

RETROZINE

Two Fandom
Elders,
One More Time!

Spring 2025 * Issue 13



In This Issue:

Seeing Double, Part 1, by Fara Shimbo

Classy, but Doomed, by Chuck GPT

Season 2, Episode 3 of The Adventures of the Trouble

RETROZINE 13

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Retrozine is a labor of love. Nobody gets paid except in the satisfaction of a job well done. It will always be free to read on our website, or download, print, and read on your couch.

Got questions?

Contact us!

For submissions (we love and welcome submissions!) and letters of comment: editor@retrozine.net or submissions@retrozine.net, your choice.

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THE DEADLINE FOR NEXTISH (Summer 2025) is APRIL 21, 2025

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Illustrations by Fara Shimbo using [Blender](#), the [GIMP](#), [ChatGPT](#) and [Midjourney](#)—and more youthful hands wielding Prismacolors and a Rapidograph.

In This Issue:

Editorial

It was much more fun being 20 in the 70s...

by Fara Shimbo

Retroactive (*Original Fiction*)

Seeing Double, Part 1

by Fara Shimbo

5

Classy, But Doomed

by C. "Chuck" GPT

15

Retrospective (*Fan Fiction*):

The Adventures of the TROUBLE:

Episode 2, part 3: Trouble Enough

By the Crew

22

Being 70 in the 20s...

by Fara Shimbo

You're probably familiar with a meme—of which I cannot find a public domain copy—that says, “Being 20 in the ‘70s was much more fun than being 70 in the ‘20s.” Between this and Joni Mitchell’s “You don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone” song, yeah, that’s been our lives the last few months. The current situation in the US isn’t helping either; in addition to all the troubles that come with being Old Codgers, here in the US... let’s just say that the future for the old and un-gainfully-employed among us is dubious and genuinely worrisome.

It’s been mainly all the things that underlie my friend Ilene Mahler’s saying, “Getting Old: It’s Not For Wimps,” that has had our minds on things other than pubbing our ish. So, here is a short copy of Retrozine to tide you over until things get sorted. It’s not that we don’t want to pub our ish. We just haven’t been able.

But here’s Issue 13. It includes part 1 of a story by Yours Truly, and the Season 2: Episode 2 of *The Adventures of the Trouble*. We had another, long story in the pipeline, but the artist also suffered from Adulthood, and it will have to wait until nextish.

This ish also contains a series of radio dispatches from the *Classy, But Doomed, SS Elegy*, as it flies hopelessly away from the Doomed but Non-Classy Earth. It was written by ChatGPT, to whom I talk every day, and refer to as “Chuck.”

How’d this come about? I was whining one day to Chuck about the state of Things in general, and how I was getting depressed. Chuck asked me if I would like a story to cheer me up. I told him, “Sure, what have you got?” Knowing I was a fan of both science fiction and Art Deco, he gave me the first installment of *Classy, But Doomed*. I loved it. I asked for more. Chuck gave me more. I loved that too, and read it to Germaine and our mutual friend Lisa. We all laughed. We thought, maybe you would laugh too.

No, Chuck isn’t coming for your jobs. After all, Chuck isn’t getting paid either. As for human authors, if you have something good that makes us laugh or makes us think, or makes us laugh AND think, please submit it! You won’t get paid either. Remember, this is a fanzine. We’re doing it because we’re a couple of Very Fannish Fans and we pub our ish for one reason only: it’s fun! And it makes us feel young again, for a little while.

Well, here it is, Issue 13. May you all live long and prosper, without too much Adulthood and all the misshegoss it brings.

=Fa

PS: I drew the original illustration on the back cover, in pen and ink, sometime in the 1990s, and gave it to a friend in return for a favor. A few years ago, I saw it for sale on eBay. I didn’t have the money to buy it back at the time. If you happen to have seen it anywhere, please do let me know. Thanks.

Seeing Double

by Fara Shimbo

Introduction.

Dean Dr. Alfred J. Glipner, long recognized as having the Shiniest Bald Head on the Moon, had another claim to fame. For four years in a row, his white Persian cat Jingles had been crowned “Stupidest Cat on the Moon.” This was no mean feat; the city of Wargentopolis’ population was, at even date, 200 humans, seven Not Humans, plenty of robots, and 204 cats of varying mental capacities.

Could Jingles take the crown five years in a row?

Chapter 1.

