of blubber wobbling around his body like a freshly set jelly. 'It would appear that we each were told the same message. God told me that soon, very soon, a messiah shall descend on our galaxy ...'

'A Galactic Messiah!' exclaimed Chucker, remembering God's words.

'Indeed, a "Galactic Messiah" was the term used.'

Scank lifted his monkey-like arms. Placing the suction pads which layered each palm of his hands he began to dangle from the higher parts of the post swinging from one arm to the other, squelching noises filled the air with each manoeuvre. Stopping beneath a small monitor he hung beneath it for several moments before dropping to

the floor next to Dong. 'So, were you given the exact co-ordinates of the appearance of this galactic messiah?'

'No, but I was told to head for the Olas system. It is there we shall be given a sign.'

Scank raised his four eyebrows and remained silent.

'CUBE,' typed Dong, in communication, a keyboard having appeared from out of his gripseat. 'PLEASE NAVIGATE WEST TO THE OLAS SYSTEM.'

With her navigational systems activated, Cube threw her crew backwards as she thrust forward into the layers of surrounding matter. The display on the domed optical screen, now giving the wondrous feeling of one of Michael Angelo's infamous chapel paintings, suddenly filled itself with stars in much the same chaos as gushing water would enter an opened hatch on a diving submarine. The glistening light flickered across the three's faces like a strobe light as they momentarily stared up at its magnificence.

Scank was soon zigzagging around the observation post's many levelled floor pressing different buttons on different shaped terminals moulded into the surrounding equipment.

Making the mistake of continuing to look around the encircling screen Chucker began to turn an all too familiar shade of white. Circling around his wobbly head the display of blurred planets, mixed with a rainbow of stars, started to affect his sense of direction. Slowly his face and body swirled into a pale yellow.

'Woof ... Oh no!' Scank yelled, frantically waving his arms as his feet stayed stuck to the above circuitry he was again hanging from.

'Chucker's turned yellow ... grrr!'

Dong didn't hear, he was too deep in thought.

'Woof ... now he's green! Get out of his way!'

Chucker's tall form began to wobble and shake. Different shades of green replaced one another until a very pale colouring dominated. Small lumps started to appear from within his stomachs like popcorn exploding into life, the explosions protruding through his skin in their attempt to escape.

Scank shouted and shouted but it was to no avail. Chucker's body abruptly curved backwards. One by one the mobile lumps began

travelling upwards. With a sudden jerk forwards the lumps turned into an impressive formation a flying chunks.

The sound of vomiting was to be heard once again.

Chucker very gradually turned back into a healthier shade of orange. 'That's much better,' he gulped, a few of the chunks having remained in his mouth. Using both right hands he wiped his huge lips clean and burped a jazzy tune.

Dong stayed completely still. In a comical fashion (only the old black and white films could muster) the squidge slowly turned to face his soon to be ex-friend, layers of puke toppling from his head, running in waves down his body to the floor. Shaking his hands free of the revolting substance which coated them, he just remained completely quiet, his eyes doing all the talking.

A sniggering sound quickly rained down from above. At least one of them was seeing the funny side to this whole incident. 'I ... woof ... did warn you,' Scank laughed uncontrollably as Dong left the observation post in yet another one of his reputable bad moods. 'He should know better than to stand with his backs to you,' he continued, looking down at Chucker. Scurrying rapidly to the lower levels, the leetlesheet positioned himself in front of a terminal whose beeping keypad span round and round ready to be fondled.

Stepping carefully backwards, Chucker permitted a cleaning robot its unfortunate duty of sucking up the remaining mess he had been so kind as to make for it. Just in time too, a vom's puke can smell very nasty if left in the open for too long. 'I'm off to clean myself up. I'll leave you to carry on the observational tasks.'

Without looking Scank waved both his longs arms in acknowledgement and hearing the suction pads on his four feet come unstuck one after the other - CRASHED - heavily to the floor.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Having escaped from its vacuum-sealed container, the bionic grass seed lifted into the air of the sci-cubicle and waited for the next gust of wind to blow it out of sight.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

It couldn't have been for more than half an hour since the leetlesheet, after rubbing his bruises, had been left alone to monitor things. He had been so busy scurrying from one terminal to the other that he hadn't come to notice the flashing red light on one of Cube's communication panels.

'Scank!' screamed Dong, appearing from nowhere. 'You idiot, look!' The squidge wobbled down from one of the many chutes which allow entry into the observation post. Running heavily forward on blubbery limbs he reached the flashing light and headbutted it several times.

Just in time to see the red light stop flashing Chucker's head and body appeared from out of another chute, a gravitational one. A useful alternative to a ladder, situated beside each other around the whole of Cube's interior both methods of transport are hidden from view inside cylindrical tubing. The user can decide between the natural feel of the ladder or the completely unnatural feel of gravitation; the gravitational one being the easiest, laziest, and generally the fastest one of the two.

'Oh my ... grrr ... god!' Scank barked, shocked by what he could see. The leetlesheet was looking fearfully at the worrying image now being displayed upon one side of the optical screen.

The red light had been indicating they were being summoned to speak by a following galactic destroyer, an extremely large and extremely pant-wetting horn-shaped space vessel. The screen itself was only displaying a comparatively small part of the approaching craft but it was enough for the three aliens to realise who this particular one belonged to.

'What does ... She ... want with us?' grumbled Dong, trying to comprehend the unwanted appearance.

When using the word "She", Dong is talking about the infamous Star Empress of the bosseye race. This race, it is safe to say, are dominating the local galaxy at present. Slavery and death walk in her feared shadow along with a small servant named Stinkz (his

looks matching his own races name) who stems from the yuck people.

'Stinkz!' bellowed The Empress. 'Where the hell are you?' Digging each of her long, painted finger nails into her slender palms she waited until the surface of her skin was broken and bleeding, something which she sadistically enjoyed. Banging her clenched fist against her throne she deliberately turned her back to add some dramatic emphasis.

'Wow! Look!' gasped Chucker, upon seeing the erotic rear image of The Empress appearing on all sides of Cube's domed optical screen, the highest part elongating her top features a little more than was necessary.

The Star Empress' body was fully endowed with welcoming curves, curves which could even make a blind alien wolf-whistle in delight. 'Look at those legs. I didn't know that kind of length was possible this side of our universe. Pausing for a moment he sucked back the saliva he was starting to produce from the corners of his mouth. 'She's absolutely beautiful.'

Scank and Dong were just as dumbfounded by her good looks. They had been expecting somebody a bit uglier from what other fellow aliens had said.

Now that she had their undying attention fixed firmly upon her buttocks The Empress began to turn slowly around to face her new admirers.

From her side profile she was just as enticing as she had been from behind. 'Wow! Look at those breasts. I've never seen four such perfectly shaped mounds of flesh. But why oh why do the bosseye have to go and wear clothes, that's what I want to know ... Mind you at least the one piece body suit she's wearing is a painfully looking tight fit. Mmm! I hope it bursts under the pressure.' Dong sighed with anticipation as she swept back her long mane of white hair to reveal the much overdue appearance of her obscured face. 'I don't believe it, I just don't believe it!'

The unexpected laughter of The Three Wise Aliens blasted out from the speakers onboard The Empress' technologically infested galactic destroyer - lights started to flash - but to the disappointment of Cube's crew The Empress didn't.

'Her eyes! Look at her eyes!' Chucker was hysterical, his body flashing all the colours of a Wobbl'it rainbow.

'It's been a long time since I've seen a bosseye with such boss-eyes,' coughed Dong, gasping for air. 'Crumbs! I bet she sees everything more than once that's for sure.'

From within her heavily fortified ship The Empress struggled to make out the changing positions of Cube's crew. The picture sharply displayed (on her personal view screen) was most confusing.

Appearing at the top, upside down, was the hairy long armed image of Scank. Clutching a ladder chute below was the wobbling figure of Chucker, holding on to it because he was laughing so much. And of course there was the most noticeable foreground figure of Dong whose layers of skin were pressing unappealingly against the screen almost blotting out the other two images completely.

'What do we have here?' said The Empress, softly, misleadingly. 'Silence!' The power of her voice was as captivating as her figure, the instant she shouted everything went quiet, Cube's crew feeling their hearts jolt to a standstill as though something had begun to squeeze them tighter and tighter.

Having regained the three's undivided attention, The Star Empress began her interrogatory questioning which was the sole reason behind her honoured appearance. 'What brings the infamous Cube to this part of the universes? I have been monitoring you for several days now and my officers tell me that our ship's sensors picked up some type of distortion from within Cube, just several hours ago in fact. What would you be hiding from me?' She paused, thinking for only a moment. 'Perhaps some kind of weapon? You wouldn't be working with the Opposers would you?'

The Opposers are a small group of freedom fighters sworn to free the galaxy of the dreaded bosseye, and basically, it would appear,

everything that moves! Whatever policies they started with, if any, have been completely forgotten.

Silence once again fell around the communication speakers. The Three (Not So) Wise Aliens looked blankly at the optical screen, each with their mouths held wide open; in Chucker's and Dong's cases they were hanging halfway down to their stomachs.

Eventually it was Dong who broke the persisting silence and in true squidge fashion spoke bluntly to the awaiting bossy empress. 'I'm sorry but we aren't at liberty to discuss the distortion you speak of ... ' defiantly he sucked in a lung full of air and then, one at a time, he filled his other lungs and expelled the pressurised air in a casual burp to finish with, ' ... you are not worthy of an explanation ... '

'Ah!' The Empress jumped in, moving her face nearer, the top of the optical screen making her elongated features even longer. 'So the galactic rumours are true.' The pupils of her eyes rapidly moved up and down, constantly staying fixed in the middle. 'There have been other distortions elsewhere. Funnily enough the crew of those ships were all fast asleep when we came upon them. Each member was in the middle of dreaming when we blew their ships to pieces.'

'Excuse me,' Chucker interrupted, yellowly, his left hands suspended in the air for pathetic attention, 'but when you say, "to pieces", I presume you didn't mean death. You wouldn't just kill them whilst they slept would you? Not a beautiful woman such as yourself ... no ... no ... surely not ...'

'Kill them now!' screeched The Empress, her patience coming to an abrupt end.

Cutting off communication Cube was instructed to immediately act to the threat by way of several loud farts and screams. Shooting to one side she narrowly avoided two horny (as in horn shaped) blasts from the galactic destroyer's forward array of guns.

Seeing it missed, the bullying ship tilted slightly as if all its crew had just run to the front of it and fired twice more.

The legendary Cube anticipated the manoeuvre and with skill, or perhaps sheer fluke, dropped thousands of feet below the enemy craft. Taking advantage of the position she fired twenty times. Laser-cubes shot out from one side like she'd rapidly given birth to

fifty glowing cubes of equal size. The repeated births had little effect on the mother they originated from, it was the destroyer who came off worst as one after the other they pounded against its flat, wide base in a display of trendy colours a Rastafarian would be proud to wear on his head.

'Woof ... Cube's done it again,' cheered Scank, jumping up and down with joy, parts of his shaggy hair (especially on his tail) swaying with every movement.

'I just love Cube's defensive attitude,' Chucker added, in admiration.

Dong wasn't so overwhelmed with joy. 'They're only immobilised for the time being. Don't get too complacent. We had better get out of here before The Star Empress has time to react. Look! The destroyer's firing as I speak ... '

Pushing her crew forcefully to the floor, which they had all become accustomed to, Cube reversed with speed, narrowly missing a few stars in the process, opened up an acceleration funnel and poured herself inside.

Somewhat like a reversed tornado, Cube has developed the ability to create a momentary vortex in space, which when opened, using focused gravitational and magnetic forces, sucks her through to another system. This procedure is what's known as an acceleration funnel.

It took just a few seconds before Cube shot out of the other end, the funnel vanishing as quickly as it had appeared.

'Where are we ... woof ... Chucker?' asked Scank, his head still spinning, his four eyes unfocused.

The green-stricken vom blew chunks, this time with nobody in the way, before he could answer. Whilst the same robot as before cleared away the artistic mess splattered beside his long feet, Chucker looked down at the location scanner and scanned for a location to give. After several moments of gulping and burping he came up with one. 'We are in the Dodu system, south of our last position.'

'I don't think I've ever been to the Dodu system,' hiccuped Dong, at the same time eating something slimy and brown.

'We're going to have to wait here a while,' continued Chucker, looking curiously at Dong's mouth, mainly at the substance he was ramming into it with such passion. With squidge one would think whenever they eat that they haven't touched any food for

months. 'Just until Cube's systems cool off. She hasn't created an acceleration funnel for quite some time and she's overdone it a bit. We should be safe enough anchored here.'

Dong strolled inwards from the far edges of the observation post and squeezed inside one of the many centrally offered and differently coloured gripseats, the one he chose being an extremely bright yellow.

Gripseats explain themselves. They are especially designed for galactic space travel, having the ability to hold a seated occupant with the minimal amount of discomfort under any circumstances using a combination of interesting methods.

Waiting for a much needed burp to arise from his digestive systems he began to munch another snack which he'd conveniently found wedged in between folded layers of blubber underneath his left armpit.

'Sod this ... grrr ... waiting lark. I'm going to take one of the pods over to this asteroid belt and have a little fun ... woof.' Removing his long knuckled finger from a scanner pad Scank disappeared inside a ladder chute. Dong stared after him but carried on eating.

'Hey!' yelled Chucker, not wanting to be left out. 'Wait for me!'

Still staying put, Dong nestled his blubber deeper inside his gripseat and swivelling it around to face the optical screen, waited for his two crew mates to appear.

Like a couple of babies leaving their mother's womb two pods popped out from Cube's sides, a tiny pinprick of light lessening as the exit route slowly closed.

Looking back at the motherly vessel, Chucker and Scank watched her shrink quickly behind whilst the asteroid belt grew increasingly larger from in front.

'Woof ... we're going to be entering the asteroid belt soon,' Scank shouted into his hand held communication pen. About a foot in length this computerised pen is used to verbally steer and function a pod. 'Chucker ... grrr ... are you ready for some cheap thrills?'

There was no visible sign from outside that the pods were being piloted by anyone. From within, the hidden occupants wore optical head-screens which enables them to perceive their outside field of

vision. By simply moving their head in the direction they wish to see, the optical display provides the pilot with the chosen navigatory view.

Seeing them entering the treacherous asteroid belt, Dong zoomed in on their location and rubbing his hands together, watched from his comfortable and rather less dangerous position onboard Cube. He could easily tell which of the two pods Chuckler was in due to the regular small trails of puke which one of them discharged every now and again, the glare from one of the local stars lighting the trail like ignited gunpowder. 'Where's the damn food robot when you need it?'

Within seconds of his call a lopsided robot appeared wearing a funny shaped chef's hat perched upon what could only be described as its head due to the fact it was the only

part of the funny looking machine which wasn't touching the post's floor, the parts touching the floor had the honour it would appear of being it's legs.

Holding out three large pincers an equal amount of squidgean sludge bars could be seen. Each one was wrapped in a silver foil packet. Taking the bars one at a time and placing them onto his laps, Dong nodded once at the robot in a rare moment of gratitude and then kindly told it to, 'Piss off!'

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Starting to feel slightly vulnerable out in the open now that it was a fugitive, the grass seed continued to hang around the sci-cubicle. It was waiting, pleading, yearning for that next gust of air to blow it out of sight.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

'Hang on tight ... woof ... Chucker ... grrr ... by the end of this you'll be vomiting to your hearts' content.' Cutting off communication, Scank's pod just managed to avoid some of the many large pieces of flying rock shooting past on all sides, from all angles.

'Eeeergh ... ' Chucker puked back in response.

The spectacular sight of the pods disappearing then appearing increasingly looked, from onboard Cube, like a couple of drunk penguins messing about with some passing icebergs.

'Hey ... woof! Look down there,' said Scank, amazement filling his voice. 'There's something signalling us from the surface of that large asteroid ... grrr.'

Both pods impossibly dropped backwards to hover above a flashing (*as in lights flashing on and off*) figure.

'I don't believe what my eyes are telling me ... It's a robotom and it's joined to a host.'

A robotom is a mechanically controlled pair of legs. The host is whatever the legs have joined themselves to; in this case some kind of space-breathing alien resembling a type of demented jellyfish.

'I thought they had all been dismantled by the bosseye ... '

'Obviously not,' interrupted Dong, looking up at Cube's optical screen which was showing an enlarged image of the flashing robotom. 'Send him down a tow-line and pull him back here. Quickly!' Using the controls closest to his fat fingertips he zoomed away from the pods' location, swivelled around the base of his gripseat, and took a huge bite out of an half eaten sludge bar.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Tick Tock Tick Tock ... Safely back onboard, in their designated cubic positions, the pods' dynamic sides slid to one side to let their anxious pilots out onto the glowing floor directly beneath.

'Chucker?' inquired Scank, his fingers scratching his ears as he looked innocently around the aligned pods. 'Where ... grrr ... is the robotom and his host?'

Several globules of perspiration slid to the end of the vom's three antennae before he answered. 'I didn't have him dangling below my pod,' he was quick to state, not wanting to be blamed for anything he hadn't been responsible for. 'You did!'

Scank gulped upon seeing the taut tow-line coming from the pod he'd piloted, disappearing ominously behind the closed docking doors which he knew had just acted like a pair of sharp scissors. 'Ooops!' he mumbled, before scurrying up to the observation post, hotly persued by Chucker's reddening figure.

Springing out from a ladder chute the worried leetlesheet zigzagged towards the optical screen. Just before reaching it one of his legs trod on the other sending him flying into a brightly lit terminal. Gently opening one eye, he was quick to open all four. 'You've got them!'

'Of course I've got them,' repeated Dong, confidently.

Chucker wobbled up to join the other two who had come together underneath the domed central part of the optical screen. The three of them stood quietly for a moment. In unison they stared at the blue beam of light sticking out from Cube's side in a rather

unfitting phallic way; at the tip of it the robottom was being held in a stable position.

'Woof ... bring him in quickly,' trembled Scank, 'the host doesn't appear to be moving ... grrr ... at all!'

As if suddenly getting the upper hand in an up until now equally matched tug of war, the flickering grip ray pulled its captive opposition directly inside Cube's medical section.

'We must hurry to a med-cubicle,' Chucker worried, the fear of what they, or rather what Scank had done, was sinking in.

Dashing one after the other into a gravitational chute, Dong was the last to leave the observation post, his large shape eventually squeezing into a chute's tubular metal casing, which with a final gush of air flushed his body downwards to rejoin his friends in the medical section.

Appearing in the triangular doorway of the med-cubicle, the medical robots stared at the three intruders who were all out of breath from running from the observation post.

Startled, shocked and most definitely horrified, Dong, Scank and Chucker looked on helplessly as one of the robots removed the unknown host which was beyond any shadow of a doubt completely and utterly - dead! In comparison to the floppy form above it, the equally lifeless robottom continued to stand awkwardly still.

This unplanned event, especially to food-minded Dong, quickly took on a similar routine of when the dead corpse of a Trebular crab is scooped out of its shell by one of Cube's painfully inefficient food robots. 'You've killed the host!' gasped Dong, holding his head in his hands, his fingers slowly sinking in to the endless layers of facial blubber.

For once both his companions remained respectfully quiet. Each of them had now turned their attention on to the robottom, hoping, praying for it to move in some small way.

Following a sudden jolt in their general direction all three jumped as the red legs began twitching in a rather aggressive fashion.

Slowly but surely the robottom began to move. Both his legs quickened in pace as he headed directly towards Scank, Chucker

and Dong with a purposeful strut. The sound of heavy footsteps echoed upon the floor even though it happened to be made of rubber.

Dong's two eyes, which as with all squidge normally are difficult to see amidst the blubber, could be seen quite clearly staring out through his fingers which he continued to hold pressed deep into his face. In comparison Scank's four and Chucker's one eye remained screwed tightly shut as if they expected to be hit at any moment.

Coming to an abrupt standstill the robotom froze, two green lights flashing from his waist which happened to be equal in height to the small Buddha-like stature of Dong whose eyes were also now firmly shut.

The Three Wise Aliens leant back in one synchronised motion, terrified at what looked like being the legs' vicious reprisal. Then as if to prove their first assumptions had been justified, suddenly, without any kind of a warning, from out of the robotom's peach-shaped behind came a long resonant fart, 'Pfffffffffffffffffffffffffffff!' The bubble of the created tense atmosphere burst instantly with it's sound and vulgar smell.

'Oh my god! What a stink!' choked Chucker, placing two long fingers over his nasal slits. 'It just about equals my puke's own smelling abilities. So that's why The Star Empress ordered all the robotoms to be dismantled ... '

'Bleep ... That's hypercritical coming from a puke-stinking-vom! Do you ... pfff ... really think that's a justified reason for having every one of my kind hunted down and killed?'

'YES!' the others replied, in unity, taken aback by the sudden mechanised voice.

The voice had come from a speaking mechanism conveniently situated within a moving bulge in-between the top front part of the legs. This same bulge seemed to give the robotom a stare inducing expressive facial movement and along with two green lights (*which had now stopped flashing*) positioned above and the two handles either side - looking like a pair of extremely big ears - there was a distinct face definitely to be seen.

'I thought ... grrr ... only the host could speak?' Scank remarked loudly, without thinking. 'And it's dead.' He shuffled his feet (or paws as leetlesheet prefer to call them) awkwardly around and lowered his muzzle. 'Oh ... grrr ... yes sorry about that.' His head felt heavier and heavier, filling with uncontrollable guilt.

'Usually,' began the robottom, flashing his right eye twice, 'when a host and I ... pfff ... are joined we become one; the host taking over all the communicative functions. Although ... bleep ... in the unfortunate event of the host being injured, or even worse ... ' his bulge quickly pointed to all Three Wise Aliens, 'killed, I have the built in capability allowing me to act on my own initiative until such a time when a new host can be found ... bleep.' Each of the guilty three-not-so-wise-aliens hung their heads even further in shame. Scank's head was now so close to the floor that his legs were bending under the strain.

Stemming from directly underneath the visual bulge and bottom (at an equal distance apart) the robottom's two comically thin legs bent in the middle before lifting the giant blocks of metal - which were his feet - in a robotic movement forwards.

Chucker watched every movement the legs made and in turn listened to every noise each part of them created, the sound being unique and fascinating; it was almost musical. 'Aren't you at all angry?' he asked, warily returning to the conversation.

'I'm not the one who's angry ... pfff ... but I know some that will be!' The robottom walked back and forth, this time slightly bouncing on the rubber surface beneath his feet. If the host had been attached its head would probably have been crinkled in deep concentration. 'Bleep ... You see ... the host I was carrying was some kind of leader for the Opposers. So if I were you I would seriously think hard about leaving this system before they see and identify this space vessel. They might just put the wrong two and two together ... pfff ... if you know what I'm trying to get at? You don't want to end up on their hit list ... and we're not talking the top ten albums!'

A little speechless from what had just been said, all three quickly communicated to Cube to leave her current positioning in the Dodu System.

The usual head rush, to their relief, signified they had entered and left an acceleration funnel which had been initiated according to their instructions for getting them, quote: "... the hell out of here, now!".

'Where has,' Robottom paused thoughtfully, his obvious name having already been accepted by the wiser three, 'Coobe ...'

'Cube!' Dong corrected, outlining her shape with his wobbly hand and arm movements.

'Where has Cube ... bleep ... pfff ... taken us?' the legs continued, a small but audible fart once again escaping from the rear like the air of a tyre deflating.

'Hopefully,' Scank replied, pinching his nostrils shut, his voice gaining a higher tone, 'we should be back ... grrr ... on our course with the Olas System ... woof.'

'The Olas System ... bleep ... Why that's where my host wanted to go before our space vessel was forced to crash-land in that asteroid belt.' Robottom's bulge moved into an inquisitive expression. In response to the movement, Dong, Scank and Chucker quickly looked to each others blank facial expressions and, shrugging their shoulders, they quickly looked back to the bulge - mouth.

'You look tired,' Chucker observed, 'even for a robot. I think we better go to the relaxation section to recuperate ourselves.'

'Not a bad idea at all,' agreed Dong, his regular grumpy nature lightening a little with the suggestion.

Robottom followed his three new likeable companions up and down a knowledgeable combination of chutes, round and round corridors and eventually through an automatically opened circular door which as it happens was crafted from an ancient and relatively unknown block of glistening wood.

'I can see ... pfff ... well actually ... bleep ... it's more a case of me being able to tell by the use of unexplainable sensory circuits, why this is called the relaxation section.'

Robottom's remark was amazingly understood. The main entrance to the section couldn't be defined as a shape of any kind, nor could

you say it was of one colour, it was everything - comfortable, warm, cool, dry, wet, big, small, short and tall ...

The robotom's bottom soon touched one of the many objects littering the entrance and instantly settled down, completely overwhelmed with the exact feeling he had needed at that particular moment in time. Gazing around the entrance, which he now had decided was fairly small in size, he wondered where each of the doors and corridors led to. 'Where do ... '

'Each of the ... grrr ... doors and corridors lead to,' interrupted Scank's voice, expectantly, Robotom nodding. 'Grrr ... this and ... woof ... indeed all the other sections around Cube lead to other parts of other sections, which in turn lead to other parts of other sections, which in turn all contain their specific cubicles, which in turn always have a toilet situated just on the left ... grrr.'

Robotom's listening sensors picked up the changing tones in Scank's voice, he would like to one day explore Cube but for now, relaxing, feeling calm and at peace with his metal bowels he sighed, 'Ahhh ... pfff ... comfortable at last,' and quickly added, 'you know, asteroids aren't very comfortable to sit on for long periods of time.'

'Yes, I've only just had mine removed. They were almost getting to the size of a bunch of Tovarian grapes.' Dong's already black figure began to blacken, in growing embarrassment. All eyes were now firmly fixed on him, the atmosphere silent.

'Bleep ... besides asteroids,' Robotom kindly continued, 'my host took me to many uncomfortable places. Let's just hope the next one will be more pleasant ... pfff.'

Thinking over in his minds what had just been said Chucker turned a greyish colour in deepening curiosity. 'I like Tovarian grapes. In fact I found some in a container on top of one of the wall tables in the med-cubicle, they tasted a bit off ... ' realising from Dong's surprised expression what he had mistaken for Tovarian grapes, Chucker's colour turned instantly from grey to green. 'Eeeeeergh!'

'So ... woof ... you say you will be able to accommodate another host,' repeated Scank, moving to the far corner to what was in his opinion a very large room, his mind fascinated at the thought of two

different life forms intertwined together in life. 'What, though, did you say your former host said about heading for the Olas System? Was there any reason it wanted to go ... grrr ... there?' His doggy voice gave nothing away of The Three Wise Aliens' dreams of seeking out a galactic messiah.

'I believe I can trust you lot so I'm not going to beat around the proverbial bush, no instead I'm actually going to attempt to tell you the truth. Whether you believe me or not it's up to ... pfff ... you?' Robottom farted once again but this time - to the others clearly expressed relief - the relaxation sensors were at hand to soak up the pungent rusty odour which normally would have been smelt. 'It all happened two days ago ... bleep ... in one of the neighbouring quadrants. There we were, me kneeling down, my host busy setting a bomb ... pfff. We were in what my sex circuits have now come to think of as the usual Opposer position. My host was planning to blow up one of The Star Empress' many galactic destroyers. Suddenly signalling for me to run. I did. Straight into the slightly unhelpful and rather solid turret of a laser-canon ... bleep!'

Scank, now hanging recklessly above everyone, was desperately trying not to laugh. Below him as if one was looking into the reflection of a puddle Chucker mirrored the same expressive smile, biting his bloated lip he managed to tame the animal of laughter struggling to escape from within, several small droplets of spit sprayed out of the pressured corners of each of their quaking mouths.

Ignoring the others childlike behaviour Robottom carried on, 'anyway ... pfff ... so there it was we lay unconscious, the bomb ready to explode at any second, when who do you think appeared to us in our moment of slumber ... '

'Who?' Dong broke in, trying to reach the end of the explanation before it had been given, and trying to regain a more serious air.

'Dog!' replied Robottom.

'Dog?' each of the Wise Three repeated, baffled.

'Yes, Dog! Our Holy Farter, Life Giver and Life Taker ... '

'Woof ... oh you mean God!'

'Bleep ... that's right, it told us there was a messiah and ... '

Dong raised his flabby arm forward as if he were a traffic cop and brought Robotom's explanation to an abrupt halt. 'I think we all know what you were told because I can admit to you now that we too have experienced the same prophecy which you have just described.'

'Yes,' Chucker interrupted, at the same time annoyed and jealous that there had obviously been others entrusted by God with the same important event, 'but of all those aliens why was your host chosen to be told?'

'Dog said it had been chosen because it would be able to raise the messiah within the loving arms of the Opposers. For the messiah is said to have risen again to help prise open the smothering grip of the dominant bosseye. A day will come when the galaxy will be free once again from their tyranny. Evil will perish and good will grow and lots of angel-like things will happen don't you know.'

'So ... grrr ... what happened to the bomb you had set to go off?'

'Oh it exploded with us next to it and blew us into space and eventually we landed on the asteroid. It must have been Dog's wish as we were blown on course for the Olas System which has uncannily led to our fortunate meeting.'

'Your explanation is a good one,' pressed Chucker, still jealous, 'but you mention these Opposers and the downfall of the bosseye ... I thought that Dog - God - wasn't into violence of any sort? Could God have been confused? Could God have mistaken the terrorist group of Opposers as a group of mirror-loving aliens hailing from the planet Op?'

Whilst the rapid answer of, 'No!' preceding another well placed fart was given, Dong decided that his sagging eyelids, which were already half closed, had had enough excitement for the time being.

'I suggest we all rest ourselves before we arrive in the Olas System. We shall then await a sign which will guide us to the messiah.'

With all in agreement for the first time in a long while, the relaxation section fell fast asleep around them.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Still impatiently waiting, the bionic grass seed was starting to wish it had been designed with a useful pair of arms and legs, or even wings for that matter, but remembering it didn't even have a mind to think with, it quickly stopped worrying.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

The relaxation section woke to find its occupants already gone. From the glistening darkness of the Olas System four pods could be seen circling Cube like flies around a pile of steamy brown stuff.

'Woof ... your piloting skills aren't bad at all,' Scank barked over the growing interference which had started to buzz through his pod's many speakers. 'Especially as you haven't a host to help you from above. If you know what I mean?'

'My former hosts have taught me many things. Flying space vehicles is just the tip of the iceberg. I have to say, though, these pods are indeed in a class of their own, I am very impressed.'

'You sound muffled ... grrr ... where have you positioned your communication pen?'

'Communication pen? What communication pen? I've been using the pod's secondary interface.'

Scank thought for a moment as to where the pen might be. 'Woof ... the pen could have been left on the ... grrr ... gripseat?' he suggested.

Emerging slowly from out of the following silence came a sloshing sound like a boot having been pulled from out of a muddy bog. The intriguing sound blasted through the sensitive intercom and out of each of the others finely tuned pod speakers. 'I had thought this gripseat ... pfff ... was a bit stimulating on the old rectum!' Robottom awkwardly waited for the thick rectal oil, which the communication pen had gathered, to drip slowly away before resuming the correct way to control his confused pod.

Dong and Chucker kept their opinions quietly to themselves as they concentrated on not hitting any of Cube's sides whilst flying this way and that around her smooth body.

'We've been out here now for hours and there's still no sign from that ... grrr ... God geezer.' In frustration, Scank flew his pod around Dong's, several times, each time dangerously coming close to a fatal collision. Dong remained mysteriously calm throughout the terrifying ordeal without moaning once; the reason being he had found some food wedged in between his toes and had given his concentration on picking them clean.

'Don't worry,' Robottom comforted, 'at least in the pods ... pfff ... we can manoeuvre closer to whatever holy sign is revealed to us. Something ... bleep ... was said to happen in the Olas System and so here we shall wait. Just try and be a little more patient!'

Several hours and a lot of arguments later something was beginning to transpire.

'Hey, look! That cluster of stars wasn't there before.' Having pointed out his observation to the others, Chucker vomited twice, moved away from Cube's orbit and the overpowering shadow a distant sun had recently cast over his pod and shot towards the ever apparent space anomaly.

'What,' replied Dong, picking the last of his toes clean, angered at not seeing whatever it was he couldn't see, first. 'I don't notice anything?' Bringing his pod swiftly level with Chucker's, he stared through his optical head-screen out into the vastness of space-type-things which had decided to move around in a space-type way.

Chucker felt an urge of excitement, 'Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Look at the way those stars are positioned ... ooooh ... don't you see it? Come on! Come on! Look ... eeergh!'

'Woof ... I see it!' Scank broke in, his voice thickly coated with two distinct layers, one jealousy and the other curiosity. 'Chucker? You don't happen to be sitting on your communication pen do you ... grrr ... because it really isn't all that amazing to be getting the over enthusiastic reaction you obviously appear to be having.'

No verbal response followed the leetlesheet's supposition.

'Oh yes! Yes! Yes! An arrow!' Dong screamed, at the same time wanting to annoy Scank further. 'I see an arrow! Yes! Yes! Yes! Let's go in for a closer look.'

Taking care not to get in the way, Cube followed her pods into the arrow-like cluster of stars that for some inexplicable reason hadn't been noticed right from the start.

'The tip of the arrow shape,' Chucker began, directing his head-screen up towards a pinkish glow, 'seems to be pointing directly at that funny looking planet over there. Therefore I would think that the messiah must be on it. My pod sensors are informing me the planet is called ... '

'Huj Huj Wuji,' interrupted Robottom, 'giving ... bleep ... home to more than five billion aliens spread across its pink oval outline which we can clearly see glowing from out here in ... bleep ... space.'

Indeed, in the shape of an egg, Huj Huj Wuji quickly appeared on each of the others optical head-screens courtesy of Robottom's nifty computer skills.

'Fascinating,' Chucker remarked in several deep breaths and then, hesitating for a moment, added, 'I suppose it too is under ... '

'The ... bleep ... control of the bosseye,' Robottom's familiar voice pattern finished, briskly. 'Yes,' he sighed, 'I'm afraid like many other worlds it is under the direct command of The Star Empress. In fact nowadays most of it's inhabitants are from the bosseye race. The planet has proven itself rich in mining deposits and is said to be considered a home away from home for them.'

The following period of thought filled with questions each of The Three Wise Aliens wanted to ask Robottom but were too afraid of being interrupted. Finally, Scank plucked up the courage to say something. 'Woof ... How come ... '

'I ... bleep ... know so much about Huj Huj Wuji? It's all down to one of my former hosts. She brought me here to live for a while, it was all to do with her line of business.'

Apart from the way in which he'd interrupted them, Robottom's outbursts of knowledge had deeply impressed each of his fellow pod pilots. Although they too had travelled, this was the first time they had navigated into this particular location in their own galaxy.

'So, any suggestions as to what we do now?' asked Dong, too lazy to think of one himself.

'Perhaps ... bleep ... we could dock our pods on the surface and ask around. I'm sure if indeed the messiah has appeared on Huj Huj Wuji, she will not have gone unnoticed by the locals.'

'Woof ... you know, Robottom, for a pair of metal legs with an arse for their head you really are quite useful.'

'... Pfff ...'

Cube reluctantly stayed in orbit around the farthest shades of pink as the large egg-like planet sucked each of the pods towards what appeared to be its large yoke, with more than a little help from gravity.

One by one the tiny cubic spacecraft burst through cloud after cloud, the overcast atmosphere quickly proving itself as having a life all of its own. Hanging carelessly around and above the underlying city which Robottom was now trying to pinpoint on a map which had, with his help, appeared on his head-screen, the clouds proved to have the annoying habit of hiding solid matter. And not only did they hide solid matter but they blocked out any type of radar device the fateful four thought of using. As you must agree this unfortunate handicap caused quite a niggling problem, but luckily, included in the pods' many useful gadgets were a handful of kamikaze probes. It had been Dong's brilliant idea to use them and they worked relatively well.

Hovering several hundred feet in front of the advancing cubic crafts, the probes (upon ramming in to a hidden solid object) sent back the all too important message that there had been something the pilots really didn't want to fly into situated dead ahead.

'We're nearly there,' said Robottom, guiltily. 'Look, I'll say it again, I'm sorry that I forgot to mention the ... bleep ... clouds. It's just that it's been a long time since I was last here. A lot of stars have flown under the proverbial bridge if you could please excuse the pun. I'm sure the clouds were not as bad as ... pfff ... this before, it must be all the mining the bosseye have done over the years, it seems to be ruining ... pfff ... the atmosphere ... bleep!'

'Speaking of atmospheres ... woof ... the one in your pod can't be too pleasant.'

'Pfff ... what do you mean?'

'Exactly!'

Using his communication pen to circle and enlarge an area of the map displayed before his sensors Robottom added, 'There's a place we can safely ... bleep ... dock our pods, down there!' Pressing another button on his communication pen he transferred the image of the map he was seeing to the other head-screens so the others could see which part of Huj Huji Wuji he was talking about, 'If you look carefully you can see some space vehicles glistening in the brief rays of sunlight.'

Moving their head-screens in unison towards a widening pink ray of sunlight which had moments before valiantly forced its way past several annoyed clouds to the ground far below, they all watched as it expanded just enough for each of them to see, for the first time, the central part of the city most aliens call Lotta Wonga.

Seeing as how the curve appeared to have such a distinct part to play in the overall make up of Huj Huji Wuji, the square shaped pods managed to cause relatively little upset on their sudden arrival through the converging clouds.

Most of the planet's dock workers were used to the comings and goings of many different craft. Some came from as far away as the planet "Faraway" itself. Quite frankly they really couldn't give a damn who landed on the planet. So the sight of the four small cubes plopping harmlessly to the ground was of little concern to their already busier than busy schedule. Besides, they knew the bosseye military police were now scanning every single atmospheric entrant to see who or what they were; Huj Huji Wuji's security was in safe hands...

'Guys?' Chucker whispered through the head-screen's internal intercom, in sudden speculation. 'I have found one flaw to our - Robottom's - plan ...'

'What's that then?' snapped Dong, wanting to quickly get on with things.

'Well,' Chucker began, still feeling that he had a good point to make, 'I just thought before we leave the safety of our pods, we ought to think seriously hard about disguising Robottom. I say this only because it would mean certain death for all of us if the bosseye

see what is, according to their strictly enforced laws, supposed to be extinct by order of their beloved empress. Things have changed since Robottom was last here.'

'Woof ... like the cloudy atmosphere for one!'

'Exactly, Scank.'

'Good point! Good point!' everyone answered over and over again into their tightly held communication pens, apart from Robottom who remained quiet.

'Dong thought for a moment before adding, 'I suggest then that we should use an old fashioned cloaking device.'

'Good idea,' agreed Chucker, 'have you got one? I sure as hell haven't!'

'It just so happens that I do. I thought it might come in handy and it looks like I was right. Robottom, stay enclosed in your pod until I tell you to come out.' Dong eventually squeezed free of his opened pod and, joining Scank and Chucker, walked casually over to where Robottom had docked several feet away. 'Right, nobody's looking this way, open up and come on down.'

Feeling like he was a contestant on the "Price is Right" intergalactic game show, Robottom quickly obliged the request of his fellow alien.

'Stand back everyone I'm going to initiate the cloaking device.'

Chucker and Scank immediately did as they were told, at the same time watching out for any immediate and surrounding dangers.

'This won't hurt a bit. You'll only feel a slight itching sensation the cloaking device might produce from time to time. Ready?'

'Bleep ... yes,' answered Robottom, lying to himself.

Dong made sure the device was held securely in both of his flabby hands and, with a great amount of skill, threw the dark woolly blanket over the pair of nervous legs.

'Pfff ... Is that it?' Robottom sighed, his vocal resonance slightly muffled.

'That's it! You are well and truly cloaked. You're now completely out of sight to the untrained eye. Don't worry, though, we three can still see you, thanks to Ammaliar Dont-Yoono's book on "The Theory

of Complete Sci-fi Bollocks". Now you'll be able to walk freely about the city, unnoticed. Quickly now, though, let's go whilst the device is firmly in place. These earlier cloaking devices have been known to have technical difficulties when exposed to high winds. Come to think of it, you had better walk behind of us because you had beans for breakfast ...'

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Hearing the pulsating tones of an alarm going off in the adjoining sci-cubicle, the unlucky grass seed was blown forcefully against a wall as an escaping Tovarion Tickle fly shot past into the outer corridor, hotly pursued by an angered scientific robot armed with a laser net.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

It had taken the planet's new arrivals several minutes to leave the open air of the oval docking area. As if they'd been linesmen at a football game, several bosseye soldiers walked around it's boundaries waiting for someone to foul up so they could use their somewhat limited authority to its fullest extent. Unfortunately, instead of whistles hanging around their necks, they carried extremely menacing weapons.

So far the party of four had gone unchallenged, the cloaked robotom creating no suspicion. 'Grrr ... your device appears to be working,' growled Scank, surprised, at the same time itching his bald belly.

Robotom again remained quiet, now having to use most of his sensors all the more carefully, so as not to fall over or bump into things as they entered the layered shadows of the surrounding city.

The Three Wise Aliens were astonished by the heavily structured architecture the local inhabitants deemed suitable for living in and around and, in some cases, underneath. Metals were intertwined with metals, which were themselves intertwined with yet more metals. A spectrum of metallic colours dominated the eye and

sensors. Rusty browns of centuries long gone mixed unforgivingly with the glowing blue-silver of the more present day metals.

Having now left the docking area some distance behind them, they eventually came to a hopeful standstill outside a large oval doorway. Above in the dusty breeze swung a welcoming sign which signified this was one of the many local breweries.

'I suggest we go in here and sample some of the local beverages, oh, and if we've got time we can do a little bit of detective work.' The veins in Chucker's neck throbbed at his own suggestion.

The others quickly agreed; anything to remove themselves from the relative openness of the streets. Stepping through the doorway they came upon a brightly lit room made up of ample proportions. Weird furniture cluttered the place but most of it was in context. Dong rubbed his multiplying bellies several times at the thought of getting some food on the premises. It had already been nearly an hour since he had last eaten.

Sinking themselves inside a vacant blob, they waited patiently to be served.

It took a long time for the mobile bar to finally hover across to serve them. Robottom had remained cautiously cloaked and was quite happy to stay that way. Still, it turned out that the barman was a squidge just like Dong and therefore probably wouldn't have said anything anyway but it was better for now not to get side tracked in their search for the messiah. A robottom on Huj Huj Wuji would take more than a moments explaining and they didn't have the time for that, not even for a fellow squidge.

'It's good to see another squidge in this part of the galaxy. What brings you to this particular planet?' The barman quickly and skilfully filled three liquid bags full of the local brew whilst Dong answered.

'I am in search of a special being. She is supposed to have appeared here recently ... '

'Oh you mean Loolol and her amazing pair of jungars! She appeared on stage here last ... '

'No, no, no, no ... no!' replied Dong, proud to be the same species as the barman. 'Although, you say, "her amazing pair of jungars! ". Where is she now ... no, no, I am actually looking for ... '

The barman itched his saggy bits and belched, staring for a moment at his nose he mimicked the great bosseye stare.

Dong looked at the others then back at the barman, 'Do you have any idea what I'm talking about?'

The barman's eyes slowly uncrossed. Looking cautiously around he leant prudently forwards over the oval bar he was central to, his huge bosom sagging on the surface next to a packet of oval cigarettes. 'No, no, no, no ... no!'

Groans immediately came from the wise three, not to mention half the locals who had been leaning in their general direction up until the barman's disappointing response.

To the groups complete bewilderment the barman started shaking his head and opening and closing both his suggestive eyes, layers of blubber rolling in motions never before seen to a non squidge.

'Woof ... is something wrong?' barked Scank, concerned, his shaggy ears staying erect for just a few seconds before folding back into their semi folded position.

The barman continued to gesture for a few moments longer until finally giving in. 'Come on! You know!' Taking the oval cigarette packet from the bar, he beamed out a lit cigarette in-between his two fat fingers which he had been holding ready in a vee shape and began smoking it, nervously.

'Know what ... grrr?' Scank growled sharply, this time just his left ear rising and falling, or rather, flopping.

'You know ... ' The barman's rolls of flab were starting to glisten with sweat as his voice quickened with each word, 'For example - barman meets The Three Wise Aliens - barman remains ignorant under repeat questioning by The Three Wise Aliens - barman withholds vital information you all desperately bloody need! You should know what to do next ... come on, come on ...' soaking his cigarette, hearing the lighted end hiss when extinguished, the barman collapsed behind the bar.

'Oh, I see!' understood Chucker, playing with his huge lips as though they were a musical instrument he'd suddenly discovered. 'You really do have information which could help us in our quest and you want us not to give up the first time we ask because if we persist

you'll tell us everything you know, including what deodorant you obviously didn't put on this morning.'

The Three Wise Aliens and Robottom waited for an agonising moment as the barman attempted to raise himself from the floor. 'Yes,' the knackered squidge sighed, wiping the perspiration off his many brows, almost burning them as a lit cigarette suddenly appeared in-between his fingers again. 'Damn, I must remember to close the packet!' Stopping, he looked around at his weird looking tormentors. 'Well? What are you waiting for? A bloody galactic messiah?'

Dong, Scank, Chucker and the cloaked Robottom quickly looked around at the other folk who were once again leaning in their direction, all of them ready and eager to hear out the rest of the conversation. Once each of them had, in turn, straightened up, like a pack of falling dominoes in reverse, and had returned their attention elsewhere, Dong asked the barman for the information he had so cleverly appeared not to have had the first time around.