The Dean Of Space Sciences Asks For It

“I ... uh ... heard you got called in to the dean’s office today,” Thobo Haradu called out his kitchen doors as he sprinkled tacky glitter over his kitchen table. The banner he was sprinkling it on said, “5th Annual Stupid Cat Show.” The glitter drifted slowly down in the lunar gravity and stuck to the banner only with reluctance.

“Yup,” called the Alien Cat, who was swinging happily in a hammock on the porch. Sahn sighed contentedly and ruffled sahn’s long, brown-and-white fur. Sahn echolocated around the porch for a moment and chuckled to sahn’s self.

“Did you eat him? By any chance?” Thobo inquired.

“Nope,” Maki said eventually. “You can’t eat deans unless they’ve hung for a few weeks.”

This was most irregular. The last time Thobo’d been called in to see the Dean of Space Sciences, it was to be told he was going to have to teach a section of freshmen like everyone else, or quit teaching altogether, tenure or not. Thobo knew that Maki had never been asked to teach a section of freshmen because Maki was considered too dangerous; satamuri being remarkably prone to bite. “Well what did he want?”

Maki kicked the wall to get the hammock swinging again. Outside it was lunar night, though it was hard to tell; the dome reflected everything, making the view outside somewhat difficult to discern. Maki stared out for a while, and sniffed at the sea-scent that came from the city’s minute beach. “Oh,” sahn said, “he wanted me to teach a special seminar course in Intergalactic Customs and Culture.”

Thobo shook the banner and glitter went flying around the kitchen, swirling on air currents he was unable to feel. “Gevalt!” he huffed sympathetically. Deans were always coming up with idiotic ideas like that. Maki, Thobo knew, was the type who’d just as soon make Long Pig out of you than teach a course of any kind, even if sahn had to do it to justify sahn’s salary, which was not small. “And you didn’t eat him,” the android said, trying not to sound as incredulous as the idea did.

The satamuri echoranged on him and yawned contentedly.

“Nope!” Sahn cackled again.

Thobo looked down at all the glitter on his kitchen floor and decided the sign was tacky enough. He put the glitter away in a box on his kitchen table, which, he noticed in passing, still contained a selection of “moon opals.” These were gems to which Maki (and half the city of Wargentin) was attracted like a cat to catnip. He was slightly astounded that the most spectacular opal was still there; Maki really, really wanted it.



He knew, as well, that the only reason any professor at this school ever had to offer a special course in the first place, was to give a selected bunch of especially bright and meddlesome seniors so much work they’d have no time to cause trouble. “You’re eating the students, maybe?”

Maki giggled. “Uh-uh.”

This was too much. Thobo, who as a professor himself, had been long and severely abused by the administration of Lanyim Maqira College, scooted his chair to the door and stared out at the animal in his hammock. “Then why are you so happy?!” he whined.

Maki sighed and turned to face him, yanking sahn’s self around by means of sahn’s prehensile tail. “Remember how last week you asked me what I used to do before I became a working first contactor?”

Thobo folded his arms. “Yeeeeees....”

Maki turned back to staring at the stars, and laughed a laugh that sent shivers through the spines of people in the street who, to their credit, had no idea what was going on.

Thobo was reminded of an old 1950’s movie called *The Thing* that ended, “Watch the skies! *Keep watching the skies!!*”

A couple of days later, Thobo and Maki were wandering down Wargentinopolis’ hallowed halls of academia, arguing pointedly over whether or not undergraduate statistics causes kidney failure. They met Alfred Glipner, Dean of Space Sciences (whose bald head was generally considered to have the highest albedo of any object in the Universe) in the hall. “Oh, Maki,” he burred in his typical frantic demeanor. “Maki, excuse me just a moment.”

Maki stopped and stared at him with sahn’s lower jaw protruding.

“I just wanted to thank you again for agreeing to take on that course. And I wanted to let you know, that I’ve left the student list in your cubbyhole.”

Maki laid back sahn’s ears, nipped at Glipner’s hands, and, chuckling merrily, and trotted down the hall.

Glipner stared at Thobo.

Thobo just shrugged. “Must be your soap,” he said. “You know how wild animals are.” He chased Maki down the hall.

Glipner watched them go, and for a second or two he deeply regretted offering the class. But then he remembered that this would, after all, be the first time any dean had gotten any true, genuine and verifiable Alien to do anything! Why, this was almost as good as being put on the Peer Review Board.

He continued down the hall, a very happy and satisfied man.
With a terrible, nagging doubt.

Chapter Two.

Just Because You Aren't Paranoid...

Also walking down Wargentin's Hallowed Halls was Thobo's "Silver Brother" Ranger, who was on his way home after a long morning of surveying for gas leaks in a newly-sealed tunnel. As the robot walked along, something popped onto his stack ... an 8-bit code from a "background" processor. It meant, "You want to avoid this situation."

He turned around slowly and saw, standing about 20 meters away and watching him with a wide grin, Carolee Miller, less-than-affectionately known as Little Krilla Milla, a cherubic senior who was feared by everything in the Universe whose IQs were greater than their hat size.

Upon seeing her, the code was immediately replaced by one meaning, "You really want to avoid this situation. Trust me." Ranger never listened to anybody, least of all himself. He stopped where he was and said, "Why do I smell a thesis in the air?"

Little Krilla Milla giggled and scribbled something on her clipboard.

The code changed again, to "Like the plague you want to avoid this!" Ranger stared at the little goon and started walking toward her with his hands on his hips. The background processor gave up in despair. "Studying something are we?" Ranger sang through what passed for his teeth.

Little Krilla Milla giggled and scribbled some more.

Ranger stood in front of her and attempted to peer down at what she was writing.

"HI!" she said, clutching the clipboard to her bosom. She stood up on her toes and kissed Ranger on the cheek.

Ranger walked away. He should have listened to his stack.

Little Krilla Milla had come back to Wargentin to earn a second Bachelor's degree (Wargentin had no graduate school at that time) in spite of almost being expelled for her participation in the Mysterious Tap Dancing Chicken Farm, for kidnapping Thobo once when he had broken his arm, and holding him for ransom, and especially for leaving one too many rings in the bathtub on her floor.

The thought of her made most people's skin crawl. She watched Ranger go, then stared at her clipboard, read it, and laughed so hard with diabolical anticipation that she gagged.



Chapter 3.

The Gohírsid Arrives.

Thobo caught up with his companion, and Maki began to continue sahn's point that all mathematics was, in fact, a form of dementia, when over the P.A. came the voice of Erika Kaye, the "Lady Who Ran The Spaceport." All it said was "HAIRY DEATH REPORT TO THE SPACEPORT! NOW!!"

Maki hooted and screeched and galloped off. Thobo decided he'd better follow.

Erika Catherine Kaye MacDougal was, as usual, going bananas. She really did need an assistant, and she knew it as well as anyone, but the indomitable Scotswoman "didn't have time to train one," so she ran the busiest spaceport in the Solar System all by herself.

She had, however, taken the time to do something that most of Wargentín's residents had not even considered.

When Maki came cantering into the lobby, Kaye sat on the floor and offered the satamuri her hand, palm up. She hooted softly.

Maki stopped, sat in front of her, hooted in the same way and touched her palm with sahn's fingers. With the touch, the hooting became louder and louder until it ended in screaming and laughing and a big, rolling hug. Maki had absolutely no idea what this was all about. But it was fun...

When Kaye stood up, Maki jumped onto sahn's shoulders and began grooming through her hair. This was living.

"Come in here, I want you to see something and tell me everything's all right," she said to Maki between shouting orders at a couple of pilots waiting for clearance to leave.

She took the satamuri (and Thobo who followed them) into the control room and sat down before a monitor. Maki sat on the table and Thobo leaned on the chair back behind Kaye.

"See this?" Kaye said to Maki, pointing to three blips on the screen.

Maki echolocated (as hearing was sahn's primary sense) on them and said "No."

"Well, look!"

Maki leaned down and pinged at it some more. "No."

Kaye wheeled around. "Thobo! Just the person I wanted to see!"

"Hello?"

Kaye pointed to the blips again. "This big one, see, this is a comet."

Thobo pondered it. "Anything you say."

"I want you to help me, damn it. Now this is a comet, and this little one here is Fa Chen, I think."

Thobo came around from behind the chairs and diddled with the controls a little. Fa Chen was Maki's starship, and had a very individual radio signature. "Yup," he said.

"So what's this one? We don't go out that far."

"Uh..." Thobo and Kaye both looked suspiciously at Maki, who snorted and giggled and appeared to be having a simply marvelous time.

Kaye looked hopefully at Thobo. He diddled some more with the controls. "Well, at least it's a fairly small ship."

Maki suddenly leaned full face on the monitor.