'Damn,' the barman replied, taking a deep drag from his dying cigarette, 'you are a pushy lot aren't you.' Happy to play along with the unfolding events, raising his hands, or rather two mounds of loose flesh with digits in, he swiftly carried on as if surrendering to their persuasive charms. 'OK! OK! I'll talk. I have heard from one of my preacher friends that there is a new alien in town. She goes by the name of Annoying Shiet. Apparently she pesters them with wild religious stories and is to be found somewhere within The Row Of Columns.' The barman looked yet again at the expressionless faces set before his own. 'Don't worry, you'll find this place, you can't miss it.' No sooner had he finished, he resumed winking and wobbling.

Chucker looked back to the barman and said, 'Could you at least give us some directions?'

The barman immediately stopped his movements and smiled. 'Good, good, you're getting the hang of this at last. You know, as a barman I am so used to having people on missions coming in here giving me the spiel, I'm getting quite a dab hand at this sort of thing, even if I do say so myself. Anyway, here I go ... you'll need to leave this establishment first, but that goes without saying, I can see you

are a bright bunch really. Take an immediate left to follow the outside street northwards until you come across a crissy crossy type of criss-cross crossing crossroad. Once there you must do the traditional dance which entails jumping up and down whilst screaming foul words at the top of your voice. Then you have to walk, again that goes without saying, ha he ha hoo, eastwards until you sight the unmistakable structure of The Row Of Columns ... You know there was a time when one could see them from outside this entrance, those were the days. In fact one could see the columns, or at least the tip of them, from anywhere in Lotta Wonga, but due to the growing population the buildings have grown taller and taller ...'

'Excuse me,' Chucker greenly interrupted, 'do you have a bag behind that bar of yours?'

'Certainly,' replied the barman, excited by the unexpected question, 'here you are, but what do you want it for ...'

'Eeeeeergh ... Dollop ... Splat ... Trickle ... Arrgh!'

'... Pfff ...'

With a ghostly white face the barman coughed, 'Well, I'd better be going now, there's some very suspicious looking bosseye seated over there in the far ceiling and they look in desperate need of a refill. Maybe I'll puke ... I mean ... speak to you again sometime ...' With that said and done, the bar, and the gagging barman, moved quickly away.

'Let's ... grrr ... go,' sniffed Scank, turning his attention to Dong, eager to leave with the other two who were already breathing the air outside. 'What are you waiting for?'

'I'm starving, I need to eat and soon! You know my squidgean race needs to eat every hour or we ... we ... we change!'

'Look ... grrr ... we have to go now, before I choke to death, I need some fresh air. Please ... woof ... it will be worth the sacrifice when we set eyes on the messiah.'

'Okay, agreed Dong, very reluctantly, looking down at his middle. 'I'm coming and then I'll meet you outside.'

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

With the vibrations of the alarm still massaging its body, the grass seed lay unconscious at the base of the wall which it had hit so hard. From within the darkness of its newly found dreamstate a strange and powerful voice could be heard ...

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Since Cube's crew had been last outside an oily odour had filled the street and within only a matter of seconds, each of their nostrils, although, in Robottom's case, fragrant sensor. This distinct change wasn't the only difference, the weather had warmed up dramatically, but according to Robottom this was just part of a normal Huj Huj Wuji winter.

'That smell is driving me mad in this heat!' squawked Dong, coughing several times, his blubbery body forced to deal with the rippling aftershock.

Everyone quickly looked around in an attempt to locate the cause of this overpowering smell.

'Woof ... look! Over there by those refuse boxes ... grrr ... what is it?' Scank's observation rapidly turned the others' heads towards the sighting. A weirdly designed robotic form was hesitantly focused on and its unique image thrown dramatically into each of their brains.

'He reminds me of what I've seen of ... I believe they are called, "Dawgs".'

'Oh, yeh,' agreed Chucker, remembering what Dong was talking about, 'those hairy creatures we've seen from those scrambled transmission waves we came across a while back.'

'Except,' added Scank, 'this one's ... grrr ... held together with wires and antique bolts.'

'I don't like the look of him!' Dong conceded, grumpily.

As if in understanding, the creature's head turned to acknowledge the group of staring aliens. His whole face was simply a mass of jaw filled from ear to ear with dangerously looking sharp teeth. From where the jaws were hinged a blood-red slit of light, on each side, represented his eyes.

'Woof ... he just winked at me!'

'Scank, you did say, "winked"?' clarified Dong.

'Grrr ... yes!'

'Just checking.'

'Oh, forget him,' Chucker intervened, 'he's only an old tin can. We must see to the business at hand. Come on let's follow the barman's directions.'

Scank didn't need to be asked a second time, he didn't like the look of that creature, not one bit. Scurrying at first to the left he suddenly dashed to the right and then to the left again. The others followed in a straight line, ignoring his frisky movements.

'The street was becoming busier the further on they went. Small crowds began developing around the best of the market stalls positioned on each side, some being at least two stories high.

Before sighting the crissy crossy type of criss-cross crossing crossroad which they had been told to head for, Dong asked the silent Robotbottom if he was all right. A swift movement underneath the cloaking device was his only response, a response which didn't demand anymore questions. Dong gave a low snarl of disapproval and slowly returned his attention to rubbing his stomachs.

Several bosseye military police suddenly appeared from around a corner and looked the differently shaped group up and down. Luckily, before anything could come of the tense situation, they were dragged aside by the many street sellers who now littered the way.

There were sellers offering medicines for computer systems that have come down with a virus, there were sellers selling equipment supposedly capable of changing the buyer's gender. Sellers selling cellars and the list went on. All in all there were some pretty unusual products swapping hands.

'Don't look now,' gestured Dong, 'but we're being followed by that dawgy creature.'

Ignoring his words of advice Chucker went black before turning around for a glimpse of the strange follower. In doing this completely unsubtle movement it made the creature instantly pretend to sniff three police officers who were rapidly overtaking

him. The creature, realising who he had started to sniff, stopped to scratch his wiry neck. Turning back to orange, Chucker resumed a forward position alongside his companions. 'Perhaps he is simply going the same way but the three police officers running towards us I'm not so sure about!'

'The What!' Dong gulped, moving his hands up to his chins and then round and round his shiny bald head.

Robottom twitched but said nothing.

'I'm ... snfff ... going to have to have a look for myself,' sniffed Scank, something he only did when really nervous. Dropping behind, he positioned his four legs ready to turn. The others waited for his analysis of the situation. 'Woof ... oops ... they've seen me looking and have speeded up!'

From his leading position Dong noticed a change in the street up ahead. 'I think we're finally coming up to the crissy crossy type of criss-cross crossing crossroads. Strangely, there appears to be nobody in sight, we must be leaving the hustle and bustle of the market behind us.'

Closing in from behind they could hear the heavy patters of what could only be the feet of three bosseye police officers still running towards them. The crissy crossy type of criss-cross crossing crossroad was now just several feet away. 'They're going to arrest us!' Chucker winced, crumbling under the intense pressure. 'I bet The Empress has put a warrant out for our immediate execution.'

The first and tallest of the three police officers - awkwardly dressed in a baggy uniform - suddenly grabbed a hold of Chucker's right arms. 'Excuse us! We are in a hurry!' he shouted, before jumping into the centre of the crissy crossy type of criss-cross crossing crossroad closely followed by his smaller, but bigger breasted, comrades. 'Chicken!' the taller shouted, as he began continuously jumping up and down with the other two joining him, their body parts bouncing in more directions than his.

'Chicken!' shouted the second officer, her voice shaking with her erratic movements.

'Chicken!' repeated the third.

'Turkey!' added the taller, again.

'Turkey!' said the second.

'Turkey ... and pheasant!' stated the third.

'And pheasant!' said the taller, in gratitude.

'And pheasant!' joined the second.

'Not forgetting ... grouse!' said the taller, finally.

'Grouse!'

'Grouse!'

No sooner had they finished their fit of calculated madness they ran hastily off into the blurring distance.

'What the dooglash was all that about?' sighed Dong, looking to the covered form beside him, for advice, his brows furrowed.

Robottom slowly stated, 'Pfff ... I don't ... bleep ... remember anything about this tradition the barman mentioned, but then I never came to this part of Lotta Wonga before when I was living here.'

Scank followed the eyebrow trend and wrinkled his left two, 'Why did they shout out names of birds?'

'Foul!' remembered Dong. 'That's what the barman must have meant when he said for us to shout out "foul words" at the top of our voices, he meant fowl! As in birds!'

Several locals, appearing from a small alleyway, confirmed his conclusion. Together upon reaching the crissy crossy type of criss-cross crossing crossroad they began carrying out the same mad ritual that the bosseye police had danced moments before.

Although at first it seemed funny to watch it was actually very effective in slowing and controlling the advancing foot traffic which had suddenly come out of the metal-work, it was acting as a primitive form of traffic light.

'Here ... grrr ... goes my dignity!' sighed Scank, jumping forward.

'I don't have any,' joined Chucker.

Dong, waited for a few moments to take in what he was seeing, and for some reason Robottom (*think about it!*), eventually followed the other two's lead in carrying out the hilarious rituals of the dance.

After this event it was with greater caution that the party of four made their way eastwards to what appeared to be a vertical line of metal cylinders. The closer they got the taller the line became until

eventually the cylinders touched, with some even penetrating, the moving bellies of the many pink clouds which had started to gather above. The warm temperature reacted in obedience and started to drop to well below freezing.

'Incredible!' gasped Chucker, overwhelmed by the spectacle of nature.

'They are incredible you are quite right,' repeated Dong, motioning his hands towards the structures ahead.

'No, not the columns! The creature ... oh ... did I neglect to mention that he's still following us!' The others nodded, slowly. 'Even though he seems to be made of twisted metals and wires he still has the ability to urinate. I think that's quite ... incredible.'

Chucker's red enquiring colour was quickly partnered with the equally toned face of an angered Dong. 'I would like for you to be a little more concerned with the finding of the Galactic Messiah and a lot less concerned about that damn creature and his "incredible" habits! Have I made myself clear?'

'Yes,' Chucker squealed, submissively.

Where they had come to stand many different species were gathering together. There were definitely less bosseye present, yet still enough for caution to be advised. Dong came to the conclusion this was the poorer part of Lotta Wonga, an area of the city where the police didn't voluntarily choose to come.

Continuing to march on a bit further, the group couldn't have been walking for more than five minutes when Robottom suddenly stopped dead.

'What is it?' Dong whispered, trying at the same time not to be talking to whom no other, apart from his friends, could see was there.

'Well, I'm afraid it's that creature again, he's having another leak on that column over there. It really is, as you said, Chucker, quite ... incredible!'

This time Dong moodily remained silent whilst his two companions talked happily amongst themselves about the creature's "incredible" habits. Eventually, in an attempt to change the way things were going, he made what he believed to be a more constructive

observation. 'There seems to be something happening over there by that column. I'm going to find out what!'

Seeing their flabby friend moving rapidly away, Chucker, Robottom, and Scank, hurried just as rapidly after him. Unfortunately, before they could catch up he had disappeared in between a curving wall of aliens.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Most of the lightly built aliens in the crowd were easily pushed aside by the squidges sheer weight, although, there were a few that actually pushed him aside from time to time. Feeling his stomachs rumbling, Dong was again made aware that he needed to eat something and quickly! Seeing a gap of light appearing up ahead, he knew, after a lot of hard effort, that he had almost made it to the front; his friends were nowhere to be seen.

Upon reaching the centre of the crowd he noted several preachers, each one from a different race, some dressed with clothes some without. In turn they themselves circled an extremely unusual looking form; each listening reluctantly it seemed, to what she had to say.

The jagged form immediately captivated Dong's attention. Positively capturing to the eye this feminine speaker wasn't like anything he'd seen before and he's seen a lot of things since being aboard Cube. She was at least a quarter of the height of the preachers, in fact about half his own height more or less, probably less than more.

'Woof ... what's going on?' Scank suddenly enquired, sneakily appearing underneath the middle of Dong's heavily rooted legs; a position most aliens would die for, some even pay for.

'Shhh ... '

'Sheet?' Scank finished, gulping several times at the thought of the consequences of his positioning. 'You'd better not be! Not whilst I'm below your bowels, like this.'

'No, no, no, no ... I meant ... Shhh, be quiet, hush yourself is basically what I'm trying to tell you. Believe it or not I'm trying desperately hard to think ...'

'Hey,' gaped Scank, suddenly recognising the speaker, 'well stone the googlies ... grrr ... look what it isn't; it's a crystal being. Woof ... well I never.' Due to the persistent cold, the vapour of Scank's breath began to freeze on his long, black muzzle, the clouds of breath which escaped his hairy face looking as though he was breathing out puffs of smoke.

A crystal being is indeed a rare and wonderful sight. They are usually to be found floating around white dwarfs, not small, pale coloured midgets, but stars near the end of their life. Having said this, they do live around most other stars, such as the laxative suns of Errnnngh-Ahhh, aptly named for obvious reasons. Knowledge of how and why they exist are privileged to only a select few. Also, one extra comment, a crystal being cannot be described as either female or male; but for the sake of translation the she descriptive is the more appropriate of the two.

Scank's impressive outburst had only been possible thanks to his childhood fascination with crystal beings. Their images are to be found throughout in his own race's *Book of Study*. The *Book of Study* displays fundamental pictures upon its many sacred pages.

'I am telling you, I have been sent by the Almighty to deliver us all from evil! To give you this day your daily bread ...' The small ball of jagged crystal invisibly raised herself from the smooth metal ground which she had settled on like a golf ball upon a tee. 'Follow me and we will see the day the bosseye no longer enslave other worlds. Together we can stand ...'

'On the likes of you!' screamed a bosseye soldier, barging aggressively through the unprepared audience. Judging by the soldier's draping black uniform - upon which a silver star rested above her left bosoms - she was most definitely in charge of the squad of equally dressed (except in yellow) soldiers who were also closing in on the crystal being's position.

'Woof ... that must be the Galactic Messiah!' barked Scank, still huddled underneath Dong. 'We must help ... grrr ... because you know what the bosseye will do to her!'

Dong was deeply worried, the unravelling situation was beginning to look dangerous. They had arrived too late. If only they had found the messiah an hour or two sooner.

Two large soldiers, who had been edging nearer and nearer, suddenly made matters worse by grabbing the crystal being and holding her whilst the rest of the squad aimed large weapons towards her back and front - if indeed the messiah had one - it was hard to tell. The battle weary soldiers all knew that if their target moved just a little bit she was to be killed instantly without so much as a second thought.

'So what are we going to do?' asked Dong, looking down upon Scank's long, frozen muzzle. 'We cannot afford to reveal ourselves, we will be captured as well and more than likely we'll all be killed!'

Rushing forcefully through the hushed crowd, Chucker and the still invisible Robottom finally came to join their companions' discussion.

'It's too crowded to be able to run,' noted Chucker, all three of his antennae twitching rapidly as if they were knitting needles working enthusiastically on a solution to their current predicament.

'Oh my god!' shouted one of the preachers, blaspheming, as he caught the ruff end of a dreadful odour which had started to spread around the gathering.

'Disgusting!' others quickly joined in, one after the other, gasping for fresh air.

All eyes seemed to be quickly fixed upon three aliens huddled together in what appeared to be a secretive discussion. Then, as if things hadn't been bad enough, out of nowhere pounced the metal creature who had briefly been forgotten, onto a more than alarmed Robottom, immediately de-cloaking him for everyone to see.

'It's a robottom!' screeched one of the soldiers in shock.

'Kill him before he fills our lungs with his lethal farting. Death, by order of The Star Empress ... Charge!'

With this unwanted aggression now aimed towards the four mysterious strangers, the messiah was carelessly thrown to the ground. The squad of bosseye soldiers were focused upon the robotom and his shit scared companions.

The general public started to panic and run. Some, who had the natural capability, ran up columns, some into them, disappearing like ghosts. It was indeed chaos for all concerned. Alien madness was everywhere!

'Quick,' screeched Chucker, 'The messiah is going to be trampled on and cracked into tiny pieces if we don't get to her soon ...' Before finishing what he was saying, the dog-like creature scooped the crystal being into its jaws and was ran off into the vast forest of columns which the distance painted around them.

Robottom dodged left and right, screaming on high volume as the soldiers started to use their weapons indiscriminately.

'Follow that bloody creature ... grrr ... it's taken the messiah!' Working to their advantage the chaotic crowd acted as a smoke screen long enough for the group to make their dash.

Running as fast as they could, Dong bouncing, Chucker wobbling and Scank zigzagging, Robottom remained some distance behind.

'Look over there,' informed Chucker, 'the creature's going into that narrow alleyway ...'

Screams and shouts, mostly in bosseye dialect, were almost upon them. The soldiers were proving to be fast at running, it wouldn't be long before they would catch up and blow their brains out. Several green lasers, taking on the form of a spinning ball, whooshed past the group's heads as they pursued the metal kidnapper.

'We must get to the Messiah before she is killed,' said Dong, now breathing heavily.

Chucker looked to the entrance of the alleyway, an idea coming into his minds. 'I'll prevent the soldiers from following,' he burped, waiting for Robottom to finally catch up, 'you keep going!'

Watching his companions carry on without him, he defiantly turned to face the oncoming squad of bosseye and, with a green colour totally unsurpassed by a vom, he spew endless chunks.

In only a matter of seconds the entrance was covered with the pungent smell of his puke. No soldier, or anything for that matter, would be following that way in a hurry. Quickly turning his head, he was just in time to see the last of his friends scampering into a blurry distance. Several desperate laser blasts from a few soldiers brave enough to cope with the growing smell whooshed past his antennae, lighting the route of the previously dark alleyway in a glowing shade of bogey green. 'Wait for me!' Chucker's form wobbled into the fading light and was gone from sight.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Chucker eventually caught up with the others as they were in the process of cornering the messiah's fearless kidnapper.

'Woof ... it's still holding her in its mouth,' confirmed Scank, kneeling down on his two right legs.

Ever so slowly the group inched their way closer and closer to the trapped, and now snarling, creature. Oil dripped from his fangs as if he'd developed a sudden case of rabies.

'Grrr ... you can't run from us anymore,' growled Scank, with equal ferocity shaking his voice.

'Who be sayin' anythin' about me runnin'?' The creature's snarling metal lips turned all too quickly into an ugly grin. 'Me name be Pugjaw, for obvious reasons, and I be head spy for the Star Empress 'erself. I'm sorry t'say this'll be the last you'll ever be seein' the Galactic Messiah,' the group looked at him in surprise, 'you see I've known about her appearance for a while now and thanks t'you I've finally succeeded'n'findin'er.' Like glistening drops of blood his eyes gazed past the confident four. From behind the group a large orderly line of crack military secret police, under the direct command of Pugjaw, were closing silently in from the rear. 'Goodbye fools,' he laughed, 'goodbye!'

It was at this precise moment the four realised they had been cleverly tricked. Looking swiftly around they met face to face with the closing in bosseye. For a brief moment their attention was pulled back to the evil, metal creature now known to them as Pugjaw. To

their astonishment his limbs had folded, his shape changed. His body was now in the form of a space shuttle with its rear thrusters glowing white hot.

'What now?' shouted Chucker, above the deafening noise vibrating through his entire body. In answer to his question the police obligingly pushed him and his companions backwards with the ends of their weapons. Reluctantly each of them were forced against a wall and quickly had their hands glued together.

Hovering for a moment longer than was really necessary, Pugjaw powered his way over their heads, higher and higher into the planet's swirling atmosphere. Instead of his pugnacious jaws, the Galactic Messiah now found herself positioned inside what appeared to be a well designed cockpit. Unlike before, Pugjaw's overall appearance was now impressively modern and faultless. Firing lasers into the clouds above he made sure there was a clear route ahead of him and blasted out of sight.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

With the alarm having stopped, the bionic grass seed awoke to find itself being lifted higher and higher towards an air vent. Its long awaited escape from the scientific section finally seemed imminent.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

'You are all condemned to die here in The Empress' prison.' The guard's voice trailed off as he pressed a small pear shaped button. With a jet of high pressure the confinement door sealed shut, reflecting its four new occupants upon its shiny inner surface.

'This ... grrr ... place stinks!' Scank looked around at the cell which had been specifically built with the occupants' comfort not in mind. 'And with the confined and combined smells ... snfff ... of Robottom and Chucker, well, we are definitely doomed!'

'Never mind that,' grumbled Dong, 'I need to eat something or I'll turn into ... her!'

'Bleep ... who?' questioned Robottom, his bulge coming back to life for the first time since they'd been captured.

'I don't like to talk about it. All that "Miss Nice" stuff.' Fed up more than usual, Dong sat down on his behind then, in unexpected pain, jumped straight back up again. 'This bloody floor has small spikes in it,' he groaned, vigorously rubbing his posterior.

None of the others took any notice of their friend's shared personal discomfort, they were too busy thinking over what he'd just said.

Scank was the first to break. 'Woof ... come to think of it, Dong, I've only ever heard you talk about what happens to your species if they don't eat. Apparently you said it is something weird? But didn't you say,' pausing, he scratched his ears, 'didn't you say that each squidge has their own unique reaction ... grrr ... if so, what's yours?'

'You don't want to know!' snapped Dong, suddenly feeling like an alienated female in an all male changing room. 'I turn into a form completely opposite to my normal self.'

The other three looked blankly at each other, in thought.

'Bleep ... so let me get this straight,' Robottom loudly analysed, bleeping with newly found excitement. 'Normally you are moody, hungry, short, fat, lazy, bossy and, let's see ... male!'

'Hold it! Hold it! Hold it! I'm not t ... ' Dong abruptly lurched forward. 'It's happening, I ... ' Again he lurched. Diving acrobatically towards one of the many darkly lit corners of the unusually shaped cell, his black skin quickly blended into the shadows.

'Thank goodness we aren't still glued to one another, this would be a most embarrassing situation,' observed Chucker, not detracting from what was happening in the corner. 'What's happening to him?'

Grunts and groans came from the corner as Dong continuously twitched and turned. Several hours passed on by, the grunts and groans having turned into an erotic selection of gasps and whimpers followed closely by an encore of intense heavy breathing.

Suddenly all went quiet in anticipation and from out of the cell's many shadows came an extremely tall and extremely well muscled white giant; it was like Dong had been stretched out. 'Hi there, my fellow alien pals!'

Dumb struck to say the least, the three spectators stared in disbelief at the newly formed alien heroine. It was still possible to make out Dong's distinguishing features but, as he himself had said hours before, everything now seemed the opposite. His general appearance was (on the whole) an extended (healthier looking) version of before, but the main difference could be noticed in his two (previously sagging) chest muscles which had now bloated out into two round, wholesome mounds and unlike the bossyeye squidge don't wear clothes; this was a change in him the others could get used to, in a sick, overfriendly sort of a way.

'OK,' said the new Dong, her voice having a cool, heroic edge to it, letting the listener think that she could achieve anything she told them, 'seeing as you all seem to be speechless, I have an idea!' Looking at her stunned friends she ruffled her new head of white hair and waited for a reaction ... it didn't come. 'See that panel above the door?' This time the others managed to nod each of their heads. 'I believe I can force it open and once opened I'll be able to raise the cell door by using my body as a circuit breaker.'

Robottom eventually reacted with a comment, his bulge shrinking for just a few seconds. 'The power surge could prove ... bleep ... fatal!'

'Yes, it's too risky,' joined Chucker in his worried, gurgly voice, his body turning white with obvious fear and apprehension.

'We're only going to die if we stay here, anyway,' reminded Dong. 'What would be the difference?'

'Well ...'

'Good! That's settled then ... stand back!' With muscles flexed and popping, the white giant grabbed hold of a small corner of the proposed panel. With an almighty groan - from both the metal and the heroine - the panel bent back with all the manners of a sardine can opening for the first time tried.

'Her' I go,' mocked Dong, with a literal jest demonstrating her newly found sense of humour. Lifting up her arms up towards the revealed circuitry, which was making a buzzing noise now that the panelling had been ripped away, the others couldn't help but notice Dong's basketball sized pectorals pushing together to form a

crevice the size of which Saturn and Uranus couldn't even make if brought together by a cosmic force. This was the stuff Greek legends were made of. Within a matter of seconds they and the rest of her body shook, the tremendous surge of unleashed power running through her veins, lighting them up like an underground map. Where the veins forked outwards it looked like a painful display of trapped lightening was desperately trying to escape from her blood stream.

'Woof ... it's working!' barked Scank, sweating profusely. 'It's actually ... grrr ... bloody working!'

At first there appeared a small sheet of light as the door slowly rose upwards from the floor. Finally the sheet turned into the overwhelming light from the corridor outside. It was very much like one of those X-file scenes when an alien spacecraft lands and opens its doors to reveal the forms of little grey aliens with large heads moving about in the growing light.

'You've done it,' shouted Chucker, concerned now for Dong's well being, 'let's go!'

Everyone looked over to the squidge. Apart from her obvious shaking she hadn't moved.

'She's ... grrr ... stuck in the surge! It looks like she can't get herself free, that's if she's still alive?' Moving forwards in a desperate attempt to dislodge her, Scank was roughly, but wisely, held back.

'Don't be a fool,' screamed Chucker, 'you don't want to join her, do you? ... Do you?'

'No ... grrr ... not really.'

'Well then, we must think of something else and now would be a good time, for Dong's sake.'

'Bleep ... I can do it!' bleeped Robottom, bravely. 'I'm mechanical; the least that can happen to me is an overriding shut down.'

'Grrr ... or total meltdown!'

'Sheet ... bleep ... maybe I won't do ... no, yes I will, we must help her.'

'All right,' added Chucker with a rather all too fast reply, 'quickly!' Grabbing Scank's arm he pushed him into the corridor and together they kept an eye out for any prison guards that might be on patrol.

Robottom took several long steps backwards until he was eventually pressed firmly against the ice-cold touch of the cell wall. With an amazing burst of speed he ran bum first into Dong, who as it happens appeared to be smiling whilst she shook.

It hadn't worked! Dong was still jiggling around like a squirrel on acid. With increasing desperation Robottom assessed his bladder level. He knew he only had a few drops of fuel left, but it would have to do. Checking both his foot thrusters were positioned correctly, he began another run towards Dong - and at a calculated time - turned them full on ...

The added powerful boost seemed to create the much needed speed to be able to push Dong away from the sparking panel, but all the same, the power surge had the final say...

Both Robottom and Dong were propelled forcefully against the back of the cell with a thud. Where the aggressive little thud had come from is a mystery; they have been known to live in circuits though, but it managed to run out of the cell alive and well which is more than can be said for the other two it left behind.

'They're unconscious,' Chucker gasped, looking from the escaping thud downwards at the two bodies (mainly at Dong's more attractive one) which were slumped half against the wall and half limp upon the spiked floor.

'No, on the contrary, I'm quite conscious,' stated Dong, lifting herself up whilst rubbing her chest.

'Oh, let me do that for you, Dong?' said Chucker, happy to help.

'No, it's all right, there's no time to lose, we must get out of this place before we're spotted and if you've ever been spotted you'll know it's not a nice experience; especially if you prefer stripes like I do.'

Casually lifting the robottom's heavily mechanised form away from the floor with the use of his ear-like handles, Dong joined the vom who had gone back into the disturbingly silent corridor to join Scank who had remained on watch.

'It's ... grrr ... great to see you alive,' welcomed Scank, looking at the motionless legs squeezed tightly under the giant's left armpit.

'What condition is he in,' he quickly added, pointing his snout in Robottom's general direction.

'I'm not exactly sure, but for the moment we must concentrate on our escape.'

'Which way do you reckon we should go?' prompted Chucker, looking left and right.

'Just follow me, alien friends,' smiled Dong, 'I'll find a way out!' Choosing to go left, she paced off down the endless corridor like a tube train which had somehow grown a pair of very large tits in front of its engine.

After several minutes had passed by, showing their hairy arses out of the taxi window and beeping profusely, the endless corridor, as it had first appeared, started to curl progressively upwards to the right.

Minutes are yet another species which crop up from time to time in Cube's world, along with thuds and several others we have yet to come across, they take some getting used to but like their motto goes, "It takes Time to make a minute pass by ...".

The group continued to scurry past cell door after cell door, light after light, always the same distance apart, always the same height.

'This is going on forever and it's starting to rhyme, we must find an exit or we'll run out of time!' Chucker paused for several deep breaths. 'This is getting worse! Where are the guards, anyway? Why aren't they chasing us like they're supposed to in these frantic situations?' No sooner had he finished, from around the following corner, the desperate group stumbled upon a small, oval, door blocking their way forwards.

'I'm sorry Robottom,' apologised Dong, in advance, 'but this shouldn't hurt too much with your circuits shut down.'

'Woof ... what do you mean by that?' queried Scank ...

CRUNCH! came the sound of Robottom hitting the door as he was used as an innovative battering ram. 'Let's just hope his metal is stronger than the door's!'

'Woof ... what if it isn't?'

'I hope we don't find that out ... damn, this door is strong!' cursed Dong in growing frustration as several more attempts failed miserably. 'It's only been dented. I can't risk Robottom anymore ... '

With biceps flexed to amazing proportions, she punched the door hard with her clenched fist.

KAPLAM! went the fist, shooting through the door as if it had been made of cardboard, making a fairly large hole to look through.

'I can climb through ... grrr ... from here on,' offered Scank, eagerly trying to do something to help, 'and I'll possibly be able to open the door from the other side.'

'Okay! Go for it!' encouraged Dong, in new found admiration.

Scank's small hairy figure whisked itself through the opening, using all six of his dextrous limbs. With a cartoon reality he pulled himself into and out of the hole and instead of "KAPLAM!" his body went, POP!

'He really is a true leetlesheet,' approved Dong, slapping Chucker firmly upon his snake-thin back, forcing him to jerk violently forwards. 'He's a brave little guy, don't you agree?'

Chucker looked up and nodded. It felt weird. He was normally the tallest of them all by far. The sudden WHOOSH! of the opening door quickly turned his drifting attention.

'Grrr ... I know why we haven't seen any prison guards chasing us,' gulped Scank, his four eyelids flickering with shock.

Not really wanting to find out what the leetlesheet was talking about, Dong and Chucker stepped cautiously through the opened doorway to be greeted by a powerful gust of warm wind; the winter weather had once again changed.

To their reluctance The Three Wise Aliens were standing together on what appeared to be some type of balcony. It circled the very tip of a column, thousands of feet above the metal-ridden city scattered in a phobia inducing way below. Surrounding them, on all sides, the other columns which formed The Row could be seen twinkling in the occasional rays of sunlight which managed to break through the pink clouds.

'Well ... stone the googles!' stated Chucker, in awe.

'Dooglash!' added Dong.

'Woof! What's that?' barked Scank, the wind drowning out his own surety.

'What's what?' asked Dong, her attention half taken away by the slightly unnerving sight of one of Huj Huji Wuji's pink clouds floating carelessly passed her head.

'That sound ... ' Scank paused to listen, 'I think it's an alarm, coming from within the prison column ... woof ... we've been sprung!'

From across the way, where some of the other surrounding columns were conveniently positioned for an ambush, came several bursts of light as though a group of tourists had suddenly taken an onslaught of flash photographs.

'Get down!' screamed Dong, at the same time pulling the others aggressively to the balcony floor. They were all just in time to be missed by several devastating power balls which screeched through a pink cloud, leaving it with a window-like hole big enough for them to see who had fired upon them.

The hole soon filled again a moment later with the pink wisp of Huj Huji Wuji's unique atmosphere.

'Bosseye soldiers have positioned themselves at the top of the other columns,' indicated Dong, feeling nice and hungry. 'As we just very nearly found out, they're using power balls set at maximum destruction. We're sitting ducks!'

'Woof ... more like shitting ducks the way I'm feeling!'

Dong continued, 'In a short space of time they'll be able to demolish the entire top of this column and we'll go with it.' Stopping, she peered over the rounded edge of the balcony. 'We must think of something ...' The gigantic squidge quickly retracted her beautifully elongated head.

Several flashes of green shot past into the top of the prison column, showering the group with thousands of painful metal splinters. Without mercy another ball struck, creating destructive vibrations which tossed the four bodies around the balcony floor like sizzling sausages inside a frying pan. This in turn was closely followed by another and ... you might just say things were not looking too good for the crawling crew of the craft called Cube.

'Quick!' shrieked Chucker, his eye widening. 'The doorway is replacing itself!'

Jumping to her webbed feet, Dong leapt for the door in an attempt to force it back open. This time she was forced to give up as a relentless bombardment of power balls stopped her from being able to break back through. 'It's no use, we've but the one chance left open to us.' Dong gritted her heroically shining teeth. Looking away from her scared companions once again at the thousand foot drop, she made her last suggestion. 'We could try our luck and jump for it?'

Chucker's sudden puking said what he and Scank both thought of that idea.

The balcony and the column were fast looking as though metalworm had set in; holes were everywhere, in fact, the top of the column had started to bend under the lack of solid foundation.

From the comparative safety of the other columns the cruel bosseye knew that the next array of blasting would prove The Three Wise Aliens and the robotom's fitting demise.

Just as each soldier was about to fire another pink cloud suddenly blocked their view of the prison column. 'Open fire! Open bloody fire!' screamed a blood thirsty commanding officer, the occasion becoming all too much for him, a cloud was not going to get in the way of his victory.

Sounds of screams and exploding metal quickly filled the sky for miles around. Each of the bosseye smiled at their malicious accomplishment having been fulfilled with such relish.

Very slowly the pink cloud lifted and to the soldiers' immediate delight, revealed that the top half of the prison column had been completely destroyed. The commanding officer stood still, smiled and then screamed for a second time out of pure mindless satisfaction, 'Open fire! Open bloody fire!'

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

From beneath the rising grass seed, the Tovarian Tickle fly buzzed back into the sci-cubicle, the scientific robot was still chasing it with a laser net. The grass seed laughed, a powerful and relentless laugh

and - with a SUCTION! of air - disappeared into the vent to fulfil its awaiting destiny.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Upon reaching a reasonably safe altitude, Cube blew away the pink cloud covering that she had just used as camouflage in her successful rescue attempt moments before. Two of her thankful crew had dashed off to the toilets and then on to the observation post, with the exception of Robottom who was now in the medical section and the exception of Dong who, with her anger concentrated on the commanding officer back at The Row of Columns, had jumped in a pod and headed back to Lotta Wonga; revenge was written all over her mind.

It wasn't long before Cube's optical screen showed a pod, with the internal pod cameras focused upon an angered squidge sitting at the controls, the pod disappearing into and out of cloud after cloud, the kamikaze probes doing their jobs successfully!

'Set sequential laser squares and release on my command!' Dong raised the pod's communication pen closer to her pouting lips, ruffled her white mane of hair and sat back to enjoy the ride. The pod immediately stopped and dropped, one hundred feet to be precise, re-establishing its gravitational core it shot towards the group of gob-smacked soldiers staring anxiously from their now vulnerable position next to the, or what was left of, the prison column.

The pod manoeuvred left and right, dodging the green power balls which were now being thrown in abundance toward its threatening approach. Inside the pod Dong bent forward slightly, her new shape just about fitting the purple coloured gripseat. Using the optical head-screen, she assessed her targets.

'Attack!' she cried, like a vengeful queen. Her voice was resonant, cold and decisive ... *to get yours to sound the same you would need to put it in an atomic-translatory oven, on distortion mark 5, for about twenty-two years, give or take a month for smokers!* In an instant all the sides of the pod glowed an amazingly bright orange,

like a baby sun, and with a blinding flash of light several laser squares burst free into the surrounding sky, evaporating any cloud in their path.

First one column exploded, then another, then ... until all who had been so cruel were themselves destroyed, slaughtered, torn apart, killed, not breathing anymore, pretty much dead and that included the commanding officer who was, as it happened, no longer commanding.

'What a heroine!' came a rush of compliments from the leetlesheet and the yellowish vom who'd stayed gathered together underneath Cube's optical screen throughout the short battle.

'Don't get me wrong in saying this, but although I miss the old Dong a bit, I have to say this new, almost queer, side to him will prove extremely useful in future situations.'

Chucker nodded, or rather moved his long neck backwards and forwards, 'I know what you mean, Scank, I agree with what you've said. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the way he ... I mean she, looks.'

'Oh no ... grrr ... of course it doesn't. No of course not. No ... woof ... no, oh most definitely not.'

Whilst her two friends discussed her new anatomy, Dong's victorious pod slowly grew in size on the west side of the optical screen; its vision looking so realistic that one might just believe that it would fly, at any given moment, into the observation post itself, ripping through the screen.

With the entire domed screen suddenly turning dark, the pod docked safely back inside Cube.

Seeing the new heroine was back in one piece, Scank decided to go to his personalised accommodation cubicle. As a matter of fact, by the time Dong burst triumphantly out of a gravitational chute onto the deck of the observation post, she found Chucker had also gone to the accommodation section.

So it was Dong found herself once again alone, but thankfully, it wasn't long before a food robot appeared with an all too tempting sludge bar. Ramming the dripping snack inside her opened gob, she was quickly transformed into his blubbery shape - his chest

deflating into its eventual sagging appearance - giving him the not so in vogue Buddha look.

Not to be forgotten, whilst the others were resting, Robottom was being subjected to the welcoming stimulation of one of Cube's analysis bugs, which at this moment was working its way through his complex circuitry, mending any fault it could find, although funnily enough it seemed to occasionally get confused and would move back and forth; faults which had been corrected kept on malfunctioning again and again, especially around his facial and rectal areas.

'X-CUBE-R?' Dong typed onto a small remote keypad he had earlier been handed by a scientific robot. The keypad, it would appear, was in its experimental stages; for one thing the keys were not suited to Dong's flabby finger tips. Dong erased the command and retyped, 'CUBE, HAVE THE OBSERVATION POST TOILETS BEEN FIXED YET?'

A series of flashing lights indicated they had. There had been a few unfortunate and rather painful incidents where the liquid nitrogen flush had been set in to action prematurely whilst Scank had been sitting on the toilet seat; several hours in the medical section had proved most embarrassing for the leetlesheet who had a rather long sheet frozen to his hairy arse.

Dong responded to Cube's answer, 'OKAY, I AM LEAVING ALL THE OBSERVATIONAL TASKS OVER TO YOU. THANKS FOR WHAT YOU DID EARLIER IT WAS MUCH APPRECIATED ... ' Somewhere in his typing there was definitely a hint of gratitude, something which was indeed most rare whilst in his male state.

The squidge's heavily weighted footsteps slowly echoed away into the depths of the ladder chute's metal casing, leaving the observation post alone and naked, its many lumps and knobs left to the mercy of Cube's more than capable hands.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Cube is a spacecraft of unsurpassed sophistication; even The Three Wise Aliens do not know where or how she was created. She is a

craft who, although out dates all she has come across, always keeps ahead of present day technology, something or someone gives her the ability to do so.

Her interior is fathomless. It has many levels filled with many cubicles and many cubicles filled with many levels, all of which are divided into areas known as "sections".

Colours and shapes play a key role in her overall design. Her cubic figure, if looked at closely enough, is individually made up from an equal amount of tiny squares. These squares seen from the outside represent each of the inner sections.

One of Cube's numerous abilities is to be able to accommodate the universes' many different species. Her accommodation section has the impressive capability of using the most up to date personalisation systems. In short, the cubicle allocated to its guest will immediately change to accommodate whatever condition is suitable for its new resident; be it a space or water lover, or anything else for that matter.

For an example of the latter, Scank's very own personalised cubicle has been adapted to his own personal tastes. There is no one floor so to speak, more a case of each side of the room (or rooms) being full of different objects only a leetlesheet would find amusing. Such as the bed which is made up of a series of leather bars which enable him to hang from when tired. Fiddly technical things protrude from every surface, keeping his hyperactive mind actively distracted.

Dong and Chucker's cubicles also reveal much about their occupants. Dong has nothing but a bed and a mirror in his, the bed shaped to his own peculiar taste, the mirror carefully hung on the ceiling just above the bed. This arrangement suits him down to the ground as all he seems to be capable of doing in his male state is eating, sleeping and other things best not stated; things the mirror is used for. So far he has ignored his heroic, feminine side; his lack of interior decoration reflects this. The walls, with the help of nano laser paint have become a target for him to get all his built up moans and groans off his flabby chests; this intensely powerful self expression has turned him into one of the best wall artists this side of

This Side. His expressive writing and detailed pictures look so real he once had a two hour conversation with one of them, shortly after which he stubbed out what was left of the long, still smoking, joint, which for some reason had lipstick on it.

As for Chucker's living area the least said the better. It is mostly full of bags and buckets which are designed for his puke to dissipate easily. For some reason the others don't visit him all that often. As for Robottom, he is yet to be given any permanent accommodation.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

'BLEEP ... I'M PLEASED TO SAY I'M UP AND ABOUT,' blasted Robottom, from out of Cube's onboard intercom, which moments before he'd raised the volume levels to the maximum setting. 'YOU HAVE ALL RESTED QUITE ENOUGH FOR NOW!' At this point Dong groaned, in disagreement, from underneath the warm foam covering the top of his bed which in contrast to his black skin looked like the head on a pint of well known Irish ale. 'AND THEREFORE I ASK YOU ALL TO MEET ME AS SOON AS ... BLEEP ... POSSIBLE INSIDE THE OBSERVATION POST.' Robottom's bulge quickly raised on each side into a smile, the two front lights which he deemed to be his eyes brightening as he raised the volume to its maximum setting, 'I ... **BLEEP ... HAVE BEGUN THE SEARCH FOR THE GALACTIC MESSIAH!**'

As usual Scank was the first of The Three Wise Aliens to appear on the post. Next came Dong, to the leetlesheet's surprise, he was normally last to surface from a sleep. 'There's no damn need to look at me that way!' Dong grumbled, showing he hadn't lost his usual grouchiness.

Eventually, as if late for his first day at school, Chucker's body appeared, feet first, from one of the side entrances, changing from green to blue. 'Sorry I took so long but I just had to puke.'

'**BLEEP ... LIKE I SAID OVER THE INTERCOM ...**' Robottom stopped talking, walked calmly over to the volume settings of the intercom which he hadn't turned off and pressed a button with his rear, a white light faded to black. 'That's ... pfff ... better.'

The others took their hands away from their ears, in Chucker's case two of his three antennae bouncing back into shape, in Scank's case his shaggy ears both flopping forward, in Dong's case he just made a suction sound as his sweaty palms came unstuck from his head flab.

'Yes ... bleep ... well, as I was saying, I have started the search for our galactic messiah.'

'Grrr ... woof ... grrr ... have you made any headway ... snfff?'

This isn't the time to talk about cooking,' snapped Dong, thinking of his groaning stomachs.

'As a matter of fact I have made ... pfff ... some headway and no, Dong ... bleep ... I don't mean the "Headway" chocolate bar!' The expressive shadows around Robottom's bulge vigorously moved as he answered Scank and ignored Dong. 'As Chucker and I kept pointing out on Huj Huji Wuji, Pugjaw was constantly leaking what I now believe to have been fuel. Therefore ... bleep ... I predict he had to have refuelled or landed somewhere nearby.' Pausing, some highly pressured rotten air squeezed through his resonating crack. The others quickly covered their air holes. 'Pugjaw used, as I do, a thruster mechanism which enabled him to power his way into the clouds above us ... bleep.'

'Hang on!' frowned Dong, placing his left hand upon his stomachs, his right hand scratching his foreheads. 'If you also have thrusters, why didn't you just fly your ex-host out of that asteroid belt, to safety?'

'Due to the simple fact ... bleep ... that I didn't have enough fuel! Not enough to pull away from those asteroids. I used ... bleep ... what I had left to save you in the prison cell.' Dong lowered his hands and looked to the floor. 'I tend only to use my thrusters when they are really needed. I prefer using other forms of flight. Thrusters and my gaseous farts can also prove lethal if mixed together. Plus it's safer than having to rely on my limited fuel supply which my bladder can hold.'

'Well ... ' started Dong.

'Besides ... bleep ... I'm also used to being connected to oxygen breathing hosts who don't appreciate me rocketing them into

space to what would be their immediate and rather messy death and believe me that's already happened once or twice.'

'Have you quite finished?' stated Dong, grumpily.

Quickly turning back to the reason for the conversation, Robottom ignored Dong and briefed the crew on what he had accomplished so far. '... and so ... bleep ... then I had Cube scan the surrounding quadrants and she eventually came up with the only available possibility. Where could Pugjaw have landed to refuel if we take away the possibility of him rendezvousing with a larger space vessel? The answer; he would have had to land ... bleep ... here!' Robottom waited a second for the optical screen to display the only planet surrounding Huj Huji Wuji.

Scank was impressed by the robottom's presentation, Dong was not so impressed, 'Let me guess, Robottom, using your intelligence circuitry to work around the clock, I bet you estimated Pugjaw had to have landed on that round moon ... oh, let us see ... mmm ... just about ... there!' Dong quickly pointed at the one and only planet.

Robottom, ignoring the squidge's argumentative mood, continued, 'So this pink moon is where I believe the messiah has been taken. It is our job to ... pfff ... save her ... bleep ... if she's not already dead.'

Completely in agreement, Scank climbed halfway up some of the post's panelling and proceeded to fiddle with some square shaped dials, resulting in nothing more than a few more lights flashing on and off, but all the same, this small achievement seemed to amuse the leetlesheet and that's all that mattered in his world.

'I see from the scanner read-out,' examined Chucker, having gone off to do his own thing, 'that it shows a moon dock is situated on the south side of Huj Huji Wuji's moon.'

There was a moment of contemplation.

'Bleep ... there is indeed,' Robottom resumed, feeling happy at last that he was being taken seriously. 'I suggest that we take the pods Cube collected back for us and fly down to the surface and together, as a team, move undetected into the moon dock itself. If the messiah has been taken there by her captor we might have a chance of attempting a rescue.'

'What are we waiting for, let's go!' Scank raced off into a chute. The others followed directly after.

Once all four had reached the docking section, where the cubical containing the flight-ready pods was to be located, Chucker, Scank and Robottom secretively stopped and huddled together.

'What are you all staring at me for?' grumbled Dong, annoyed at having been purposefully left out of their obvious scheming.

'Woof ... have you eaten any food within the last hour?' enquired Scank, trying not to give anything away, his toothy grin not doing him any favours.

'No!' Dong looked innocently at each of them. 'It's been nearly an hour now since I last ate.'

Looking as though they'd formed into some new type of eight legged alien with two heads, all three schemers examined the squidge's body for signs of hidden food.

'Listen to me you lot,' flared Dong, 'there's no food anywhere on me! I'm going to eat something from the pod's food containerisation unit; you know that plastic little box I keep under the gripseat for times such as this,' the nervous squidge paused, taking a deep breath as he realised what they were thinking, 'because I'm not, I repeat not going to turn into that heroine again! Okay?!

'Okay, okay!' all three replied, smiling. 'Of course, we wouldn't dream of putting you through all that so soon.'

Dong hesitantly strolled off and entered one of the opened pods. As soon as its outside had sealed firmly shut, the remaining three huddled even closer together.

'Did you ... grrr ... empty all the food containerisation units?' whispered Scank, checking all was going according to their plan.

'Yes, everything is just as we wanted,' answered Chucker.

The three laughed a cruel and heartless laugh then quickly dispersed so as not to cause anymore suspicion; if that was at all possible.

Unlike entering and leaving an acceleration funnel, the feeling experienced when departing Cube by pod is quite unique. It brings

forth a sudden rush of freedom, or puke if you happen to be a vom like Chucker. It's as though you are being set free into a world of incomprehensible excitement, at all times alert to every movement and sound around you.

Like sex it can invoke the feeling of not being quite in control of your bodily organs; an ecstatic feeling that rushes and rushes around your body - until finally - you feel relieved as you enter uncharted depths ... this is the main reason the pods are used frequently!

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

The grass seed couldn't help but feel a little claustrophobic as it continued to be propelled upwards through the narrowing air vent.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Passing, without knowing, through a local gathering of spacedust mites, the pods made their secretive descent to the surface of the eerily pink moon, Huj Huji Wuji's pink suns shrinking from the background the closer they went.

Dust mites live almost everywhere. The three main varieties are the aforementioned spacedust clans along with their closest relatives the moondust and cosmic clans. As clans they often feud and many stories can be told of their colourful history. Coincidentally a large thousand strong clan of the moon variety have just been crushed to death as a result of the pods landing on them – but that's another story.

'Okay ... bleep ... so far so ... pfff ... good,' sighed Robottom, checking all the appropriate instruments. 'It appears as though we haven't been detected by the bosseye moon dock.'

'Hey!' interrupted Dong, in an angrier voice than normal. 'Where's the food all gone? you bastar ... ' The shock had only just sunken in when the inevitable started to happen.

The three listening schemers, in each of the other pods, smiled once again as the sound of high pitched whimpers and screams dissipated into the silence which followed.

'Woof ... this is,' Scank began, wanting to get straight on with the mission ahead of them, 'a code W.H.W.L.O.I.F - Priority One Alpha.'

'W.H.W.L.O.I.F ... bleep?'

'Robottom ... grrr ... it comes from the vomish language and it basically stands for: What Have We Let Ourselves In For?'

'Bleep!'

'I've never heard of that before?' queried Chucker.

'Woof ... just shut it, vom!'

'Why did you succeed the code with "Priority One Alpha?"' Chucker persisted.

'You'll find out soon enough ... grrr ... We are going to have to equip ourselves with the required apparatus. Robottom, you obviously won't need an atmospheric breathing suit but you may require something else. If you do, just speak your request into the communication pen and the pod will see what it can do for you. Understood?'

'Bleep!'

'Eeeeeeeerrrrrgh!'

'High there, guys!' blurted out Dong, now in her opposite form.

'It's ... grrr ... great to hear your luscious voice again,' added Scank, feeling a little safer knowing the squidge's heroic side had emerged to join them as planned. 'Woof ... it's time to step outside.'

Breaking the intense silence which the pink moon had bathed her new visitors in, came a succession of long winded and rather misplaced burping sounds which the four pods made as they slowly opened to allow their occupants out.

Scank was, after being the most agitated, the last to leave the safety of his pod. Watching the chosen side he had programmed to open, half of the pod's inner surface (littered sparsely with lights, dials and peculiarly angled switches) slid to one side, letting him conveniently step onto the outer part which separately to the inside had lowered itself down to form a useful ramp.

The barren surface enthusiastically welcomed the leetlesheet's four paws as one after the other they scurried off to join the others, gathering and squashing several clans of moondust mites as they went!

The surface of the pink coloured moon, on the whole, looked like a mass of bubbling porridge - with the added ingredient of strawberry jam mixed in - creating its pinkish colouring which in reality the bright glow of the distant two suns helped to achieve.

'Grrr ... Dong?' queried Scank, looking between her legs.

'I know! I know! You are wondering why I'm on this bike. There's a simple explanation. Those moon craters we saw on the way down have to be amongst the tallest I've ever seen, anywhere! There's no way I could leave this place without having ridden my moontain bike across them. No way!'

'Okay! Okay!' repeated Scank, in awe of the long low slung shape of Dong's moontain bike which was supported by two extremely wide rubber tyres which seemed to want to burst free from the thinner rims they were attached to. The sight of the squidge's feet pushing down on the massively oversized pedals moved the bike away from his gaze.

With all four eventually lining up side by side like something out of an old cowboy movie, they made their way towards the direction of the moon dock, Dong throwing more dust mites up behind her bike as she rode through clan after clan.

All except Robottom had opted for pod equipment. Robottom obviously had no need for a spacesuit and for defence he felt it best to rely on his own unique talents; his ability to fart and the more impressive ability to run extremely fast in mass panic (usually in circles) and not forgetting his refuelled bladder so his thrusters were now ready for use in a dangerously thrusting sort of way.

The Three Wise Aliens were each equipped with a much needed spacesuit, making them look something like a futuristic Ninja. The suits were made of organic materials which, when fitted around the wearer, seal themselves over him, her or sometimes it. Being organic they are able to produce the required atmospheric conditions for the smothered wearer inside, although it has to be said that on

previous occasions they have been worn because they look so damn cool; in Dong's new form it was a question of watch out Cowboy!

To defend themselves, the wise three had chosen a cube blaster each. These worked along the same lines as the pod's defence mechanism which Dong had been so kind as to demonstrate earlier in The Row of Columns. Within a small hand sized cube energy is stored and when needed it can be expelled in cubic form towards a given target; this is accomplished by way of the griptrigger which is built into a protruding handle. You have a choice of firing laser cubes (which are solid; therefore containing and inflicting more power) or laser squares (which are less powerful but lighter and faster) the assortment of produced colours being the envy of all those who have witnessed them - and survived!

The group had only been walking for several minutes when Dong felt the irresistible urge to do something heroic. 'I'm going to scout ahead of us,' she proclaimed, her voice slightly distorted through the transparent part of her spacesuit covering her face.

Before the others could object, answer, move, she had cycled off into the distant scenery of bumpy porridge, followed closely by a growing cloud of moondust mites feeling the full force of her rear tyre as it dug itself deeply into the surface of the moon.

Watching the moountain bike disappearing into the scenery, Chucker remained alongside the other two. With the distinct lack of gravity evident to his senses, he let his long neck curve backwards so he could look up at the glistening stars above, his position not unlike a cobra readying itself to release its venom. He could see no sign of Cube; she was rightly keeping a low orbital profile (out of sight!).

Next to the vom, Scank was keeping his eyes on the moon's tricky surface which had started to slant upwards. The leetlesheet appeared to be having a bad feeling about something and Chucker quickly noticed.

'What's wrong?' the vom wobbled, his eye twitching nervously in its watery socket, allowing Scank with the reflective qualities of the spacesuit to see two reflections of himself.

'Dooglash ... grrr ... what was that ... no, no it's just my imaginative mind taking over,' came his own undecided reply as he continued walking, surveying the ground.

Chucker tapped the leetlesheet's shoulder several times, 'So you're not worried about the forty fully armed unfriendly fat fanatical bosseye soldiers aiming their guns at us?'

The vom's comment was abruptly followed by the deafening sound of the forty fully armed unfriendly fat fanatical bosseye soldiers open firing. The forty fully armed unfriendly fat fanatical bosseye soldiers were each dressed from head to toe in an exceedingly badly designed bell bottomed space suit; its colour a putrid yellow.

Line upon line of power balls sailed through the air with the sudden ferocity of a box of fireworks making contact with a naked flame. As the lethal bombardment plundered towards its surprised victims, from the depths of space a clan of spacedust mites watched part of the moon's surface light up in an exchange of green and blue; a colourful sea of destruction soon shook the globe with each wave of attack.

Dong turned instantly, again skidding her thick rubber tyres on a family of moondust mites. She could hear the cries of battle calling to her heroine heart. With a great amount of speed and a little hashish too she hoped she would get to her friends quickly enough not to care...

The sight of the moountain bike appearing and then disappearing, as it launched itself up and over moon crater after moon crater was unforgettable, her figure growing pleasurably larger and larger the more distance she covered. Eventually she came close enough to see that an inspirational battle was already being fought by her brave companions fighting to stay alive.

Scank had found the moon's gravity, or rather lack of it, suited his natural abilities extremely well and so was jumping madly up and down whilst firing a deadly shower of laser cubes.

Chucker was most impressive, bringing a tear of pride to Dong's eyes. In a state of mass panic he held his cube blaster tightly within

his three fingers and for each of his nervous wobbles a row of laser squares thundered forth into the bewildered enemy.

Whilst the others were using their impressive and very effective weapons, Robottom was using one of his own. Apart from dodging left and right, at every opportunity some of the enemy found themselves being kicked extremely hard from behind. As each of the bosseye were sent flying through the air one after the other, Chucker joined in by using their out of control predicament as a fun way to blast them; it was just like being at a galactic fairground, except this time the prize that was on offer was not a bag of goldfish or even a coconut, it was the prize of staying alive!

Managing to jump out of the way, Scank sighed as four yellow power balls flashed past his face. Feeling as though the shots had singed a few nasal hairs, he knew if he'd been just a second later he would have been dead for sure. Looking quickly down to the surface whilst he was in full flight he spotted the smug grin of the bosseye responsible and saw that he was about to fire again...

'Never fear ... Dong is here!' came a comforting cry, sounding somewhere the middle of Tarzan and Jane's jungle cries. Having launched her moontain bike into the air with the help of a wickedly steep crater, she immediately disintegrated the guilty soldier and then, in a kind of naughty satisfaction, blew the end of her blaster - and then - she crashed!

Seeing the white hero recovering herself, Scank waved in gratitude before looking over toward Robottom. To his immediate horror he witnessed the full force of a green power ball striking the brave legs to the ground. Without a thought for himself, he rushed over to defend his fallen friend. By the time he arrived Robottom was in a kneeling position and shaking vigorously.

'Get out of ... bleep ... here! Now! You will die if you stay near me.' Scank remained absolutely still and began drowning in a mixture of shock and sadness. 'That crater, over there! Run to it for cover ... bale ... be ... BL ... b ...'

'So you're not ... grrr ... too well then?'

'Bleep ... RRRUN YOU FOOLS!'

This time the leetlesheet carried out the request. With angry determination he rapidly signalled for the others to follow him and then without a second thought disappeared over the brow of the crater that Robottom had pointed out.

The robottom, it would appear to the forty fully armed fat unfriendly fanatical bosseye soldiers who had come to gather around, was almost coming apart at his bolts. The deadly shaking kept on increasing and increasing until ... with an almighty bang ... his buttocks exploded ... but not until one last, 'Bleep!' was heard ...

'Grrr ... do any of you smell anything?' snuffled Scank, from within his protective spacesuit. 'I think I've guessed what just happened.'

'Me too,' gulped Chucker, swallowing a few chunks which had been left circulating beneath his tongues. 'We better see if Robottom is okay...'

Not knowing what lay in wait for them on the other side of the hill, they crawled cautiously up and around the top of the moon crater to peer over the other newly indented side; its inward curving appearance making them feel as though they were surfing a giant sand wave back on Wobbl'it; Chucker's home world.

'Stone the googlies ... eeerrgh!' hurled Chucker, feeling weak at the knees, folding his four hands across his chest.

The scene from where the three were standing was one of mass destruction. All that was left of the forty fully armed fat unfriendly fanatical bosseye soldiers were their forty fully frazzled, fried, and totally fuc*ed spacesuits, each one scattered in shreds upon the moon's restructured surface.

'Woof ... where's Robottom?' barked Scank, ever more worried now for his friend's safety. 'Where the ... grrr ... heck is he?' In a sudden frenzy, using all his limbs, he clambered down what was left of the crater leaving an unreadable trail of footprints as he went.

Dong and Chucker took a deep breath inside their spacesuits and followed the leetlesheet's erratic trail...

At first The Three Wise Aliens found themselves nervously kicking at broken space helmets and deflated spacesuits and to Dong's complete horror, parts of the destroyed moontain bike. They did this

for at least thirty to forty seconds, the organic suiting was becoming hot and sweaty, this only adding to their growing anguish.

It wasn't until they took the time to rest and collect themselves that Dong spotted something interesting. 'I don't remember a leg-shaped mound being there before?' she observed, suddenly hungry.

Realising what its appearance might signify they ran to the mound at full pelt reaching it in just under an hour; *time and space; you can never fully get used to its idiosyncrasies!* Once there the three got to work, looking like a group of dogs desperate to find a buried bone. Throwing clouds of dirt in the air, breaking up moondust mite family dinners, they continued to dig, deeper and deeper.

Stopping, in disappointment, his shoulders (of what he had of them) beginning to droop, Chucker said, 'I was so sure we'd find Robottom buried here.'

Leaving the vom quickly behind in a dusty haze, Scank and Dong carried on digging deeper and deeper and then even deeper. It wasn't long before they both disappeared into a darkening hole.

Chucker remained seated above, his huge feet dangling over the growing hole's crumbling sides as he whistled a sad tune. Stopping, in wonder, he shouted, 'I can't see you anymore!' Leaning forwards he added, his voice creaky, 'I said I can't see you ... hello ... guys?'

Waiting for a reply which never came, the blue vom, slowly turning grey, decided to investigate further. Without delay he slid downwards in to what had now become an extremely dark and extremely dark pit. Leaving the solid touch of the pit's uneven sides, the moon's gravity added an awkward feeling of falling in slow motion, the feeling becoming ever more apparent as he began to focus upon a dim light far beneath his feet.

... After an extremely long minute, if that was at all possible, Chucker's feet met unexpectedly with a metal floor.

'Oh good, you followed us down,' greeted Scank, seemingly alive and well.

Dusting himself off with both pairs of hands, the vom eventually replied with, 'Where are we?' and then a worried, 'Have you found Robottom?' He glanced across to Dong who was busy examining a

network of shafts which were surrounding them like a large wasps' nest.

'I cannot say whether or not Robottom blasted himself all the way down here, I can't see him anywhere around the place. Even if I did he may have decided to find another way to the surface via one of these shafts. Things could have also happened the opposite way around though.'

'What do you mean?' questioned Chucker, picking at the part of the spacesuit covering his neck.

'Well, Robottom could equally have blown himself up into space, in one or even several pieces. But then, having just said that, we didn't see him on the surface or in orbit so that gives us a little hope that he may still be alive somewhere.'

Chucker looked around at the shafts. 'Do you think these might lead us directly into the moon dock?'

'It looks very likely,' answered Dong, running her dirty hands through her long shiny hair, whose white colouring glowed in the weird light, the organic spacesuit having allowed it to flow freely through its protective membrane. 'What's more if they do allow us entry we will gain the upper hand in rescuing the messiah.'

'Woof ... what are we going to do if the bosseye send more soldiers to look for us?'

'That's the best part of all of this any of above patrol will think we were killed in the explosion, along with the others.'

'Grrr ... so we'll need to seal this hole up,' growled Scank, 'that way we won't give them an indication that we are still very much alive and an indication of where we've gone.'

'Yes,' agreed Dong, 'we will have to seal the hole up when we are positioned inside one of these shafts, that way we won't be buried alive.'

'But we might have to come back this way if these shafts don't lead us anywhere!' argued Chucker, obviously afraid of being trapped, a little hint of claustrophobia setting in.

'We don't have time to think about the consequences,' comforted Dong, placing her hand around one of Chucker's flexible antennae which poked through the spacesuit as did her hair.

Chucker reacted with a large smile from behind his organically smothered face. You are right, let's just live dangerously and do it!

With all three having hunched together inside one of the many shafts, Dong did the honours of firing a successive line of deafening laser squares into all sides of the hole.

Before the dirt had time to fall to the metal floor The Three Wise Aliens had crawled briskly away from the main force of the foreseen dust cloud which rapidly imploded in on itself leaving several clans of moondust mites confused and bewildered.

The flat rough shape of their chosen shaft quickly proved difficult to manoeuvre in. At first each of them were finding it hard to move forwards under the cramped conditions, especially Dong, but after a while they got used to a certain set of movements; movements which made them feel like a Tovararian slug.

'We shouldn't have far to go,' whispered Dong, from behind.

'Robottom is okay ... grrr ... isn't he?' Scank growled, hopeful, his thoughts returning to the asteroid belt where he had first set eyes on the loveable pair of robotics legs.

'Of course, Scank, my hairy friend, he's fine, wherever he now is?' Chucker went red at the thoughts he was suddenly having.

'Grrr, I just can't help thinking that he hasn't survived his final fart. It was pretty awesome and he seemed pretty distressed.' Feeling a sudden drop in the surface ahead of him, the leetlesheet halted and turned his head back to inform the other two of another shaft, leading in a different direction. 'It looks as though there is an adjoining shaft going downwards. This place is looking more and more like some complex maze.'

'If we are able to, I suggest we continue to crawl onwards,' said Dong, confident of her own advice. 'I am certain it will lead us to the moon dock. I had nearly reached it on my,' the squidge paused in thought, 'moountain bike before your cries of help turned me around.'

'I'm sure you're correct,' agreed Scank, 'it does appear to be the most sensible decision. For all we know this downward shaft could lead to all our deaths.' With the choice made he crawled happily

onwards, taking care not to slip down the adjoining shaft he had just found.

After several bends had been carefully negotiated, just ahead of the group, something appeared to be moving toward them. Even in the dim light Scank had a good idea as to what the moving object was. 'Woof ... stone the googlies and double dooglash!'

'What is it?' asked the others, their view blocked by Scank's body.

'Back as fast as you can! A cleaning drone is heading this way and it is operational ... grrr ... it's sucking things into its ... snfff ... frontal crematory device. Back! Back now! Head for the downward shaft, it's our only option to escape being burnt alive...' The leetlesheet knew it would be no good blasting the drone for it was equipped with its own safety shield which was part of its specific design; a design he knew only too well for once upon a time he was top salesman for an intergalactic company who introduced them onto the market, another story perhaps for another time. 'Back! Back! Woof!'

'I have an idea!' stated Chucker, seeing Dong's muscled frame was slowing them up as it rubbed against the sides of the shaft with each frantic movement. 'Lubrication is what we need to get us quickly out of this mess...'

'And ... grrr ... into another, if you know what I mean!' stated Scank, knowing what the vom had in mind.

A vom's spacesuit is equipped with a facility which collects and stores excess vomit. His idea was to discharge the vomit, thus producing the much needed lubrication they needed to get them to the other shaft in time - the drone was almost upon them.

There just wasn't time to argue. Before Dong could finish, 'Why does puke always contain bright coloured vegetables?' she found herself moving rapidly backwards as though having entered a water slide. Slipping and sliding she reached the shaft that led downwards with Chucker and Scank following on from behind. Together their bodies plopped downward as if someone had just pulled the plug in a bath tub, the vomit making a gurgling sound as the last of it washed away after them.

Thankfully, as Scank had expected, the length of the cleaning drone stopped it from falling in after the three, instead it rolled steadily onwards towards, it was about to find out, a wall of hard packed moondust mites and moon dirt.

Falling now, out of control, the robotom rescuers looked as though they were now in need of the rescuing. Bend after bend pushed them faster and faster to their unknown destination...

After two days of the same falling exhilaration, the group began to realise something was indeed amiss.

'We MMus have fallen into some kind of loop,' screamed Chucker, his voice shaking as if on some kind of monstrous roller coaster ride, 'upon which we're continuously being pushed round and round ... '

'SSomething tells me that you're right!' Scank replied. 'We must come up with something to get us out of this MMess and today would be NNice!' Finishing his sentence he was just in time to be lunged around the next bend.

'I've GGot the answer, guys,' Dong heroically yelled, wishing she had thought of it two days ago.

'SSpit it out!' Chucker's voice sounded fatigued.

'I'm going to flex my muscles; hopefully they will act as a brake, bringing us to what I hhhope will be an abrupt hhhalt. Then what I'll tttry and do is hold on as you sssmack into me. It's going to bbbe knackerung so as soon as you are brought to a standstill you mmmust use your cube bbbblasters to bbbbreak through the sides of the shaft and then you mmmust ggget out as fast as you cccan ... OOOokay?'

'OOOakay!'

Bumping his head yet again, falling faster and faster, Scank thought of a small problem with overall plan. 'Woof ... what if there's nnnothing bbbut solid mmmatter sssurrounding us?'

'Well you know as well as I dddo what that means,' yelled Dong, approaching yet another sharp bend, 'we'll be stuck in the llloop until we dddie ... so get rrrready!'

Feeling as though their brains were being squashed into a small canister, Scank and Chucker got themselves ready as was asked.

'Here gggoes ... ' shrieked Dong.

In a burst of sheer, intense pain her muscles flexed against the shaft like a balloon inflating in a tube and due to the fact that she hadn't eaten in two days the attempt worked better than she could have hoped.

Bringing her body to a complete and utter stop, Dong watched in disbelief as her two friends slipped past her body, starting yet another loop. There was no option left but to wait for them to come back around and make another attempt to stop them.

The brave squidge strained for a long time ... occasionally losing her grip ... but eventually she found a comfortable, permanent position which saw her take up the position of a rolled up hedgehog.

Appearing through the dim haze the shaft lighting created, Scank and Chucker eventually hurtled toward the curled up form of Dong. Before she could do anything, the squidge noticed that from behind their clear visors the leetlesheet and the vom were smiling. 'Why the hell are you both grinning ...' Before she could finish the two of them had slipped in-between her huddled together cleavage and started yet another loop.

All Dong heard as they disappeared below was Scank barking, 'That was a bbbloody good idea of yours, Chucker ... grrr...'

'You bloody perverts!'

It seemed even longer than last time but two figures finally appeared from above the squidge. Positioning her body parts so they could definitely not slide past her, Dong braced for their impact. Feeling the full force of them hitting her back she found herself slide a couple of meters before thankfully coming to a stop.

Placing the cube blasters directly against one side of the shaft, Scank and Chucker fired a laser cube, hoping that it would act in the same way as a pastry cutter. In disappointment Chucker looked at the leetlesheet, where they had fired there was nothing more than a dent in yet more metal. As if connecting psychically, they both turned at the same time and fired into the other side of the shaft.

'We've found a ladder chute ... woof ... we've broken through!'
'Whoopee!'

Knowing the pressure Dong must be under with them both on her back they began to evacuate the shaft, carefully crawling through the square hole as if its edges were made of broken glass.

After Chucker had positioned himself above the leetlesheet on the ladder, Scank's head appeared back through the hole, concerned for Dong who hadn't followed. 'Hold on!' he barked, in support, seeing the squidge's grip wasn't too secure.

Dong acknowledged her companion's call by nodding. Slowly she made an attempt to crawl her way to where Scank was holding out his arms to help.

Suddenly, without any warning, the squidge slipped another couple of meters; her strength was leaving her under the constant pressure she had to sustain to keep from moving. Slipping a little more with each brave effort she was soon quite a distance from Scank's assistance.

'It's no good, guys, I'm going to fall back into the loop, and if I do, I won't be able to stop here again,' stated Dong, looking at the sharp edges of the hole. 'My organic spacesuit will be ripped and without any breathable air in here I'll definitely die. It would be too dangerous to even attempt it. No, you had both better find the messiah on your own. Who knows, you may even be able to come back for mmme... '

Scank watched helplessly as Dong's beautiful form fell, her glowing white hair vanishing into a dot as she disappeared from sight. 'Damn it! There's ... grrr ... nothing we can do, quick!' Bringing his head back through the hole he looked up to Chucker, 'We must go now if we're to have any chance of not completely messing up this mission.'

Chucker was at first reluctant to leave but with a lot of barking and growling from his companion he was eventually persuaded to commence the long climb up, or it could have been down, the ladder.

Even though they were tired and hungry the weird gravity of the moon made it fairly easy for them to ascend higher and higher until they eventually stopped beneath a large circular hatch.

'This ... woof ... must lead into the moon dock,' Scank remarked, pulling up level with Chucker, on the same run of the ladder.

'It's definitely an air lock of some kind,' the vom added, not having seen its design previously.

Luckily for them the air lock was a manual one, allowing them to open it without the use of any security codes, just their brawn would suffice.

Using the comparative strength of their combined multitude of long arms, the leetlesheet and the vom managed to turn the lock's mechanism. After a lot of grunting the hatch was pushed upwards, opening up into chamber.

Climbing through the hatch as if the music had suddenly stopped on a game of musical chairs, they took a good look around their new found room which sparkled like a glitter ball. They had entered what appeared to be an air chamber. As far as they could determine, the chamber made the air breathable to allow its users a safe entrance into, hopefully, the adjoining moon dock.

Staring at a door opposite the one they'd climbed through, they looked at their fragmented reflections. Bending down they closed their route of entry. Clicking their fingers together and singing out the words 'Crazy boys' the air pressure hissed into action around their sensitive bodies. Whilst they waited disturbing thoughts of Dong and how many loops she had completed since they'd left her entered their tired minds.

'She'll be all right ... grrr ... so will Robottom...'

Feeling the first stage had been completed successfully, their organic suits sensed that the atmosphere was safe and automatically retracted like a foreskin shrinking away from a Jewish surgeon's knife. This motion exposed their heads to the atmosphere, allowing them to finally breathe naturally.

Not happy enough to have just their heads exposed, Scank and Chucker tickled the suits and they immediately responded by retracting from the main part of their bodies until they were positioned conveniently upon their backs; acting as a useful rucksack.

Seeing their reflections moving like shiny ants, they watched as the chamber door slid to one side, allowing them their first glimpse of the bosseye built moon dock.

After vomiting several times, Chucker joined his four legged companion inside a brightly lit passageway and rubbed his eyes. 'It looks like we've made it!'

'Woof ... which way?' Scank asked, unsure, shrugging his hairy shoulders.

'Why not ... left!' replied Chucker, wobbling.

'It feels great to have our faces and bodies uncovered,' stated Chucker, filling his lungs with the air now flowing freely from an air vent next to his nose slits.

Scank nodded and began moving down the passageway, Chucker followed. They eventually stumbled into a large room filled with flashing equipment. Lots of different coloured lights made them feel as though Christmas had come early. The parts that were flashing the most looked highly technical and most impressive to the eye. Unfortunately theirs were not the only eyes to be quickly impressed. Two bosseye had spotted them enter.

What followed was a scene from a Jackie Chan movie, Scank reacting first. Seeing one of the bosseye reaching for a weapon, in a mere second, he had somersaulted, rolled to the left, back to the right, growled, spun around, had a scratch and then watched as Chucker blasted them with his cube blaster. 'Grrr ... what did you go and do that for?' he wined.

'Sorry, I just couldn't stop myself,' smiled Chucker, his large lips bending like two large sausages glued together.

Rushing over to a recognised set of lights, which appeared to be clustered together for a purpose, Scank began pressing them erratically. 'Perhaps we will be able to use this room to find out if Pugjaw and the messiah are nearby?'

Chucker strode over to a keypad placed in the middle of the wall, just below a viewing screen and, using his nostrils, started pressing each one of the musical keys. A moment passed before he spoke. 'According to this system's data collective, yesterday evening a small craft disembarked from this dock, rendezvousing with The Star

Empress' personal galactic destroyer, the same destroyer we have recently come across.' Stopping, he searched for the actual point of rendezvous. 'No ... I just can't get a fix...'

Scank looked up with a sparkle in his eye and after removing it with tweezers he barked, 'Only one galactic destroyer was reported to be on the border with the Umpy Bolland system ... grrr ... well as far as I can detect! Plus,' his voice filling with emotion, 'the battle on the moon's surface involving us reported there were no survivors ... grrr ... no prisoners were taken ... grrr ... no metal legs have been spotted, captured or ... ' he lowered his shaggy muzzle.

'What a cock up!' snivelled Chucker, going black in respect.

'Snfff ... Your phrasing couldn't be closer to the truth,' agreed Scank, sniffing, thinking about the direction Robottom more than likely exploded.

'It looks like we won't be seeing our cherry red friend ever again. We must get out of here and back onboard Cube if we're to stand a chance of at least saving Dong and possibly the Galactic Messiah...'

'Woof ... you are right,' responded Scank, anger running through his veins as he explored further into the dock's information web for a way of escape. 'At last!' he barked, with a much needed boost. 'Finally some good news...'

'Come on what is it?' pleaded Chucker, going from black to white.

'This moon dock ... grrr ... is equipped with an escape capsule on each level,' he took a deep breath through his watery snout, 'we can use one to get back up to Cube.'

Without another word spoken they ran out of the room, determined now to reach the nearest capsule.

Passing several adjoining corridors and air locks, Scank caught a glimpse of what they were looking for, up ahead. 'Woof ... there it is!' he pointed out, rubbing his suction pads together like a chef about to prepare a meal. 'One useful escape capsule, for two, coming right up!'

BOOM! came a sudden explosion as a yellow ball of light smashed into the ceiling, filling the corridor with lethal clouds and piles of debris.

'Oh rollocks, not again,' swore Chucker, determined to have something right happen to them on this mission. He dived into a firing position, sliding next to the capsule door as if mimicking a balling ball just kissing the first in a triangular line of skittles. Releasing several loud coloured laser cubes in support, he allowed Scank enough time to reach the access plate positioned in the middle of the door; a plate which would need to be deciphered if the two of them were to gain entrance to the capsule and escape.

Without bothering to decode the access codes, Scank stuck to one of science's most basic of rules; if at first you can't be bothered blast away and see what happens. Kissing his blaster against the access plate, he squeezed the griptrigger and waited as the recoil broke his arm. 'Arrrrrrrrrrrrrrgh!'

Chucker turned to see his friend's limp arm drop the cube blaster at the same time as the capsule door opened. Next a powerball shot past his antennae into the leetlesheet's bold belly, sending him to his knees as he clutched at his stomach.

Without another thought, the vom went bright red, rage coursing through his veins. Getting to his feet he faced the onslaught of power balls and stared directly at the bosseye firing them. 'You didn't want to do that!' he stated, taking a step forwards. His colouring slowly turned to orange as power ball clipped one of his antennae, 'Ouch!' He continued to step forward, his colouring fading to a yellow as a power ball shot through his bandy legs, 'Sod this!'

Within two strides the vom had pushed Scank into the capsule and had got the door shut. Now all he had to do was release it into orbit; if only he knew how... There was no time to help his friend's motionless form, looking at an endless row of buttons, upon one side of the capsule, with great concentration, he pressed a large red button which read, "Push to release capsule into orbit!", he hoped he had chosen the correct button, there had been so many.

A sudden rush of speed threw him to the floor as the escape capsule tore free from the moon dock. Before it could touch the first pink layers of the reflective moon, a row of lasers shot past from the angered enemy on the surface below.

Several times the capsule was struck and weakened. Chucker pulled his wounded friend closer to try and bring some comfort to his limp body, knowing it was all he could do for the leetlesheet. With a deafening BANG! the internal lights were suddenly shut off. Another BANG! set off a flashing red light - a rocket thruster had been destroyed - Chucker knew this by way of the brightly lit screen in the middle of the capsule flashing the words, "Thruster has been destroyed!".

The vom looked through the capsule's transparent roof. He watched helplessly whilst the bombardment of red lasers hurtled around the small unprotected craft, fading and eventually blending into the storm of approaching stars.

Keeping his eye upon the brightness filtering through the roof, he jerked back in fear as sudden darkness fell all around the capsule; this was it, he thought, terrified at what was about to come next. 'Sheesh ... Charlie never had this problem with his chocolate factory lifts or did he...'

His first fears of being dead were quickly put to rest as the darkness was replaced with a familiar and most welcome light; Cube had swallowed the capsule - to safety!

Continuing on her set course for vengeance, Cube swooped down over the moon dock and released a shower of blue and red cubes.

All that could be seen from the comfort of space was immense flash of mixing colours. It was as if an angry artist had just spilt a tray of coloured paints. When it was all over, the colours blending back to pink, the moon dock was left to the clans of moondust mites who had been stirred up enough to inhabit it for themselves. Whilst this mass settlement was being accomplished, the occasional escape pod ejected into space like popcorn being made.

Being only a fifth class set up, the moon dock had been no match for Cube's weapons. Not knowing what had just taken place, from inside the medical section, where they had been brought onboard, Chucker watched a team of medical robots taking Scank's body away from the damaged capsule. He knew there was nothing he

could do so he raced off to the observation post to see if he might at least in some way be able to help Cube.

Reaching the post as fast as his tired legs would carry him, the orange vom was just in time to see a pod appearing on the east side of the optical screen. 'Chucker,' laughed a familiar voice from out of the intercom, 'glad to see you've made it back safely.'

'Dong!?' Chucker gasped, gulping a piece of vomit.

'We're both ... bleep ... coming in,' added Robottom, cockily.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Chucker entered the pod cubicle just in time to see Dong and Robottom docking. He had informed Cube of the messiah's hopeful destination, leaving the delicate art of navigation down to her. As for his friends he still couldn't believe they were both alive.

Having eaten a little food on the pod, this time finding the food containerisation unit was full, Dong was back to his regular flabby appearance. Chucker wobbled, in greeting. 'How in this universe did you manage to escape from the loop?' Robottom appeared from over the squidge's shoulders, forcing him to wobble even more, 'you had ... both ... better tell me what happened to yourselves on the way to the medical section. Scank's been taken there.'

'The medical section!' exclaimed Dong, very concerned, 'Is his condition serious?'

'To be honest I haven't had a chance to find out yet. I'd only just walked into the observation post when you approached.' Chucker was becoming tearful. It is a funny sight to see a vom cry; instead of falling down the face from their one eye, tears build up until they explode into a cloud of steam.

Slightly less enthusiastic, due to the new circumstances, Robottom explained what happened to him and Dong. 'When you left, as I had asked you to ... pfff ... my upper systems were in the middle of overloading.' Placing a foot inside a gravitational chute, he continued, 'It was caused by the surge created when the power ball struck me. All my upper circuitry was caught in a surcharging overlap phase. It has happened to me once before so that is how I

... bleep ... knew it to be wise for you all to take cover. What I didn't know, this time around, is that it would act like a rocket; propelling me up into space, emptying my bladder and rendering me disabled amongst the stars.'

Chucker slapped his feet upon the metal floor and asked, 'So how did you get rescued?'

'Well, without any of my thrusters in use I thought I was going to drift inside a black hole or something equally disastrous. Then, just when I was about to be melted by a robotic refuse craft, actually, that's one thing the bosseye have to be commended on - their sense of cleanliness ... bleep ... there's almost a refuse device for every one thousand bosseye don't you know ...'

'Robottom!' snapped Dong, stopping him from getting too carried away.

'Sorry ... bleep ... where was I ... bleep ... oh yes, the robotic refuse craft, well it was approaching me, I was about to have a melt down and who of all spaceships should pay me a visit, why Cube, of course. As soon as I was able to I took another pod back down to the moon to look for all of you. I immediately scanned ... pfff ... the area where the battle had been fought for any traces of organic deposits; which I was hoping your spacesuits would have left behind as a trail for me to follow. Following the readout disc, my sensors led me to where I had previously had my unfortunate little explosion. I began digging with my feet, but that idea soon wore off, so I continued cutting through the ground with the help of my pod's drill. It hadn't been long before I came across a circular nest of shafts ...'

Realising they were almost at the med-cubicle Robottom decided to cut it short, 'After I'd deprogrammed a confused looking cleaning drone which I found struggling to push its way forwards, and which the readout disc showed was blocking the route you had all taken, it was a simple matter of me using my refuelled thrusters and locating a rather dizzy Dong. In the end, together, we flew back to where the other pods still stood and after programming them to ... bleep ... pfff ... return ... bleep ... rejoined Cube it was her alone who picked up your location and took effective action.'

It would have been an impressive, and much longer, tale if the sight of Scank lying helplessly on a med-couch hadn't brought its order of importance into prospective.

'He doesn't look too good,' said Chucker, crying, taking several steps forward his own steam cloud of tears.

Dong came from behind to walk over and stand beside the unconscious brown leetlesheet. As he did so Robottom walked over to one of Cube's medical interfaces and, with a method I'd rather leave to your imagination, connected his frontal circuitry.

'According to ... bleep ... the medical analysis carried out on Scank,' he started, his robotic voice now muffled, 'he has severe lack of internal body parts syndrome.'

Looking across to Robottom, Dong stared for a while at the position the legs were attached to the wall and asked, in frustration, 'What are those damn medical robots doing about it?'

Robottom trembled slightly then stiffened as the information was released. 'At this moment they're on a ... bleep ... coffee break.' Dong was just about to shout when he added, 'But there are other internal med-bugs which are monitoring him inside. It seems that is all they can do for him because he was injured so badly.'

Trying to come to terms with their friend's awaiting fate, the three of them stood, sat, and stood again, beside the med-couch, for several long and utterly boring seconds. It was quickly decided that they wouldn't be so bored if they just left the med-staff to it. They knew there was also the matter of finding the messiah to sort out. If they were to have even the smallest chance of locating her they would have to put all their brains into gear and preferably not reverse.

Keeping their eyes still firmly upon Scank, together, in line, they edged their way backwards like actors leaving a stage at the end of a show, gradually getting nearer to the opening doorway. They were so transfixed with their friend's well being that they hadn't seen the extremely late medical robots rushing back from their extremely long coffee break. The latter misfortune resulted in only one obvious outcome. Chucker was thrown violently, along with Dong, upon two exposed anaesthetic powder injections which took immediate

effect. Robottom, after having been catapulted through the air in much the same way at the other two, was conveniently shut down, yet again! 'Oh not again!' moaned Dong, remembering his last major god-sent dream. 'Isn't there another bloody way we can get these holy news bulletins?'

For a long long time there flowed deafening silence and unlike the last dream the squidge had had, it scared him a little. Where was The Voice?

'Hey,' remembered Robottom, 'I've ... bleep ... been here before!'

'Beeeerrghh Agheergh?' Chucker responded in his native tongue.

'Hang on!' shouted Dong, miffed. 'Just wait a minute! What are you guys doing in my dream? Have you been here all this time?'

'Your dream!? It's my dream!' replied the other two at the same time.

'I suppose God wishes us to receive communal prophecies at the cheap rate.'

Silence once again fell upon their minds...

Feeling as though they had been suspended in nothingness forever, which was far too long, Dong decided - was allowed to decide - to say something else. 'Hello?'

'What do ... bleep ... you think is going on?' wondered Robottom, attempting to fart.

Suddenly, from above their suspended images, two images briefly appeared and disappeared.

'Did you see what I just saw?' Dong admitted, shaking his head almost to the point of a wobbling jelly.

'They were fighting!' affirmed Chucker, jealousy filling his voice while he attempted to achieve the same type of wobble.

'Good and evil?' Dong enquired further.

'Yes, I suppose one could say that, but yet what I saw cannot be described so simply ... it was more,' Chucker paused to think, whilst in the background a small fart was finally released from Robottom's metal cheeks.

'More ... bleep ... a feeling!'

'Yes, that's it! More of a feeling...'

'So which of these feelings do you think is going to win?' joked Dong, in somewhat foul taste.

Immediately with only a suddenness only a suddenness would know about, a powerful storm erupted around their three forms.

'Oh my god!' screamed Chucker, overwhelming his colouring organs.

'That's Wight,' God's voice cheerfully boomed out, like thunder. 'It Is Most Certainly ... Moi!'

'So you won the fight, then?' said Dong, trying his best to cope with it all.

'This Time ... Yes ...'

'I presume you are the good and not the evil image of the two images we saw?'

'You Know I Am, Dong! The Other Was The Devil, He's A Bit On The Weird Side, You Want To Watch Him If Your Paths Ever Cwoss; He's A Bit Schizophrenic ...'

'What actually happened?' Chucker croaked, feeling colourless. 'If you don't mind a mere vom asking...'

God could not be seen in a solid form, but if it had been, it would be breathing heavily down their necks in a deep, eerie sound.

'Occasionally He Twies To Get The Better Of Me. This Time I Managed To Force Him Back To Where He Comes Fwom. The Devil Knows I Have Sent The Galactic Messiah And I'm Afwaid His Pwesence In This Particular Galaxy Will Be Felt Even More As A Result. He Will Now Do Eveything Possible To Twy And Stop The Messiah Fwom Fulfilling Her Destiny.'

Silence knocked at the door of noise for a moment and, realising it was not in, went to the pub on its own. 'I Have Called Each Of You Here Today For Two Weasons And Both Involve Your Good Selves And The Galactic Messiah. Your Haiwy Fwiend's Life Is In Danger; His Only Chance Of Survival Is For You To Find The Messiah! What I Ask Of You Is This, I'm Forgetting The Opposer Idea; I just Don't Think The Messiah Would Have Been Too Happy Stawing At Miwwors All Day And Living in Vain On The Planet Op. So From This Second Onwards I Formerly Entwust Both Cube And You To Wescue The Messiah And Take Her Onboard As Part Of The Cwew ...'

In a FLASH! all three found themselves back inside the med-cubicle, Robottom slowly straightening himself into a standing position, Dong and Chucker copying him.

'He's still unconscious,' noted Chucker, looking down at the hairy body lying limp on the med-couch.

'Look,' shouted Dong, unable to cope with emotions, 'come on,' he grabbed Chucker's smooth, skinny and rather scaly shoulder which felt, as normal, cold to the touch, 'we must now concentrate on finding the messiah to make all of this sacrifice worthwhile.'

After using the much needed med-cubicle toilet hoses attached to the med-couches, the three said farewell to Scank and walked quickly away from the medical section without anymore accidents being caused.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Having satisfied some sexual urges, which in theory it wasn't supposed to have, the grass seed moved nearer and nearer to a growing source of light...

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

It was a different manner to which the three remaining crew entered the observation post. There was an important task ahead of them and it was their duty to see it through to the end. God had given Cube a helping hand, helping her to reach the border of the Umpy Bolland system not only quicker than an acceleration funnel could have managed but with a the added bonus of putting a smile on her circuits; the hand of God can never be under estimated.

'OPTICAL SCREEN ON!' demanded Dong, typing the words as heavily as he could. Tucking parts of his loose skin inside an already over stretched gripseat, he quickly made himself comfortable. A purple coloured vom sat next to him in an equally purple coloured gripseat; the blending tones making it difficult to see Chucker's knowledgeable combination of brisk movements which he had

started to undertake via a hovering keyboard that had landed in front of him seconds before.

Using a mixture of the hovering keyboard, a data plate discharger (this acting like a remote control enabling the vital operation of a few of Cube's more delicate functions) and a few voice activation commands, Chucker vomited several times.

'What's the plan?' Robottom asked from behind, still choosing to remain standing.

'We know that Pugjaw is meeting The Star Empress on the border of the Umpy Bolland system, I suggest we try and locate him before he has the chance to board her formidable galactic destroyer.'

'EEEEerrrrgh Ayyyyyargh?'

'What did you say?' said Dong, looking to Chucker's lowered head. 'Bleep,' Robottom answered, fluent in the vom language, 'he said, "What if he does?"'

'Well if he does manage to board the destroyer we'll have to dream up some bloody way of getting him off ... so shut it, right!' Dong banged the sides of his gripseat several times. 'Robottom are you going to taste the rainbow?'

Not quite understanding what the squidge meant, the metal legs declined the offer. Watching the already raised (by about a foot) circle of differently coloured, central gripseats, their colours resembling a rainbow, it dawned on him what "Tasting the Rainbow" had meant.

Robottom silently wished that he had joined them as a deep burping sound moved the circle higher and higher until its round shape had almost plugged the sloping neck at the base of the optical screen. In all of its new found splendour the screen curved, bringing forth the many inspirational colours of the Umpy Bolland system.