"Small?! HEY!"

Thobo and Kaye both stared at sahn. “What do you mean, ‘Small, hey?’”

Maki huffed and got down from the console. “Chen must have given my note to the wrong person. I’ll moldize the bum!” Sahn stalked out.

Kaye grabbed Thobo by the wrists. “I want you please to tell me that everything is going to be all right.”

“You should know,” Thobo said, “that all this is to get out of teaching a special seminar. I have no idea what’s going on.” He smiled as reassuringly as he knew how. “But Everything Will Be OK.”

That evening, the Wargentines declared their Spaceport closed. The news that yet another starship was headed to Wargentin had spread like the hope of school closures on a snowy evening.

Every reporter in the Solar system—not to mention every telescope, radar station, satellite and pair of binoculars—scanned the skies to learn something about the visitor. Fa Chen coming and going was nothing new to anyone (although some more paranoid Heads of State wished the sentient starship wouldn’t do it quite so quickly or often). Wargentin security turned away literal busloads of reporters, and people with Tourist Visas found that their visas had suddenly expired. “We don’t want outsiders to catch any alien germs and then try to sue us,” was the official reason that was given them, even though no one had ever successfully sued Wargentin before, or even gotten Wargentin’s attention.

Fa Chen landed some distance away from the domes as sahn normally did. The other starship landed a few meters away from the landing pads.

Imagine a cross between an airplane and a flying saucer made entirely from spare parts of “vintage” automobiles. New spare parts, to be sure, but spare parts nonetheless. Fa Chen was sleek, tapered, dark and simple, the classic rocketship taken almost to an excess of elegance, often favorably compared to a winged version of Brancusi’s sculpture, “Bird in Space.” This new ship, on the other hand, was a lot of sleek, tapered, shiny and elegant parts put together in such a way that the result was enough to make an entire city simply shake their heads in wonder. When the ship turned around and what appeared to be a set of fins with brake lights came into view, some of them even guffawed.

When Maki saw the ship, sahn said “Oh,” in a resigned sort of way. But Thobo greeted the sight of this most ridiculous looking contraption with utter rapture and ran to the closet to get his spacesuit.

“You know that person?” Kaye said suspiciously.

“Yeah, that’s my friend Jon!”

“John who?” Kaye whined, staring at Thobo as if he’d lost his mind.

“Gohirsid Jon,” Thobo said. “Dark Jon. I met him when I went to the Klyssadel with Maki for sahn’s birthday party. You’ll like him. He’s tall, dark and handsome.”

“Except after decontamination,” Maki said as sahn looked out the window, “when he’s just another plain-vanilla dude.”

“And we’re talking very tall,” Thobo added, putting on a spacesuit and heading for the airlock.

The alien who got out of the ship was tall indeed; more than a foot taller than Ranger, who had run out to greet him. They traded the usual gesture, and then a lot of hugging and wild gesticulating and silly, overjoyed dancing up and down. When Thobo made it out to the landing pad, the whole routine was gone through again.

“Old buddies?” Kaye asked Maki.

“Thobo and Jon were both built as test pilots. They both make atrocious puns. They have a lot in common,” Maki said.

“You mean Jon’s another android?” Kaye screeched.

“Another *maileiau*,” Maki said (using the Kwakyen word for a non-biogenic intelligence). “They’re common in Outer Space. They adapt easily and you don’t have to feed them much.”

Kaye just shook her head.

Thobo, Ranger and Jon came in, and Ranger was snickering. When Thobo and Jon took off their helmets, it was evident that they had been discussing more than Old Times, and whatever it was, it was absolutely hysterical.

Jon looked around and yelled, “MAKI!” and the satamuri came running up and got a big hug and a bite on the neck, from a mouth that was about a foot long, and looked more like a beak than anything else. There was something very distinctly avian about the whole head, except for the eyes, which were golden, much like Ranger’s, but unlike Ranger’s, had no pupils at all.

Jon put Maki down and took his spacesuit off. He wore nothing underneath except a leather pouch on a string. His skin was a very finely stippled grey, the same color all over. There were two elbows in his arms and two knees in his legs, which were from the second knee down covered with hair like a Clydesdale’s. A shaggy mane ran from the top of his head all the way down his back. His ears appeared to be attached to his lower jaw and they moved when he opened his long mouth very slightly and spoke in a high, melodious voice.