Supposedly one of the most colourful and beautiful, the Umpy Bolland system is also one of the most dangerous systems. If its nests of black holes don't suck you in, you most probably will be thrown into a deadly shower of meteorites; the trouble is it has the knack of drawing you in to it! Due to its reputation the system is home to

many pirate ships hiding from something or rather; normally it's Rather the most infamous of all the pirate ships.

'There's Pugjaw!' bellowed Dong, like a character out of Moby Dick, climbing to the edge of his gripseat. 'CUBE!' he typed, 'SWITCH COMMANDS TO VOICE ACTIVATION ONLY, PLEASE.' Wiping his lips thoughtfully, he continued, 'Navigate to full speed; gravpull 1000000000 ... Get that sodding shuttle!'

Gravpull is the terminology describing the speed to which Cube can pull herself along a gravitational line. Gravitational lines are known to exist in infinite numbers, connecting each and every object around the universes.

'There's no sign of The Empress' galactic destroyer,' informed Chucker, removing his hand from a glowing sensor.

Pugjaw's figure soon became dwarfed by the approaching Cube.

'He's turning to fight us!' cried Dong, in amazement. 'I've tasted the rainbow enough. I'm lowering the circle of gripseats.'

'Full blocking tactics advised!' shouted Chucker, not willing to take any risks.

Connecting to an interface Robottom quickly obliged the vom with a little help from Cube. A row of green lights from the circuitry above showed the blocking to be engaged. 'Good, let's see that bastard's laser try and damage us now!'

BOOM! the observation post shook. 'What the hell was that?' yelled Dong, knowing full well something of Pugjaw's size could not be capable of such frightening power.

'A ... bleep ... galactic destroyer's at our rear end!' Robottom sounded surprised to say the least. 'It must have used ... bleep ... a space pocket to hide from our sensors.'

'Never mind,' said Dong, accepting the situation, 'Cube is still in blocking mode. Our main priority is to capture Pugjaw. I'm not going to let that little shit get the better of us again ...'

BOOM! the post shook again...

Pugjaw laughed, knowing that it was now Cube's turn to be dwarfed by the formidable and utterly gigantic galactic destroyer coming for its much awaited revenge.

'Look at that smug creature, he's actually got a smile all over his cockpit, he's laughing at us! He hasn't yet realised that he's drifting into the dangerous Umpy Bolland system.' Chucker was hoping Pujaw would soon be scared into holding his current position, he wouldn't be able to survive the Umpy Bolland System with all of its dangers, not a shuttle of his size and limited power.

'Look, Captain,' said a dark, tall handsomely bearded form, 'it's a bosseye galactic destroyer!'

'I can see it, Number One,' answered an authoritative voice, pronouncing every word with Thespian pride, his tongue obviously dying for an R to roll over it. 'They arrrrre afterrrr that small shuttle craft,' the voice paused, 'crrrraft, the one heading towards us!' The captain stopped to itch his long nose and shiny bald head. 'Initiate full defence systems and set frontal, excuse me, frrrrrontal, course, full speed, Number One. We arrrrre going to snatch that shuttle crrrraft whilst those two fight it out amongst themselves. But before we do all that ... Computer, tea, earl grrrrey, hot!'

After the tea had been happily sipped, the long, mostly white form of the pirate ship, moved slowly away from the asteroid which was sheltering it.

'Dong, there's a ship coming at us head on ... it's called the U.S.S Something or Rather, I believe it's Rather.' Chucker leaned forward, his eye narrowing, 'I think it's a pirate ship ... it looks very familiar though ...'

'You say it's coming at us head on,' repeated Dong, an idea bursting open in the middle of his mind, making an awful mess in the process. 'I think we'll leave the navigation up to Cube, don't you agree?'

'Yes,' smiled Chucker, catching on, 'agreed!'

Quickly summing up the situation at hand, Cube acted accordingly.

Having started firing a spiralling round of spinning horn shapes, the galactic destroyer watched each silver torpedo miss its target. They missed not just one- two- three- four- five- six- seven- eight- nine times

but after ten consecutive attempts. Throughout the bombardment Cube had knowingly moved up and down, escaping extinction yet again. The bosseye are renowned for their bad marksmanship, the reasons for this reputation are obvious.

Meanwhile with all the attention being paid to the raging fight in front, the pirate ship continued on its drawn out (but most thrilling) forty-five minute course to snatch Pugjaw for its own purposes.

Seeing what was happening, Cube plunged forwards with an astounding amount of grace, leaving the more than surprised galactic destroyer behind in a storm of stirred up spacedust mites.

Moments later the destroyer followed them at full speed.

Cube jerked forwards, this time with just enough accuracy to initiate a hold on Pugjaw via a grip ray and - with another skilful and completely unplanned manoeuvre - dropped downwards with breathtaking velocity.

As hoped, the manoeuvre resulted in the dramatic collision of the two spacecraft which were left embarrassingly behind to make their unwanted, and slightly painful, acquaintance with each other.

'WWWehey!' screeched Dong, from the safety of his newly vibrating gripseat.

'It's bbbecoming my favourite line but she's dddone it yet again,' cheered Chucker, his voice also shuddering.

'HHHold on!' Robottom quaked, rattling at an interface. 'Our speed hasn't dddecreased! WWWe seem to ... bbbleep ... bbbe above a bbblack hole ... and it's pulling us in! Cube's having a mmmomentary systems failure!'

Chucker and Dong looked quickly at the optical screen.

'GGGet the Pugjaw and the messiah inside one of Cube's sections right nnnow!' yelled Dong, his tits flapping against his chin. 'DDDo it before it's tttoo late!'

Chucker gave the appropriate commands, pulled himself free from his gripseat and stumbled over to the appropriate terminals.

Lying below like a dew ridden spider's web, the black hole waited impatiently for its new victims to be caught within its powerful structure. Twirling and glowing, the vortex of light and darkness appeared to spin more and more with each passing second.

Back inside Cube's chaotic observation post, Chucker was struggling to access the appropriate command functions. 'It's no use Ill can't do it!' he yelled, being thrown violently upwards or it could have been downwards. 'The gggrip ray isn't functioning properly. We're gggoing to have to let PPPugjaw go or the messiah will dddie inside him. It's our only ooooption!'

It was now Dong's turn to leave the safety of his gripseat. His first and easiest task would be to set his body free of the constraining suction which the gripseat was designed to produce under circumstances such as the one he was now not enjoying. He could achieve release after one simple command, his authorisation code, was stated. There seemed, unfortunately, to be one small problem. He was always changing his code to different things, to initials and numbers he thought he might remember more easily in a highly pressured situation. 'CCChucker? I cannot rrremember my release cccommand?'

'You fffat bbbast ...' the vom responded, not being in complete control of his mouth, the dominating grav forces cut his helpful answer short of its ending.

""You fffat" ... what?' repeated Dong, struggling to understand. 'Oh yes, now I remember! YFB!' No sooner had he said the correct three letters of his code, the yellow gripseat set him free to the mercy of the tidal grav forces which his distorted face showed to be rushing around the post.

With a huge weight just about keeping his shuddering body upon the floor, the squidge grabbed a hold of what was near to him and quickly set about helping the others in initialising Pugjaw's, and therefore the messiah's, release from the powerful grip ray.

Freed at last from her hold, Pugjaw was quickly left behind as Cube's bigger bulk was sucked down faster and faster. Trying to escape the pull of the black hole himself, Pugjaw found the messiah's added weight was hindering him from escaping, his thrusters weren't powerful enough. Knowing he needed all his power if he was to escape, he opened the cockpit, which were his jaws, and let the messiah tumble after Cube and thus towards the growing centre of the black hole. Realigning his thrusters, he quickly

found it a lot easier to power his way back to the blazing destroyer which was now some distance away. Result! He had just destroyed the Galactic Messiah and Cube...

'BBBleep ... the mmmessiah has been released!' informed Robottom, 'and she's bbbeing pulled in after us.'

'She'll dddie!' gasped Dong, feeling his head being pulled to the left and right at the same time. 'We nnneed some dilithium crystals or she'll bbblow!'

'What are you tttalking about, Dong?' Chucker shouted.

'Oh nothing, never mind!'

Cube had no other choice left open to her but to hand control over to fate.

'We mmmust get back into the gripseats or we will bbbe killed,' Dong kindly pointed out, the others having figured that out for themselves.

'EEEEErrrgh arrgh eeeayhargh!' responded Chucker, his face pressed hard against some prickly circuitry.

Robottom looked on, helplessly, from the stable position he had been, and still was, safely anchored to.

With luck more than anything, Chucker was abruptly thrown within reach of a gripseat. 'I'm sssafe,' he sighed, after a huge gymnastic effort had landed him within its web-like grip. Looking across to Dong he realised the squidge wasn't going to survive for much longer if he didn't steady himself soon; all that flesh was proving fatal.

Starting to feel like he had fallen inside a washing machine stuck on spin dry, Dong was tossed round and round and round.

Robottom knew it was up to him to do something. Seeing the squidge's blubbery buttocks flying in his direction, he used what soccer skills he had acquired over the years and kicked the peach shaped ball of flesh towards one of the nearest gripseats.

Flying through the air the grav forces worked in Dong's favour as he was sent on a well aimed course towards a gripseat. Once he had touched the 'seat's material, its suction was initiated and his body was gripped securely into place. 'Thanks RRRobottom, I owe you ...'

At last all three were in a somewhat stable position. All they could do now was watch the Galactic Messiah on the optical screen - and that soon went blank - as the black hole welcomed its new victims. Cube was out of control, so great were the pressures that the crew were eventually knocked unconscious.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Shooting out into the light, from the air vent, the bionic grass seed flew over three strange forms; one fat, one thin and one robotic arse...

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

'Your Most Gracious Empress ... he has arrived ... ' Stinkz quickly scurried to hide behind The Star Empress' standing figure, her new attire consisting of some kind of skimpy leotard partly covered by a long, white, transparent cloak.

'Ah ... Pugjaw ... I see,' The Empress caressed her lips, 'you have survived yet again!'

'Indeed I've Empress. If only I see your bootiful eyes once more.' Stinkz coughed and spluttered, stopping as soon as The Empress' foot met solidly with his soft head.

'Cut the space crap! Where is this so called "Galactic Messiah"? I was led to believe by Huj Huji Wuji's moon dock that you had her in your cockpit?'

'I did, in a matter of speakin', several times as it happens, but ther'be no need to go into tha'now. You have no need t'worry as I have ejected'er into that black'ole I just escaped from.'

'MMM ... yes ... well okay, good!' came a quick, rare, and most unexpected approval from The Star Empress. Stinkz stirred. 'Still, I wish you to keep your network of spies at their designated positions in the galaxy. I want to monitor any other out of the ordinary happenings.'

'Very well,' finished Pugjaw, bowing his glistening jaws.

'Tell Navigator Dipsheet to enter on your way out, there's a good fellow.'

Pugjaw nodded once, blinked his blood red eyes and left the throne room in deadly silence. Stinkz grinned as the creature disappeared out of the doorway.

'Oh good,' sniggered Stinkz, still from behind The Empress, its tiny mind already turning to the next visitor the throne room accepted in.

'What did you just say?' The Empress shouted, looking as usual for an argument.

'Nothing,' cowered Stinkz, before adding, 'Your Most Beautifulness!'

'Star Empress, you wish to talk with me?' Standing tall, proud and to attention, was an extremely handsome bosseye officer. He was dressed in the formal baggy uniform of a navigator.

Looking the young male up and down and undressing him with her eyes, The Empress pouted her lips before answering. 'I did!' Purring, in approval, her voice turned low and husky. 'I wanted to talk with you about the collision we just had.'

'What collision was that then?' he replied, blankly, his eyes twitching in the middle as he tried desperately hard to recall such an incident.

'Oh ... ' began The Empress, slowly, sarcastically, 'just the one where we lost half this destroyer's front section! The one where several thousand of our crew were sucked out into space to their exploding deaths! The one where the pirate ship and her crew now have their bodies embedded in certain parts of this destroyer, some of which I may add are burning into the metal as we speak. I could go on - but I won't!'

'So you noticed?' Navigator Dipsheet gulped several times. 'Damn! I was hoping I could have covered it up.'

Stinkz peeked its scruffy head out from behind The Empress, its eyes widening at the sight of the handsome idiot.

'I don't like mistakes!' The Empress pressed on. Several of the navigator's muscles flexed with uncertainty, his future career wasn't looking too bright. 'But ... ' she continued, 'I am a reasonable woman, with womanly needs. Meet me in my chamber in one dung drop's time!' After I'm through with you you won't want to go near a

black hole ever again. Do you understand what I'm telling you?' The Empress widened her legs and licked her lips in moist anticipation.

'Er ... well ... no ... not exactly, was there intended to be some kind of hidden sexual innuendo in what you just said? If there was then I'm afraid I ... ' Having been cut short of his full sentence, Stinkz and The Empress watched as a red beam encompassed the navigator's body and he disappeared.

Turning to one of the windows of the throne room, the two figures looked on as a body appeared in view and exploded, leaving blobs of flesh and other bits to merge with a clan of cannibal spacedust mites.

'Such a pity, it's been ages since my juices were this shaken over a male.' The Empress started to think of what might have been. 'But then again what a complete, and utter, prat!'

'He definitely deserved to be ejected into space, oh most definitely without a shadow of a doubt!' Stinkz loved watching her victims' deaths. It had almost become an obsession of its. Without her knowledge it had once held a party in her thrown room and, just for the hell of it, sucked all those who'd had the stupidity to turn up, out into space. It had been great fun to watch. He now collects information on how each particular species copes with space suffocation.

'Computer! Promote Officer Dungheed to Navigator and tell him to plot a course toward Huj Huj Wuji and then toward my personal bed chambers! Oh, and please be good enough to get whoever is left of the crew to peel those bodies away from my side of the destroyer.' The Star Empress stared out of her view screen as the remains of her spaceship pulled away from the Umpy Bolland System. 'Ah, yes, also, Computer? The ship Cube and her crew ... put missing, presumed dead, at the top of their data file.'

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

It was lucky the universe had little knowledge of crystal beings. If Pujjaw had known, he would not have thrown the messiah into the

realms of a black hole. Crystal beings are among the few who actually understand what powers will await them within...

Stars live throughout their lives constantly changing. To exist they need an even balance of inward and outward pressures. This balance, in most cases, helps to create the illumination of the star via the reactions produced.

Some stars come to a point where their inward pressure becomes dominant, so much so that the outward pressure cannot compete; the balance is thus affected. The next reaction is the imminent collapse of the star, the result usually being a black hole.

The inward pressure of a black hole is so powerful that illumination, for example, cannot exist to the outside eye. Unfortunately the collapsed star [Black Hole] then proceeds to affect everything surrounding it, which also starts to be pulled towards its centre by the inward pressure. It must be said that this change takes place over many, many, many lifetimes, and then some.

No one knows for sure exactly what is on the other side of a black hole; no one that is, except for crystal beings and a few select others. It isn't just coincidence they have been sighted around white dwarfs. Crystal beings have the task of monitoring many other stars, including black holes.

Black holes are, in elemental theory, completely impossible to understand. For example, to recap what has been explained, they are created by the overpowering inward pressure of what once was a visually bright star suspended in a galaxy, therefore that visual star, although undetectable, must surely still exist at its centre in one form or another ... mmm?

The question is, where does the matter being pulled towards the star's centre go - once it reaches the point of no return - if each surrounding area of the star's surface (or what's left of it) is also pulling from all known angles? There is no way of escaping the all round inward pull. Everything in current mortal scientific theory suggests the centre is the only place to go but to where, I ask again? There surely isn't enough room for all the matter that is constantly being sucked in! You'll be glad, or bored, to know that

the answer to the latter question will be answered at a later stage, but for now I would like you to read the following which I feel is a lot easier to comprehend than the previous few paragraphs - ZJHS HSouojskdj;jjlsjd;'idjncciccmnclj==++++slqjlkji%55%@sjcljxkh - so what is a black hole ? h dqsdkn+=3##y qd/k?ldkk djdd q iu76qd765fyh4346431c]qo - a thing which sucks everything into it in space ! jshckghih*76277~# - etc.

Although the particular crystal being we have heard about so far in this adventure has been sent with the role of messiah, crystal beings, since their beginning, have been regarded, for interpretation, as a kind of angel. The centre of a black hole isn't incomprehensible for nothing, as you are about to find out.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

'Wake up mortalssss!'

'Who said that?' groaned Dong, coming to.

'I, we didn't ssssay "That" - I, we ssssaid - "Wake up mortalssss"!'

'Who did?'

'Me! Ussss!'

'Okay, a joke's a joke!' snapped Dong, already angered.

'I, we know, isssn't that obvioussss?'

Dong quickly decided it best to ignore the voice and help his waking companions.

'Are we functional ... bleep ... I mean are we alive?' asked Robottom, swivelling his joints the correct way around.

'To tell you the truth I'm not exactly certain?' Dong replied, coughing, rubbing his belly buttons.

'Damn, does my head hurt or what!' Chucker looked around. 'At least we're still onboard Cube, but are we still inside the black hole?'

'All Cube's systems remain ... bleep ... dysfunctional,' informed Robottom, his two block-like feet facing an intricately detailed holographic display - which was floating above the connected interface - his exact position having remained the same since his inexplicable shut down. 'We have no way of finding out anything!'

'What about the pods? Can we use them?' suggested Chucker, limping across to try and make the optical screen operational.

'It would be too risky,' Dong answered, now itching each of his saggy nipples with a half swallowed sludge bar, 'we have no way of knowing what we would be in for. Especially if we are still somewhere inside the black hole...'

'What about Scank, he will have been shaken up pretty badly in the medical section.' Chucker was just about to rush off...

'He issss all right, he issss with me ... ussss!'

'With who?' Chucker made the easy mistake of asking.

'Me! Ussss!'

'Look, what is your bloody name?' screamed Dong, tired of being messed about.

'I, we don't have a bloody name. No, mine, ours issss clean, although, I, we would like a bloody one if you ...'

'Shut up!' Dong turned angrily to his bewildered companions. 'Guys, this isn't the usual weirdo. The only way we are going to get any answers out of whoever whatever this is, is by asking straight forward questions. Watch and learn. I'll go first.'

Releasing his frontal circuits from the interface, Robottom sat himself inside one of the gripseats (positioned at the far edges of the post) that was nearest to him. As if in a cinema, Chucker quickly settled down next to the red legs and together they waited for Dong to speak, at any moment a box of popcorn was expected to appear.

'What is your name?' Dong began, this time trying to be a little more patient.

'I, we have many namessss,' replied the voice, which I may add was neither soft nor deep in tone.

'Right, we'll forget the damn name for now,' conceded Dong, scratching his head in growing anguish.

'But I, we didn't give you my name to forget!' stated the voice.

Dong turned, raised his hands, and broke down. 'I give up with this. I just wish I was somewhere else.' Instantly, the squidge disappeared before his friends' bewildered eye and sensors.

'What the ..?' gasped Chucker, blabbering.

'Something ... bleep ... weird is going on here,' said Robottom.
'Where's Dong gone to?' he carefully questioned the voice.

'SSSSomewhere Elssse!' answered the stranger, sarcasm and innocence playing a lead role in his voice.

'Where's that?' said Chucker, interrupting, without thinking, his top half changing to yellow, his bottom half remaining brown.

"That" issss clossse by, but persssoonally I, we prefer
"SSSSomewhere Elssse".'

'He's ... bleep ... talking as though "That" and "Somewhere Else" are locations,' observed Robottom, astutely.

Chucker nodded in equal thought and, knowing the grip of his gripseat wouldn't be activated under such calm conditions, stood easily away from it without having issued his code. 'I wish Robottom and Chucker would be sent to Somewhere Else!' he shouted, taking care how he phrased each word. As anticipated they instantly vanished from the post ...

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Feeling silently proud to have (for something with no arms or legs) successfully made it into the observation post, the grass seed felt a little hard done by when another gust of wind blew it straight back inside the same air vent to which it had only just escaped. Escape from the scientific section was not going to be as easy as it'd first believed, that is, if it had a mind to think a thought with.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

The messiah was still only a quarter of the way inside the black hole. From all around she could see, hear and feel the all too familiar scenery she had already come across several times before. Swirls of colours ever changing in both size and pattern wrapped around her form as she floated inwards.

The slow and gradual change from the factual and theoretical mortal side of outer space to the unexplainable and

incomprehensible immortal inner space became more apparent the deeper in she went.

This was all happening sooner than the messiah had anticipated. It had been explained to her that she would be brought into temptation by the Devil at some stage in her life, but to bring Cube and all her crew into it at the same time was indeed a challenge which had been unforeseen.

The mental stress was immense from knowing that if the others accepted a temptation they would be caught on the dark edges of the black hole for eternity. She must get to them before it was too late, before they are tricked into doing something they might, at a later stage, deeply regret.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Without even time to feel either a little claustrophobic or even a large one for that matter, the grass seed was spat out of the air vent and propelled onto the widening blade of a spinning fan, a fan which hung loosely from the central part of its least favourite sci-cubicle, just above the container from which it had escaped days before.

As the blades continued to turn round and round and round and round and round, the embarrassed grass seed was forced to go round and round and round and round and round with them. If it had been blessed with a mind and a stomach it would have started to feel - and be - completely and utterly sick.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Seeing themselves materialising, Chucker and Robottom found Dong leaning heavily upon a sign which had "Somewhere Else" written upon it in large lettering.

'Where in the hell are we?' moaned the unhappy squidge seeing the others, hitting the edge of the sign with his clenched fist.

'Nice catch phrasssse! I'm, we're going to use that one,' rejoined the voice.

'Let's play along with this fool,' proposed Dong, 'we'll walk on in the direction this sign is pointing to. Maybe where it leads us is where we'll get some answers, well I hope to god...'

'Oooohh, don't ssssay that!'

'Can't you damn ... bleep ... well leave us alone!' shouted Robottom, his mechanical voice turning to full volume.

'That'ssss it! Excellent! Get angry, and even violent, then...' There was a moment of silence. 'It'ssss your lucky millennium. I, we musssst leave you to your own devicessss. Enjoy ... ' The voice left the three alone unexpectedly.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

The answer to what lies at the centre of a black hole is made easier the closer you get to its core.

As was explained earlier, if the mass at the core of a black hole is pulling from all parts of its surrounding area, then where does the matter being pulled towards it disappear to? If you think about it, human logic cannot even begin to explain what happens, so oddly enough there has to be a reason for this.

The centre of a black hole is where a whole new existence begins. It is where everything one knows is completely turned upside down. Another dimension, if you like, exists there; the centre being the gate, the opening, the door, marking the border between both sides. It's a dimension where time has no meaning and meaning has no place in time.

Believe it or not but this place is subconsciously known to the universes. Some planets have interpreted small amounts of it into parts of their own local knowledge, a part, a few, have called Religion.

In many universal readings there is talk of angels [Crystal Beings] whilst in others there is a portion of unexplained knowledge describing a gateway, the so called "CeNtre" of a black hole's core. Some species even talk of near death experiences, the vision of a

tunnel with a light at the end which as you now know happens to subconsciously be referring to the image of a black hole.

Above all there is the following lexis which are widely used by almost every species at one time or another within their histories, the lexis are - *God and Devil, Good and Evil*. The similarity between the two isn't just a coincidence; these expressions are merely a mortal description of powers that really do play a role in the vital structure of life and death.

Many species have taken these words and used them to describe that of one sole being. It is indeed very difficult to explain, they exist not as a single solidly structured alien but as what would be best described for you to understand as a *feeling* in both cases.

The closest the mortal world has got to this understanding is through the word known as "*faith*". Unfortunately this word has been used to support the ideas of many as a means to prove that their own religion is the real one when in fact all religions are the "real one" to some extent.

If you still doubt what has been said I'll leave you to ponder this. Don't you think it too coincidental the role light and darkness have in your society? The comparison of the evil dark outer edges of a black hole with the good hidden brightness at the centre; these things are so apparent that surely you cannot, even as a critic, dismiss them altogether, perhaps just one at a time, but not altogether! Also, why does one think that if you were to ask somebody where they think their mythical heaven would be, they will most certainly point upwards?

Believe what you will as long as it makes you personally happy, but, for the purpose of what you are reading, I ask you to keep an open mind about all that has been said and that you remember the famous philosopher from the city of Lecturinfools and his now legendary words, "... you and your neighbour are both right, it is their neighbour who is wrong until proven right ...".

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Having gone round and round and round for the two-hundred and twenty-seventh time, the bionic grass seed (who was also still a fugitive) started to hear a familiar buzzing noise coming closer and closer.

Feeling itself being forcefully thrown against the same solid wall as before, the grass seed said goodbye to his one and only fan, fainting to the blurred images of a scientific robot still chasing a Tovarian Tickle fly.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

The messiah had arrived sooner than expected. This was to be the first time she had actually stopped within the Edge.

'SSSSo you have actually come,' mocked the Devil. 'Normally you crysssstal typessss carry on beyond the Edge of Darknessss. Although, having ssssaid that, ssssome of your kind, on the odd occasssion, decide to join with me, ussss...' Smug laughter arose. 'They come to live on the "edge" assss ssssurfer mortalssss would ssssay, making their livessss more exciting.'

The messiah was in constant thought. She couldn't trust anything the Devil was saying. 'Where has the ship called Cube and her crew gone? I know they are here! They weren't ready to enter so soon, therefore according to the law of space and time you must have stopped them from going further inside to the CeNtre. You know damn well you have!'

'You're a clever little ssssheet aren't you!' cursed the Devil. 'I'll, we'll have you know what you have been told about me, ussss issss all wrong...'

'Wrong!' snapped the messiah. 'Wrong! You're insane and evil, twisted and dangerous, mad and destructive...'

'May be it'ssss not all wrong ... in other wordssss you could let it be ssssaid that I'm, we're downright good fun to be around!' The Devil was enjoying mocking the relatively inexperienced crystal being, by making her angry he was gaining an advantage. 'Follow me, let'ssss ssssee if your friendssss have been brought into temptation yet.' The

Devil thought it best to move things on at a fast pace, he was in control now and that was the way he wanted it to remain.

The messiah disappeared from the *Nothingness* and reappeared in a grandstand position above the two Wise Aliens and their farting companion. 'Looks like you've failed!' she smirked, thankful for small mercies.

'SSSSo far!' growled the Devil, starting to smell of sulphur.

Dong, Chucker, and Robottom, had been walking for what had seemed like forever over a long winding road which was made up of overgrown food, plastic sick-bags and large oil drums. Rotten fruit the size of a galactic cruiser had been trodden in step after step after - yes you've guessed it - step.

Large glasses of water had poured down from above (out of what was supposed to be some sort of sky) as they carried on walking in the direction the sign had pointed. Little alien men and women - and things - had shouted "Oopsy poopsy woopsy" at them whilst socks and books continued to flow past their faces in the shape of a curling stream. All in all, you could say, things had become bloody confusing!

'What is going on?' groaned Dong, not knowing they were being watched. 'We'll all starve if we don't eat soon. I don't know about you but I would do anything for a sludge bar!' Dribble began pouring from his mouth in buckets and in this world of the Edge there were real buckets filled with saliva falling to the floor!

'Yes ... mmmm ... sludge bars,' said the other two, in hypnotic reaction.

No sooner had they all agreed, they found themselves back inside the observation post, the hunger sensation was now the only feeling dominating their minds and bodies.

'Scank? You're alive!' said Chucker, seeing his hairy friend appear from out of a chute. 'How did you manage to ...'

'Never mind that now,' said Scank, ignoring his friend, pointing to the optical screen. Dong, Robottom and Chucker quickly turned their attention on the image it was displaying.

'Bloody hell!' exclaimed Dong, excited. His scrunched up figure gave an appearance of a child who's going to wet himself at any given moment. 'It's a space crate containing sludge bars. Cube, bring it aboard, bring it aboard!'

Within seconds the crate was wrapped in light and slowly but surely the grip-ray reeled it in. The starving crew continued to dribble at the sight of the crate growing bigger and bigger and BIGGER upon the screen. Suddenly, before anyone could do anything, the worst scenario was happening, Scank had moved over to the grip ray control centre.

'What are you doing?' shouted Chucker, terrified at the thought of what the leetlesheet was about to do.

Scank took no notice and proceeded to cut power to the grip-ray. The others were horrified.

'I'll kill you, you leetlesheet,' spluttered Dong, 'I'll bloody kill you!' From out of thin air a cube blaster appeared in his chubby hand, ready to be fired into action. The squidge was just about to use it when he was hit by a voice ... 'Ouch! That hurt!' Shaking his head from side to side to recover from the blow he swiftly apologised for his brash behaviour and quickly went to calm, and sit, himself down.

'You are indeed sssstrong,' raged the Devil, 'but I am, we are older and sssstronger!'

'Yeh,' answered the messiah, in childish retaliation, 'but my dad's bigger than your dad! So there!'

'Watch and learn,' roared the Devil, knowing he had reached that part of the adventure when he must reveal his entire plan to everyone in the whole universes, 'becausssse it issss thesssse idiotssss by which I, we will get you to join me, ussss. In their current sssstate of hunger they will not think twice about killing, esssspecially that overweight ssssquidge, and when they do kill they'll be mine forever ... unlessss ... unlessss you would be willing to sssswap yourssself for them and I, we know you would!'

'Would I ..? '

Once again thunderous laughter filled the Edge whilst the Devil mulled over the messiah's response, the laughter quickly turned to silence.

'Never mind,' shrugged Chucker, 'bring the grip ray back on line. We can still get the crate aboard.' He stood still and waited.

'The grip ray ... bleep ... has made contact,' informed Robottom, having taken Scank's place at the controls. The crate was theirs to plunder once again. 'Hang on! There's something heading rapidly towards us?' Chucker and Dong stood away from their gripseats, eyebrows furrowed. 'Uranus-eaters! It looks like it's a mother with her child. They're after the food crate!'

'I'm not letting them take our crate! I'm not!' Dong raced over to a series of switches and consequently fired two laser cubes.

'Damn! The 'cubes have missed!' jeered Chucker, in an equal display of madness. 'Have another go! Have another go!' Dong moved his hand to fire again. Chucker's facial expression changed. 'No! Wait!' he retracted, but Dong had already fired.

Almost in slow motion the two black and blue laser cubes flew obediently towards the Uranus-eating mother and child, seeking out both their inevitable destruction. Then, in a sudden flash of light, both 'cubes seemed to know what to do as they turned away from the space creatures' direction and back towards Cube. Before they struck, the emotional crew would have enough time to say goodbye to each other...

'How did you know?' asked Chucker, realising, with relief, that Dong had deliberately fired the laser cubes in a self destruct pattern.

'Who else but the Devil would have set us up with this ridiculous scenario even the reader is struggling to comprehend. If you remember, God did warn us about him, but I didn't think the Devil was this stupid! There were many clues ...' Dong paused, knowing that the Devil had to be listening ... *By the way, the laser cubes were waiting for Dong to finish his explanatory finale before blowing Cube to bits, just in case you were wondering.*

'For example,' he began, 'let's see what went wrong, well, Robottom, you have hardly farted since we woke up. The same can be said of you, Chucker, you've hardly wobbled or puked. But Scank, my dear friend, my bestest buddy, you haven't even climbed one single thing on the observation post and you haven't had one tiny scratch and you haven't even growled. Oh yes, the other thing was the way I was able to ...' *Okay, the laser-cubes have waited long enough!* Dong stopped explaining and, silently, with the others, watched the 'cubes fly, in slow elegant sequence, into Cube's side.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Cube's crew had valiantly ... *actually that's a lie, they had used the gripseats as toilets had the truth be known ...* anyhow, it would be true to say that they had watched as the destructive laser cubes exploded around them in a blaze of yellow and orange ... *or was that Chucker's puke?* Eventually though there was a blinding white light and after a short while ... *which had been followed by a long while on a bicycle ...* of thinking they were finally dead, they were proved utterly wrong as they focused, once again, upon the welcoming image of the real observation post which was revealed to them along with a new crew member. Before they realised who it was, a Tovarian Tickle fly came from out of a chute to buzz around their vulnerable heads.

Knowing how dangerous a Tovarian Tickle fly's sting can be, Robottom, Dong, and Chucker, fell to their knees like a falling row of dominoes.

'Oh really,' blushed the messiah, in a way only a crystal being can, 'how embarrassing, there's no need for you to get down on your knees for me, it's quite unnecessary.'

'Watch out!' warned Robottom, jumping bum first into the newest holy crew member, who as a result, conveniently dodged the fly. 'And ... bleep ... by the way, welcome onboard.'

'Yes, welcome,' added the others, still on the look out.

'This is just a small example of our nutty life onboard Cube. Now you are part of the crew,' Dong pleaded, dramatically raising his voice, 'couldn't you do something to get rid of this sodding fly!'

'Sure!' reacted the messiah without a second thought, delighted to already be of some assistance. 'Have you got a rolled up newspaper handy?'

'But I thought you weren't actually suppose to kill things,' argued Chucker, 'I would've thought you would make it disappear or something along those lines?'

'This is different!'

'Why?' Chucker continued to question.

'Because it is this fly's given time to die! Otherwise, yes, you are right, I am normally unable to harm.'

'Mmmm ... I see ... I think?'

[illegible]

While the crew were chatting amongst themselves, a scientific robot from one of the sci-cubicles to which the fly escaped, came in and, after a little comical struggle, caught it safely within a reinforced laser net.

'I thought you just said it was that fly's time to die?' repeated Dong, having seen everything, but the instant he asked the question the robot malfunctioned and as the messiah had predicted the fly became minced to a pulp inside the netting. It appeared to buzz one last time as if to say something along the lines of, "Oh buzzzollocks!". 'Point taken,' complemented Dong, to the messiah, 'but how were you going to swat the fly anyhow, you've no arms or legs?'

'Well, in my natural element I have the ability to accomplish tasks by simply thinking about them. Unfortunately, within your domain I find it more difficult to achieve the array of things I'm used to. This was why that Pugjaw creature snatched me so easily I find it terribly difficult to manoeuvre in this type of mortal atmosphere.'

Walking, or it would be more correct to say hovering, across to the collapsed scientific robot, the messiah proceeded to demonstrate her magical ability by lifting it up from the floor without the use of any hands. If the crystal being hadn't known better, she would have

sworn that its mechanical face had smiled upon seeing the dead fly squashed between the net and its left pincer.

'It's as though you have arms,' noted Chucker, 'but they're invisible!'

'Exactly,' acknowledged the messiah, 'arms do not always have to exist as a solid viewed state. In your atmosphere I use most of my concentration on walking and holding things. It can be very tiring at times.'

After hearing what had been said, Dong looked to Robottom and back to the messiah. 'May I make a suggestion, Galactic Messiah ...'

'Please ... if I'm going to be part of this crew then I'm going to need another name. Let me think ... because I'm a crystal being, call me ... Crystal!'

'Nice,' said Chucker, 'but how about ... Cryst?'

'Perfect!' approved the messiah. 'By the way, Dong, what was your suggestion?'

'I think ... bleep ... I know!' intervened Robottom. 'If you don't object, I would like to have you as my next host.'

The messiah looked the bowing metal pair of legs up and down with glistening crystal eyes. 'I would be most grateful and honoured to sit on your arse,' smiled Cryst. Similar to Robottom's, her unusual visage was blended into her jagged crystal shaping, the visual expressions becoming more evident the longer they were looked at.

'You haven't smelt his farts yet!' Chucker joked, seriously.

'I'm lucky in the respect that I have no nostrils in this form of mine, which means I have the ability to block smells out if I so desire ...'

'Oh believe me you will desire! I think you are going to fit perfectly in with Cube's crew with that ability.' From the corner of his eyes Dong was quick to notice a panel flashing and, after tripping over a gripeat, ran over to investigate. 'It's the med-cubicle, it's Scank!'

'The med-cubicle? He's not dead is he?' asked Chucker, turning white in dread.

'I'm not sure. We must get there as soon as possible.' Before leaving, Dong turned to Robottom. 'There's no time like the present. Attach yourself to the messiah, and hurry after us!'

With a symphony of strange sounds Mozart would have been proud of, both forms joined together as one. The end result was indeed a weird sight to behold. Positioned happily at Robottom's top the messiah's round shape emerged in its already mentioned more than five billion times, jagged form. An egg cup from a wacky universe would be a good description for the role Robottom now played. They very, very, very roughly looked like a cross between the legs of a stork and a (spiky) punk wig embedded into the waist, there was no sign of a stomach or chest.

'Let's go!' said Cryst, content with her positioning.

Using his top speed to impress his new host, Robottom arrived at the med-cubicle just in time to hear the others screaming.

'Oh sheet! He's dead! He's dead!' In a state of shock, Dong and Chucker stood frozen to the floor.

'Robottom, take me closer,' pleaded Cryst, calmly.

Together as one they walk towards the med-couch where the leetlesheet lay lifeless.

'Whoops ... bleep ... ahhh ... ' yelled Robottom, finding one of his feet had become entangled in some cables.

Dong and Chucker watched helplessly as the new form flew messiah-first into the circuitry above Scank's head. Bolts of electricity, intertwined with red and blue particle beams, subsequently threw Robottom and Cryst forcefully downwards and onto the floor. Flashing and smoking, the circuitry fell violently onto Scank's exposed head.

Within seconds of touching him, the violent surge of vivid power lit the leetlesheet's body in only a way a violent surge of vivid power can. What had been a still corpse now shook in spasm upon the rippling med-couch.

'It's a miracle!' cried Chucker, jumping up and down. 'It's a miracle he's still dead!'

'Woof ... no ... grrr ... I'm not!' emerged a familiar voice.

'Scank, you're alive!' gasped Dong, walking quickly to his side.

'Thanks to you I suppose,' observed Scank, looking with tears of emotion towards the messiah. 'Welcome onboard, finally.'

'Well, it wasn't exactly me,' Cryst blushed.

'Oh, you are too modest,' complimented Scank, propping himself up against the back of the med-couch, a grimace of pain flickering across his face. Dong and Chucker kept completely still and said nothing. 'You will never guess what I saw whilst I was dead?' he continued, dying to reveal his near death experience whilst he could recollect it. 'A black hole, would you believe it, of all things...'

'Really?' the others replied, their voices donned in that slightly raised tone which sarcasm often wears.

'How do you feel?' asked Dong, grabbing one of Scank's long hairy arms, stroking it in sympathy.

'You tell me. You are the one touching my arm! I ... snfff ... hope I still feel hairy?'

'No ... I mean, how do you feel mentally and physically?'

'Funnily enough, I feel mentally and physically ... grrr ... with most of my normal bodily senses!'

Seeing that Scank was back to his unbearable sarcastic norm, Dong knew he was well enough to be hit.

'Ouch!'

Pushing Dong aside impatiently one of the medical robots barged through to check the miraculous recovery of their patient.

'I presume you're okay to leave, then?' remarked Chucker, seeing the robot was totally unconcerned as it quickly left the med-cubicle for yet another coffee break. 'Right, let's get you out of this damn place.'

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Being a bionic grass seed was beginning to piss it off.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Upon leaving the disinfected smell of the med-cubicle, Dong turned to look properly, for the first time, at the new partnership of Robottom and Cryst. 'Um?' he mumbled to himself. 'I think it's high time we gave you your very own personalisation cubicle.'

'Brilliant idea,' agreed Chucker, 'we'll go to the accommodation section right away.'

Grouping together like a bunch of haemorrhoids, the happy crew walked further down the curving corridor - its changing colours being matched step after step by the proud (and wobbling) vom.

After half an hour of being hopelessly lost, everyone - now feeling completely miserable - stopped by two openings which broke the smooth seamless walls they had become accustomed to for so long. They had finally found a gravitational and ladder chute.

'What function do these have?' asked Cryst, learning new things all the time.

'They enable ... grrr ... us to move from one part of Cube to another. Woof ... watch ... ' Scank leapt forward and quickly disappeared. Cryst immediately realised that instead of falling at speed to the deck below, he had fallen at a perfectly controlled rate, the invisible pressures keeping him in an upright and stable position.

'Cool!' approved the messiah, setting herself up for her next over emphasised word. 'Levitation!'

Before the others jumped, Dong stepped up to a brightly lit device which had the holes of a pepper shaker punctured onto its rounded surface. Lifting his fingerless hand halfway up the middle of both chutes, he pointed to the device and began to describe what it was there for. 'This is simply used to verbally instruct the gravitational chute's sensors, to send you up or down or sideways.' The squidge, who had seemed to have taken on the posture and stance of a parachute instructor, suddenly moved to the edge of the gravitational chute and shouted, 'Down!' before leaping out of sight.

'My turn,' squealed Cryst, just like a four year old child pleading next turn on a game. 'My turn!' Not wanting to wait any longer for the experience she took a deep breath and ran hastily towards one of the two available chutes - and jumped.

Chucker was quick to run to the place where the messiah had just leapt from. 'You will find the gravitational chute's all over Cube,' he yelled, his voice echoing as he peered down the chute to which Cryst now lay in agony at the bottom. 'Along with these ladder

chutes situated alongside. It is up to you which one you decide to use. Personally, if I were you, I'd stick with the gravitational type!'

A small and still rather stunned voice echoed back in response, 'Thank you.' Robottom twitched about on the hard floor, at that moment wishing he was back in control of his own functions.

Moments later saw Chucker joining the others in the accommodation section, his face in the process of exchanging green for orange colouring.

'Well then,' smiled Scank, rubbing his naturally padded wrists together and looking to Cryst, 'let's show you ... grrr ... an accommodation cubicle.' Seeing him dart off down a corridor, the remaining crew gratefully followed the zigzagging figure of their much missed friend as if he were the new host of the Crystal Maze, which as it happens was the messiah's favourite show.

It didn't take long before they had reached Scank's chosen destination. 'You can move in here, in between mine and Dong's places,' he happily suggested, already jumping across to the opening doors.

'Hang on, Scank,' shouted Chucker, 'aren't you forgetting something?'

The leetlesheet halted abruptly and looked back. 'Oh yes, sorry. You'd better be the first ones inside, Cryst, Robottom. The personalisation system has just been set to adapt to the first being, or beings, who enter.'

All three wise aliens looked thoughtfully at Cryst and Robottom, both of them having remained still. 'Well ... what are you waiting for, go on then!' Together they slowly entered.

Closing in swiftly behind the hesitant new occupants, Chucker, Dong, and Scank, watched as four small triangles whooshed together to form a perfectly square shaped door. With the cubicle firmly closed, the remaining friends talked excitedly amongst themselves.

'I can't wait to see what happens. The system's never had to deal with two joined beings in the same room before.' Dong looked quickly back as the usual sounds of the adaptation requirements were being undertaken.

'Don't forget,' added Chucker, 'the system will adapt to whatever its resident requires, meaning it's capable of space conditioning!'

'That means we'll only be allowed inside with our organic suits on. Damn!' Dong's blubber bounced in frustration.

Suddenly there was an immense thunderous clash ... IMMENSE THUNDEROUS CLASH! ... the square door mysteriously opened. 'Come in,' beckoned Cryst, in a rather relaxed voice.

Dong was the first to venture inside. 'No space?' he questioned, taken aback by what he saw - or rather - didn't see.

'No!' stated Cryst. 'There will be no space whilst I'm onboard Cube.'

'What was that noise?' wobbled Chucker, looking around the completely unchanged rooms whose walls were left in their normal state of flashing circuitry and glowing terminals.

'This cubicle hasn't changed at all...' Just as Dong was finishing his sentence, he and the others noticed that one thing was indeed different. Each of their mouths dropped open in complete and utter disbelief. The messiah's form was being overcast in a powerful shadow of what appeared to be a large solid gold box. At the top of it, on each end, was a pair of long meticulously carved handles. Dong eventually managed to set his frozen voice free. 'Is that the- the- the ...' He couldn't quite spit it out so Scank finished for him.

'Woof ... the Ark?'

'Yes, the Ark is what it is,' twanged the soothing voice of the crystal being as if a tubular bell had been struck. 'I have much to learn and much to preach. This will give me the knowledge I require. Call it, if you will, call it my own fully integrated personal encyclopaedic library.'

'Do we have to? It's quite a mouth full!'

'All right then, don't!'

The Three Wise Aliens looked shocked, if not flattered by the presence of such a powerful object having been brought aboard Cube. Chucker looked down at Robottom. 'Have you seen inside it?' The legs remained absolutely still and didn't reply.

'He did,' answered Cryst, 'for he is part of me now as I am also part of him.' A beautiful fart resonated into the air, proving the point. 'I

speaking for him; we speak as one. I'll eat potato - so he'll fart potarto, I'll eat tomato - so he'll fart tomatarto, potato, potarto, tomato and tomatarto, let's call the whole thing off ...'

'What the heck are you talking about?' shouted Dong, irate, at the same time cutting the messiah's song in mid flow.

'As a robotom he is programmed to hand over all functions to his host. Didn't you realise?'

'Yes, come to think of it he did mention it, I'd just forgotten.' Dong looked at the pair of mechanical legs and waited for them to shout - only joking - but they didn't. 'Is he okay?'

'Perfectly fine,' assured Cryst.

After staring at the Ark, entranced by its looks, Scank and Chucker decided it was a good time to leave. 'Now you have your own place to go we're off to the relaxation section just down the end of the corridor to the left ...'

'Is the section integrated into part of this one?' asked Cryst, wanting to know everything about Cube's interior.

'Yes, it has proved to be a good combination. So, anyway, are you coming with us or what? It's the nearest you'll get to heaven onboard Cube!'

'Sounds good, I'll be right there.' Cryst quickly finished what she was doing, which was nothing, and promptly joined them outside in the corridor.

Once inside one of the relaxation cubicles they slept for a while, ate for a while and slept for another while until all their whiles were almost used up.

'So what happens from here on,' said Scank, his thoughts turning to future endeavours, 'we have universes, or perhaps universeseses, waiting for us out there. Cube is a great explorer and can take us anywhere we want to go.'

Cryst smiled, an annoying smile, 'I appeared on Huj Huji Wuji for a reason. That reason was to bring the bosseye to justice for all the evil they have inflicted on other worlds, especially the evil renaming of planets to names such as Huj Huji Wuji. This means I must return to

their ruling quadrants and finish this crusade before anything else is undertaken.'

'We understand,' said the others in complete misunderstanding.

For their last remaining while the relaxation section stayed nice and peaceful, each of its occupants falling into a deep and overwhelming state of slumber.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Just when all its hopes and aspirations seemed completely lost, the grass seed was set alight by the flickering flame of a Bunsen-burner and so - as a direct result - it began to smoke itself, a smile (if it had lips) forming upon its face (that's if it had one of those too). In the background there seemed to be a tune playing, adding to the mellow moment it was now experiencing.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

'Woof ... oh sheet!' squawked Scank, jumping from his restful position.

'What is it?' asked Cryst, awake instantly.

'Grrr ... a communication light's flashing again. Something has been trying to contact us!' Before darting off, he stopped to look at the others, 'We must remember to switch the bloody warning siren back on, so the next time we'll know immediately when someone wants to communicate with us.' With that said, he scurried off to the observation post using a clever mixture of both the gravitational and ladder chutes.

Almost tripping over his legs, he clambered to the appropriate panelling and pressed a selection of musical buttons. 'Scank, opening communication ... woof ... who is communicating?' Cube's speakers crackled with interference. 'I repeat ... woof ... who is communicating?' Dong and Cryst stepped beside him, their faces carrying a worried expression.

'Has there been an answer?' Dong enquired.

'No,' replied Scank, wrapping his mind in deep thoughts.

'Maybe I can clear up the frequency with the leveller coding?' suggested Cryst.

'By all means, have a go,' relented Dong, impressed by the messiah's fast growing knowledge of Cube's many systems - of course she did have the help of Robottom beneath her.

Without any hesitation, the crystal being began to move the correct controls with her invisible fingers. All the while the speakers crackled and crackled until something eventually burst out loud and clear...

'Get out of the damn way, you imbeciles! This is Captain Rugga of the refuse ship 7821ARSE...' the message faded. Cryst reacted by pressing several buzzing keys in an attempt to re-establish the transmission. '... Ships thrusters are over heating, navigation impossible!' The message ended...

If you are wondering why Cube, being the most secretive and intelligent, hasn't moved already, and yet she can save the crew in other situations, well, it's because of her built in safety program. When the crew are onboard she will not act unless given the authorisation to do so. If the crew happen to be away from her, or in the event they are unconscious or not in the right frame of mind, she can override all systems and act accordingly.

'CUBE,' requested Cryst, switching from a keypad to voice activation, 'evasive action to get us the ... BEEP! ... away from the path of that approaching ship.'

As if to say, thank Cryst for that, Cube's gravitational core whooshed into immediate action.

Within a gap too close to be described as close, the refuse ship shot past, pushing Cube into an uncontrollable spin.

Violently turning round and round and round and round through space, breaking up millions of cosmicdust mites (yet another clan!) as she went, Cube's army of cleaning robots took up positions around Chucker's greening figure.

The spinning cube looked as though the Devil had just thrown a dice and wasn't going to let it stop until it landed on six six six.

Inside, the crew were being thrown back and forth around the observation post, the cleaning robots, armed to their wires with

utensils, still followed Chucker's every and sudden move. This was all becoming too much of a bad habit.

'Cryst, do something!' yelled Dong, before being thrown with the other Wise Aliens (closely followed by the pack of robots) into some above - turning quickly into below - panelling. Gripseats were most definitely not an option at this point in time. Cryst was the only one of them managing to keep in a relatively stable position.

'I'm trying something, but it's not working!' the messiah blabbered.

'But you're not doing anything?' screamed Dong.

'Exactly,' replied Cryst, 'and it's not working!'

'It's the gravitational core!' informed Scank, who for a brief second or two had managed to clutch hold of a sprocket stabiliser lever thingy-me-bob relay switch with his suction hands and feet; more commonly known, for those of you who aren't dyslectic, as his suction hands and feet. 'Its levels must need ... grrr ... balancing out.'

'Okay, I'll have a go at doing that,' offered Cryst, pathetically. There wasn't much time left, she would have to balance the core before body parts start to break off her flying colleagues. Floating over to a white panel she casually inserted Robottom's nose and began groaning.

Adding to their problems, Cube was now on a collision course with a planet, its name being "In-The-Way" - it was what most early space explorers of the local galaxy thought was a myth, a space mirage, but having come across it once before Cube knew it to be otherwise. Its sole purpose for existing was to glide around the galaxies getting in the way of things; it was yet another proud creation that the Devil, all by himself, had thought up.

'Look,' blared Chucker, in overwhelming dread, 'a planet, I saw a planet! We're going to collide.' The others couldn't believe their luck, it appeared they had just missed one collision only to be confronted by another which was, on paper, deemed a worse proposition. Because of this, for a moment, they didn't believe what had been said was true.

The optical screen was stuck with the forward view all around and was spinning along with Cube.

'You're right!' suddenly screamed Scank, seeing the planet for himself, his suction pads ripping away from the sprocket stabiliser lever thingy-me-bob relay switch.

The doom coloured planet started to move nearer and further, but then nearer still and, for some totally known reason, it felt the increasing urge to collide with the cubic space vessel which was now only some seconds away from being burst like a Tovarian boil full of puss.

'Done it!' exploded Cryst as a sequence of blue lights turned red. Cube immediately stopped and, in her now favourite manoeuvre, dropped just in time for In-The-Way to pass by in utter disappointment over the top of her.

'Thank god for that,' wheezed Dong, looking to Cryst, waiting for her initial reaction to his statement. 'I mean it, literally!'

'I know.' The messiah smiled once more, this time with accomplished relief.

With everything that had just happened, and Dong's religious outburst, Chucker let the cleaning robots have what they had been waiting for. In the following minutes the sound of vacuums and pulsating air dryers filled the post with the same busy noise a nest of Trebular ants can give if listened to with a stethoscope.

'Cube,' said Scank, leaping up to a small round monitor positioned high above. 'Quickly ... grrr ... navigate an interception course with that refuse ship ... 7821 ARSE.'

Cube jerked forwards with a bang and stopped.

'Systems malfunction,' observed Cryst, feeling a case of deja-vu coming on. The wise aliens, still a bit shaky and bruised from the past several minutes, painfully went to work on the problem alongside their saviour (now in both senses of the word).

'The analytical data survey points to the motion section,' grumbled Dong, 'the gravitational core is leaking.'

'Is that serious?' asked Chucker, stupidly.

'You know damn well this means we'll be left to drift in space. If the bosseye spot us we will certainly be vaporised.' After Dong's telling off, Chucker changed slowly to green, the last remaining cleaning robot taking one look at him and exploding like the tightly

wound mechanisms of a watch which has just been smashed with a hammer, each and every part flying in each and every direction impossible.

'Who's going to the motion section?' inquired Dong.

Scank dropped his arm, 'Woof ... I will go.'

'Can I come,' pleaded Cryst, eager for more knowledge.

'Sure,' said Scank, grateful of the company. 'I'll meet you there.'

'We'll stay here and observe,' smirked Dong.

As the leetlesheet disappeared down one of the chutes, Chucker stopped Cryst from giving immediate chase. 'Scank prefers the ladder chutes because he likes to exercise his limbs, but you will be better off using a gravitational chute to get to the motion section. You remember what happened the last time you rushed down a ladder chute!'

The messiah nodded. 'Okay, which one of these will take me there the quickest?'

'That one over there - on the left!' Chucker smiled, his lips almost breaking free from his face. Cryst acknowledged its positioning and hurried off, not wanting to waste anymore precious time.

Dong and Chucker began to snigger. It wasn't long before they were on the floor in a fit of hysterics.

'You know that chute leads to the observation post's designated toilet capsule ... ' Dong had to pause for all the laughter he was having to endure. 'She'll be placed directly upon the toilet seat and ... '

'Very funny,' grimaced Cryst, emerging from the chute, the slightly forgotten robotom not looking too pleased either. 'This is an emergency if you haven't forgotten, we are drifting aimlessly through space.' She scowled. 'Which chute is the right one?' Slowly the crystal hearted messiah began to smile in an attempt to fit in with things.

'No, seriously,' said Dong, 'you say you want to know the right one, okay, it's that one,' he pointed, 'next to it.' Both he and Chucker resumed serious expressions.

Cryst instantly turned Robottom back around and sprinted into the chute positioned on the right. Uncontrolled coughing from Chucker and Dong turned immediately into roaring laughter.

'That's the other toilet capsule,' laughed Chucker, puking into a bag he held ready.

'I know!' cried Dong, hysterical. His bladders were beginning to itch under the constant vibration, he would be needing the toilet himself soon enough.

This time, when the messiah eventually emerged, her (or rather Robottom's) rear-end was plugged full of multi-coloured toilet paper some of which was dragging on the floor as she walked forwards. She didn't appear so spiritually fulfilled with kindness and goodwill, 'Right!'

'Well that is what you asked for, right is where you went...'

'I mean – right – listen – shut up – be still ... OR I'LL TELL MY DADDY!' She paused. 'In a way, yes, well I suppose it is slightly funny,' she admitted, remembering anger was not the way to approach things, at the same time staring at the optical screen with wide crystal eyes, 'but I'm not laughing about the fact that the kamikaze planet we just missed is heading back towards us!' Dong and Chucker instantly stopped laughing and looked up to the screen. 'Only joking!' boasted Cryst, her revenge tasting sweet as honey. 'And just so I don't have to rely on you in future, I'm going to use Robottom to access Cube's layout data.'

'Okay,' said Dong, his laughter resurfacing.

'We'll show them, Robottom. Start connecting yourself to download the appropriate information.' The messiah quickly spun around in unsuspecting shock, whilst in a way I'd still rather leave to your imagination, Robottom inserted his extending bulge into an appropriate information (and ironically termed) interfacial hole.

Having to endure the continuous laughter of the other two, Cryst waited for the data to be adequately processed. She was definitely relieved when it was all over (so was Robottom) and this time around, knowing where to go, she disappeared down the correct chute.

'Sorry I took so long,' apologised Cryst, at the same time slamming both of Robottom's feet onto the glistening floor of the motion section, its magnetic fields keeping each foot suspended several inches above the actual surface.

With the delicate prowess of someone learning to ice-skate, Robottom, very slowly, walked towards what appeared to him to be the motion section's centre.

'Never mind ... grrr ... about all that,' said Scank, not having listened properly, 'it's this I'm more concerned with.' What he was standing in front of and pointing to looked similar in shape to a circular chimney that had been painstakingly wedged between the floor and the somewhat low ceiling. Using the same comparison from what the messiah could see - where an opened archway was positioned behind the leetlesheet - the inner metaphorical fire, which should have been blazing away, looked to be extinguished.

At the gravitational core's (the chimney's) centre, a ball of wires and tubes (the extinguished fire) looked to be filled with important substances, some magnetic, others simply containing different types of liquids as simple as carbonated mineral water.

'So how does all this work?' Cryst enquired, getting onto Robottom's knees to view the core from underneath.

'Well ... grrr ... this complex ball ... '

'Ah yes,' the messiah immediately cut in, 'I've noticed how its overall design matches the blueprint of a, so I'd previously thought, undiscovered atom, undiscovered in this universe anyway. Cube is indeed one of the wonders of the universes. I can see now why I was asked to be a part of her crew. You were saying ... about the "ball"?''

'Thank you ... snfff ... ' sniffed Scank, suddenly feeling like an amateur soccer player having to tell David Beckham how to kick a soccer ball; the messiah and Robottom's knowledge was far superior to his own. 'This complex ball-like atom-thing structure holds many different elements which will be too complicated for me to explain to ... grrr ... you.' Scank didn't think his waffling was getting him anywhere and he was more or less correct with that assumption.

Knowing that he would have to review his notes on atomic science if he was to have another future confrontation with a boffin; Scank carried on with his extremely long explanation. 'The elements, when in a proper working order...'

'When functioning correctly!' insisted Cryst, not realising that she was almost correcting the leetlesheet's every sentence.

'When ... grrr ... functioning correctly,' Scank emphasised with a distinct growling sound, 'the elements will start to glow until eventually you get ... grrr ... blinded...'

'You mean it will accelerate its luminosity until transmitting rapid degeneration of the optic cells ... '

'SHUT UP!' shouted Scank in unleashed fury. Cryst went still, looking completely innocent. 'Do you want me to tell you about the gravitational core ... woof ... or not?'

'Um?' the messiah mumbled in a gesture meaning, yes you schizophrenic hairy nutter please continue.

'Okay, so then, when the appropriate levels balance out and the - you know what - has started to light up ... snfff ... it becomes a necessary precaution to wear this visor.' The leetlesheet pointed to the bridge of his snout, upon which a thin blue strip of transparent plastic covered each of his four eyes. 'Just wait here a moment, I'll go and get both of you some to put on.'

With a type of sucking motion the leetlesheet disappeared up inside one of the many (unfortunately termed) suck-holes punctured into the ceiling. This rapid movement rather looked like someone having sucked a pea through a straw. He appeared moments later with the two visors clutched in his hand.

'Do these suck-holes lead to other parts, cubicles of the motion section. Do they,' the messiah badgered, 'do they? Have I got that information right?'

'Yes,' answered Scank, 'it's a ... grrr ... bit like a bee hive in many ways, you do get used to their complex layout - the others haven't yet - but I'm sure you will. Anyway, now that I'm thinking about it ... snfff ... both your so called eyes probably wouldn't be affected by the glowing core.' He still proceeded to hand Cryst and Robottom the two visors before adding, 'Still, I would like you to put them on

because they'll make you look pretty cool and funky, just like me.' Placing his weird fingertips upon the frame of his own visor, he proceeded to move them up and down.

Looking up at the rainbow coloured archway (the metaphorical mantle-piece of the chimney) they were positioned under, Cryst thought it wouldn't hurt to ask one more question as long as she was careful what she said. 'Surely there is a containment door to stop the dangerous light escaping when the core is operable?'

'There is! It's incorporated into the whole unit (the chimney-stack) and automatically slides downwards like a rusty guillotine when sensing the ... grrr ... gravitational core is, as you would say, "operable". But with our current problem it is wise to wear the visors whilst we try and ... snfff ... fix the problem from inside.'

'Have you worked on this problem before?'

'No ... woof ... not in this capacity. You see, the gravitational core was designed so once its substances were in place, and balanced, that particular part of it would be maintenance free. But we must bear in mind Cube's been through ... grrr ... a lot recently.'

'There was a leak according to the sensors,' remembered Cryst, 'have you found it yet?'

'No, that's our first task and biggest problem. Once we have found where it is we can try and use what ... woof ... substances are left and balance their remaining levels out.' Scank wiped his brow, 'Maybe then we will be able to get to a friendly ... grrr ... space wharf and get the repairs and other things we need done.'

Cryst suddenly stiffened, looking utterly alarmed. 'You know as well as I do that most wharfs are under bosseye control. We'll be blown up before they ever let us dock!'

Scank winked several times. 'We will just have to surrender ourselves as pirates then. It will throw them off guard, for they already believe Cube and her crew are all missing and more than likely all dead. It will take ... grrr ... them ages to verify who we really are. At least I hope it will.'

Cryst didn't press the point any further, instead, she turned her attention back to fixing the core.

Scank looked up at her as he lay down upon the floor, ready to crawl underneath the ball of wires to search for the leak, 'There's an interface, or as you would correctly term it - an information interfacial hole - positioned in a quiet corner, somewhere over there. Go and plug yourself in, you'll find it useful.' Cryst slowly nodded and whilst whistling a peculiar whistle, walked over to the far corner to connect Robottom's bits; this was getting all too regular an action.

After several minutes of continuous movement she returned, holding a metal tray, smiling. Scank couldn't help but notice that Robottom's bulge appeared to be smiling also - in fact - it was grinning. 'Woof ... what's that?' he asked, looking rapidly to the tray so as not to confuse the question.

'It's the motion section's do-it-yourself tool kit. It was in the draw beside the interface.'

Scank looked surprised and a little embarrassed, but then again, he always does. 'Grrr ... I never knew we had one.' With awkwardness, he slid back under the wires like a tortoise retracting into its shell.

'Still no leak found?' shouted Cryst as Scank appeared and disappeared after several minutes.

'Not ... grrr ... yet,' came Scank's hastened reply as the last part of his body disappeared from sight.

'Where have you gone to now?' Cryst waited for a reply, she couldn't see the leetlesheet anywhere. 'Scank?' Placing the tray of rattling tools to hover upon the shiny floor, she knelt down with the aid of Robottom's trusty, and most useful, knees and after a frantic visual search, she spotted two pairs of familiar hairy legs through some purple tubing which seemed to distort their shape considerably.

Scank had somehow managed to crawl right around to the other side of the core. 'Woof ... I've found the damn thing!' came a cheerful bark, muffled at the same time by the layers of wires and tubes.

Cryst quickly pulled the tray under the wiring in her own special way and crawled beneath the core until she was roughly positioned somewhere below the legs she had been focused on.

'Is that you ... snfff ... Cryst?' asked Scank, only hearing but not seeing.

'Yes, I heard you say you'd found the leak so I brought you the entire DIY kit. Tell me what you want and I'll give it to you.'

There was a moment of silence whilst Scank assessed the problem. 'It's ... grrr ... going to be difficult,' he sighed in frustration, 'but let me see, mmmm, I think I'll be needing a pair of scissors ... grrr ... and a roll of sticky tape.'

Cryst briskly searched through the tray of complex modern materials, passing laser drills, testing equipment, analysis pads, state of the art gravity hammers until eventually she found what had been asked for. 'Got them!'

'Hang on,' replied Scank in equal tone as one of his long arms lowered itself through several contorted gaps. Grabbing hold of the instruments, with the mobility of a python having snatched an egg, he re-coiled his arm and slid it back through the gaps he'd made by pushing some of the wires and tubes apart.

'Is there anything else you need?'

'No thanks. You can crawl back out now ... woof ... I'll have this leak fixed sooner than you can say - dooglash.'

'Doo ... what?'

'Woof ... just get out of here!'

Having crawled out upon his request, Cryst didn't have to wait long before he joined her. Slipping out from underneath the core, the leetlesheet's suction pads made a similar sound to that of a champagne cork being released from the neck of a bottle. 'Well done,' the messiah eventually congratulated as he stood up and dusted himself down.

'Cheers,' Scank smiled, pressing his blue visor closer to his eyes. 'Now it's just a case of balancing the levels ... grrr ... if we are still able to?'

'The information I have gathered,' assessed Cryst, placing her invisible hands upon Robottom's startled bulge, 'tells me we are going to have to change the level settings on both the inner and outer terminals. This course of action should make the core function.'

'Woof ... I will be the one to realign the inner terminal,' decided Scank, swiftly, 'I'll be able to crawl around the core much faster ... grrr ... than you would.'

'But you could end up being sealed inside when the containment door is initiated!' exclaimed Cryst, her usual concern for the welfare of others being safely upheld.

'I'm ... grrr ... going to have to take that chance,' Scank replied, bravely - *which more often than not is sometimes confused with stupidly.*

The messiah watched her comrade's shaggy limbs clambering back inside the inner terminal. Feeling slightly apprehensive, she walked slowly across to the outer terminal and set about initiating and balancing the gravitational elements.

Most aliens would have been unable to figure out how to use Cube's array of functions but, with the added knowledge Robottom delivered, Cryst was able to set about the task feeling quite confident.

Although Robottom's knowledge was sufficient in operating the terminal mechanisms, he had never seen one of this particular cubic shape. It was as though someone had welded a metal cube against the wall. The only similarity it held with the many other terminals he had experienced over the years was the fact it used pressure points to key in the proposed data. For a brief moment, if you closed your eyes and imagined hard enough, the way in which it was being used looked as though a small accordion was being played, the escaping musical notes being replaced by data.

Still inside the core, Scank was just about finishing. The casing around the inner terminal started to glow, warning him the gravitational core was at any moment about to resume. Knowing the urgency by which he must leave, he quickly climbed down from the back of the complex ball and in his frantic rush to escape, he slipped. 'Bugger!'

The terminal began to convey to Cryst that operations were now also ready on the outer side of the core. After waiting calmly for around about two seconds, she started to have growing feelings of panic as she saw there was no sign of Scank and the core itself had

started to glow quite brightly. Suddenly, to go from bad to worse, the containment door above the arched opening was beginning to lower, the deep burping sound it created adding to the moment of doom.

Without a thought for herself, well actually that is a lie - she was *doing it because it was in her job description* - the messiah ran forward to pass underneath the lowering door. 'Scank, what's wrong?' she shouted. 'Get out of there now, the core is established.'

'Woof ... I can't! To make this page more exciting I have to stay in here and look fatally doomed.' Looking down at his hands, he practised pulling his four fingers apart in the middle to leave a v-shaped gap, but he soon gave up, it wouldn't have been funny anyway.

'Don't be a fool!' resumed Cryst, angered by his better acting abilities. Realising he wasn't going to move, she pushed herself under the core till she was in reach of his entangled form. 'If you have to make this dramatic point I will be the one who gets trapped inside. Is that all right with you?'

Scank quickly looked away from the messiah and into the increasing glow. He knew it would mean severe pain and a slow death if he decided to stay. 'Well ... snfff ... okay, if you insist.'

Just as the containment door was sealing shut and was two centimetres away from closing (as you would expect in this kind of situation) Scank miraculously dived out from underneath, into the safety of the outer room.

With the same effect as a lighthouse, the gravitational core projected a beautiful spectrum of light through the remaining one centimetre gap and onto the nearby floor. As the last glimpses of the spectrum disappeared from his reflective visor, Scank felt a huge turd roll to the floor, showing his immense relief at having narrowly escaped.

Observation post sprang immediately to mind as he heard an agonising scream coming from within the sealed core. At first his head filled with terrifying visions of what might be happening to his trapped friends, then he remembered Robottom and an interfacial hole were in close proximity to each other and, upon hearing

another scream, had second thoughts as to their exact kind of suffering.

In a moment of sheer panic the leetlesheet ran around the motion section feeling a contagious need to scream. Gradually calming down he slid across the magnetic floor, shot up a suck-hole, and vanished into a gravitational chute.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

With the effects of the smoke taking full control over its senses, the grass seed forgot about the burdens of reality for a moment and began imagining itself flying back up to the observation post, except this time it had the use of wings and an army of garden gnomes to help it get there...

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Chucker jumped into a sudden shade of white as Scank's small hairy figure appeared abruptly from behind where he was standing on the observation post, shouting, 'Woof ... The Galactic Messiah is dead! The Galactic Messiah is dead!' over and over again, in obvious panic.

'Calm down. What do you mean by - dead?' Dong grabbed the leetlesheet's shoulders and shook him before kneeling him in the groin. 'And what is this new song, "The Galactic Messiah is dead! The Galactic Messiah is dead!", I don't recollect Bob Marley having sung that one before?'

'Cryst has been shut inside the ... grrr ... gravitational core,' explained Scank, out of breath. Relaxing himself for a moment, he began to tell them what had happened...

'We have to get to a space wharf as soon as possible, but Cube's only going to be able to reach gravpull 90210 with such low levels within her core.' Chucker paced back and forth, thinking aloud. 'Where is the nearest wharf?'

'Hang on,' waved Dong, willing to oblige him with an answer. After several seconds of keyboard banging he hadn't managed to come

up with one. 'It's going to take a minute to find a wharf, but I can tell you that after our experience with the black hole, we have been placed inside the north quadrant of the Cantoo System. We are now, as I'm speaking, passing into its west quadrant.'

Ancient local logic believes that each system is surrounded by an invisible circle, the circumference of this circle is known as the system's border line. If you were to imagine the circle as being a large, very, very, very large cake, and cutting it into four equal slices, each slice would be representing the four quadrants of a system - north, south, east and west.

'The Cantoo System,' said Chucker, running a finger across a monitor, 'is dark years (these are like light years only they are a lot darker) north of the Umpy Bolland System.'

'At least we didn't end up in the far reaches of some other universe!' added Dong, thankful in the thought of knowing where the Cantoo System actually lay. A beeping sound below his blubbery hand signified a wharf had been located due south, 'I've found one about a dark year away from where we are.'

'How long will it take us to reach it?' asked Chucker, his voice having been afraid to ask the question.

'With no way of creating an acceleration funnel and Cube only capable of gravpull 90210, I would go so far as to say, four, maybe five seconds.' A sole moon passing slowly around the optical screen, as if having just decided to take an afternoon stroll, acknowledged that the space wharf was close by.

'According to Cube's specific calculations the wharf should be behind that moon.' Dong raised his hand.

'How are we ever going to get the bosseye wharf commander to give us what we need?' said Chucker, moving over to the south side of the optical screen.

'Grrr ... by simply surrendering!' stated Scank, matter of factly.

'By what?' repeated Chucker, his voice reaching a high pitch.

'If we say that we are pirates ... grrr ... and we want to give ourselves up, they will allow us to dock!'

'Then what do we do?' the worried vom persisted.

'I haven't thought of that yet ... snfff ... but our main aim is to get the substances the core will need to reach normal power.'

Tossing a soggy cake, which a food robot had just given him, from hand to hand, Dong purposely threw it over his left shoulder in a brash manner. 'Who cares? Let's just go ahead and do what Scank says!' His carefree words rushed quickly from his mouth to smack each of the others in their completely astonished faces. To have seen Dong of all squidges throwing away any kind of food was most unbelievable and indeed a first. 'What are you staring at me for, let's just do it!'

Upon seeing the wharf, Cube moved into its orbit. From behind her reflective skin the colours of space seemed to move slowly - as if in warning - as she proceeded to open a communication channel.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Just when the grass seed had imagined itself, with the help of its gnome friends, reaching the observation post easily and swiftly, it threw up several times from its imaginary mouth and began coming down to the complicities of reality. From somewhere a boy named Zamo sang, '...just say no!'

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

'I am Derder, the bosseye commander in charge of this wharf.' The stranger's unshaven face moved closer upon the optical screen, his dented and scarred features were not a pleasant sight. 'You say you wish to surrender. That is very commendable. I would've done the same had I been in your position.' He laughed, annoyingly. 'I do have only one question to ask though ... '

'And what may that be?' snapped Dong, clenching his fists tight.

'Make that two questions! Firstly what is the meaning of life ... and secondly ... who the hell did you say you were?'

'Pirates!' Chucker surprisingly yelled out before anyone else, his reaction totally artificial.

Transmission ceased for a few minutes whilst both sides assessed the situation.

'I have given clearance for your vessel to dock. But I warn you ... any false moves and you'll be in my bad book, do you get what I'm saying?'

'Yes!'

In her own time, Cube pushed nearer to one of the wharf's many docking-spikes. It was as though someone was forcing her against a naked flame, feeling all the while as though she wanted to fight her advancement. The wharf's shape was distinctly, and appropriately, reminiscent to that of a second world war sea mine - *the sight of it getting closer obviously having the same effect*.

The sheer size of the space wharf's central black sphere appeared daunting enough, millions of pin-pricks of light representing each lighted window, without the added long docking-spikes surrounding it. The spikes allowed access for all manner of space traffic, of which Cube had now become an honorary member.

With a loud pressurising sound the docking-spike slid into place, Cube's rape was complete; she now lay motionless devoid of emotion. She was at the mercy of the bosseye and she knew, as did her crew, that they had none.

From his authoritative position onboard the wharf, from one of those many pin-pricks of light, Commander Derder could be seen making a galactic call, at cheap rate. 'Hello, Empress, are you there?'

'I am here, it is I, we speak together through land and sky!' The Empress' rhyming answer was unexpected, she sounded a bit out of it, the commander thought he had better follow her lead. She continued, 'You are using the emergency channel this'd better be good!'

'I've captured Pube, I thought you wanted to know, so I'd understood?'

'I think you mean Cube, you stupid bald prat!'

'Well, yes, Cube, or it's something like that.'

'You are sure you have Cube and she's attached to a spike.'

'I can set her free and blow her up, if you like?'

'No, you fool! I'll be there as soon as I can!'

'Okay, Empress, we'll do this according to plan.'

'Rhyme with the end of my sentence again and I'll kill you!'

'Of course, Empress, but you just don't understand what I'm going through ... going to do ... your tits are looking bigger today!' Whilst the commander hastily ended transmission, from within Cube's docking section, from within a small cubicle, her surrendering crew discussed the fate which would await them on the other side of the docking hatch.

'Let's get whatever they have in store for us over and done with,' grunted Dong, fiddling with his lips.

'Agreed,' joined Scank, jumping up to a triangular console. 'The commander hasn't even recognised us yet ... grrr ... we'll all be back here with the essential supplies before you can recite The Book of Infinity!'

Chucker said nothing and continued picking his nasal slits, these being barely visible to the naked eye.

With a great heaving moan, Dong yanked open the heavy hatch which was twice his size. Gazing back at the inside of Cube for what might very well be the last time ever, he eventually turned to leave.

Without looking where he was going he walked belly-first into the nozzle of a weapon deliberately having been held out in greeting.

'Cube and her crew are here-by under arrest for the crimes they have committed within The Star Empress' domain.' Standing tall and muscled, the arresting soldier pulled Dong and his companions through to the inside bosseye territory of the wharf. In turn, they were handcuffed to a wharf security guard and after several loud orders were given, she, alone, was given instructions to lead them to a prison cell.

The not so wise prisoners were now chained together with Dong in second place, Scank in third and Chucker in fourth. The bosseye leading them was short and fat and this she seemed to be constantly aware of. The chip she carried on her shoulder was immense and occasionally she took a bite from it to proverbially stop it from getting any bigger.

Every now and again this incredibly tiny security guard would stop, and facing her captives, proceed to hit them viciously with her hand-held stinging bludgeon.

Her overall appearance left much to be desired. Unlike The Star Empress' four pert breasts, hers seemed to sag into one large lump of unwanted fat; they seemed to want to get as far away from her ugly face as was possible.

'Have you ... grrr ... thought of anything to get us out of this mess yet?' whispered Scank, the guard hitting him for a third time, hard enough to make him yelp.

'No, not yet, although I'm sure I had thought of something before, I just can't think what it was?' Dong started to feel his bruises and stings mixing together. 'It will come to me soon enough.'

'It'd better!'

Pulling their chained wrists abruptly forward with her own, the small bosseye bitch (which her friend's - if she had any - called her) forced the three captives, on purpose, into a solid wall as she turned a sharp corner. 'You do you realise you're all going to die,' she chuckled to her great amusement, in a demented witch kind of way, looking out for the next sharp corner to arrive.

In answer to the guard's callous outburst, the high pitched sound of two twangs ... TWANG! TWANG! ... brought her to an abrupt halt.

'Look, I will kill you all myself if you don't ...' Turning her head back to gaze upon the three, she looked completely horrified by the sudden appearance of a large breasted white giant, her jealousy and shock were immediate.

Remembering part of her plan, Dong looked downwards at the guard's face. Upon the floor the handcuffs lay shattered after the tremendous pressure her expanded wrists had induced.

In ignorant defiance, the small bosseye swung her stinging bludgeon upwards in a feeble attempt to regain her authority. With heroic timing, Dong grabbed the weapon and casually snapped it with one hand.

After witnessing such a feat of strength the guard decided it best to escape extremely rapidly.

Seeing her attempt to flee, Dong quickly bent down, grabbed hold of the trailing handcuff chain she was still attached to and gave it a cruel tug, the guard having no choice but to jerk backwards through the air like a yo-yo.

Remembering her holstered laser canon, the bosseye made a last desperate effort to regain some kind of authority over the situation. 'Drop the chain, you over inflated piece of blubber! Nice bosoms!' With the sound of the chain crashing to the floor, she started to feel slightly more assertive, but the 'canon still shook in between her hands.

'So you thought you could escape from me,' she smirked, looking up at the towering squidge and then into her enlarged eyeballs. 'You think I'm small don't you?' she continued, taking another bite from the chip on her shoulder, poking the end of the 'canon into Dong's heavily muscled stomach. 'You do don't you?' Her voice was becoming more and more irate.

'Well all right then, yes! I think you are a short stumpy pot bellied little alien turd eater, who thinks the whole galaxy has it in for you, and in your case, it probably does!'

The guard was fuming after this truthful retort. Her temper had reached boiling point. 'We'll see what size means now that I'm holding this weapon.' Lashing out, she struck Dong in the side with the butt.

Dong promptly turned to her friends and winked. The guard soon realised there had been absolutely no effect, she now knew it was going to be impossible to break through the shield of muscles which stood before her. 'You think this is funny! You don't take me seriously, do you?'

'No not at all!'

'You think a small guard like me can't harm you. Right, I'll just have to ignore The Empress' orders and kill you all right now, myself, little tiny moi!' All three watched, it seemed as if in slow motion, as she placed her fingers around the 'canon's long curving trigger. 'Who needs The Empress' orders anyhow ... she's tall as well by the way ... The Tart! And she's pert! Now you'll see what you're going to get

from a short bitch like me ... ' Closing her eyes, she defiantly squeezed the trigger and the laser canon fired into action.

Dong and the others managed to dive to the floor as a gigantic power ball blew past them to roll downwards through the corridor, unfortunately a dust mite was now running for its life on the other side of it - re-inacting a famous scene from the Indiana Jones trilogy.

Seeing she had missed, the security guard aimed the 'canon down at Dong and fired again.

The squidge was too quick, in a flash of wobbly bits she was towering over the quivering bosseye. 'Look,' she began, 'I've nothing against small people, but ... ' The guard wasn't in the mood for listening, yet again she tried to fire the 'canon.

Seeing no other choice left open to her, Dong pushed her to the corridor floor and lifting a leg high into the air, slammed it down and looked away.

Silence fell as Chucker and Scank finally added something to the fight.

'She was small ... snfff ... wasn't she?' admitted Scank, looking underneath Dong's messy foot at the guard's new pancake shape.

'You had me fooled, Dong,' added Chucker, wobbling, 'what a brilliant plan, knowing you would change at that precise moment. You know something, you're "all-white" in my books.'

Dong flexed her whitening biceps at the clever double meaning. 'Well, I don't like to brag.' Taking hold of their cuffed hands, one at a time, she ripped the bindings apart.

'We can use the ... grrr ... guard's laser canon. She won't be needing it now!' sniggered Scank, picking it up from the discoloured tiled floor.

'Good idea,' agreed Chucker, 'I suggest we also look for a place to hide the body before they discover we've escaped. And then we must find what we need to get Cube back to full strength so we can get the heck out of here.'

Until any of the above could be done, Scank and Chucker had to peel the pancake corpse away from the Dong's foot. When they were finished they dragged what was left of it over to the nearest door.

Before they'd realised what was happening, from in front of their startled faces, the door opened. They knew instantly that they had stumbled across a lift because it was already occupied by two wharf workers standing inside. Both workers gazed in wonder at the three unknown aliens standing face to face with them.

'Oh, excuse us,' Chucker babbled, trying to think of some excuse to get them out of this mess, feeling the strong need to explain their current predicament to these two new strangers. 'We are the wharf's newly assigned undertakers. Err ... we've just found this body lying about. You couldn't carry out her last dying request and give her a ride in the lift, could you?' Before they had a chance to answer, Dong threw the dead guard upon the floor of the lift. The lift shuddered.

'Oh, and mind your feet,' noticed Scank, 'she's still bleeding quite a bit.' The completely stunned workers, who had remained speechless the whole time, looked down at the green blood which had started gushing out, the unexpected tide which quickly formed, lashing against their feet. 'Thanks a lot, you've been very understanding.' The lift door began to close. 'Come on, this way,' the leetlesheet casually instructed, dropping from the cleanliness of the ceiling.

Following his lead, the escapees ran onwards until they came to an oval opening, this opening, according to Chucker, was the point to which the base of the docking-spike joined the wharf's central sphere.

Standing together, and feeling as small as a flea, they walked, hopped and slid through the opening to find themselves looking down upon an immense cargo bay. It was a large domed shaped area, full of crates and boxes ready to be taken to different parts of the galaxy and in some cases beyond.

'We must be able to find something we need here amongst all this,' observed Chucker, itching his reddened scales, a few flaking off.

'We have to get off this balcony and down to the bay floor,' said Dong. 'There's a ladder further along, let's go climbing, come on, guys.'

Scank gulped at the hundreds of feet they would need to descend in order to reach the bottom cargo decks.

Taking hold of a metal run at the very top of the ladder, Dong led the other two down the palm-sweating route awaiting them...

It took a long time before the group of three reached the welcome feeling of a solid deck beneath their feet. Fortunately their slow descent had gone unnoticed, this was mostly due to the size of the place, although, there were a handful of alien workers and robots working all over; they either hadn't seen the three, or like most, they didn't like the bossy and were content to let them go unchallenged.

'Slinky!' gasped Scank, with sudden and unexpected happiness upon seeing an unexpected face amongst the workers.

Passing by their now hidden forms (behind several boxes) was another small - but blue haired - leetlesheet. Scank could hardly believe his eyes.

'Scank The Atom Climber (a respectable title for a leetlesheet), last I heard you were nearing the border of the Sopo System?'

The two reunited brothers ran together and kicked each other in the traditional Trebular greeting.

'I can't ... grrr ... chat for long,' Scank regretted, turning back to his friends and motioning for them to come out of hiding. 'You remember my ... snfff ... friends, don't you?'

'Yes, of course, the crew of the infamous Cube are becoming local heroes for most of the enslaved populations of this galaxy. But I don't recognise her?' Slinky pointed to the all white giant.

'Take my word for it, it's a long story, but that is Dong.'

Slinky shook his head in disbelief. 'I cannot believe I'm talking to ... what is it they're now calling you since the messiah's so called arrival ... The Three Wise Aliens. My brother of all people; how proud I am. My fellow workers won't believe this ... ' Slinky quickly turned around and shouted, 'Hey! Fellow workers, look who it isn't ... ' As he turned back upon the three gaping figures most of the workers had already started to come running, from all over the place. Slinky chuckled, a

large smile appearing around his shaggy muzzle, 'They'll love this, they will!'

'Oh no!' said Chucker, bringing his hands up to cover his eye as he realised what was about to take place ...

Eventually all of the preliminary greetings were over. A lot of sore body parts could now be felt amongst the group due to the many gathered species and their different (traditional) ways of welcoming one another!

Scank was still in the process of recovering from a Tovararian ug's headbutt when Slinky came over and helped him to his unsteady feet. It was now that the blue leetlesheet finally got around to asking the much awaited question. 'What the hell are you actually doing here, brother?'

Each of the not so wise three, beginning with the large white squidge who still had several of the smaller unknown alien workers hanging from her breasts - *apparently this being their own customary way of greeting* - took turns answering Slinky's question, explaining to the workers why, how and what it was they had come for.

After they had been entrusted with the truth, the gathered workers, without any hesitation, dispersed and at the same time told the Three Wise Aliens to, '**** OFF!' and to, 'GET A LIFE!'

Even after his rude comrades had all returned to their work places, Slinky chose to remain behind and help his brother search for what he and his two friends had said they needed. 'So what was that again: a cylinder of nitro-gravtons, two canisters of Uranus-eater urine (this has been proven to contain gravitational properties) and three pints of ale ...' Slinky paused. 'What's the ale for?'

'For us!' the three replied automatically, with three matching grins.

'Okay, I will see what I can do, but I'm not promising anything. Although I think you might be in luck because we are having ten-thousand crates delivered sometime today. I am sure there must be some of these substances inside one of them. You just wait here, I won't be long.'

Several days later, after successfully remaining hidden from the enraged bosseye soldier patrols, Dong, Chucker, and Scank, were all becoming slightly impatient with Slinky's rather slow progress.

Scank's blue brother, to his own credit, had actually been through almost all of the ten-thousand crates and was attempting to open the last one at this very moment. Fingers were crossed in hopeful expectation.

Pulling the last lock aside with all the energy he had left, the crate door slid suspectingly open. Jumping back in shock, Slinky jumped back in shock because he was shocked with what had so shockingly shocked him into being shocked.

In complete astonishment - and of course in complete shock - he looked back across the cargo bay to where Scank and Dong still lay hidden, seeing their heads momentarily appear and disappear from above the top of the stacked boxes. Scank briefly waved when he saw his brother was looking; it was his way of telling Slinky to get a bloody move on!

'Have I ... grrr ... just waved?' enquired what appeared to be another Scank, from inside the opened crate.

Hearing a loud hiccup coming from behind, Slinky looked briefly at the other shadowed companion and closed his four eyes. 'Yes, you did, but...'

'Please, don't be alarmed, you are not seeing double, we are from the future. We have ... woof ... brought you the substances which we need in this time. For the moment this is all I can say to you, dear brother.' Scank pushed the needed supplies forward from the shadows of the crate. 'Quickly, take these to our good selves.'

'Okay,' puzzled Slinky and grabbing the supplies, hastily loaded them onto a hover-trolley. 'BBBye then,' he stuttered.

Pretending he hadn't seen what he'd just seen, he pushed the hover-trolley briskly towards The Three Wise - and still waiting for him behind the boxes - Aliens.

'I have finally found what you wanted,' he said upon reaching them, trying hard to forget that he was pretending he hadn't seen what he'd just seen.

'What? All of it!' replied Scank, pretending that he hadn't noticed that his brother was pretending he hadn't seen what he'd just seen.

'Yes, believe it or not... Anyhow, I must be going, things to do, aliens to see...' In sudden haste Slinky kicked Scank emotionally hard, stumbled backwards, and left them to their own devices.

Dong took the liberty of grabbing the supplies off the hover-trolley, the trolley lowering with each supply her huge arms lifted away from it, in the end it hissed viscously before dropping down upon the floor to wait for its next load. 'I can't believe this. The supplies couldn't have been better if we had walked up to ourselves and handed them over. There are even three back-packs so that we can climb back up the ladder more easily.' The squidge was just about to head for the ladder when a hairy hand pulled her backwards. It was Scank.

'Before we have to go all the way up that ladder,' he said, smiling, 'do you think we should have some of the ale now. It would make the climb less of a drag?'

'Sure! Why not?' Dong beamed, already in the process of taking the first swigs from the cylindrical container.

Like a North-American Indian's pipe of piece, the container was passed from one hand to another until it had been completely emptied. The Three Wise Aliens quickly became "The Three Piss Heads".

'Wha' the hell's goin' on?' Dong hiccuped.

'Yours ... grrr ... boody ...' Scank laughed at his verbal mistakes before struggling to correct them. 'Your body ... is doing somethin' ... I think ... grrr ... I hope?' Having made his observation known, he leaned onto the bent puking figure of Chucker. 'Hey, Chuscker ... grrr ... my good friend. Look at Dongy's boody!' He staggered upon his unstable legs.

Chucker, wiping his lips with his two right arms, looked up. 'Bloody hell!' he burped, just in time to puke again. His colour was now in a constant swirl, his eye-ball having joined it.

Dong staggered across to a shiny glass panel and used it as a mirror. Looking at his/her distorted reflection, his/her mouth dropped open. 'We's aren't at a galactic fun fair, is we ... bloody hell!' Due

to the food properties ale contains, his/her body had taken on a new shape all of its own, he'd/she'd never drunk ale whilst in his/her heroic form before and this was obviously the result.

Parts of Dong's new body shape had definitely remained white muscle whilst other parts had deflated back to black blubber, his/her chest looked most confused. He/She looked distinctly like a futuristic type of dairy cow. His/Her height, too, had shrunk, about a foot, although, he/she was still the taller of the three. 'Let us gets back to Kebab ... I mean ... Cube.'

With the back-packs safely in position on their fronts, the reason for which I won't go in to, the Three Piss Heads started to make their climb back up the ladder, the same one they'd used to get down.

'But Empress,' Commander Derder grovelled, 'the prisoners may have escaped but somewhere in this wharf they still hide, and we hold that to our distinct advantage. Don't you agree?'

The Empress stared hard. 'No not really. I will say this, though, if you don't find them you won't be speaking to me again, or anybody for that matter, understand?'

'Yes, Empress, I do. Thank you. Thank you ... ' No sooner had the transmission finished, Commander Derder put the space wharf on an even higher security alert. He hadn't wanted to go this far but The Empress had arrived faster than anticipated. Apparently her half-missing destroyer was aided by a freak solar wind and, as a result, had been propelled through the stars at extreme speeds.

'Those bloody wise gits! I knew they would be more trouble than they're worth, I should never have allowed them onto my wharf.' The commander slammed his fist against the nearest wall. 'Where can they be hiding?'

'Weh'hey!' echoed Scank, swinging from halfway up the ladder.

'SSSShhh!' Chucker hushed loudly. 'We've got to gets back onboard what's her name?'

'Cube,' said Scank.

'No thanks, I don't take any when I'm drunk!' Completely forgetting the point of the conversation, Chucker resumed climbing, leaving Scank quickly behind.