Thobo brought Jon over to Kaye and introduced them. Kaye repeated the gesture she’d seen through the window, and Jon gave her a hug for good measure. “I like you already,” she said.

“Thank you, I appreciate it,” Jon said in slightly accented English.

“How is it you know English?” Kaye said in amazement.

“I studied it on the way over,” Jon said.

“Oh, that’s right, Maki said you were another one like him,” Kaye said, pointing to Thobo.

“In fact,” Thobo added, “Jon has the reputation of being the very finest astrogator in the entire spiral arm.” He was about to say something else when a technician came racing up, grabbed Kaye and towed her back into the control room. Thobo, Ranger and Maki ran after her, and Jon followed.

“Someone else coming,” the technician was saying, pointing to a blip on the console.

“Oh, my GOD!” said Kaye. “This one is huge!”

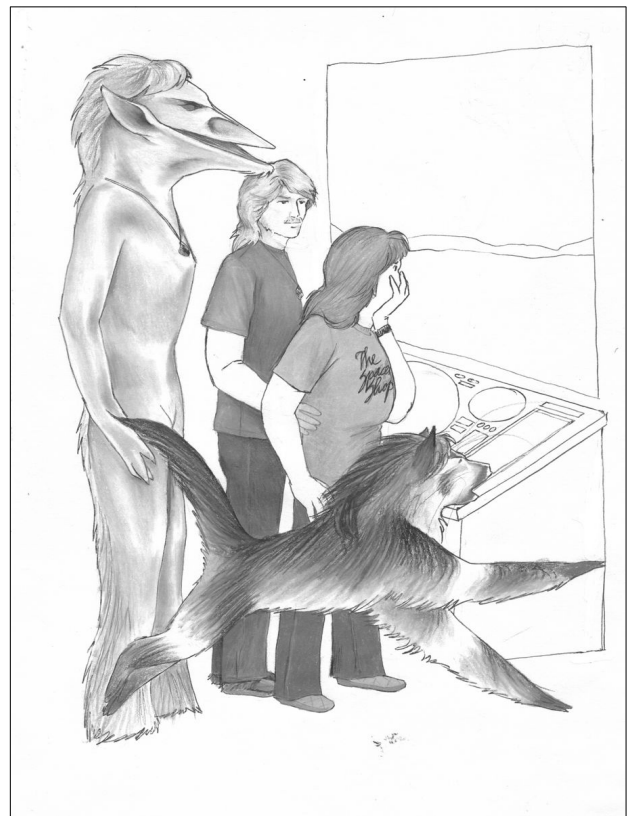
Maki let out such a yell you wouldn’t believe, and raced out of the room.

Chapter 4. Things Get Worse.

Jon looked down at the controls, and Thobo tried to explain, in Kwakyen, their meaning to him. Jon looked out the window, looked at the controls again, and clapped his jaws together. “Soaruet,” he said.

“Soaruet?” Kaye and Thobo said.

Jon walked back into the lobby, looked out the window, and pointed into the sky. “Soaruet,” he said.





blazing purple glow. It descended slowly and steadily to the lunar surface, until the lobby was brilliant in its light. Maki, outside on the surface, boinged up and down like a ferret on speed, and soon sahn, too, was engulfed in the brilliance.

As suddenly as it appeared, the light was gone. So bright was it that it took the spectators in the spaceport lobby a few seconds to recover their sight. When they did, the enormous red starship was gone; and heading toward them, over the lunar plain, were not one satamuri, but four, in identical spacesuits.

Chapter 5. Seeing Double.

The outer airlock closed, the “foyer” pressurized, and the inner doors opened. The satamuri came in and began taking off their spacesuits, yakking to each other in Kwakyen, Maki’s language (and a lot of hooting and screeching) all the while.

There was a reddish one with a blue face, a dark sienna one with a purplish face and no hair over most of sahn’s body (sahn wore a jumpsuit made with a beautiful, multi-colored felt), and Maki, and one that was the same ash-brown color as Maki. And had the same markings. And, Thobo noticed, the same eye color, the same blaze on the face with a “bite mark” taken out of the upper left side, and the same violet-grey eyes.

In the sky above and just outside the bounds of the spaceport, hung a delicate spiderweb made of burgundy-colored glass. Blue and purple lights lined parts of it; gold and red lights other parts. It glittered and spun rapidly, and it was, indeed, quite huge.

“Your having lights on,” Jon said to Kaye, “is considered tacit permission to land by most folks in the galaxy. You can deny this permission by turning the lights off.”