Meanwhile, some distance above both of them, Dong was on his/her own top secret mission. On this made up top secret mission, he/she was imagining being a spy on a top secret task to do whatever the hell he/she liked to complete the top secret mission ... *It makes sense if you're drunk.*

Having left the others way behind, the squidge had already reached the top of the ladder and, in a kneeling position, was tapping the balcony railing in what he/she thought was morse code but was in fact turning out to be a rather funky beat.

'Hey, Dongy, nice sounds!' approved Chucker, before throwing up over the ladder and onto the balcony which appeared to him to be moving. After a while he managed to crawl over to the stability of the far wall.

By the time Scank appeared, Chucker was still propped against the wall and was wobbling his head to the groovy beat radiating from the squidge's moving hands. 'Wow!' gasped the leetlesheet, also impressed by the vibes. 'Are you ... grrr ... we ... snfff ... stayings here then?'

'No, we were waiting for you, Scanksy,' replied Dong, one eye not quite open. 'We needs to get some supplies for Cube. She's having troubles with her core gravitational.' Stopping his/her drumming, to the other two's utter distress, he/she got to his/her feet, one being deflated the other inflated. 'Come on, we can gets to the lower cargo decks the way you just comed up - or is that - came up?'

Having taken his fat muscular friend's word for it, Scank was just about to descend back down the ladder when he noticed something rather relevant. 'Hangy on a minuter? We've already gots the stuffs on our fronts, look!'

'Oh yeh?' snuffed Dong. 'What is we waiting fors then, let's return to Cubes?'

'I doesn't know what we is waiting fors ... grrr ... but before we go, can we be sick?'

'I don't sees why not,' belched Dong, 'why shoulds Chuscker have all the fun.'

'EEEErrrrgh!'

'Arrrrgh!' ... SPLAT!

'What about me,' joined Chucker, 'Eeeeeeeeeerrgh ... ergh!'

Leaving most of their insides upon the balcony floor, the three ran unsteadily towards the oval opening they had arrived through.

Chucker was the last to trip successfully into the docking-spike and it was he who almost had his legs blasted off by an exploding power ball. 'Goodness gracious me!' was all he mumbled, his mind and senses numbed.

Rushing back to the fallen vom, Dong peered around the left side of the opening, but he/she soon pulled it back again as another yellow ball of power shot past and ripped into its surrounding plastic rim. 'I think we has been spotted, lads. Runs for it!'

The three inebriated aliens had thankfully kept hold of the laser-canon they'd taken from the dead security guard days before. Without its help they would have been captured or killed for sure.

Dong volunteered to hold up the rear with the canon held firmly in both hands, giving his friends the much needed time to stagger ahead.

Scank and Chucker could quickly hear, from behind, as they staggered through twists and turns, that more and more bosseye were ganging up on their valiant friend. Suddenly gaining their bearings, as they passed by the blood-stained lift door, they ran on and on and on until finally they were in sight of Cube - who still remained punctured by the docking-spike.

Surprisingly, seeing the hatch to her wasn't guarded, they both clambered over and opened it. They swiftly fell safely inside.

Together the vom and the leetlesheet waited and waited and waited for Dong to appear. They could still tell that he/she was alive due to the deafening sound of weapons exchanging fire, the noises of battle echoing down through the corridor and into the cubicle they lay in.

'Get ready to close hatchy Scanksy,' slurred Chucker.

Hearing the vom's sudden request, the leetlesheet began to close the hatch immediately.

'Wait for what's his/her name!' Chucker shouted.

'Who?' asked Scank, struggling to see who was speaking to him.

'Erm? I can't remembers!' Chucker toiled with his brains for several moments. 'Oh well, keep closing the hatchy then.'

Whilst Scank was having trouble closing the hatch, the sounds of firing got louder and louder, Dong was almost there, fighting his/her way nearer and nearer to Cube.

Scank was just about to lock the hatch when he was suddenly pushed backwards with great velocity. Dong's peculiar figure shot through into Cube closely followed by a yellow blazing power ball which splashed against some panelling, sending sparks flying and flames leaping.

In their drunken state it had looked to Scank and Chucker as if a freak comet had just flown into Cube's docking cubicle. It wasn't until Dong leapt back to the hatch, sealing it completely shut, that they realised who it was. 'Dongy!' they both cheered.

Scank, staying in the unflattering position Dong had pushed him into, lifted his head up from the hard floor and said, 'Tha' were ... snfff ... easy enoughs!' Releasing some wind he closed all four eyes and blanked out.

Huffing and puffing from the fighting, Dong shrugged his/her shoulders at the comment and grabbed the other two's back-packs. Feeling more sober now than Scank and Chucker combined, which wasn't hard, he/she made his/her way to the observation post via an unnecessary extra fifty sections - perhaps he/she was more drunk than he'd/she'd thought after all.

'CUBE,' he/she typed, relieved at having finally made it, 'NAVIGATE US AWAY FROM THE DOCKING-SPIKE AND HOLD POSITION JUST OFF THE WHARF. I'M GOING TO FIX THE CORE SO THAT YOU CAN GET OUT OF HERE.' With that typed and done he/she took a gravitational chute, and fifty different suck-holes, to eventually find himself/herself inside the main part of the motion section.

Feeling the last traces of alcohol leaving her body, she slid across the floor to a protruding cubic terminal and proceeded to open the core.

Not forgetting about the messiah, she put a blue visor on and walked over to the encased gravitational core (which for some reason she suddenly thought looked rather like a chimney) and waited for the confinement door to slide upwards, its burping sound copying her own.

The lethal rainbow coloured glow gradually lessened in automatic response. It would soon be safe to enter whilst wearing the protective visor. With a sound of foreboding the door reached the very top of the arched opening (which again for some reason reminded her of a mantle-piece). The gravitational core was at last fully accessible.

Taking a deep breath, Dong took another before stepping inside. Rubbing her eyes from behind the visor, she couldn't believe what she saw. 'Cryst, almighty!' she cried, rubbing her eyes for a second time.

Having been left to the relentless energy emissions, Cryst and her legs had become joined to the core itself. Robottom was sticking out from the bottom, literally, whilst Cryst, in the worst position of all, remained trapped as part of the fading ball of which she promptly told Dong was the blueprint of a mostly undiscovered atom.

'Ball or atom, it's all the same to me,' smiled Dong, heroically.

'Things haven't gone too well since my appearance,' responded Cryst, hiding her obvious concern, 'have they?'

'No, I suppose not,' admitted Dong, still surprised by what had happened to the messiah. 'Is there any way of getting you out of there? Alive?'

'Only the one, but you won't like it.'

'What is it then?'

Cryst felt slightly embarrassed. 'We would have to go and see God.' She waited for a reaction.

Dong, even as the heroine she was, remained quiet, walked over to a robot who was about to eat something disgusting and

snatching the snack from its pincers, ate it. Waiting for a few seconds, he returned to the core. 'You bloody what?'

'We would have to see God,' the messiah repeated, as softly as a mouse being trodden on, the last air of its lungs being expelled rapidly, rendering its speech useless.

'In other words, we will have to go through another black hole?'

'Yes!' she squeaked.

'Let's just forget about this for now, we have to deal with more important matters. If we don't get Cube away from this wharf every one of us will end up dying! Cube needs the core at full strength if she's to stand a chance of breaking free from the wharf's magnetic shield.' Stopping, he stared hard at the messiah. 'But how the heck am I going to do that with you like you are?' The motion section fell thoughtfully silent.

'The only route open to you is to leave us inside the core. Go ahead and do what you have to do.' Cryst closed her eyes, Robottom flashed.

Dong didn't have time to argue, not that he would have under the circumstances, so he quickly set to work, trying every now and again to ignore the presence of the other two.

At times it proved extremely difficult as Robottom kept farting, the smell driving him mad and the sound given off was something like a blown up balloon being released every few minutes.

Having almost completed all of his set tasks, from out of a suck-hole popped Scank, grinning profusely. 'Bloody hell ... Urp! ... Oops ... grrr ... excuse myself. Wha' the blazes happened to you two ... or is that four of you?' The leetlesheet was desperately trying to make out the messiah and Robottom from within the ball of faded tubes and wires.

'I'll tell you later,' interrupted Dong, 'right now we've got to get out of here ... Scank?!' The squidge turned to see the leetlesheet falling into a heap on the floor, his black and tan body hovering as it sagged. Dong turned back to face the messiah. 'Well, my work is complete for now, I hope you don't find the next few minutes too uncomfortable?'

'Don't you worry about it just you get Cube out of here!' Robottom flashed his eyes several times but Dong didn't notice.

Having said his rushed goodbyes, he re-established the gravitational core, went over to Scank's sleeping form and just in case, placed a visor over his four (firmly shut) eyes.

It didn't take long for the quickly established glow to brighten, at the same time the confinement door moving into position.

The squidge waved goodbye to the two trapped forms for the last time before pushing Scank into a suck-hole.

Reaching the observation post a lot faster than it had taken to leave, he left Scank to lie within a comfortable gripseat and went to sort out the next awaiting problem. 'CUBE,' he informed, 'CORE IS BACK TO NORMAL LEVELS. YOU HAVE PERMISSION TO TAKE ANY MEASURES OPEN TO YOU TO ESCAPE THIS WHARF. YOU KNOW THE SITUATION.'

As if they'd been magic words in a spell, Cube immediately complied with his request. First she powered up the core, as if a racing driver revving their engine, then (with Cryst almost shattering) holding the power for several more minutes, she waited for the right time and let rip - taking the hopeful consequences.

Looking somewhat like a fly, a rather square one, caught in an invisible web, Cube struggled to break free from the wharf's strong outer magnetic shields. Several tense minutes passed by (again in a taxi, the driver now slumped over the steering wheel), until, with a sudden jolt, she broke through the imaginary web and burst free into the welcoming stars.

Inside the depths of the docked galactic destroyer, having turned on her personal view screen to see what all the commotion was about, The Star Empress watched with disgust as Cube disappeared into an established acceleration funnel, instantly becoming a speck in the distance.

After having given a classic demonstration of being "out on the piss", the completely knackered crew retired to their personalisation cubicles. By the time Dong arrived at his there was a queue of food

robots lining the corridor so he gratefully snatched all that he could carry and went to lie on his bed.

Having remained in charge, Cube happily welcomed the crew's eventual appearance some twelve hours later, the group of them arriving in mid conversation, something appeared to be troubling them.

'Honestly,' repeated Chucker, 'I have been hearing things.'

'Come to think of it, I have been feeling as though something is watching me from time to time lately.' Dong scratched his chins in thought of what the others had said. 'It must just have been the after effects of the ale we drank.'

'Yes, you are more than likely right.'

'Grrr ... maybe?' concluded Scank, using two of his four legs to scratch an itch which had settled behind his ears.

Taking their places - basically anywhere they liked - around the post's many levels (their eventual positions looking like a new Nintendo level game) The Three Wise Aliens went to work on the impossible task of releasing the messiah from her current predicament.

Cryst had several visits from Dong throughout the full twelve hours whilst the other two had slept. During their awkward conversations the squidge had asked if she was okay, she bravely responded by saying she was in good spirits but was there any chance of drinking some. It was also during these discussions, through the sealed core, that Dong took the time to ask her more questions about getting her and Robotom free.

'So ... woof ... what was it again the messiah said to you?' Scank asked from his hanging position on the above levels of vibrating circuitry.

'Actually,' replied Dong, 'she will be able to tell you soon enough because I'm going to put this communication device, this one I'm holding like a gun, inside the core with her. The messiah will then be able to speak directly to us and give us some much needed information and navigation as we go through the black hole.'

Scank dropped to the floor and took the device from the squidge's sweaty hands. 'Good idea ... grrr ... but won't it melt when the gravitational core is at full power?'

'No. It is made from the same materials as the casing around the core.' Dong snatched it back. 'So if you both would be so kind as to cut all power and search for the nearest black hole, I will see to this.' Without waiting for an answer he plodded off to the motion section, this time using a ladder chute, the exercise being much needed.

'Chucker? Can ... grrr ... you pass me the compu-maps from where you are in the back of the post ... woof ... please.'

The vom obliged. Pressing the appropriate button, several hard rectangular objects slid out of their hiding place. Wanting to help Scank in the search for a black hole, he walked over to where the hairy git had sat (on a spongy part of the floor) and handed him one of the two maps whilst he looked at the other. Lifting it high above his head, he struggled to operate its intricate systems.

'Here ... grrr ... let me demonstrate ... woof ... you operate it like this.' Scank pointed out the "On" and "Off" switch and proceeded to turn the compu-map to the "On" position.

Instantly the map's surface lit up, an index appearing for Chucker to view. Pressing the appropriate pressure key for the location of black holes, the greying vom stared as several more options appeared to confuse him even more.

'Woof ... I've found one!' shouted Scank, to the vom's relief. 'The Bunyag System. Situated north-east of here. It is a smaller one than the others we have come across ... woof ... but it will do the trick.' Placing his compu-map abruptly to the floor he began (officially for the first time in this adventure) to scank around. Nobody could scank like Scank could, with his head lowered he showed several of his teeth through his muzzle and also began to slink (which his brother, Slinky, does better) around the post, Chucker decided to puke (which is something he does best).

'Everything's now complete, Cryst. As I've explained, you'll be able to communicate with us from now on.'

'Brilliant,' responded the messiah, in true sickening spiritual gaiety. 'Don't worry, I'll tell you what you want to know when we're within the pull of the black hole.'

Dong looked abruptly around, but saw nothing. 'Did you just hear something?' he asked, seeking confirmation.

'No,' replied Cryst, Robottom wriggling.

Initiating the necessary safety measures, the squidge quickly returned to the observation post.

Thank goodness he be gone, thought Pugjaw, sneering with his razor sharp teeth, his reddening eyes still hurting from the momentary glimpse he'd caught of the gravitational core. Clamping his jaws tighter together in an attempt to ease the pain, he waited until it lessened. To help him block his reaction sensors the metal creature decided to once again go over his new assignment.

'I thought I heard something move behind me when I was in the motion section,' remembered Dong, bringing full power back to Cube with a little help from his friends.

'Did you see anything?' asked Chucker, thinking it strange, tapping several codes into a holographic-data-grid-type-thing with wobbly bits on it.

'No, I'm afraid I didn't.'

Keeping quietly to themselves each of the wise three thought for several boring hours about these inexplicable, and rather spooky, mysterious incidents. After a while their minds turned back to more important and substantial things.

'Black hole sighted,' observed Chucker, running up a spiral walkway which led to a dustbin.

Dong and Scank stopped what they were doing to look at the accretion disk, its spiralling gases producing an immediate hypnotic reaction, the optical screen zooming closer and closer.

'So beautiful ... grrr ... and yet so deadly,' Scank sighed, his voice soft and distant.

'But hopefully not for us,' added Dong, shaking his weary head.

Chucker, turning to white, gulped at the thought of what they were about to do.

'Is anyone in the post?' interrupted a worried voice. 'Is anyone there? Hello?'

'Yes, Cryst, of course we are here! We're about to enter a sodding black hole.' Dong moved across to a round monitor and gave it a satisfactory headbutt. 'And we've just sighted it. Cube will feel the gravitational pull in five minutes. Okay?'

'Okay, okay, please, keep your flab on. Inform me when we enter the point of no return.'

'I think we already have!' stated Chucker, terminally.

Dong didn't like the sound of the messiah's last remark but he added, 'We will.'

Cube slid closer and closer, keeping at a steady and controlled gravpull 1111111, she was taking a more cautious approach after what happened the last time.

Turning to the optical screen above, Chucker looked at the far off galaxies that lay in the surrounding distance.

'We are in its grasp,' informed Dong, the eight corners of Cube feeling the first pull of the outer layer. 'Everybody,' he said, remembering before, 'secure yourself into a gripseat.' Scank was already in one, Chucker went quickly to sit next to him whilst Dong just sat in the 'seat nearest to his arse. Scank had been unconscious the last time so this was a new experience for him.

Due to the black hole being that much smaller, Cube felt herself being pulled quicker and quicker towards the Centre.

'This time,' said Cryst, feeling the time to help was about right, 'don't use any directional power. Let Cube drift and be pulled by the energy of the hole itself or, if you prefer, by the holy power itself. Anyway, it will still be a rough ride, so make sure you are all comfortably secured.' The crew looked at one another already seated safely and tutted. 'If you become unsure of any floating debris then initiate blocking.'

'Understood,' affirmed Dong, not so sure now that they were safer even with a crystal being guiding them.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

With reality having hit it hard (by way of a fire-extinguisher's jet) the fugitive grass seed was blown into the outer corridor and into a ladder chute. The scientific robot holding the extinguisher hadn't noticed it lying next to the wall which due to the Bunsen-burner having fallen against it was now covered in flames and rolling layers of smoke.

The grass seed couldn't believe its luck, or rather lack of it. Out of the two chutes positioned side by side, a gravitational one and a ladder one, it had landed inside the one which, for something with no limbs to climb with, would only double its feelings of bionic uselessness.

Whilst it was deciding how it could go about being unborn, it felt itself moving higher and higher. To the grass seed's astonishment it was getting lifted nearer and nearer to its destiny; a destiny to be fulfilled once safely inside the observation post.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

With the circle of gripseats raised, Scank, Dong and Chucker were given the chance to observe their advancing destination, thanks to the optical screen which this time was functioning as normal.

The beginning of their incredible journey soon revealed layer upon layer of different coloured gases. Chucker was astonished by the variety and the fact that he hadn't been some of the colours during his life.

'Debris!' remarked Dong, upon feeling and seeing Cube shake.

'Woof ... initiating blocking,' reacted Scank, using a new gadget which Cube's scientific robots had coughed up. The gadget was something like a bracelet but instead of jewels it was covered with lights and several numbered and lettered touch sensitive grids. Having to learn how to use these new inventions was all part of being one of Cube's crew, she was constantly changing and improving her technology.

The now constant change in outer pressures was starting to shake Cube about like a lethal cocktail. A few comforting words from the messiah would not have gone amiss at this point in the voyage.

'Cryst, how long is it actually going to take us to reach this so called CeNtre - or Heaven - as you once called it?' Dong, along with the others, kept calm as he waited for her reply.

'Oh, not too long. About ... let me calculate it ... about a couple of centuries, perhaps a little more.'

'Several what?' spluttered Dong, squeezing the corners of his seat in an open display of anger.

'It's okay, it'll pass soon enough,' calmed Cryst, her voice completely unconcerned for how the others might be feeling.

For more than an hour the crew stared blankly out of the optical screen, their state of shock evident.

When eventually finding his voice Scank mumbled, 'Cryst ... grrr ... let me get this into perspective. We have entered a black hole and will not reach its event horizon and core, if ever, until we are old and smooth skinned, or dead, so how come you didn't mention this fact to us before? And how can you sound so ... grrr ... damn calm?' Dong and Chucker lifted their arms forward and moved their differently shaped fingers in a sign of moral support.

'You tell her!' whispered Chucker, leaning his head over, letting a Trebular flea jump across the visible distance between the two companions.

'Don't worry you won't age anymore than normal. Time in a black hole becomes less important the further inside one goes. And as for any other complications, well, I'll sort them out - after all, I am the Galactic Messiah!'

'But what are we going to do for all that time? We'll be bored stiff. We can't even leave these sucking gripseats, we may also be struck by a floating comet or something just as destructive. You know as we all do that black holes contain endless amounts of matter which has, like us, been pulled into it.' Dong was beginning to sweat. 'And all of it is spinning around the vortex ready and able to hit us anywhere at anytime!'

Peace be with you,' smirked Cryst, in her own crystalline whim. 'Oh, of course, one more thing, you will all be blanking out in an hour or two and probably won't wake until we are out of the Centre. Don't panic, Cube and I will take over when you are unconscious. I would suggest, before you do, blank out that is, you had better program several of the duty robots to take care of each of you for when you are unconscious. You understand for what reasons I hope, natural processes and all that smelly sort of stuff. Please let me know when you have arranged it all.'

With only two hours and worsening conditions to complete their additional tasks, the three rushed around the sections in mass panic...

Finishing his last errand, stepping out of a ladder chute onto the spongy part of the observation post's floor, Chucker felt something, something rather like a piece of grit, from underneath his right foot. Due to this little annoyance, before joining the others who awaited him in the circle of gripseats, he wiped his sole several times until the feeling had gone. Looking quickly down, he saw a small amount of his own vomit and something which looked like a grass seed.

Ignoring the small insignificant mess he'd just left, the vom wobbled off towards his companions at the same time having to cope with the unsteady vibrations the black hole was sending around the observation post.

All three of them had now finished their preparations for their somewhat longer than expected journey. They each had blow-up neck pillows, bags of sweets and not forgetting their knee blankets. The robots had their instructions and had, for an extra payment of mere electricity, agreed to wipe certain body areas clean; so whilst the Three Wise Aliens were inside the black hole, they would be around their brown holes.

'Okay. Everything has been arranged,' growled Dong, still in a state of annoyance.

'Before you all leave me,' came Cryst's voice, 'I must add, certain things will happen to you whilst you are unconscious. The different stages of a black hole have their own warped sense of humour ...'

'What do you mean?' shrieked Dong. 'You ...' Before he had time to say what he thought of the messiah, he blanked out, the other two quickly joining him.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Being a robot of strong disposition, Pugjaw was able to remain awake. He had actually watched the three main crew members loosing consciousness and knew everything they were trying to do for the trapped messiah.

For days on end, weeks on end - *time wasn't much of a factor whilst inside the black hole* - he had attempted to access Cube's navigatory chips in the hope he could turn her back around; he hadn't liked the idea of going to the CeNtre. Eventually though he was forced to give up after Cube warned him off with a thousand volts of static energy. But when he finally recovered he saw his current predicament as a blessing in disguise, he realised he now would be able to accomplish his assignment with unforeseen ease.

Pugjaw's mission was to explore Cube for weaknesses and compute-map her interior. Without anyone to get in the way it could be done as easily as easily is easy to do. Cube's remaining crew of robots would cause him no trouble; they had their own assignments to fulfil.

The dog-like creature tried, at first, to make his way around on his claws, but this proved too difficult under the extremely shaky conditions the black hole was creating. There was no other choice left for him but to change into a shuttle and use his thrusters.

A week into his exploration, without thinking - an illness most aliens in this book suffer from - whilst he was exploring the highest circuitry domes of the docking section, his thrusters ran out of fuel. It actually wouldn't have been too bad if it wasn't for the fact he was several hundred metres above the extremely hard looking floor below. The phrase "*Oh sheet of metal!*" was said several times over before Cube's well mannered floor greeted him with a firm slap on the back. They both hit it off extremely well for their first meeting, in fact, Pugjaw was completely shattered after all the preliminaries were over with.

Whilst he'd had this sudden need to examine all parts of the floor, within the gripseats inside the observation post, The Three Wise, and pretty vulnerable, Aliens were encountering something rather strange; the messiah's last comment was being fulfilled ...

What you have to understand is that there are consequences for those who enter a black hole when they are not supposed to. It is rather like the old adage of being able to see things in a desert and by this I mean a mirage, not camels and sand.

In a black hole, compared to a mirage, the main difference in what you see and do is it can actually become reality. This is due to all the layers you have to pass through on the way towards the Centre.

It is because of this close combination of universes that there seems to be a chemical reaction which causes time distortions and the likes to exist. These can actually have a profound effect upon any objects moving within the hole and Cube and her crew were indeed objects, and moving ones at that.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

So it was that Cube found herself being pulled towards the CeNtre...

For the first century she monitored the ever changing colours like a Japanese group of tourists armed with cameras, coming across some most peculiar sights. Entities clung to her and circled her but thankfully the messiah was always at hand to help them carry onwards, her spiritual guidance taking on a more literal meaning.

For the middle centuries of the voyage, Cube passed through several storms of unknown origin. Some could be defined as energy formulations caused by the joining universes, others time affecting - this last point Cube knew to be true because her internal time processor kept on changing...

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It was during the last centuries Cube felt mostly alert because Cryst was using all her own power and knowledge to guide them through the previously encountered, and much dreaded, Edge.

Passing through dark distortions, they were surrounded with a vail of blue light, the messiah creating and holding this light securely in place until it was safe to be extinguished. Everything had been protected by it, all except one thing, one creature, and his time was most definitely up, for now. Pugjaw's scattered remains were pulled, like a baby being born, through the blue light and into the arms of the Devil. His destiny was about to be twisted, as were his limbs...

As Cube finally left the Edge behind it felt as though her sensors had just broken out of a wall full of varying levels of evil. Most of these levels had made her want to stay and maybe she would have had Cryst not been there to push her on. The levels which had felt repulsive and sadistic especially had made her want to stay, but the messiah would have none of it!

Whilst inside the Edge, Cube thought its temptations couldn't possibly be equalled, but she couldn't have been more wrong. The closer she continued to go towards the CeNtre, the less like a spacecraft she felt. As she continued inwards her sensors dimmed, until she surveyed no more as a solid form. Passing through the eye of the black hole, the Gate, she simply just *became*!

Whilst wandering around the preliminary stages of the CeNtre, she bumped into Captain Rugga of the former, aforementioned "out of control", refuse ship 7821ARSE. It was yet another name in the soup of Heaven and that too seemed to fade into the swirl of things.

It was like being born again - you are at first unsure of the world you've been brought into - then with experience you find you can do things you hadn't even considered. Things just happen, develop.

Just as Cube had become aware of some of her new abilities she was suddenly taken roughly aside, spread-eagled against a wall, and questioned.

'HOW HAVE YOU MANAGED TO COME THROUGH THE EDGE,' said, or is it felt, something, someone, everyone, everything ... 'IT IS NOT YOUR TIME, AND THE DEVIL WOULD HAVE TAKEN FULL ADVANTAGE OF THAT OBVIOUS FACT!'

'I BROUGHT THEM!' the messiah reluctantly owned up, her soul joining the interrogation, 'Do we have to talk so loud?'

'WHAT DID YOU SAY, SPEAK UP, DON'T SPEAK IN THAT MORTAL TONGUE!'

'NEVER MIND!'

'AH, THE LATEST GALACTIC MESSIAH, WHY HAVE YOU RETURNED?'

'I NEEDED A FAVOUR,' coughed Cryst, feeling a little more than embarrassed about the reason for coming. 'I NEED TO RETURN TO MY MORTAL FORM ONCE AGAIN. UNFORTUNATELY I HAD TO SACRIFICE MYSELF IN THE MORTAL WORLD AND IT LEFT ME IN A RATHER AWKWARD POSITION, LITERALLY! SO I NEED SOME HELP?'

'MMMMMM ... I'LL SEE WHAT CAN BE DONE, BUT IF FOR SOME REASON "WHAT CAN BE DONE" ISN'T IN HIS OFFICE, I'LL TALK TO GOD.' Suddenly, or it could have been slowly, because of the non existence of time, Cube found herself being sucked backwards through a hole until ... POP! ... she found herself back in solid reality.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Cube had asked the messiah upon their sudden return why God seemed to speak differently compared to the immortals they had experienced near the Gate; the messiah quickly explained that part of the language that is spoken in the immortal CeNtre is lost in mortal translation.

Spotting a criss-crossed one thousand ringed planet (five hundred of the rings running north to south, the other five hundred east to

west) Cube slammed on the grav-brakes and shifting the gravitational core into reverse, went into orbit around its glow. Once the anchor had been initiated she waited patiently for The Three Wise Aliens to wake up from their unconsciousness.

'Where are we?' yawned Dong, seeing Cryst and Robottom free of their previous affliction.

'In space!' leaked the messiah's unhelpful answer.

'What the heck has happened in here?' the squidge gaped, leaping onto his unstable legs and falling (in the same motion) to the soft grass covered floor.

'You must be careful,' Cryst pointed out, 'your muscles will have become weak after sitting still for so long. You are fortunate that the exercise robots managed to keep your body from completely deteriorating.'

Throwing his refuelled angry thoughts aside for the moment as he wiped his mouth free of the stains which the food robots had made when trying to feed him each day, Dong ran around the other side of the lowered circle of gripseats to check on his friends.

Seeing Scank and Chucker still asleep, he slumped his tired body onto a seat next to them and stared aimlessly at the observation post's new green hair style.

Over the centuries the bionic (no longer a fugitive) grass seed had taken root, and thanks to Chucker's nutritious puke and the spongy moist part of the floor, it had fulfilled its long awaited destiny, like the tale of the ugly duckling it had come up trumps. The post now looked like a cross between the hanging gardens of Babylon and a crazy, really crazy, golf course. The bionic faculties of the initial seed have yet to be discovered by the crew.

'The first thing I did,' explained Cryst, seeing Dong looking at the greenery, 'was check if any of Cube's systems were damaged but they were working perfectly fine, actually, I would go so far as to say, even better than normal. In disbelief, I again tried out several more of Cube's operations and found they were in excellent condition.'

'Can it be removed?' asked Dong, out of curiosity, stroking a grassy panel.

'No, it's embedded itself into the floor and in some cases beyond. Robots from the agrarian section tried to clear some of it away but it turns out this particular grass cannot be removed without using acid, an acid which would probably get rid of the post and half the observation section surrounding it, so ...'

'So we are left with liking or lumping it,' stated Dong. 'Well I have to say, after my initial reaction, I actually quite like it! There's something about being surrounded by lots of grass that makes one feel happy and relaxed.'

'So,' Cryst carried on, 'I got the robots to give it a bit of a trim with a lawn mower and strimmer.'

'Eeeerrgh!' puked Chucker, starting to stir from his sleep, the wafting odour - acting like smelling salts - leading Scank to opening his nostrils and then his eyes.

Standing shakily upon Robottom's legs, the messiah, remembering what each of the crew had just gone through because of her, warily welcomed the two of them back and explained to them, regarding the post's green coloured decor, exactly what she had told Dong.

'Oh ... snfff ... well,' yawned Scank, stretching his arms behind his head and looking directly at Cryst. 'There's nothing wrong with having a little grass, but what I think is important is that you are out of the gravitational core and back safely with us.' The messiah smiled religiously. 'So now we can all beat the complete and utter crap out of you without the need to wear protective visors over our eyes. Come here!'

'Yeh,' joined in Chucker, with a "was it all really worth it" tone.

After a severe amount of grovelling and a lot of miracles, the crystal being managed to reach their sense of mercy and they all managed to slowly calm back down.

'According to this read-out,' explained Chucker, running his hands across its brailled surface, 'the only planet with one thousand rings around it, in this galaxy, is the planet Dungheap. Therefore we must roughly be in a south-easterly position on the farthest reaches of our own galaxy. I'm confused though as to which system we are in due to the ongoing war which has been going on between the three

local systems; each one of them declaring this particular area of space to be their own.'

'But why ... grrr ... have we been dumped out here of all places?' Scank was most puzzled by their distant location.

'Wait a minute!' snapped Cryst. 'I think I'm being told something by God.' She furrowed her crystal edges and concentrated in the following silence.

'What is it saying?' Dong sarcastically enquired. 'No, hang on, let me guess, it's telling you you've left your keys behind in the CeNtre and we will have to go back and fetch them.' The squidge chuckled to himself, holding his belly in both hands as it shook up and down.

'How did you know?' gaped Cryst.

Dong's expression suddenly went blank; he could very well believe it to be true.

'No, really,' continued the messiah, her sense of humour improving, 'God has informed me this ringed planet is opposite the white dwarf I once had the privilege to call my home.'

'But shouldn't you have known this yourself?' Dong stated.

'Yes, but I had to say it for the reader's benefit.'

Not in the slightest bit interested with the messiah's and Dong's ongoing arguments, Chucker thought over what Cryst had said that God had said, and after a small bit of detective work had been done, which involved turning the optical screen on and then using his eye to look around it, he came up with a niggling question. 'Where actually is this white dwarf? I can't see it anywhere!'

'I am not exactly sure, now you have come to mention it,' frowned Cryst, 'because according to Cube's sensors we are supposed to be facing it?' The four of them looked at each other in surprise and then tried looking out of surprise.

'If that's the case, where has it gone to?' rebuked Dong, happy to throw a proverbial spanner in the works. The question was a good one and demanded analytical robots and other adequate ways of investigating the problem should be immediately carried out and routinely examined.

'What have ... woof ... you found out so far, Chucker?' asked Scank, having found nothing which could relate to the white dwarf's disappearance himself.

'The only clue I've got as to the disappearance is these small traces of electrons, photons and protons. They appear to have left a trail which is just under a dark year in length. In other words the white dwarf star has simply vanished!'

'There are,' begun Cryst, swivelling around Robottom's waist in the same way a psychiatrist would clasp his or her hands together before getting into intricate detail on a subject, 'certain interesting facts to do with stars. Black holes tend to ... how can I put it ... ' The messiah paused and made a few noises in her attempt to think of something good, to make the others believe she knew exactly what she was actually talking about. 'No, I can safely say, this definitely baffles the religion out of me.'

More tests were quickly undertaken until, after a full day had passed by, Dong decided they weren't getting anywhere. 'We'll leave it for now,' he said, stretching his rubbery blubber and releasing it with a ... TWANG! 'We can think about it all after some much needed food and rest.'

'That's all you ever think about!' cracked Cryst, still concerned with getting to grips with the matter at hand, the white dwarf had once been her home.

'No, Dong is correct,' added Chucker, in ambassadorial grey, 'we would be doing ourselves no favours if we carry on. We are mere mortals.' The vom quickly made Cryst see the delicate situation by throwing-up several times.

In a rush to suddenly leave the post, the four of them found themselves fighting each other to get to the nearest exit first.

Reaching their accommodation personalisation cubicles one after the other, they disappeared out of sight like the start of a greyhound race in reverse.

'Maybe the Ark will have the answers?' contemplated Cryst, to Robottom, as the door of her cubicle belched itself closed behind them.

One- two- three- four- five seconds passed by (now on motorbikes after their taxi crashed) before the messiah came rushing back out into the empty corridor, screaming.

It must be serious, thought Scank, dropping to the floor, or was it the ceiling, or perhaps the walls, of his cubicle.

'The Ark! It is gone!' she cried, running back and forth on an upset Robottom, the other three figures now watching her from their opened doorways.

'I guess we must return to the observation post,' sighed Dong, dragging his tired limbs away from his leaning position. 'ARK! Did you say, ARK!' he repeated, looking slightly more awake. 'The what ... you say it's missing?' Upon realising the severity of the situation, his eyelids rolled upwards like a blind flapping open to reveal a ray of morning sunlight. Joining the panicking figure of Cryst, they both ran aimlessly around the corridor like a pair of chickens with their heads cut off.

Chucker and Scank stepped into the corridor, leant on each other and slowly followed after the hysterical duo who had already run off into a gravitational chute.

'This explains a lot of unanswered questions,' thought Cryst, openly, gradually calming herself down as she walked towards a terminal, the observation post groaning at her return. 'The Ark is one of the few God-sent objects in the mortal world. It contains parts of a black hole.'

'In ... snfff ... what respect?' snuffled Scank, leaving Chucker's uncomfortable shoulder to collapse upon a turquoise gripseat whilst massaging his feet on a prickly stem of grass.

'It contains such powers as entities and their likes and these can be released if opened by the wrong alien. It acts as a gateway, unleashing the same dangerous effects as a black hole. If you open it, and it was not meant to be, you and your current surroundings can be completely destroyed.'

'The Devil has a role to play in all of this, of course, for he is able to add the dead that the opened Ark causes to his so called Edge. If he was to gain control of the Ark he would be able to suck in most of our souls.' Chucker looked shocked. 'I said "our souls", Chucker,

not, never mind, basically the Devil could suck every soul out of the universes. The more souls he gains the more the Edge will spread, until the inevitable merging of dark and light come together as one. We would all be ... be ... GREY!' Chucker fainted.

'So ... snfff ... it's not looking too good?' sniffed Scank in conclusion, eventually sneezing and then having a good, long scratch.

Chucker groaned on the floor whilst thinking what it would be like "to be ... be ... GREY!" The colour limitations were most unsatisfactory to the vom.

'What would you say caused the white dwarf to vanish, with all this incite we now have?' munched Dong, eating a coiled worm-like worm thing which had once been a worm-thing worm like that of a worm-like goat.

Before answering the question Cryst examined the last of the gathered data the terminal had just vomited up from its buzzing metal stomach. 'It seems to me as though it has something to do with the time and directional distortions we encountered when we were going through the black hole. Apparently,' she added, her form reddening as she read the remaining data, 'we have been in the wrong place.' Coughing, she lowered herself further inside Robotom. 'The white dwarf is actually on the other side of this ringed planet we call Dungheap, Cube's sensors must be offline.'

'So we've just wasted almost two days,' shouted Dong, his anger reaching a crescendo.

Cryst quickly changed the subject. 'About the ARK! Where do you think it is?'

Chucker, Scank and Dong, completely fed up, turned, and without speaking, walked back to the comfort of their beds.

It didn't take long for the three of them to rise and fall asleep, the messiah choosing to stay awake on the observation post, watching dirty movies on the optical screen, the first one titled, "Mud".

The Ark had been entrusted to the messiah by God, how in the universes was she going to be able to explain this latest conundrum after everything else that had recently happened; not very easily was what she concluded whilst on the optical screen the sound of

whimpering and a flash of moving fleshy mud stole back her attention.

While Cryst was rubbing her crystal edges with intense passion, from below, underneath Cube, something strange was happening - the same could actually be said for Robottom who was also situated below the wide eyed crystal being.

At first a series of sparks vanishing into space flashed at Cube's base. These sparks quickly grew in strength until, from all four corners of her square base, a series of different coloured beams shot outwards, joining together at an equal point in the distance (less than a dark year away).

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

'Eeeeh! Arrrrgh! Eeeeergh! Ah! Oh! Huh! Eeeeeeeeeerngh - Ah!'

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

'What a ... grrr ... dream I just had,' yawned Scank, biting off a loose part of his suction pads.

'Me too!' replied Chucker, wishing he had remained asleep.

In their own time the three sleepy figures climbed up the observation post's ladder chute, descended, then climbed it again.

'At least you had a dream,' moaned Dong, slow in reacting, 'I twisted and turned all the time, right up until this wondrous messiah of ours summoned us to report to the post, yet again!'

'Between you and me ... grrr ... this God thing is starting to annoy me!'

Dong and Chucker nodded in agreement with Scank's unsurprising comment.

'Ouch!' they yipped, as each of their heads were smashed together by an invisible force. Vigorously rubbing their painful injuries they staggered across to Cryst's hunched-over figure.

'What is it this time?' asked Dong, an arrogant tone floating around the top of his voice.

'Please come over here and look at this,' said Cryst, too engrossed at what it displayed to even look at them.

'Is that coming from Cube?' questioned Chucker, feeling blue.

'Yes,' replied Blue, feeling Chucker back.

'Do you ... grrr ... know what it is?' asked Scank, wondering who Blue was.

'I do ... It is a Time Point.' The messiah turned to look at the three startled faces staring back at her like the pose of the former US presidents cut into Mount Rushmore.

'How could ... woof ... this happen?' Scank stepped closer to the image, his feet soaking up some dew from the grass below.

'I know this pattern of light only to exist within black holes,' Cryst continued, with renewed enthusiasm.

'Does it have something to do with the missing Ark?'

'I don't think so, but a good point. No, I believe it has something to do with the white dwarf and me being in such close proximity. It has triggered a reaction via certain scientific facts too complicated to get into right now.'

'Can you explain in layman terms?' Dong requested.

'Well, when you were unconscious the time distortions we encountered in the black hole must have reacted with Cube's blocking system. The system appears to have stored some of the energy they dispersed. My being so close to the white dwarf, because I'm a refractory crystal being, has triggered this so called energy into the connected beams, which we can see joining together into this pyramid shape below Cube.'

'So why ... grrr ... has the energy drawn together into a point, or as you said, pyramid?' asked Scank, looking from the optical screen and back to Cryst, its image reflecting in his tired eyeballs.

'It's using the Time Point, the tip of the pyramid, to escape back to where it should be. Imagine if you will what effect a large magnet has on iron pilings - how it pulls every last fragment away from its surface - what we are seeing now is roughly the same effect. This effect will last only for as long as there is energy to be sucked, and until every last bit has all been sucked, the Point at which the four beams of energy join could be used to travel through time.'

'You're saying we can travel backwards and forwards throughout history if we so wanted,' gasped Chucker, gasping. 'But how could we know whereabouts in time we would be sent?'

'You are forgetting. This creation we look upon is from the other side, all you need do is think of where you wish to go and you will be sent there!' The messiah's words seemed to roll and roll upon the three's ear-drums, echoing, echoing. Even though the three were wise, they couldn't even begin to imagine what powers lay beneath their feet - so they didn't.

'Never mind, hey,' shrugged Dong, not really bothered, having seen it all before, 'I'm going to go down to Dungheap.'

'What for?' asked Cryst, surprised by the sudden lack of interest.

'Some supplies! We weren't ready the last time. We had thought Cube had everything she needed, but it turned out that she didn't. It's going to take the scientific robots several months to replicate the materials the gravitational core uses so until then I want to be on the safe side. The last thing we need is you to become an excess part of the core again. Besides, I also want to buy some of the planet's local brew, some ale perhaps. Yes, some ale, it might just help me get on with you a little better.'

'Good idea, can I come?' pleaded Chucker, flattering the squidge by turning a similar dark colour to his own.

'Woof ... and me!' added Scank, jumping on a gripseat, spreading his arms wide as if he were pretending to be an aeroplane. 'Woof ... and can we surf down through the atmosphere?'

'Look, you can both come, but it will be safer if we take the pods. We'll leave the atmospheric surfing experience alone this time around. I still haven't recovered from the last wipe-out I had when you dragged me out to Hul Hula Waver Bigga Thanna Shitta. We'll ride some magnetic waves when we get back. Oh, and remind me to check out what moountain bikes they've got when we get down there.'

'Okay, but about your promise of surfing, let's not ride the magnetic waves on the motion section's floor! I want to feel the freshness of space ... grrr ... blowing over my organic spacesuit as I

ride one of the big gravity waves Cube kicks out when moving along a gravitational line.'

'You're on! But until then,' agreed Dong, rubbing his hands together, 'let's get going before the bloody planet closes!'

Turning to leave, they stopped and waited for Cryst, well it was actually really Robottom they wanted and missed more and more; it wasn't that Cryst was awful but more a case that Robottom was more fun without a host. 'Are you coming with us?' they asked, looking directly to the legs not the host which was a bit rude.

'No,' replied Cryst, not noticing, 'I'm going to stay and observe this, and perhaps finish the movie I was watching. Robottom's bulge moved into a smile.

The pods quickly blasted away from Cube, making certain they were as far away from the Time Point as was safe.

'Let's ... grrr ... hope,' prayed Scank, raising his communication pen forwards and back, 'by the time we return ... woof ... all that mysterious energy will have drained away.' His friends moaned in agreement and continued on their zigzagging course downwards to Dungheap.

Cutting through the five hundred (north to south) rings one after the other, with the protection of the blocking mode initiated, the pods soon became part of the huge planet's normal flow of traffic.

'Where do you suggest we get the supplies?' asked Chucker.

'Your guess is as good as mine,' answered Dong, 'I've only ever heard of this planet, I've never actually visited it before. The only thing I do know is that it is among the few planets the bosseye haven't taken control of.'

'Do you know why?'

'No! But who cares, as long as we get what we want!'

'True.'

Protruding up from the planet's shanty architecture, if you could be so polite as to call it that, stood, or rather leaned, a fluorescent building which showed the most adequate facilities for docking. Most of the different shaped flying crafts seemed to head for it so it appeared the best, even if the only, place to land.

'The inhabitant species ... grrr ... are called what?' Scank repeated. 'Moodies,' screamed Dong, his voice rattling the speakers. 'They are said to be related in some way with my own species. I can't imagine why, but I'm sure we will find out soon. Get ready to dock ...'

Entering what turned out to be a multiplex shopping dock, in a matter of seconds the pods found themselves having to rely on its artificial lighting as they looked for a convenient space to park.

With little distress the small cubes settled in amongst the endless rows of vehicles lining the area. Feeling pleased with their unhassled parking, all three jumped out onto the green and red gravel floor.

'Let's ... grrr ... get what we came for and then leave,' said Scank, trying to take in the peculiar patterns the moodies painted their interiors with. He had subconsciously already developed a disliking for this run-down planet.

'Look!' noted Chucker. 'The majority of those aliens must be moodies and they all seem to be coming and going from that specific point over there in that corner.'

What seemed to be the usual traffic of moodie locals flowed back and forth throughout a slippery walkway. Their short, wide, smooth skinned bodies were squarely shaped from their head down to their feet. Like squidge they are also a binary structured race, they could be more or less described as a stunted - very stunted - Frankenstein and it's due to this all their hallways, doors, and buildings, tend to give you the impression you are looking at a wide-screen film.

Getting used to the design of everything, the party of three walked over to some large door-flaps Chucker pointed out and slipped through. Once through to the other side of the flaps they found themselves having to stand upon a hydraulic floor which slowly lowered them downwards to the many levels situated below.

'I don't like the way they stare at us!' observed Chucker, whispering so as not to offend the moodies surrounding them whose bodies were pressing The Three Wise Aliens closely together. From behind the vom's scaled form an elbow suddenly, and he hoped unintentionally, rammed into his back. 'Ouch!'

'Grrr ... I know what you mean,' growled Scank, looking angrily at the elbow responsible for his friend's grief. 'I've not seen many other species around this place so far, I wonder why?' His voice considerably shook as the floor came to its last downward stop.

'Good,' said Dong, peering above several square shaped heads similar to his own, 'this level looks like it should sell the things we need. Scank, grab one of those hover-trolleys from over there and follow us two.' He quickly pulled Chucker away from the hydraulic floor and by the time he glanced back around he could see Scank was already in hot pursuit.

Clasping the trolley's unusually shaped handle in his hands Scank attempted to push it forwards through the growing crowds. The leetlesheet felt a bit threatened when a large wedge formation of moodies suddenly shuffled in between him and his two companions. Plunging the trolley forcefully through the wedge so they had no choice but to move, he managed to scurry through the momentary open space to eventually come to a halt behind Dong's welcome form. 'Which way?' he could hear him asking Chucker, who in turn shrugged.

Once again moving slowly forward they began to realise more and more that every small step they took had to be painfully fought for with a push and a shove. Dungheap was over-populated beyond any expectation they might have had.

After just half an hour of their continuous battling, the Three (not so) Wise Aliens had carelessly made their way to being completely lost.

Scank found himself being pushed backwards, almost retracing the steps he had so tiringly fought for, now having to cope, all by himself, with the middle part of the crowded level. The trolley was rapidly becoming his only chance to survive the foot traffic. Before he had time to think how silly he would look, he jumped into it and waited to be pushed over to an exit. He couldn't see the others.

Whilst Scank was in the trolley, Chucker had been tripped to the floor and quickly swept in a current of moving legs onto the awaiting dangers of the level above.

Unlike the other two, the heavily blubbered Dong had pretty much held his own in the crowds and was walking confidently forwards, still foolishly believing that his two friends were in tow safely behind him - little did he know what fate was about to befall them.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

'Who's going to give me a big bolly for a colourful sex object?' shouted the auctioneer into the growing crowd of buyers.

With his own unique wobble, Chucker stood tall and skinny, his colour changing with each emotion he was being subjected to.

It had been only three hours and yet in that short amount of time the vom had managed to be forced by a gang of moodies to either die or go on sale as a sex object. He eventually opted for the second choice as it was the only one which meant he would still be allowed to breathe.

Many moodie females were scattered amongst the perfectly legal gathering; it was actually quite hard to tell them apart from the males. Everyone had their eyes stuck on the vom's unusual, but arousing, form. Chucker kept trying to peel the eyes off, but they were immediately slapped back like silly putty, their pupils enlarged, each vein flashing red. The many males that were showing an intense interest in him were making him start to feel sick, it was all becoming too much to take in.

'Do I hear big bollies?' directed the surprised auctioneer to the back row.

'I do!' gasped the new bidder.

This was turning out to be the biggest sale of the year! Chucker was proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that he held more sex appeal than the auctioneer had first thought possible. She was already even considering buying him for herself, but sadly she had already reached the maximum limit of twelve husbands.

Finding himself turning blue the bids increased - with yellow there was unstoppable screams of lusty want - the chunky result of green was the final straw - in her greatest sale ever the moodie auctioneer slammed her bum and then her head against a board

she was holding to end the bidding at the amazing call of, 'Many, many, many, many big bollies!'

With the new record-breaking price tag added to his name, Chucker was instantly taken behind the scenes to be made ready for delivery to the lucky, probably blind, bidder.

Without knowing the terrible fate of her scaly friend, the heroically handsome alien figure (of the much starved Dong) arrived at the pods with the needed supplies piled loosely upon a hover-trolley. 'Where the heck have the guys got to?' she thought silently to herself, but yet loud enough to be in speech marks. She had been hoping they would have met her back at their pods.

'Hey! You!' beckoned a droid about to leave the dock. 'You had better get to the second level and make it snappy!' With that said and done it fired its thrusters and shot into the air.

Having nothing to lose, Dong carried out the droid's suggestion. With each of her leg muscles expanding and contracting, she ran across to the door-flaps, leaving a cloud of green and red gravel behind her as she went. Jumping onto the already lowering floor, she waited impatiently under the watchful eyes of its compressed passengers as it descended each level.

'Holy schamoly!' Leaping from the hydraulic floor onto the second level, some twenty feet before it had even reached it, the squidge rubbed her eyes for a third time, then a fourth time, and finally a fifth time. Over to her left, whilst on the lowering floor, she had seen Scank's familiar figure being forced, with a stinging-whip, to turn round and round for the ecstatically charged bidders pressed tightly around his auction platform.

Feeling great anger at his friend's humiliation the squidge took heroic action. Like a gorilla having broken free from its cage to plough its way through a gathering of monkeys, Dong powered over to her hairy friend.

Pretty much in shock by the sudden change in events, the crowd stared after the giant who quickly took off with their second most wanted sex object. Several carelessly aimed laser beams were

desperately fired from the unruly audience as the two of them headed behind the scenes.

Seeing what had just taken place, the enraged gang, responsible for the capturing of both Chucker and Scank, grouped together and raced off after them.

'They're ... woof ... worse than the bosseyel!' panted Scank, in the process of being untied. 'They've already auctioned Chucker, as well!'

"Auctioned" you said, in the past tense; where is he now?' worried Dong.

'I'm not sure ... grrr ... he had just been sold before I was put up for bidding. That man over there might know?' Scank pointed to an old moodie sitting at a triangular desk.

Dong wasn't in the mood to be polite. Marching up behind the hunched up figure she grabbed him and lifted his body away from his swivelling seat until both his legs dangled in the air.

'You auctioned a tall skinny alien who changes colour!' the heroine demanded, raising the moodie even higher and at the same time giving him two black eyes with a left and right from her heavy-weight breasts. 'Where is he?'

'He has been sent to The Great Dung. He, he's only just been taken above to an awaiting transporter ...' Throwing him mercifully to the ground, Dong saw some of the angered gang members appearing from around a round corner.

'Death!' one of the members - dressed in nothing but blue skin - screamed, running madly towards the white giant with a circular-bladed knife held tightly in her fingerless hand which resembled something like a boxing glove.

Scurrying to one side, Scank managed to trip the aggressor over as she ran forward. With several untranslatable swear words yelled - her ugly features had their first and final meeting with Dong's clenched fist - she was out for the count.

'Quickly ... woof ... this way!' motioned Scank, beckoning the squidge across to a round hatch resembling something out of a submarine. Opening and slamming it shut behind them, from the other side, they were able to wedge it closed with one of those bars

- you know - the ones which are always conveniently left lying about especially for these life threatening escape scenes, the ones which heroes can jam against a door and still have time to make their hasty escape bla bla bla.

Hot and out of breath, the wisening two raced to the nearest hydraulic floor as it was about to rise. Scank was finding it a lot easier to run and stand in the powerful shadow of his muscled friend; the squidge seemed to have the distinct knack of making room wherever she went.

'Woof ... what if the transporter has already left?' Scank queried.

'We may lose Chucker forever,' replied Dong, looking down at the red and black mosaic lying below her feet. 'Let's hope it hasn't!'

Before the floor reached the docking level Dong was able to boost Scank up to it and quickly followed after; if they hadn't done this they would have never caught a hopeful glimpse of their skinny friend being pushed aggressively inside an oval craft.

Running as fast as they could they were still too late to stop the transporter from leaving. Lifting up in a hiss of air its glowing exterior abruptly left the dim lighting of the dock, leaving them both staring after it in dismay.

'The pods!' cried Dong, already scrambling to get to them, 'we may yet have a chance to save him.'

Making full use of his natural abilities, the leetlesheet, as if having just been challenged to a race, cheated by climbing over several short cuts to reach them first.

After programming Chucker's pod to return to Cube, with their own craft up and running, the pods rushed forward like a severe case of diarrhoea and shot away from the dock.

'Woof ... where's it gone?' shouted Scank, desperation filling his voice as he searched for a glimpse of the transporter in the green coloured sky.

'East!' answered Dong, spotting its shape slowly descending upon the slanted roof of one of the taller of the distant buildings.

Purposely keeping their distance the two pods hovered out of sight, waiting for the emergence of Chucker. With the vom in the open they would be able to dive down and rescue him more easily.

'What do you ... grrr ... think is wrong?' demanded Scank. 'Where is he?'

Dong looked the craft over again, zooming in on its location with the use of her dynamic optical head-screen. Feeling her hearts rapidly thumping through her chest, getting more and more highly pitched, she watched the nose of the transporter suddenly open down onto the assortment of rubbish which she could see littering most of the roof-top.

'There he is!' shrieked Scank, his own head-screen focusing on Chucker's sad face and bringing its image closer. 'Come on ... grrr ... let's get to him before they see us!'

Just as their pods were about to descend two balls of flying metal shot past, heading directly for the roof. 'Globular fighters?' Dong remarked, flabbergasted, literally. 'Oh my god ... they're going after Chucker! That gang of moodies must have followed us. Damn! We have to get to him before they do!'

Dong and Scank's heads quickly filled with blood as they plummeted downwards at maximum speeds in their desperate attempt to save their friend.

'GGGravpull 6414646441,' shuddered Scank, his face feeling the pressures, '6414646442 a-a-and holding...' With sheer determination they managed to hold their course for several more seconds - but this time it would not be enough - they were too late!

The slanting roof had become engulfed with roaring flames, its image, although still some distance away from them, burnt into their eyes.

The transporter hadn't known what hit it, the unexpected explosion having crunched its shape like a recycled can. The attacking circular crafts responsible for this deliberate carnage had long since vanished into the growing layers of smoke curling into the sky, the colouring of the two together making even the English channel look clear. Giving chase would be useless. Chucker had just been murdered in cold blood and there was nothing more his gob-smacked friends could do about it.

'We ... snfff ... better return to Cube,' snivelled Scank, holding back the awaiting tides of uncontrollable laughter - laughter being the way leetlesheet's come to terms with grief!

As a sign of respect the pods shot towards the right, to the left, and to the right again, until finally moving back to the left and then with immense speed disappearing into the green haze scattered above them in the gaseous ceiling Dungheap has the audacity to call its sky.

Reaching the familiar layers of dark space, the two square craft fitted themselves back inside Cube, their pilots waiting for a while before stepping out and walking hand in hand to the observation post.

'Where's Chucker?' asked Cryst, noticing his obvious absence by the distinct lack of smell. 'I thought I saw his pod dock several minutes ago?' The messiah could sense something was wrong and moved awkwardly within Robottom whom in turn moved awkwardly within a gripseat.

'He wasn't inside it!' explained Dong, erratically. 'He's just been burnt alive. Whilst his flesh was reducing to something similar to smoked ham, his eyeballs were exploding like balloons full of puss, and whilst his guts ... oh yes, his guts ...'

'Woof ... he's been murdered!' Scank quickly cut in, his laughter unbearable.

'Murder?' repeated Cryst, an abrupt fart escaping in shock.

'Gritting her teeth in anger, Dong made her way towards the optical screen as if she'd suddenly been possessed by Donkey Kong. Bouncing from one terminal to another, from one grassy platform to another, she jumped closer and closer to the screen until her face was pressed forcefully against its cool surface. Smearing squooshed nasal snot from one direction to the other, she remembered the Time Point! 'What if we were to go back in time and warn Chucker that he should have stayed on Cube?'

'Woof ... we could prevent him from being killed!' added Scank, his laughter subsiding for a moment.

'It could work,' screamed the messiah, running frantically around the post smacking her head against everything she saw, including

Scank, until finally calming down. 'But! You would only be able to go back to a recent event. The energy is running out so you don't have much time left in both meanings of the phrase. So, if you must go you'll have to leave quickly, or perhaps faster than that.'

'All right, all right,' sniffed Dong, 'before I change my mind ... Let's go, Scank! Once we get outside we will go into the Time Point in joined formation, it will be safer that way.' Scank nodded his muzzle and flapped his shaggy ears.

Having climbed inside their pods and blasted them back out into space, The Two Wise Aliens gave instructions to join up. Like two square magnets held the correct way around the pods purposely came together, the two small cubes eventually forming a solid rectangle.

Inside the now single craft Scank patted Dong on the forehead as he was now seated directly behind the squidge like a pilot in a scene from Top Gun, the central wall of the joined pods having moved to one side after they'd come together.

'Are you ready?' checked Dong with bated breath, turning her gripseat around to face the leetlesheet before punching him in the face.

'I am!' exhaled Scank. 'You take us ... hey ... grrr ... ouch ... in!'

Reflecting Dungheap's many rings upon its shiny surface, the rectangular shape of the joined pods slowly manoeuvred until it was directly underneath Cube, positioned at her innermost centre.

Waiting at the base of the time pyramid, whose magical shape the four beams of energy continued to outline in the darkness of space, Dong set a course for its time-pointed tip and shot downwards at gravpull 8697111.

'AAAbout our ... woof ... dddestination,' Scank screamed, as if on a roller-coaster ride just having gone over the edge of the highest part of its run, 'I cccan only think of ttthe space wharf?'

'MMMe too!' shuddered Dong, letting the increasing vibrations do their worst.

....suoicsnocnu meht dekconk ti ,elohw kcalb a sa tceffe emas eht fo rewop eht tlef yeht ,denibmoc dnuos dna thgil fo deeps eht naht

retsaf ,meht tih tahw wenk yeht erofeB / Before they knew what hit them, faster than the speed of light and sound combined, they felt the power of the Time Point and, yes as you should know by now, having the same effect as a black hole, it knocked them unconscious ...

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

'Ah!'

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Struggling to open their eyes, Scank and Dong looked for any signs of damage before they carried out their appointed mission.

By logging their exact coordinations into the pods' memory collective, they hoped to be able to return to the future through the same place they exited. Of course, for them to get back home they will be dependant on the energy still returning from the other side of the Time Point.

'Look ahead of us!' remarked Dong, locking her optical head-screen upon a moving distant image. 'It's Cube!'

'It,' recollected a stuttering Scank, 'it ... grrr ... looks like we are just about to give ourselves up to Commander Derder to get the supplies we needed so bad! ... '

'We don't, didn't, have to! I have the supplies I bought on Dungheap. They're in the trunk at the front of my pod.'

'Quick then ... grrr ... we must try and get to us before we surrender.'

The stressed pods began to glow at their constant full speeds. The Time Point had placed them too far away; they weren't going to catch themselves in time.

'Damn! We are giving ourselves up,' Dong cursed, squeezing her communication pen in frustration.

'It doesn't matter, we should still be able to get to us inside the space wharf and be able to warn Chucker.' As he was speaking, upon his head-screen, he noticed a freight vessel starting its steep

approach toward the base of a docking-spike. 'I've just had an idea!'

So as not to be seen the pods kept in joint formation and floated into a position just above the freighter's steel mast, avoiding its sensors and hiding the pods.

'You see ... woof ... those crates stacked on deck,' Scank pointed out, using his communication pen to place a circle around them on Dong's head-screen, 'they're big enough for us to hide in!'

'Ah yes, I'm with you,' understood Dong.

Before the wharf came close enough to be able see them visually, Scank, sealing off the middle of the joined pods, flooded his own pod with space and, in his organic spacesuit, went outside and guided Dong and the pods, like a camel to water, into one of the crates, out of sight.

Leaving the rest down to the freighter, the two stowaways relaxed as it cruised through a large opening which had appeared just below the docking-spike Cube was now joined to. Once positioned inside, the opening vanished behind them, replaced by a complex wall of molecules.

All Scank and Dong had to do now was wait inside the crate, and knowing Slinky was going to be looking through them all, they would be able to give their past selves a discreet hand written message telling themselves about Chucker's unhappy future event.

'We mustn't forget it took nearly three days for Slinky to go through ... grrr ... all these crates,' reminded Scank. 'We can eat the pods' emergency rations until then, okay?'

'Umm ... err ... ' Dong had already given in to temptation, his blubber bouncing back to full stretch with each mouthful of food.

Several days quickly passed by. Scank and Dong had eaten all their emergency rations and were now left with two containers of ale. Dong lifted one of them above her head, feeling its weight, 'We do have two lots of this ale; we could drink one and give our past selves the other?' The squidge struggled to look at her friend in the dim light of the closed crate - they had both only just left the confinement of their pods.

Scank remained mysteriously silent ... 'HICCUP!'

'You mean to tell me,' Dong shouted, guessing what Scank had done, 'that you've been drinking from the container already and you didn't even bother to tell me, cheers, thanks a bundle.' To make up for her loss, knowing what the consequences were for drinking ale in her current heroic state would be, she took a huge gulp from the container. 'To Chuscker!' he/she toasted, his/her speech already slurred, his/her body having undergone the (black and white) mad cow transformation.

'Yes ... groof ... to Chuscker!' repeated Scank.

By the third day they were still completely inebriated. Having gone to try and sleep unsuccessfully back inside the pods, Scank opened the side of his own completely down to the floor of the crate and fell out. 'Dongsy, we haved to gets the supplies we is needing in this present times ... wgrrr ... froms your pod's trunk. Dongsy?'

'Oh there was a drunken runt who dids play with its ...'

'Ah ... grrrup ... there you is,' Scank broke in upon seeing his black and white friend's form appearing in the opening of his dimly lit pod. 'Get the damn stuff out of the trunk! I thinks my broother is finally comin' ... Shhhh!' Stumbling around in the darkness, the leetlesheet placed his sucking fingertips on Dong's thingy-me-bob. 'Oops! That is nots the door handle?'

'Oi!' Dong cried, smacking Scank's hand away from where it wasn't wanted. 'Have you gots the note what we dids write ourselves?' With a drunken smile Scank shook his head from side to side several times before getting the utter poop beaten out of him for having touched the squidge's protruding thingy-me-bob without his/her prior permission.

'No ... gwoof ... Dongsy, you haves gotted the notes we dids wrote ourselves!' With his eyes having only just become accustomed to the poor visibility, in an instant of pain - caused by Dong and the following experience - the crate flooded with a wedge of light as he and Slinky opened its door at exactly the same time, him from the inner side; Slinky from the outer side.

Scank immediately saw his blue brother turning his head around in complete astonishment and of course in complete shock because he had been shocked with what had so shockingly shocked him into being shocked. Slinky was looking back across the cargo bay to where the current Scank and Dong still lay hidden and could see their heads momentarily appear and disappear from above the top of the stacked boxes.

'Have I ... grrr ... just waved?' enquired Scank, from inside the opened crate, his attempt at sounding sober appearing to work.

Hearing a loud hiccup coming from behind, Slinky looked briefly at the other shadowed companion and closed his four eyes. 'Yes, you did, but ...'

'Please, don't be alarmed, you are not seeing double, we are from the future. We have ... woof ... brought you the substances which we need in this time. For the moment this is all I can say to you, dear brother.' Scank pushed the needed supplies forward from the shadows of the crate. 'Quickly, take these to our good selves.'

'Okay,' puzzled Slinky and grabbing the supplies, hastily loaded them onto a hover-trolley. 'BBBye then,' he stuttered.

Pretending he hadn't seen what he'd just seen, he pushed the 'trolley briskly towards The Three Wise - and still waiting for him behind the boxes - Aliens.

'Bloody nice bloke is your brother,' slurred Dong. 'Now all we have to do is hope that the Time Point is still ... Wait a moment!' Stopping, he raised his voice a couple of feet and leant upon the side of the crate. 'We need to get our future selves out of this bloody mess first!'

With a continuous spray of spit, both drunks fell heavily to the floor with a bout of self-absorbing laughter. It took them a while before they attempted to, after relieving their bladders in one of the many corners, climb, fall, and climb again back inside the pods.

'Oh dear,' hiccupped Dong, trying to be serious for a moment.

'WWWWhat is it?' asked Scank, desperately trying not to burst into another fit of the giggles.

'I didn't give Slinky that note we wrote ourselves!'

Within a matter of seconds the leetlesheet sobered up pretty fast. 'You didn't ... woof ... what?' he barked.

'I forgot to give Slinky the note.'

'I heard ... grrr ... you idiot!' Scank thought their new situation quickly over in his minds. 'If we hurry we still might catch up with ourselves.' Falling back out of his pod onto something wet, warm, and smelly, he reopened the crate door.

Looking in surprise at the sudden opening of the crate, a patrol of bosseye soldiers trained their weapons on Scank's equally surprised head.

'Oh bugger!' Scank slammed the door closed, dived inside his pod, and informed Dong of their situation. 'We're right in the ... grrr ... sheet!' Several loud laser blasts confirmed this to be so.

'All right,' boasted Dong, for a brief moment the heroic side dominating his blubber, 'times to get some action!'

'Sir?' shouted one of the soldiers who'd been ordered to go on top of the crate, 'something's happening inside?' The soldier was soon proved to be right. Breaking out of their concealment the pods sent her body hurtling backwards through the air, the squad of surprised bosseye acting as her primitive brake as she landed on their held out arms.

'DESTROY THAT SPACE CRAFT!' screamed the angered sergeant in charge, leaving the things of the CeNtre to say "WHO THE HECK SAID THAT?" at the same time the sergeant lifting himself up from the floor and brushing down his dirtied uniform.

A stream of power balls quickly followed the rejoined pods throughout the bay, at one time getting so close that it looked as though the soldiers were holding a flying dragon by a leash.

A continuous line of fire soon took on the appearance of a weird sprinkler system watering the cargo bay, except this particular sprinkler was destroying rather than replenishing whatever it touched.

'Woof ... we're hit! We're hit!' cried Scank, flicking several switches up and down in reaction with the use of his long haired pointed tail. He flicked the same switches once again - they weren't about to do

any use he just liked the feel and sound they were making. 'We're hit!'

'We've only sustained minor damage. We'll be fine as long as we don't move ... Only joking ...' BOOM! 'Shits! We're hit! We're hit!'

'Grrr ... we're stuffed!' shouted Scank, trying to realign all major functions and regain control of the situation. 'I need more ale!'

Like a trapped insect the pods continued to fly in crazy circles, closely followed at all times by the increasing fire-power of the growing amount of bosseye below.

'We can't use our weapons ... woof ... we might hurt the workers?' worried Scank, thinking about his brother. 'I know it looks like a tight squeeze, but do you think we would be able to fit into the opening of that passage-way, down there?' The leetlesheet quickly transferred the image which he was talking about onto Dong's optical head-screen.

'There is only one way to find out!' replied Dong, desperate to try anything.

Leaving the power balls in a blinding flash, the pods burst forward.

'Oh ... grrr ... dooglash!' screamed Scank, his pod monitor showing their direct course set for the small opening.

Dong didn't bother scanning for measurements he/she flew directly into the passage-way and just hoped they'd fit.

There was a slight clink as the left side of the pods touched. Dong was slow to compensate and finally levelled out after rein-acting a bouncing bomb. Several unexpected wharf personnel were forced to dive into open doorways as the rectangular spacecraft continued to push through the inner passage-way like a turd exploring a rectum – *hey I didn't write this stuff ... sorry.*

'Solid barriers have just sealed the passage behind and in front of us. We have ... grrr ... no place to go!' Scank watched as the two barriers began to move inward from the front and rear.

'It looks like the bosseye want to burst these particular pods open,' observed Dong, making a joke out of the crisis as her sobered heroic form finally completely came through.

'What if we ... woof ... were to fire sequential laser squares?' suggested Scank's quivering voice, the barriers almost at the point of touching the front and back of the pods.

'Once again, my hairy friend, we can but try ... Firing now!' The long craft began to brighten as the barriers finally made contact with each glowing end of the pods. With a sudden and deafening explosion the surrounding passage-way blew outwards, dented by the released forces.

'Few ... woof ... that seems to have stopped us being crushed,' Scank sighed, 'but we're never going to reach Chucker or the Time Point ... grrr ... that's if it still even exists after the amount of time we have been on this wharf ... grrr ... in time!'

'We might just have a chance,' said Dong, doing a defiant Sherlock Holmes impersonation. 'Tell me what your head-screen shows you when you look above us?'

'I don't understand it? The metal ... woof ... it appears to be moving like waves on a rippling pond which is full of water which is rippling and wet and all that sort of thing?'

'There's only one explanation I can think of which could make this happen. The pods' blast must have weakened the compounds within the space wharf's molecules. My dear Scank, I do believe we have struck space!'

Abruptly, from directly above them, a rectangular patch of metal ripped free and floated away into a sea of glittering darkness, the pods followed.

'That's ... snfff ... that sorted out,' sniffed Scank.

'Time to find Cube!'

'Damn ... grrr ... right it is. Have you still got the note?'

'Yes,' answered Dong, 'it's held safely in-between my bum cheeks.'

Surfing across the lowest layer of the space wharf's magnetic shield, the pods could see Cube was thankfully still attached to the docking-spike like a golf ball on a tee.

From the corner of his head-screen Scank sighted something that both mystified and shocked him. 'Pugjaw!' he gasped. 'He's ... woof ... managed to break through Cube's security web.'

'She hasn't got one?'

'I know ... grrr ... but it sounded good. Anyway, that metal cretin has just got onboard her.'

Dong felt the heat of the situation getting even hotter. 'Damn! We have to reach ourselves more than ever! Who knows what that evil creature's up to now?'

'She ... woof ... is powering up,' cried Scank, 'Cube's going to attempt to make her escape. I'm trying to communicate but the wharf seems to be ... grrr ... distorting the signal.'

The pods skidded to a standstill, the surf coming to an abrupt end. Watching helplessly, and knowing the implications it would cause, Scank and Dong stared through their head-screens whilst Cube successfully blasted away from the space wharf. Seeing her disappear into an acceleration funnel they felt the last nail had sealed their - or more appropriately - Chucker's coffin.

'We have lost our last remaining chance,' screeched Dong, with growing anguish.

'Let's not torment ourselves by thinking about it now. We have to leave the wharf now, before it re-establishes its broken magnetic shield.' The leetlesheet clutched his gripseat as he was quickly pushed back with the obliged acceleration Dong had immediately initiated.

'We are ... grrr ... approaching the Time Point,' Scank observed, moving his hands up and down the communication pen to relieve his built-up stress. 'I hope it's still open for business?'

In between the clusters of stars and formations of planets the pods centred in on its recorded location.

Feeling all hope had left her body, Dong said, with a sad tone to her voice, 'Well, my scanky friend, here goes nothing ...'

Reaching the navigated co-ordinates the joined pods were sucked back inside the existing time distortion that thankfully still existed in time.

Once again both pilots lost consciousness, although this time they were quicker to regain it once they were safely on the other side of the Time Point.

Unwanted feelings started swimming round and round and round their minds like a school of piranhas eating away at their fond memories of Chucker. They now found that they couldn't quite picture his face without their own minds adding something here or there. In the end his face looked something like a demented dwarf who'd had plastic surgery to extend his nostrils. The death of anyone is bad enough, but a close friend was difficult to cope with.

'Woof ... where are we?' asked Scank, surfacing from his thoughts.

'I think we are back onboard Cube,' marvelled Dong, double checking her own statement. 'It feels as though we never left!'

Opening the pods, the glum pair of time travellers made their way to the observation post, hand in hand, to tell Cryst and Robottom the unchanged sad news.

'How long ... grrr ... were we gone?' laughed Scank, in extreme sadness.

Cryst looked at the two of them in surprise, 'But you've only just left the post!'

'Never mind,' muttered Dong, 'it doesn't matter about the endless theories and explanations. We have failed so therefore Chucker's still dead!'

Focusing on some images moving around the optical screen like goldfish around a bowl Scank felt anger pushing through his eyes, to land heavily on the tongue of his opened mouth. 'Those are the globular fighters that murdered Chucker! They are heading our way ... grrr ... at an aggressive speed.'

Dong turned abruptly. 'CUBE!' she demanded, her fingers filling with hate. 'BLAST THEM OUT OF THIS SYSTEM. DESTROY THOSE TWO MOVING GONAD IMPERSONATORS ... NOW! NOW! NOW! ... DID I MENTION, NOW!'

'No, stop!' Cryst counteracted. 'Even after everything they have done, you still cannot kill a fellow alien in cold blood, well, at least not like this ...'

'Why not? They did!'

'It's too late to fire ... snfff ... now anyway,' informed Scank, 'they're too ... grrr ... close!'

Looking up at the flashing terminals, Dong smiled. 'Cube's bringing them aboard! What a good idea! That's much better than quick death; we can torture them and then kill them. Come on, follow me, let's go and get the bastards!'

Having left the observation post behind them in a blur, feelings of their (except Cryst's) anger grew and grew with each gravitational chute they entered and left. By the last one they were ready to kill.

'Quick,' screamed Dong, 'there they are - Cube has kept them inside their crafts.'

Running towards the small globes, similar in size to their own pods, the angry gang of four skidded to a halt, leaving several marks upon the floor. Their facial expressions looked startled as one of the fighters quickly opened.

Dong and Scank were now face to face with what looked like themselves, except for a few minor differences here and there.

'Not much times to explains,' slurred the visiting DoNg his/her black and white figure shifting from side to side as if needing the toilet. Turning to face what turned out to be his/her round pod, he/she proceeded to pull out the sagging skinny figure of Chucker like a maggot from out of an apple.

'But ... but ... but it was you who flew down and killed him?' recollected the sober and more attractive Dong.

'Woofgr ... no!' stated the new ScAnk stumbling to lean heavily upon DoNg's lowered shoulder. 'We was saving him! The Great Dung he was sold to ... hiccup ... groof ... is a much hated alien; the explosion you dids saw was actually caused by the Opposers. The Opposer's sideline in terrorism has proved very profitable in recent times ... woogr ... and it was them who did plants a series of bums ... I mean ... bombs, and so it was them who dids blows up the residential roof-top Chuscker was standings on. We were flying down to saves the vom ... gr ... not kill him!'

'But how do you know all this?' asked Dong, his counterpart looking her up and down.

'I am afraids we cannots tells you where we is comed from and hows we knows all this. The universeseseses hold many secrets and so do we ... hiccup ... I can only tells you that we dids comed from

the Time Pointy thing out there ... speaking of which ... we must be goings before it's gone, I tink I'm getting a cold!

Jumping back inside their pods, or rather, falling back inside their pods, ScAnk and DoNg said their brisk farewells and left Cube quickly behind.

Not long after the two visitors had disappeared through the Time Point, as DoNg had predicted, the last trail of residual energy vanished back to where it had come from.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

'Stinkz, do you realise what I can do with this box ...'

'Ark!' corrected the scruffy alien, shifting about on its many legs.

'What?' The Empress snapped. 'Have you turned into a bird?'

'Ark,' Stinkz repeated, 'it is called the Ark! That was fantastic the way you stole it from Cube when she was docked at the space wharf ...'

The Empress struggled with her mind, trying to think if she should kill the little yuck for entertainment. With her eyes wobbling in the middle, each of the pupils fighting one another to get closer to her perfect nose, she finally said, 'I knew Pujaw would prove rewarding, thanks to him spotting the Ark I will go down in bosseye history!'

Turning, she wandered over to a blue sponge-like seat and sat down, letting her buttocks soak up its perfumed base. Stinkz, as usual, followed to grovel in her slender shadow. 'I wonder what my chief spy is up to at this very moment?' pondered The Empress, thinking aloud so as to get an answer from the small yuck breathing heavily beside her. When she didn't receive one, she peered down at the miserable git and kicked it in its precious particles.

'What was that for?' winced Stinkz, the pain rapidly growing with each breath.

'I just felt like it,' hissed The Star Empress. 'At least now you can't follow me around the place.'

Stinkz was determined to prove her wrong and, in agony, crawled after her as she marched out of the throne room.

With its pain lessening, the yuck managed to follow The Empress' tight gripping figure into a nearby lift and down several hundred decks, every soldier saluting her beautiful body as she walked elegantly past each of the male bosseye's pounding pants. After much effort had been undertaken they finally came to a halt outside of a heavily guarded doorway.

'Ah, here we are at last. We have reached my wonderful onboard prison.' The bosseye ruler smiled in gratitude as two guards allowed her entrance into the awaiting corridor positioned, as one would expect, on the other side of the door.

Hopping through the round opening, Stinkz followed The Empress' every move, walking past different smelling doors and teasing the unfortunate occupants like Commander Derder who were held captive inside them. But the yuck knew where The Empress was heading, she had promised she'd be back, and the captured Slinky knew this as much as anyone.

'Oh, Slinky, it's so good to see you again.' The Star Empress delighted in seeing his blue image cowering in a corner, bruised and battered after his many previous visits.

'I have told you, I didn't help them!' slinked Slinky, desperate to be set free.

'So why have my spies told me that you were seen talking to Cube's crew before they escaped from the space wharf?' She looked hard at his burnt face, his hair no longer covering his once shaggy muzzle. 'You lie!'

Slinky winced as his interrogator slowly undid her top. Reaching down inside, she pulled out her four erect pets and began playing with them in a teasing manner.

Bouncing within her gentle grip, these pets lived around her and protected her. The Empress loved the feel of their webbed feet and scaled bodies as they tended to run all over, and sometimes within, her bare skin. Holding them up above her head, letting their droppings roll down her long white hair, Slinky began laughing, in terror! 'Tell me what you know!' she demanded, not knowing the leetlesheet was Scank's brother.

Stinkz sniggered from within the shadows; it knew its mistress was going to kill the blue alien whatever the outcome.

'I don't know anything!' Slinky repeated with leetlesheet stubbornness and pride. These were to be his last words.

Throwing her pets to the floor, they scurried across to Slinky's hunched-up form and immediately got to work. Screams quickly filled the air whilst his weakened body was subjected to their unbearable tickling. Eventually his hearts couldn't cope under the continuous strain and he lay dead, his body, the remnants of his life, lay twitching to the immense delight of the spectators.

'Excellent,' screeched Stinkz, with climactic excitement.

Seeing The Empress bending over, each of her babies quickly stopped molesting Slinky's dead body, stood erect, and leapt back up her slightly raised dress. 'Good to have you back,' groaned The Empress, feeling their bodies close to her own. 'I suppose it's time for me to return to the home world,' she proudly stated. 'I will send word of the box ... Ark. By revealing it to my people I shall become even more of a living legend. Cube will be nothing more than a gravy block ready to crumble within my powerful grasp.' She turned to Stinkz who was licking Slinky's blood-stained lips. 'Come, we must leave before he's thrown into outer space.'

'Can I stay outside the door and watch through the viewer?' pleaded the yuck.

'Very well,' conceded The Empress, knowing that it would mean she would have to walk back alone to the throne room.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

'You have been lucky!' boomed the Devil, trying to give a reason for his confused guest's current situation. 'You have been chossssen to be one of our ... my, persssoal sssspiesss - ssssecret agentssss ... oh what hasssn't got an ssss in ... sssslavesss - oh bollockssss! In fact, I, we, want you to be one of the highest ranked, to prove thissss I, we have changed your name. Only one before you hassss ever achieved two capitalssss in hisss name sssso quickly, only one! The higher up the rankssss you climb the more capital lettersss you will

achieve, before long you could be known assss "PUGJAW: THE IMMORTAL!"

PugJaw shook his head several times as if it had just been drenched with a bucket of ice-cold oil. The dog-like creature couldn't believe what he was hearing through his mind, one moment he had remembered being in the air, the next he was falling to the floor of the docking section and the next ... well, he was here, wherever "here" was. 'Where this I be?' he asked the invisible voice in his malfunctioning accent.

'The Edge!' came the proud answer.

'Be I alive, or be I dead?'

'Neither!'

With his mind still struggling to understand where he was, PugJaw felt himself once again being left in his own desired surroundings until the voice of the Devil returned trying to offer, yet another, long winded explanation.

'You were brought here becausssse you were not ssssupposed to have died sssso ssssoon, and I, we knew thissss when I, we felt you enter the Edge, and sssso therefore you became mine, ourssss!' PugJaw continued to look defiant as a chorus of laughter swarmed around his metal ears like an angry hive of wasps. 'Don't worry,' hissed the Devil, 'you will be allowed to live again amongsssst the mortalssss, but! But only assss my, our sssslave and sssspy - agent - yessss - agent!'

PugJaw felt weirdly relieved upon hearing the Devil's last comment, he hadn't wanted to question the deep feeling of evil any further. 'I think I be understandin' yourselves, yourself? So when do I be leavin'an'wher' do I be goin'?'

'I'm, we're glad that you have come to termssss with your new posssssition and that you are eager to carry out an assssssssignment, but before I, we ssssend you gallivanting acrossssssss the galaxiessss, there issss ssssomething in my, our contract which I, we musssst notify you of. I, we will sssskip mosssst of the jargon and come sssstraight to the lasssst few ssssentencessss, which, if you're interessssted, go ssssomething like thissss ... 'PugJaw had no choice but to listen and feel what the Devil had to say.

' ... Bla bla bla ... You sssshall know what I, we want you to know! Bla bla bla ... Your mind belongssss to me, ussss, and that'ssss about all of it really. Oh, yessss, of coursssse, I, we nearly forgot; regarding your next misssssssion, assssssssignment - job, I'll, we'll be ssssending you back to pretend to work for that bosssssssseye empressssssss with the nice titsss.' The Devil paused in admiration, he liked what he'd heard about The Star Empress from his many secret agents based in the mortal world. 'SSSShe hassss the Ark and I, we want it! I, we think the besssst time for you to carry out thisss misssssssion, assssssssignmet - job, would be ssssometime around about - NOW!'

Suddenly the vision in front of PugJaw changed, revealing a half remaining galactic destroyer instead of the void of floating emotions he had become used to inside the Edge. This, he presumed, meant that he was now back in mortal space...

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Dungheap and its problems were three days gone, Cube and her crew were heading north-west at gravpull 894618452 in an effort to reach the central part of their own galaxy.

Positioned at the very centre is where the home world of the bossey spins. It spins under the strong influences of the two small suns surrounding it - these having the power of making you cross your eyes if looked at long enough; as do the two small moons and two north stars...

'We ... grrr ... definitely saw PugJaw entering Cube...'

'Say that again!' interrupted Chucker.

'That again!'

'No!'

'PugJaw!' repeated Scank.

'Yes! It sounds different? Dong, you say it!'

'It!'

'No!' snapped Chucker. 'Say PugJaw ... There, did you notice the difference?'

'Something has happened, I can feel it,' stated Cryst, her voice distant as she repeated the name over and over again in her mind.

'So, anyway, as you were saying,' reminded Dong.

'Oh ... grrr ... yes, I was saying that we definitely saw PugJaw entering Cube,' repeated Scank for a second time, going over in detail what he and Dong had witnessed on the other side of the Time Point. 'But the fact remains that he's not still onboard. We've checked everywhere.'

'If you are right about what you witnessed,' summed up Cryst, 'it seems to me that we should soon be on course to retrieving the Ark. If PugJaw's not still onboard then he must have returned to report to The Empress, perhaps along with the Ark?'

'Or perhaps,' added Scank, 'perhaps ... grrr ... The Star Empress found it and took it from Cube when she was connected to the space wharf? Which reminds me, we need to step up security a little if we are to have future peace of minds. I'll ask the scientific robots to create a security web.'

'I agree,' replied Dong, 'I'll set about writing a computer program for the sci-robots to develop something.'

'Good idea!'

'So, really, either way we think about all this, The Star Empress is who we have to aim to find.'

Chucker, still feeling a little queasy after his one minute celebration party which his companions had held in honour of his unexpected resurrection, thought about the stolen Ark and the consequences before asking the messiah, 'How much time do we have?'

'I can't say. We just have to hope the Ark is not opened - or worse still - found by the Devil. It has no Guardian ... because I was that Guardian ... and I'm ...' The messiah burst into tears, crying a shower of tiny crystals. 'With nobody guarding it nothing can stop its power from overspilling!'

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Leaving the sight and feelings of PugJaw, the Devil turned his attention towards Cube and what she and her crew were up to. He knew he would have to delay them somehow, otherwise they could ruin his plans and that would really tick him off something chronic.

He had already come up with an idea and it was about time he put it into action ...

Cube was currently hurtling through space at her maximum speed, she was making good time, it wouldn't be long before she could possibly open up an acceleration funnel and reach the border of the bosseye home world.

'Holding gravpull ... 9999999999.9 ... gravpull 10000000000 reached,' Chucker informed the others, his middle half turning yellow, his two feet a contrasting red.

'We have got to get there as soon as possible!' declared the messiah, obviously still worried about the Ark and its unguarded powers.

'Can ... grrr ... we open an acceleration funnel ... ahhh ... now?' suggested Scank, brushing a blade of grass away from his nostrils before sneezing several times in succession.

'We can't,' explained Dong, 'a freak storm appears to have pushed us too close, it wouldn't be wise!' All of The Three Wise Aliens quickly raised their arms forward and wriggled their fingers upon hearing the word "wise"...

CRASHING SOUND!

AN EVEN BIGGER CRASHING SOUND!!

'What in the CeNtre's name was that?' screamed Chucker, the post's internal lighting fading to a dim haze.

FWERP! FWERP! FWERP! ... came the sound from the communication light which had started to flash. 'I see you remembered to turn the siren back on,' said Cryst, looking at Scank, raising Robottom away from the grassy floor which now had skid marks cut into it.

After pressing the correct sequence of buttons, an angry voice of somebody angry at being angered, belched out from all the surrounding speakers. 'Boy ... hhhaw ... are you lot in trouble now! You've definitely crashed into the wrong alien this time. I'll have you in universal court before you know what hit you ... hhhaw ... or in this case after you know what hit you.' Pausing to breathe heavily, the mysterious speaker caused Cube's internal speakers to crackle.

'Who are you?' demanded Dong, completely clueless. 'What are you talking about? Universal court?'

'Space-rage ... hhhaw ... is it? Well two can play at that game!' 'What?'

'Space-rage! I've seen it ... hhhaw ... all before. I've been flying around the universes before you were even born. You may have heard of my name, it's Fader - DaFt Fader, and I'll have you know I can crush you like an empty can. I used to be an Imperial Dark Lord ... hhhaw ... well I suppose I still am, but now I also sell space insurance ... to get to the point I'm trying to make ... you were speeding! That means you were in the wrong and I can claim from your insurers!' Gasping, he paused to breathe, again deeply, as if using an asthma inhaler. 'I've only just borrowed this fighter craft from my storm pooper friends because mine broke down. What ... hhhaw ... am I going to tell them when I get back ...

'Oh well, I didn't really like flying it anyway because until one reaches light speed one doesn't realise it ... hhhaw ... uses a two-handed bloody gearing system. This caused me a few problems because one of my hands was cut off in a sabre fight and ... hhhaw ... well, the rest is pure history. I was attempting to change gear when your sodding spaceship came out of nowhere and hit me. So I'm suing you for negligence and dangerous driving, and I bet you don't have any space insurance?'

'Well ... er ... no! But - '

'No buts ... hhhaw ... that's all I ever hear from you boy racers and you obviously are boy racers - just look at your vessel's shape; one big furry dice if you ask me.'

'What are we going to do?' asked Chucker, whispering to the others. 'I didn't see any fighter craft? It must have appeared out of nowhere?' He didn't realise how right he was with his last comment.

'He won't do anything if we explain the situation,' remarked Cryst, slightly worried that the alien might have a justified case against them.

Taking some time to think it over, the wise aliens, and their two legged messiah, paced about the post until the internal lighting was fully restored.

Cube was still continuing at gravpull 10000000000, the crashing sound hadn't stopped her from decreasing her speed; she still had instructions to get to the bosseye home world.

'Look ... hhhaw ... if you don't decrease your speed this instance I'll, I'll lift you all off your feet and suffocate you by squeezing your throats! But before I do ... hhhaw ... would you be so kind as to peel my fighter away from your north side ... hhhaw ... now!'

'We better do as he says,' gulped Chucker, turning completely yellow.

'If we cut our speed now we'll not reach the Toesuck System for another two hours! It could result in the destruction of our galaxy! Everything we know could be destroyed in a shower of intense pain ...' Cryst stopped herself short of the full explanation, thinking over everything she'd just said. 'But then again,' she smiled, 'we must help our fellow alien in times of trouble. He does seem rather distraught.'

With a lot of moans and groans Cube slowed to a standstill and within seconds of having stopped, Dong, Cryst - and her lower metal half - and not forgetting Scank and Chucker, each took four pods outside and started to chisel DaFt Fader's squooshed spacecraft away from Cube's dented bodywork which after a while repaired itself.

Dragging the compressed fighter inside the docking section, Cube's crew had to then use a can-opening device to be able to release the trapped pilot.

With the last piece of metal severed from the craft, the Dark Lord stepped out onto the docking section's glowing floor, which seemed to dim in brightness upon the spot where he stood. At his full height he stood defiantly still, making Chucker feel even more uneasy, especially as the mask which covered his face made his eyes glint in a black evil shine. 'I need you to take me ... hhhaw ... immediately to the Dagobah System. I am late for my Jetty class! I've been learning to build them in outer space with the help of a small green alien and his one-eyed snake. I am one of ... hhhaw ... his most accomplished Jetty Knights would you believe.'

'Excuse us for a minute or two,' Chucker politely interrupted, coughing, dragging his companions discreetly to one side. 'We

cannot waste time taking him to the Dagobah System! We'll just have to knock him out, or something?' The group huddled closer together, for a moment turning their gazes upon the menacing figure tapping his foot impatiently upon the floor.

'How would we be able to knock him out?' asked Dong, swallowing the last of his sludge bar. 'My other half won't be able to merge for at least another hour, besides, this bloke has the "Force" on his side!'

'What "Force"?'

'The "Insurance Force" of course!'