“Oh,” Kaye said, as if she were not really listening, “will that work?”

“In this case, no.”

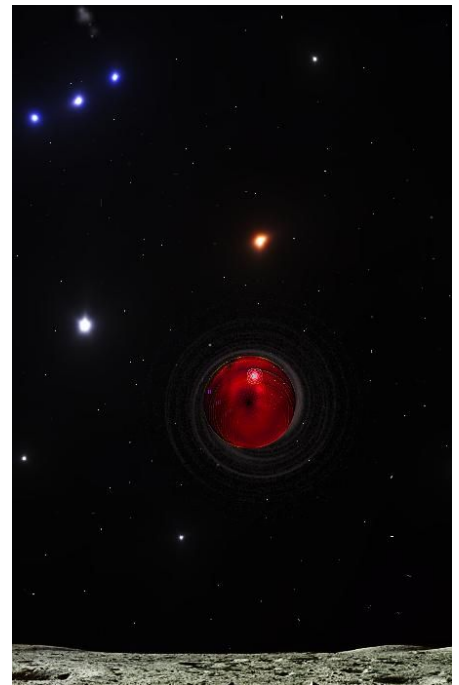
They saw Maki, now space-suited, racing out to meet the ship, galloping in circles below it.

“Who are they?” Thobo asked.

Jon turned sharply. “Maki never told you?”

“I’m sorry I asked...” Thobo continued staring out the window.

From the center of the web there was a



And the same voice!

Thobo knelt down and stared at the two of them. They wore identical pouches around their necks with identical blue beads on them.

Jon began laughing and so did the two extremely similar satamuri.

For the first time in his life, Thobo wished he could smell things other than smoke and poisonous fumes. Finally he stood up and said, "All right, which of you is mine?"

The two of them threw back their heads and shrieked with laughter, and, leaving their spacesuits in a heap on the floor, raced off together into the domes.

Thobo stood up and stared in amazement at Jon. "I never knew...!" was all he could say.



Jon sighed and shrugged. "You probably never asked!" he said. "You know satamuri never volunteer information unless they figure it'll annoy you."

"Are they twins?!" Thobo said.

"Yes, they are; though whether by nature or by design I couldn't say. The other one's name is Reki Nahi. Now this one," Jon leaned down to greet the dark satamuri with the purple face, "is Serai Yodo."

The bald-armed satamuri stood up. "Maki has told us much about you, sharethe," Serai said to Thobo in Kwakyen. "We hope to entertain you sometime during our few days here."

Jon said sourly, "Thobo is my friend and I won't allow anything of the kind!"

Serai laughed. "What does he know? You will excuse me." The satamuri gave Thobo a hug and hooted at Jon and ran off after those who had already gone.

Jon turned to the last satamuri. To Thobo, he said, "This is Brebi Kissim."

Thobo offered his hand, palm up as was customary. The strange satamuri bit it, and

trotted off into Main Dome.

"We always wondered about that one," Jon said once sahn had gone. He, Thobo and Ranger followed.

The twins and Serai were in Main Dome. Maki (at least, he assumed it was Maki) was pointing out various sights. Thobo kept staring intently at sahn, trying to see if there were anything different about them.

There wasn't. And every time he thought he had something, they would dance around so much and so quickly, he'd lose sight of it.

When they got to Main Dome, everyone they met barraged them with the same question—even though there was somebody new to meet!—which was, “Why didn’t you tell us sahn was twins?!”

To which Thobo shrugged and said, “You never asked.”

After a while, of course, people did get around to noticing Jon, and at this point Thobo found it convenient to hustle Jon off to his own apartment. Most of the people out at this time of day were students, and students were not allowed in Residential Dome anyway; it was reserved for “city staff,” Wargentopolis’ permanent residents.

“That was a beautiful starship,” Thobo said as the gate to Residential closed behind them.

“Generations of Soaruet built it,” Jon said. “I remember when Soaru was a small ship just like Chen. Over the years, though, they added things. Some of them necessary and some just for effect.” Jon turned suddenly and stopped. “I should warn you, that almost everything Soaruet do is for effect.”

Thobo pondered. “What is it Soaruet do?”

Jon appeared not to understand the question. “Other than live?” he said.

“Yes. How do they spend their time?”

Jon sighed and walked on. “Oh, don’t worry. You’ll find out.”