'Sorry to have kept you waiting,' said Chucker, the group dispersing. 'I'm afraid we have discussed your request and we have decided we will not be able to take you to the Dagobah System. We do have our reasons ...'

'Reasons!' screamed DaFt Fader. 'I'll give you reasons!' Raising his only hand he began to lift all four crew off their dangling feet without so much as touching them.

'Dooo something,' gurgled Chucker, looking to the messiah who was also starting to choke.

'I'm sorry but I caaan't hurrrt my fellow aliennn.'

'Scank,' gasped Dong, lifting his blubbery arm to draw the leetlesheet's attention, 'the pppressure valve, behinddd you! The pressure vvvalve!'

After a painful thirty seconds had passed, Scank eventually realised what the squidge had been trying to say. Turning around in the air, he managed to reach a large round tap and turned it.

Shining with evil, like a black mirrored skull, DaFt Fader's masked face turned its gaze to see what the hairy alien was up to. Thankfully he was too late.

Forcing open the pressure valve Scank desperately released a jet of burning steam all over the darkly clad evil doer. Falling heavily to the floor, the desperate crew quickly made use of their current freedom. 'Run!' shouted Dong, already halfway to leaving the section.

Recovering himself DaFt Fader pulled out his favourite weapon ... *make that second favourite* ... from his shiny trousers. Within less

than a second a large glowing rod had erected itself into the air - its red glow - glowing red. 'Death!' he breathed, walking slightly off balance as he gave chase to the fast, frightened four fleeing friends.

'Where do we go?' asked Chucker, scared almost into mustard coloured shadings.

'We need ... grrr ... something to defend ourselves with,' said Scank. 'We'll go to the safety of the observation post and get some cube blasters.' The other three quickly followed his lead as he dived head first into a ladder chute.

Nearly reaching the end of the ladder chute, Dong, being last, caught a glimpse of the dark pursuer beneath him in the chute as he continued to climb. It suddenly felt as though his feet were dangling in a pool of Tovarian sharks ready at any moment to be grabbed helplessly from below and dragged downwards to their inevitable death.

'Hurry! Hurry!' cackled the mustard coloured vom as he saw DaFt Fader's hand reach up to grab one of Dong's legs. Luckily for Dong the Dark Lord had forgotten he only had one hand and so fell helplessly downwards, his light sabre cutting away parts of the ladder as he continued to fall in a spiral motion.

Upon reaching the solid floor of the observation post, wishing they had used the gravitational chutes in their escape, Dong pushed Robottom and Cryst out of the way. Turning back to the chute he had just come through, he proceeded to press four digits on a brightly lit keypad. Immediately after the fourth digit had been pressed, every chute in the observation section securely sealed safely shut.

'Woof ... good idea,' noted Scank, realising that the squidge had used the four-digit-lock-out-code which is more appropriately known as the lock-out code with four digits.

Grabbing an arm full of cube blasters Chucker handed them out to his companions, except of course to Cryst who didn't want to be seen dead with one; only by one it would appear.

'CUBE, RESUME GRAVPULL 873465827 TOWARDS THE TOESUCK SYSTEM.' Dong looked into the others frightened eyes. 'We should

be safe now. That weirdo won't be able to get to us with all the entrances sealed off ...'

'That's where ... hhhaw ... you are wrong!' DaFt Fader snorted, emerging through the solid floor.

'Ah?' observed Chucker. 'So that's why you are called "Fader" - because you can fade through solid matter!'

'It has ... hhhaw ... been fun,' he breathed, taking no notice, 'but now you really all have to - die!' Sounding like an over enthusiastic pervert, DaFt Fader's heavy breathing increased with each step he made towards them.

'I like ... woof ... your black shiny boots!' exclaimed Scank, trying to calm things down a little.

Dong raised his cube blaster to fire it in an attempt to stop the Dark Lord from advancing any closer. With immense pain shooting through his arm the blaster was immediately thrown, along with him and the others, against some slit panelling.

'Heaven help us!' yelled Chucker, turning away from the dark face, feeling his honky breath coming closer.

Shoving his glowing rod back inside his pants, DaFt Fader began to raise his hand in a threatening manner.

'Woof ... make a dash for it!' barked Scank, jumping to the above circuitry and sticking to it.

Everyone, apart from Chucker, dashed in different directions, the vom's wobbling figure staying glued to the spot, he had never been any good at hide and seek - unfortunately this time his life was at stake.

Seeing his trapped prey frozen in front of him, DaFt Fader sprinted to grab the pathetic vom. But as he hurtled towards Chucker with gathering speed, he was suddenly hit by the full effects of a galactic shock wave which lashed against Cube in a spray of scattering smells.

With the shuddering onslaught of what appeared to be some type of storm continuing to pour over Cube's body and into the surrounding distances, DaFt Fader completely lost his balance and was propelled through the air to quickly fade, to everyone's relief, through each and every wall of each and every section.

'Quick ... woof ... the optical screen!' pointed out Scank, dangling from its middle. Everyone, except again for Chucker who was more concerned with getting on a toilet on time, came running to see.

The remaining three looked at the screen, all eyes fixed upon the wriggling dark form being carried off on the ever spreading shock waves. 'What a ... snfff ... horrific way to die!' sniffed Scank. 'All those waves and ... grrr ... no board to ride them with!'

Before they could rejoice at their narrow escape from death, another tremble, of equal severity, threw them to the floor like sacks of dirt.

Cube eventually stabilised but not after several terrifying minutes had gone by (this time on surfboards).

Dong was the first to pick himself up. Limping across to a chair which had some sort of helmet dangling above it, the squidge sat down (the helmet lowering instantly to cover his head) and began to search for information as to what was causing the outside commotion.

'What does your analysis tell you ... grrr ... Dong?' asked Scank, dropping to the floor.

'I will be able to tell you that!' interrupted Cryst, coming across on Robottom to stand beside the two of them. 'The Ark has been opened. The destruction I warned you about has begun.' The messiah stood still throughout the following eerie silence; apart from the noises made by the background sounds of Chucker flushing the toilet. 'CUBE, PLEASE DROP YOUR SPEED TO GRAVPULL 1 AND KEEP CURRENT NAVIGATORY DESTINATION.' Looking at the others, the helmet having lifted away from Dong's head, she added, 'I have a bad feeling there's more to this than I anticipate.'

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

The Empress had docked upon her home soil to be greeted by welcoming jeers. No sooner had she stepped off her galactic destroyer, planned parades were led through endless streets, and then as a sign of how big an event it was, endless streets were led

back through the planned parades, the obvious presence of the golden box finally bringing the doubting whispers to an end.

The bosseye population had been forewarned of the Ark's arrival, but many had disbelieved what they'd been told. The Empress had a way of exaggerating and so there were a lot of officials who'd felt sceptical as to whether or not she had been telling the truth. But after seeing the holy box paraded through the streets in full public view, the nation rejoiced and immediately set to work on the celebrations which would come before its grand opening.

Several days of preparation passed by until the eventful day had finally arrived. The Ark was to be opened publicly by The Star Empress in front of the entire bosseye population. No other species had been allowed to remain inside or on the outside surface of the home world. Only if you were a bosseye were you to have been permitted to observe the ceremony. Even Stinkz, having been ordered rather forcefully, had to wait inside the repaired destroyer until the celebrations had finished.

From all over the galaxies more and more bosseye flew back to the Toesuck System. The big event played host to more aliens than an annual Star Trek convention. There'd been endless rows of spectators sitting on spectators who had sat on the endless rows first (there had been a lot of bosseye to fit in). Positioned in a place of honour The Empress' best generals and worst generals (those of which were dead, having been dug up and brought along in their coffins) stood (or in the latter cases laid) by her side ready for the experience of their lifetime (or indeed deathtime).

Having fallen silent in anticipation, the whole planet watched and waited as The Empress placed her hands upon the lid of the Ark. Several generals moved from their ranks (not the dead ones I hasten to add) when they saw her struggle to move it, but when a few of them had been disintegrated, the rest stayed where they were. The Star Empress had wanted to open the Ark all by herself so she alone would be the one to go down in bosseye history.

Several hours passed tediously by. A few generals had fainted and the crowds had half fallen asleep, when suddenly, The Star Empress had been able to move the golden lid to one side, its

smooth structure quickly sliding open with a forbidding sound ... FORBIDDING SOUND! ... and, in an instant, everyone had become alert with the excitement which the forbidding sound had given them.

From the high position where the Ark had been placed, its heavy lid toppled onto the ground, and the moment it touched, every single bosseye had felt their hearts stop. The Empress, at that initial time being the only one who was able to see inside the Ark, uncrossed her eyes, her stunned facial expression televised for all to see.

With its power unleashed to her uncrossed eyes, The Star Empress was abruptly thrown into the row of soldiers standing several metres below. One by one they fell like a line of dominoes whilst from out of the Ark a wave of lights swirled around in the reddened sky above.

With a terrifying sound ... TERRIFYING SOUND! ... the lights soon turned into creatures. Acting like a load of drunken genies having just been released from their tormented years of captivity, the entities started to sing.

As they continued to spurt out from the Ark like a gusher of untamed oil, sounds of screams and farts ... SCREAMS AND FARTS! ... rose from around the bosseye home world as the evil set about its destruction.

With something similar to a nuclear detonation, the planet was levelled to the ground. Where there had stood generations of architecture there now lay rubble, and eventually even the rubble began to bubble and disperse under the intense powers that persisted to rape the planet.

Storms of laughter were vomited from the entities as they danced through the destructive hours. Finally, when the Edge had collected every soul, they turned on the planet itself, its apocalypse having sent shock waves rippling out into the blinking stars...

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

'I've located a small unidentified object floating due east,' notified Chucker. 'Should we see what it is, or should we carry on to the bosseye home world?'

'We must stop,' said Cryst, an angelic tone ringing around her voice, 'it could be somebody, or something, in need of our help!'

Dong stared at the messiah and whilst smirking, said, 'Then again, it might not!'

'CUBE?' she responded by running to the nearest keyboard. *'PLEASE, IN THE NAME OF GOD, GO EAST!'*

Scank quickly added, *'DO AS SHE SAYS, CUBE,'* typing his command with the use of the bracelet gadget-type-thing he had just placed on his arm. He quickly motioned for Chucker and Dong to sit in a gripseat.

Carrying out the request, to the letter, Cube jerked from side to side, up and down, until she was in visual sight of the small object.

'What the blazes just went wrong with Cube's navigation?' gasped Cryst, her face indented into some cracked circuit boards. The optical screen responded by displaying a trail of cosmicdust mites (with the use of Cube's particle refractor) mapping out the bumpy route they had just taken. Catching a distant sun's glare the outline of the word "GOD" was lit up for all to see clearly.

'Sometimes ... grrr ... you have to be careful how you order Cube to do something,' Scank chuckled from the comfort of his gripseat.

'PugJaw!' shouted Dong, his voice filling with a mixture of surprise and hate as his minds fought for the reasons as to why the metal creature should be found floating aimlessly around this particular quadrant of space. Keeping his enlarged eyeballs focused upon the image, he used the optical controls to zoom in on the sighting.

'It looks like he's ... grrr ... run out of fuel,' Scank noted, astutely, noticing the creature's distinct lack of movement.

'The question is,' added Chucker, 'he's dangerously devious, do we bring him back onboard?'

Dong tapped his hands on the edge of a pink gripseat and contemplated the answer.

'We haven't much time,' reminded Cryst, worrying. 'He may be evil, and would probably rip your throat out if given the chance, but

I say we bring him into the warmth and loving safety of Cube.'

Before anyone could react she initiated a grappling light and with the added touch of the grip ray, pulled the creature aboard. By the time she turned around for the others' reactions she found they had all left the post. Knowing where they had run to she leapt into a gravitational chute and headed for one of the docking cubicles.

'He's been deactivated,' sighed Dong, looking down at the motionless metal spy.

'I suggest before we ... grrr ... activate and question him we secure him to that hover-trolley. Also,' Scank added, noticing something useful, 'we should use the straps around those crates and tie him so that he can't move his limbs. We don't want him changing into a shuttle ... grrr ... or anything else we don't know about ... woof ... whilst we're questioning him.'

'What about his sharp jaws?' Chucker was quick to point out.

'Put this protective mask on him,' offered Dong, picking it up from where it had been hanging around a couple of nearby fire extinguishers.

'What are you doing to him?' gasped Cryst, in usual pity as she ran to join them.

'It's for our ... grrr ... safety!' snapped Scank, really getting fed up with her religious goodness. 'You know very well he can be quite a dangerous handful.'

'Still, all the same, being the messiah and all I would prefer him to be set free to wander around the place.'

Dong quickly intervened, 'Have you ever been headbutted?'

'No,' answered Cryst, innocently, 'why?'

HEADBUTT! ... CRACK!

'Ouch!' yipped the messiah, feeling the force of Dong's head rebounding off her own.

'He stays tied up or we send him back out into space?'

'Okay,' she relented, 'you win.'

Double checking the robotic creature was firmly secured, Chucker reactivated his operational circuitry. 'That should do it,' he sighed, stepping a safe distance away.

From each side of his enormous jaws PugJaw's eyes began to flicker into operation. 'You lot!' he yelled, immediately struggling to break free from his restraints once he realised where he was. The mask they had placed over the front of his face seemed only to add to his demonic appearance, making his voice sound distant and his face less readable - if that was at all possible.

'Why were you deactivated?' said Dong, starting the interrogation.

'Thee Star Empress were deeply disappointed with the lack of information I'ad concernin' this'ere square shaped tub of yours.' Cube shook a little as if in acknowledgement. 'She, and the small shite that be walkin'in'er shadow most of thee time, cast me out into space to be driftin' forever, but it be lookin' like she failed thanks to your kindness.' Dong grimaced at him, Cryst smiled.

'You say ... grrr ... you didn't have enough information on Cube ... so you did come onboard!' said Scank, him and Dong knowing this to be true.

PugJaw looked startled. 'How did you be knowin' tha'...'

'Never mind,' interrupted Dong, 'we just do.'

'Okay, you've got me, I did com'aboard.'

'Do you know ... grrr ... where the Ark is?' Scank persisted, desperate to get to the bottom of the riddle concerning the space wharf.

'Thee Empress took it from you when you was on the dockin'-spike. She'as it.'

Even with all this easy cooperation PugJaw was definitely hiding something from the crew and they, except for the happy-clappy messiah, could sense it.

Dong decided it best to ask more questions. 'We entered a black hole and yet from the time we left the space wharf we never logged anyone leaving Cube. So how did you?' In answer to the squidge's clever question PugJaw reacted violently, it was as though the Devil had possessed his body, as a matter of fact he probably had, but the crew wouldn't have known that.

After several minutes of the same set of disturbing movements, the four wide-eyed spectators seriously started to worry about their prisoner's mental health. Stopping himself from his fit, PugJaw

continued to look at each of the crew one at a time, and seeing he had their attention he proceeded to make a sucking sound from in-between his metal lips with the use of his metal tongue. The four quivered as thoughts of him eating their flesh suddenly raced through their minds. After his vacuum impression was over, he flickered his eyes shut and remained quiet.

'Scank?' asked Dong, feeling lazy. 'Can you take this metal git to a containment cubicle, a con-cubicle, and have him contained. We'll leave him there till we have further need of him. I think he's had enough for the moment.'

Grabbing hold of the hover-trolley PugJaw was still tied to, remembering his last experience of pushing one with much distress, the leetlesheet obliged his friend by hovering it out of the docking cubicle.

On his short journey to the containment section, a section only recently designed to suit the more aggressive species Cube encounters, Scank felt several more of his own questions needed to be answered. 'You seem more aggressive ... grrr ... if that's possible, from when we last met. Why is this? Is it something to do with your ... woof ... halitosis?'

PugJaw wriggled violently but remained silent. If only he could get free he would wipe the smile off their faces, preferably with the use of his large teeth and a nice glass of Chianti.

'I know you hate us and you don't want to talk, but can I just ask you one last thing, and then I'll promise to leave you alone?' PugJaw looked at the brown shaggy alien for a long while through his blood-red eyes and slowly nodded. 'Why are you such an ugly bastard?'

Feeling rather content with his last question and the spasmodic reaction it got, Scank pushed his captive forwards, and after negotiating several gravitational tunnels which proved a lot easier to hover the fairly wide trolley through, made his way along one of Cube's slanting corridors until reaching a plaque which had "Containment Section" written on it in neat lettering, a plaque which could translate its meaning to any species that looked at it.

'Woof ... here we are,' Scank joyfully informed his metal prisoner, approaching an opening bubble-door, a door constructed from an impenetrable see-through blob. 'This is your con-cubicle.'

Pushing PugJaw inside, they both looked around its empty layout, the floor, walls, and the ceiling, consisting of the same substance as the door. 'Perfect!' exclaimed Scank, safe in knowing that there was nothing in the cubicle which PugJaw could use to escape.

With his thoughts returning to the plight of the Ark the leetlesheet knew he must hurry up and meet the others back on the observation post. Unfortunately, upon turning to leave the con-cubicle, he absent mindedly dropped his Psychopath's Escape Kit - the kit he'd received in his Virtual E-mail not all that long ago - consisting of a laser drill, chain saw and many other useful and nasty objects. For some reason when it had been delivered, he hadn't noticed the postal code SIX SIX SIX printed on the back of it.

As the heavy kit bounced clumsily upon the bubbled floor, PugJaw's eyes shot open. Rocking the trolley back and forth, he was quickly able to jerk forwards; this motion sending him face-first on top of the fallen objects. With the same action an Italian uses to suck up his Mama's home made spaghetti, the kit quickly disappeared through the hole in his mask.

Hearing the disturbance behind him Scank quickly spun around to see what the prisoner was up to. 'You ... woof ... won't be able to escape by throwing yourself to the floor,' he chuckled, a long and nervous chuckle, not realising what had just taken place. Lifting PugJaw quickly back into a hovering position, he said his goodbyes and skipped off down the corridor doing his end of show Morcambe and Wise impersonation; a rather good one too.

With the containment section fading from his minds, Scank scurried towards the observation post, descending and climbing ladder chute after ladder chute until eventually popping out onto a welcoming part of its green coloured floor.

'Is that metal mongrel secure?' worried Dong. 'I still don't trust him!'

'But you should!' joined Cryst, desperate once again to stick her jagged edges in where they weren't wanted. 'It is this lack of trust which makes this galaxy so full of evil.'

Dong turned to Chucker who was promptly being sick and, for the first time in a long while, accompanied him in the vom national anthem. 'Ergh eerghee ... Ergh eerghee ...'

'Anyway,' continued Scank, returning to Dong's understandable enquiry, 'PugJaw ... grrr ... has no way of escaping, so don't let it worry you. The con-cubicle I locked him in is completely secure.' Noticing something odd, the leetlesheet quickly clambered around the base of the optical screen like a hamster around an exercise wheel with its eyeballs starting to burst. '*CUBE INITIALISE BLOCKING,*' he typed into his bracelet, '*IMMEDIATELY, WITHOUT QUESTIONING ME, NOW, THIS MOMENT WOULD BE NICE, HURRY!*' ... FART!

Hearing the different tone in Scank's voice, Chucker, Dong, and the messiah stopped what they were doing, which once again was absolutely nothing, and joined the leetlesheet where he had come to a halt in the central part of the circle of gripseats, directly underneath the optical screen. As the circle of seats moved upward to taste the rainbow, making a lovely belching sound, Cube shuddered.

'It looks like some sort of debris?' Chucker remarked, seeing the advancing cloud of mixed particles behaving like a swarm of hungry locusts.

Dong instantly took a closer look with a pair of examination spectacles he had just pulled from out of a Jim'll Fix it-type side-drawer positioned inside one of the gripseats. 'Parts of the cloud appear to be from a large vessel, but I can't make out what category it is, or was. I suppose it would be safe to presume it was, previously, fairly large and maybe even larger, perhaps with some colourful sticky bits on it. Some of the waste appears to be made up of dirt particles.' The squidge pointed to the small specks, after taking off the spectacles, which were now showering upon Cube's sides along with the remains of what once had been a small alien - more than likely from the yuck species. It wasn't long before the

crew could hear a distant rumbling from where they stood deep inside the observation section.

A strip of light suddenly flashed on the panelling to the right of the four, followed closely by a high pitched beeping. HIGH PITCHED BEEPING! HIGH PITCHED BEEPING!

'According to Cube we have just crossed the border line of the Toesuck System.' Chucker gulped a deep and guppy kind of gulp. 'This is ... was ... where the bosseye home world should be!'

'The bosseye home world, but how could it ...'

'The Ark,' reminded Cryst, her voice low and solemn, 'the Ark holds more power than you can imagine. You can now see what destruction it can wreak if it's abused. We must find it quickly. The Devil will be well aware of its location and will have sent one of his best secret agents to retrieve it.'

After the circle had lowered back down from tasting the rainbow, Chucker wobbled to the far reaches of the post. 'I'll scan the system for any emanating traces it may have left.'

'It could have been blasted light years away by its own power,' noted Dong, seeing more sign of clouds full of rubble and dirt floating ominously towards them.

'We still need to try,' persisted Chucker. 'We must never give up hope, never, we were meant to succeed; we were meant to live amongst the flowers and trees and little bumble bees!'

'Chocolate ... grrr ... on the paper frogs don't cry!'

'Okay! That's enough!' shouted Dong, bringing Scank and Chucker's weird conversation to a necessary halt. 'That's enough craziness for today; let's just get on with what we do best, which as we all know is mostly nothing. But before we do, eggs sitting on a wing talking what apples fly around the dog basket in which heaven flowers and trees and little bumble bees! You said black?'

Inserting Robotom into an interface Cryst ignored the others and searched for any additional clues Cube may have to offer. Meanwhile, Scank and Dong had folded their arms and assumed a concerned stance beneath the optical screen, now and again pretending to search through the layers of oncoming destruction floating outside in space.

'Arrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrgh!' screamed Dong, jumping away from the west side of the screen. He was certain he had seen something moving from within the gathering haze, it had been ghastly whatever it was.

'Woof ... what is it?' demanded Scank, worried by the squidge's overdone reaction.

'Oh nothing,' Dong replied, shaking his head, trying to tell himself he'd been imagining things.

'Arrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrgh!' repeated Scank, before leaping up to the central part of the domed screen. He too had just caught a glimpse of something horrific. 'There is definitely something out there!'

Cryst ejaculated what information Robottom had collected back inside the interface and came sprinting over to investigate the situation further. 'Arrgh!' she screamed, not as scared as Scank. 'It's an entity, I think? I can't be sure!'

Making all three of them jump, especially Scank who found himself dangling beneath the middle of a large eyeball belonging to a grotesque face which briefly appeared and disappeared upon the optical screen, they all began to scream. 'Arrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrgh!'

'Now I'm sure! No I'm sure!' concluded Cryst as Robottom quickly dispersed of a long and underpant-staining odour.

Cube soon began shaking under the pressures the entity was starting to emit as it held her firmly against its rippled skin which I think, especially for the younger readers, is best described as simply that.

'Cube, evasive action!' bellowed Dong, switching to voice activation, seeing the entity placing its grotesque tongue against her trembling surface - mechanical rape not being all that uncommon to these creatures of evil!

Shooting upwards like a jack in the box, Cube tilted, and fired. Ten powerfully packed laser cubes sparkled through space without even affecting the only slightly startled space monster.

'Nothing happened!' stated Chucker, taken aback with growing fear, his middle turning brown.

'Where's that thing come from?'

'It must have somehow survived the suction of the Ark,' explained Cryst. 'The Ark should have vacuumed up all the entities and returned them to their own black hole once their task of destruction had been completed ...'

'Well, this one's still free!' Dong pointed out, falling to the floor with a jerk, clutching his rumbling stomachs...

After picking up a few grass stains on her white body, the giant squidge sat in a cross-legged position and announced her timely appearance. 'High, guys! I'm at your disposal once again. Ready to do galactic heroic things.'

The heroine quickly stood, taking up a similar stance to that of an ancient Greek statue. Placing her muscled legs firmly apart, her finely chiselled body flexed and popped its many tightened lumps and bumps with all the prowess and noise of a popcorn maker. Her melon sized pectorals started bouncing up and down in joyous rhythm as she started to dance in a trance.

'This is actually a good sign,' said Cryst, totally ignoring the grinning white form jiggling beside her. 'If the entity is here then maybe the Ark is still in close proximity, and with the Ark's help we might be able to suck that monster back to where it came from. Being a black-belted messiah I have the ability to do so.'

'Found it!' cheered Chucker, having remained working at his post. 'I have located some frequency distortion across this system's expansion fields. It must surely belong to the Ark.'

'Can you detect its exact position?' enquired Cryst, hopeful.

'I think so?'

Reappearing upon the east side of the domed optical screen the entity lashed out in an attempt to disable its new cubic play thing. Cube, adrenaline still flowing through her circuits, managed to swerve to avoid it. For the annoyed entity it was like trying to swat an over-active fly in mid flight, even so, it tried again and again but without much success.

'We can't afford for it to hit us,' remarked Cryst, stating the obvious, 'it could destroy us instantly. We need a cunning diversion to give us the time we need.'

He was finding his hike around the inner most part of the galaxy a little boring, so when the shock waves and vibrations passed him by, he was more than eager to go and investigate. The Uranus-eater did not, to the luck of Cube's crew, know what he would be letting himself in for.

Gliding through the particle clouds and churned up layers of fragments, the shark-like form, blindly, searched onwards until finally stumbling into the path of a surprised entity, who appeared to be trying to squat a small moving sugar cube.

Had he been any other Uranus-eater, the impatient entity would not have stood a chance but – unfortunately - although fortunately for Cube - this particular Uranus-eater was a member of the U.N (United Nebulae); this meant he was prepared to take action and defend himself only if it proved absolutely necessary. The entity would therefore have to be very, very careful how it handled this untimely confrontation; it wouldn't want the Uranus-eater to put an end to all the fun it was having trying to rape and destroy the cubic play thing.

Cube and her shaken crew watched the cautious entity struck the Uranus-eater like a coiled snake (its unleashed power worse than any venom).

In response to the entity's act of sheer violent provocation the Uranus-eater used all his own formidable powers and stayed completely, completely still.

The entity, who was now starting to feel pretty frightened by his foe's actions, decided to lash out once again even if it meant taking the consequences. This time around it managed to cut a few of the Uranus-eater's limbs off, gallons of his blood bubbling out into space.

The Uranus-eater, who on the other hand was now extremely angry, rolled over and showed the entity his heavily armoured belly. He had experience of many former conflicts and so knew exactly what he was doing, or so he thought.

In blind panic the entity burst through the revealed stomach and blasted its dumb owner into millions of tiny pieces, joining the rest of the debris floating in a complex combination of swirls around them. The largest piece, which was what was left of the Uranus-eater's

head, flew at high speeds towards Cube and splattered, like a dollop of bird's muck, against the display on the optical screen.

'Incredible?' marvelled Scank, feeling a political lesson coming on. 'It was a close fight ... grrr ... but it's a pity the Uranus'eater didn't actually bother using his formidable powers how they should have been used. If he had he might of finished the conflict sooner and with a more satisfactory outcome. Oh well, never mind, eh, such is the stupidity of these mad universes of ours. Remind us not to pay the next annual subscription fee for the U.N - if his actions were anything to go by it seems to be a waste of our money!'

'The entity is turning back towards us!' laughed Dong, displaying her shiny teeth in a cheesy grin whilst flexing a stimulated muscle in and out.

BEEP!

'I've pinpointed the Ark,' confirmed Chucker, in response to the beep.

'Great! Where is it?' asked Cryst, hastily.

'Exactly ten thousand feet below our current position.'

Dong saw the entity was hurrying towards them at an increasing speed. She quickly ran to lie beside a keyboard with one hand placed upon the keys whilst the other propped the side of her leaning head. '*CUBE, DROP NINE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED AND NINETY-NINE FEET. AND THIS TIME, NOT LITERALLY!*' Feeling her stomachs reaching her head, she knew Cube had obliged her request. 'What should we do now, Cryst?'

'I must go out in a pod and lure the entity back inside the Ark.'

There was no time like the present so, with Robottom facing the correct way, the messiah made a run for the pod cubicle. The Three Wise Aliens watched her weird figure dash inside a ladder chute, the figure then appeared to tilt unexpectedly as the sudden pressures pulled her down. 'Not again!' the messiah echoed, upon hitting the hard floor at the bottom.

'We really ... woof ... should have said something,' laughed Scank, 'for Robottom's sake at least. 'She may be able to pick up and use objects but she just can't seem to get the hang of those ladder chutes. I don't know what's going to happen if she falls down one

of the ladder chutes which lead down several sections, she, and Robottom, will be shattered to bits. I'm telling you, we should have warned her.' Looking at his friends and seeing their cheery expressions he added, 'No ... grrr ... maybe not!'

Positioning herself inside a burping pod, unaware of the laughter she'd caused, Cryst attempted to communicate with the three in the observation post. 'When I leave, you must move Cube away to a safer location. I'll stay here and take care of matters.'

'Very well,' confirmed Scank, 'we ... woof ... shall leave everything down to you.' Bursting northwards Cube left her baby pod hovering directly above the Ark, the entity having mysteriously disappeared.

'Initiate arms!' requested Cryst, moving the communication pen away from her mouth and up to a set of watery holes. As instructed the pod grew (with the use of organic technology) long arms from the middle of each of its sides. 'Place pincers on the Ark lid and be ready to move it away as fast as you can, but only upon my command.' Moving the optical head-screen around she looked for a sign of the entity in the surrounding haze with the help of a number of visual filter lenses. 'Pod? Fire, from above, laser squares, releasing ten.'

With the laser squares acting like pieces of bread being dropped into a murky lake, this time, instead of a few fish being disturbed, the entity was.

Taking the bait, the colourful entity's changing form dived towards the pod, the Ark purposely held beneath it away from view.

'Hold position and wait command!' Cryst repeated, reaffirming her orders to the pod, sweat starting to glisten down her jagged sides and onto Robottom's quivering bulge. She watched as the entity coiled itself ready to strike. 'Hold ... Hold Now!' she commanded as the evil wrath shot downwards, and then forwards, until every direction had been shot dead and it was able to turn its attention on destroying the pod.

Moving to the side, revealing the opened Ark, the pod's protruding arms kept hold of the heavy golden lid. Cryst quickly used her sucking power and combined it with the Ark's own unleashed suction. The startled entity disappeared within the awaiting tardis-

like darkness of the solid gold box. Making sure the lid was sealed tightly into place, Cryst signalled for Cube to return.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

'That proved no problem,' puffed Cryst, safely back onboard inside one of Cube's relaxation cubicles.

Everyone had left the stresses of the observation section and took this decisive time to rest and contemplate their adventures.

'You see what greed can do to you!'

'No, what?' said Chucker, stroking a passing wisp of smoke.

'The bosseye and their need for more power, don't you see what has happened to them? The Ark has wiped out about ninety-nine percent of the bosseye race from existence. This galaxy is finally free of their tyranny. What is left of their power will fall when aliens hear of this drastic and most sudden change in events. The balance of power has been tilted.'

Dong, Chucker, and Scank, sat, lay, stood, whatever felt comfortable, on the floor of the relaxation cubicle pondering what the messiah was trying to say.

'Cryst ... snfff ... what happens to the Ark now?' Scank wondered, curling his shaggy ear hair with one of his twirling fingers.

'I think it best for me to take it back to God, before any evil should find it.'

'Does this mean ...'

'Yes, I'm afraid so. I will be leaving you to your own adventures once again.'

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

It was several hours before the four figures emerged from the fathomless depths of the relaxation section. Focusing their thoughts on Cryst, each of The Three Wise, and secretly happy, Aliens said their goodbyes to the sniffling crystal being.

Using areas of Scank's shaggy hair Dong wiped his lips free of the remains which their last supper together had just left. 'We'll only

come down ... snfff ... as far as the entrance to the pod cubicle to see you off,' smiled Scank, not knowing the squidge had just used him as a napkin.

'Good! I mean ... very well,' sighed Cryst, with a strange sucking sound coming from in-between her lips.

Reaching the cubicle doors shortly afterwards, the group were feeling quite emotional; the curry they'd just eaten was probably responsible for this feeling.

'We'll wait for Robottom out here,' added Dong, dying to see, smell, and hear those likeable legs once again without an annoying host interfering. On mentioning his name Robottom appeared to shuffle around as if he was being drowned under water, but Cryst soon calmed him down, like a jockey whipping a horse. 'So then, it is goodbye from here on,' repeated the squidge, differences set aside.

'Yes, farewell,' contributed the other wise two, patting the messiah's crystal body softly upon the back.

Turning tearfully away, the docking cubicle doors burped open, allowing Cryst entry. Stepping through, leaving the others waiting outside, she waited for the door to seal shut.

Once out of sight, the jagged host quickly broke free from Robottom's waist and began peeling parts of the crystal shell which covered her, away. It was as if she were treating herself as a hard boiled egg readying itself to be pickled. 'Thank bleedin' goodness tha'be all over with. I were gettin' fed up with tha'bloody righteous accent.'

It wouldn't be long now before PugJaw would complete his mission. With his new found abilities, turning to Robottom, he froze the legs to the floor in a spell of sheer terror and carried on with the rest of his plans.

After escaping from the con-cubicle, sticking to his orders, the Devil's spy had eventually come to wait in the docking section until the moment Cryst returned from her battle with the entity, dragging the Ark.

The messiah had been caught totally off guard. Helped with powers from the Devil, Hannibal "The Animal" PugJaw was able to rip

the messiah's very soul out from her crystal shell and, following a great suck, banished her into the Ark, and subsequently the Edge; the Devil hadn't forgot their last meeting and had a few things to get off his chest.

If it wasn't for PugJaw's growing hatred for The Three Wise Aliens he would have taken the Ark and escaped long ago. But now that his revenge had been set (literally in the form of a bomb) he could feel rest assured that this was indeed a good time to leave.

Turning to gloat at Robottom's knee knocking figure, the evil spy leapt onto the Ark as if it were a flying carpet and after a thunderous clash ... THUNDEROUS CLASH! ... he disappeared through the opening docking doors and floated out to space.

Freed from his spell Robottom used the ability of his thrusters to stop himself being sucked away.

Having heard the recognisable sounds of the docking doors belching shut, the anxious crew of three came running in to greet their old friend.

'You survived the separation then,' observed Dong, pinching his nostrils shut.

With flashing lights and a grimaced bulge Robottom blasted everything he'd just witnessed at each of his companions, using both ends...

'PugJaw's ... bleep ... working for the Devil now,' he continued to bleep, his volume so high it was deafening. 'He's taking the Ark to the nearest black hole. We have to stop him!'

Without so much as another word spoken by any of them, they raced off to the observation post, cutting what should have been Robottom's own one minute celebration party about one minute short.

'CUBE,' Scank rapidly typed, '*NAVIGATE TO THE NEAREST BLACK HOLE.*' He paused whilst Dong searched through a Compu-map for the nearest. Upon finding one he quickly held the 'map up for the leetlesheet to see. '*IN THE BUNYAG SYSTEM, SITUATED NORTH-WEST. ESTABLISH AN ACCELERATION FUNNEL AND MAINTAIN GRAVPULL 10000000000.*' Scank began to grind his teeth. 'We should ... grrr ...

hopefully be able to out run that little bastuard even with the Devil helping him.'

Seating themselves within the circle of colourful gripseats the four adventurers waited for the usual thrust forward.

This time instead of the normal vortex of blurred atoms the acceleration funnel naturally created, Cube shot forwards in a bright flash and deadly silence instantly followed...

PugJaw stayed glued to the top of the Ark whilst stars streamed past his eyes. He knew his revenge had been fulfilled by the flare of light which, from behind him in the distance, had sent with it the tale telling vibrations of the explosion he'd placed in the gravitational core. The bomb had been set to blow-up from the moment an acceleration funnel was initiated.

Gazing into the approaching outer rim of the black hole he felt his new master would be pleased by all of his recent success. He even believed that he would be awarded another capital letter to his name; it would be a great honour to be called PuGJaw so early on in his early career of evilness.

'I don't believe it!' he whined, catching a glimpse of a spacecraft speeding towards him from the black hole.

Upon closer inspection the spacecraft was seen to be as round and nearly as large as a small moon and it was being accompanied by two smaller globes.

PugJaw quickly stood up, the Ark momentarily rocking from side to side.

The three globes continued their confident approach. It wasn't long before they surrounded his out-numbered form.

'Evers ... groof ... heard of reincarniti ... reincarnyu ... reincarnation!' stated ScAnk, a little inebriated. 'No? Well neither have we ... hiccup ... We is actually froms the future, and with ways even ours good friend the author doesn't understands, we is here to ... hiccup ... to ... wogrr ... to stop you! Please meets, for your current interpretation, Cube - Cube's outer dimensional spherical counterpart- and not forgetting her pods. She and we are abouts to become your worst nightmare ... hiccup!'

Breaking away from their mother's smooth round belly the two smaller globes swarmed around the Ark and its unbalanced rider.

PugJaw had no choice left but to fall off as if he'd been hit by a freak wave. Transforming himself into the shape of a triangular fighter craft he rocketed away from the golden box. From out of two small flashing holes positioned below each of his wings he began firing serpents of glowing matter at his new enemies' every move. He mustn't fail his mission now that he was so close to completing it.

Seeing the Ark drifting away, the large spherical Cube, under the direct command of RoBottom's inserted bulge, snatched her chance. Throwing out a grappling light from her side, she attached a grip ray and reeled it safely inside an opening which briefly appeared and disappeared. With her main task successfully completed she focused her attention on destroying Hannibal "The Animal".

PugJaw began to scream; from inside each of his pointed wings something was attempting to break through. After a sheer amount of distress had been endured, the violent throbbing suddenly stopped as something burst through his metal skin in the shape of two gigantic laser machine-guns. Before he knew what was happening the guns' circular shape began to rotate, releasing infinite pulses of laser bullets into the surrounding space. In the continuous bombardment the bullets circled in search of their targets.

'I've beens ... snfgrr ... hitted!' screamed ScAnk his pod spinning like a basketball on Magic Johnson's fingertip.

'So has I!' gulped DoNg, as sparks fell from his/her head-screen onto his/her shattered communication pen.

PugJaw watched with interest as the crippled spherical pods hung motionless in space like a pair of sagging gonads. 'Now yee all shall die!' he screamed insanely, taking on the accent of a sea-faring pirate about to board a ship full of treasure. Realigning the barrels of his new invincible gun, he set about their destruction.

'We is nots doing too well ... groof ... is we?' laughed ScAnk.

In answer to the leetlesheet's question an acceleration funnel opened up and spat out several crafts, one of them, a small round pod, raced over to help.

'ChUscker' sighed DoNg, relieved by his timely appearance. 'You gots to them in time.'

'Of course I did, but let's not worries about that now, we has to gets you boths to safety. Pod! Initiate armsies!' His pod responded by moving its arms downwards in an attempt to grab each of the powerless gonadic pods. 'Damn!' ChUcker, cursed, seeing the closing pincers sliding away from the pod's rounded surface. Using the only option now open to him, he drew back the wiry muscular arms. 'Guys, hold on to your gripseats!' Shooting abruptly forwards, the arms successfully punched the pods one after the other into an opened section within their larger mother-ship. 'Goooooooooal!' the vom screeched. Happy with his new found sport he followed his friends inside Cube.

'Sheet and dooglash!' swore PugJaw, who had come to a thoughtful standstill upon seeing the reinforcements arrive, his luck having slid into a pair of trainers and run out on him.

'And ... grrr ... you are in it!' added a familiar voice from within the spat out Cube as she released no fewer than fifty laser squares from one her glowing sides.

On target, the squares lashed around PugJaw's body to explode like boxes filled with party-poppers and confetti.

From the observation post, on both Cubes, everyone watched in disbelief as his metallic form began to fade. Appearing in his place hovered a blood-stained craft, its cylindrical structure curving upwards into the shape of two large Viking horns - in fact the whole thing wasn't that dissimilar to a Viking helmet. 'You have pulled me, ussss right over the Edge with all your anticssss. I, we have had jussst about enough of your perssssisstant ... your consssstant ... your meddling!'

Cube, having survived the privilege of not being blown to bits thanks to her round counterpart, thought for a brief second before firing at exactly the same time as the spherical Cube. This resulted in a mixture of laser squares and laser cubes plunging into the left side

of their new enemy whilst a reflection of laser circles and laser spheres plunged into the right side. The Devilish object began to shake and, with a powerful battle cry, tore itself free from their consistent line of fire.

'The spherical pods!' remarked Chucker, onboard Cube. 'They're re-attempting to attack.' Bubbling up from the top of the big sphere three pods burst free into space. In response the Devil fired a single blast of solid light at their every move and counter move until each one of them had been hit...

'Whoops!' chuckled ScAnk, 'I is ... woogrrr ... disabled again!'

'So is I!' responded DoNg.

'And ... eeerrgh ayargh ... me too!' puked ChUcker.

Coming to their rescue, ejecting themselves from one of Cube's flat sides, three of the square pods aimed and fired three tow-lines from their base.

'Why didn't I thinks of that?' mumbled ChUcker, looking drunkenly over the blurred controls of his pod for the reason why.

With all six pods successfully connecting to one another via the three tightening tow-lines, each of them, two at a time (a square pod leading a round pod) flew to a safe distance where they would be able to repair the damage.

Watching his colourful ammunition missing their targets completely, the Devil turned away from the vanishing pods and fired at the remaining mother Cubes. This time the ammunition hit in a well aimed set of explosions.

'Blocking has been annihilated!' shouted Robottom, from Cube's controls. 'The next blast will destroy us, his power is too strong!'

Hearing her counterpart's transmission, the spherical Cube came to the rescue with yet another plan in mind. Orbiting the horned craft she began dispersing mega-tonnes of stored puke from her disposal section.

Sliding through space, like a scary monster from Scooby Doo, the vomit settled upon the Devil's spaceship and drip by drip it poured from the tips of its horns to cover every part, top and bottom. Two large carrots settled side by side to resemble orange eyes.

'He can't see us!' communicated both Cubes.

'Blast him!' Dong's voice echoed. 'It's hammer time!'

Having returned to the battle, all six pods fired directional laser squares and laser spheres. The noise that ensued sounded like a million children each banging a pair of symbols to annoy their music teacher. The colourful projection of lasers lit the darkness of the surrounding space like a ferris wheel, the Devil acting as an involuntary hub. Round and round and round and round and round and round and round it went; faster and faster and faster and faster and faster it span.

In mass confusion the Devil moved back and forth, struggling to see, the carrots still stuck firmly in place. Both mother Cubes compensated his every move and fired him back into the mini pods' continuous deadly line of fire, keeping the ferris wheel effect going.

With all pods almost at breaking point, unable to sustain their actions, in a screeching cry of surrender and pain, the Devil began to fade back to the Edge. The Cubes tilted at each other as if in acknowledgement at what was happening and unleashed the last of their secret weapons to finish him.

Both Cubes juddered. Waited and waited ... and waited and waited ... Then suddenly, from each of them, a gigantic kitchen sink blasted out from their kitchen sections into what was remaining of the faded Devil's image.

Having now thrown everything they had at him, including the kitchen sink, the Devil vanished into the Edge ... a small dust mite was already writing the history books for its clan as the last sounds from the Devil screams faded away.

ANALYTICAL PAUSE ...

Both confused but triumphant Cubes hung together in the tranquillity of outer space; one still drunk and the other still sober. In the heavenly setting of their background the black hole of the Bunyag System was doing its renowned Catherine wheel impression as it span round and round in a display of burning colours which even the temporary ferris wheel effect, created by the pod lasers, couldn't have matched.

'What shall we do ... hiccup ... with the Ark?' asked the spherical Cube's crew. 'What if we takes it backs into the black holey with us?'

'Grrrr ... but you wouldn't be able to guide it through the Edge!' replied a sober Scank. 'You told us ... woof ... yourself that you'll be going back through the time distortions way before reaching the Edge. We can't take anymore risks! You'll have to transfer it back over to us and we'll deal with it.'

From inside the observation post onboard the time-travelling spherical Cube, sudden indications were demanding their immediate return to the future ... SUDDEN INDICATIONS! SUDDEN INDICATIONS! With no other choice left open to her, Cube spat out the Ark and started reversing into the black hole.

One final communication managed to reach the sober crew which sounded something like, 'We will try to remember whats you dids said about asking us to go back and saves Chucker from being deaded...'

'You'd better!' Chucker screeched, soberly, worried by the spherical crew's obvious drunken approach towards his life.

Ignoring her crew's moans, Cube pulled the floating Ark inside the opened docking section and moved away from the black hole at gravpull 007.

ANALYTICAL CLOSING SUMMARY ...

So it was that the square Cube and her uniquely talented crew had been left alone to ponder the many problems surrounding the return of the Ark.

'Bleep ... Hang on a second!' Robottom shouts over the rising tide of music which is now starting to play; signifying the end of this adventure. 'Why didn't we just ask ... bleep ... our future selves what they had previously done with the Ark?! And why didn't they ... bleep ... bloody tell us?!'

Cube knew the answers would be waiting for them in the future but navigating there might prove a problem; especially when you've got a pregnant squidge onboard!

... ANALYSIS UP TO DATE

Further Reading

If you liked this book and would like to read more Adventures of Cube please email: TheAdventuresOfCube@googlemail.com

Also, please don't forget to visit the CLIC Sargent website at:
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