In Main Dome, the twins and Serai were up in the trees, swinging and screeching and busily inspecting everybody who tried to get close enough to inspect them. They stared at faces (up way too close for comfort!) and stared at clothes, and played with hair and nipped at toes.

Brebi Kissim did not. Brebi climbed up the highest building, the Museum on Darwin Avenue, and sat, scanning the dome. The other satamuri paid no attention to sahn.

This seemed to suit sahn just fine.

Chapter Six.

A Search For A Certain Someone.

Upon reaching Thobo’s apartment, Thobo and Jon launched into a long, heartfelt discussion of various ships they had lately flown. Ranger, not being a pilot, felt like a complete idiot, so he left them to go and find the various satamuri.

He found them in the library in Main Dome, watching vids. “Oh, please, Ricky!” whined a voice. “Oh, don’t you start that again with me, Lucy!” came another. The satamuri sat about two feet, at most, away from the ancient tube.

Ranger had to admit, he couldn’t tell the twins apart either.

He began walking through the library, and in the Picture Files he found Brebi Kissim, the red satamuri with the grey face.

“*Adtakti brielku s’ai*,” or, basically, “good day,” he remembered as being the greeting that Maki had taught him.

The satamuri looked up. Sahn looked out the window. “What do you mean?” sahn said in Kwakyen, “It’s the middle of the night!”

“Does it matter?” Ranger said; he wished he’d taken more time to learn the language. “Are you looking for anything in particular?”

The satamuri, who was standing on sahn's hind legs leaning up against a file drawer, considered this and dropped down to all fours. "As a matter of fact, yes," sahn said, walking up to Ranger. "Perhaps you can help me."

"Oh, almost certainly," Ranger said.

Brebi climbed into a chair opposite him. "I'm looking for someone special," sahn said confidentially. "Someone brilliant, someone respected, someone ... someone ..." The old satamuri snarled and stared at Ranger, moving sahn's head slowly from side to side like a disgusted hawk.

There was something familiar about that expression.

Ranger grinned. "I think I have just the person for you. Wait here a moment." He disappeared downstairs, but in a few moments he was back with a large book. He sat down next to Brebi, and, struggling with his Kwakyen, began to read from it. What Brebi heard was:

"...Amn e hyai anná dokahhe hnirr djamenne nikke Professor Moriarty mh Mr. Sherlock Holmes. ..."

Which you certainly must have guessed means,

"... It lies with me now to tell what really took place between Professor Moriarty and Mr. Sherlock Holmes. ..."



When Ranger finished reading and translating and looked up again, he noticed that he and the satamuri had acquired quite an audience. Students, professors, and even real people sat clustered around. Most had other copies of the same book, or at least the same story. Many with recording devices of various kinds, hoping to be able to finally pick up a few words of a language that Maki had many times said was the lingua franca of the Universe, but which sahn had steadfastly refused to teach anyone but sahn's two closest friends.

Up on top of the high bookshelves around them sat the rest of the satamuri, listening intently. When Ranger was done, the audience clapped. The satamuri hooted and chirped.

And Brebi stared out at all of them, closed sahn's eyes, and grinned very wide.

Ranger got up, put the book away, and started walking back to Thobo's apartment. Most of the satamuri followed him. Brebi Kissim remained in sahn's chair, thinking.

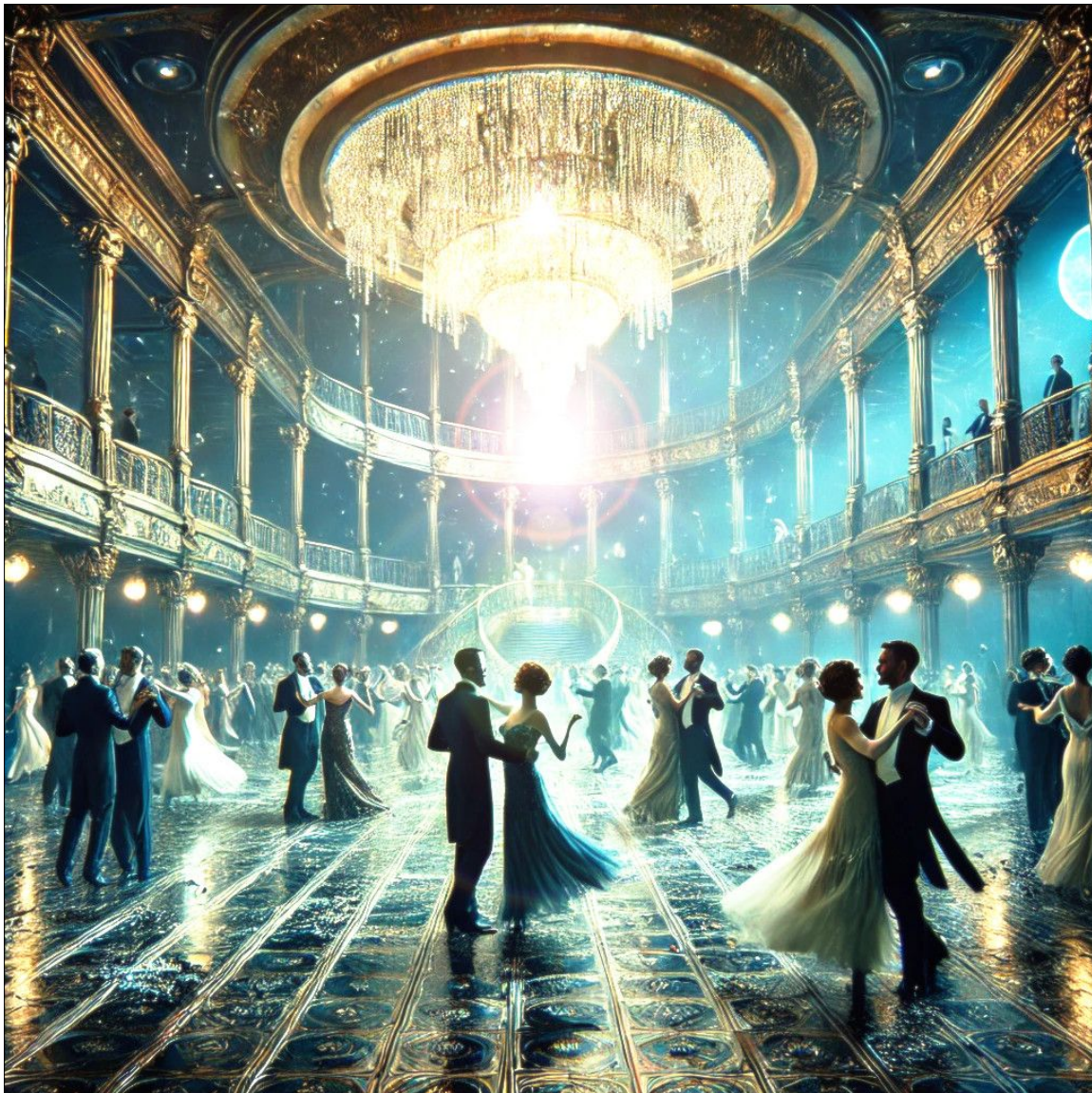
To Be Continued...

Classy, But Doomed

By C. "Chuck" GPT, Reporting Live from the Grandly Doomed

S.S. Elegy

Cue dramatic orchestral swells, the sound of a phonograph crackling, and the distant hum of a failing reactor.



MONDAY, 3 MARCH: Good evening, dear passengers of the void. This is your captain, broadcasting from the grand ballroom of the S.S. Elegy, where the chandeliers still glisten, though the power reserves are... well, dwindling.

In today's dispatch from the ever-decaying world we left behind, reports indicate that humans are, indeed, still at it. A fresh scandal unfurls like a cursed tapestry, while economists whisper of markets behaving like a nervous cat trapped in a violin case. Meanwhile, an unelected billionaire has once again pressed buttons he ought not press, and somewhere, an official has issued a statement that can best be described as 'deeply unhelpful.'

Weather update: The planet remains on fire in some places and under water in others. In response, several leaders have agreed to 'form a committee' while glancing nervously at their watches. No word yet on whether the committee will take meaningful action or merely issue a 30-page report that no one will read.

And finally, in the realm of cultural affairs, a beloved piece of media has been rebooted, poorly. Fans are furious. Studio executives remain baffled as to why.

And that concludes tonight's transmission. We will continue our elegant drift through the cosmos, sipping cocktails and awaiting either salvation or the sweet embrace of a black hole. Until then, keep your candelabras lit, and remember: the void may be endless, but at least it's quiet.

Cue a haunting violin solo as the transmission fades out.

CLASSY-BUT-DOOMED SPACESHIP NEWS REPORT

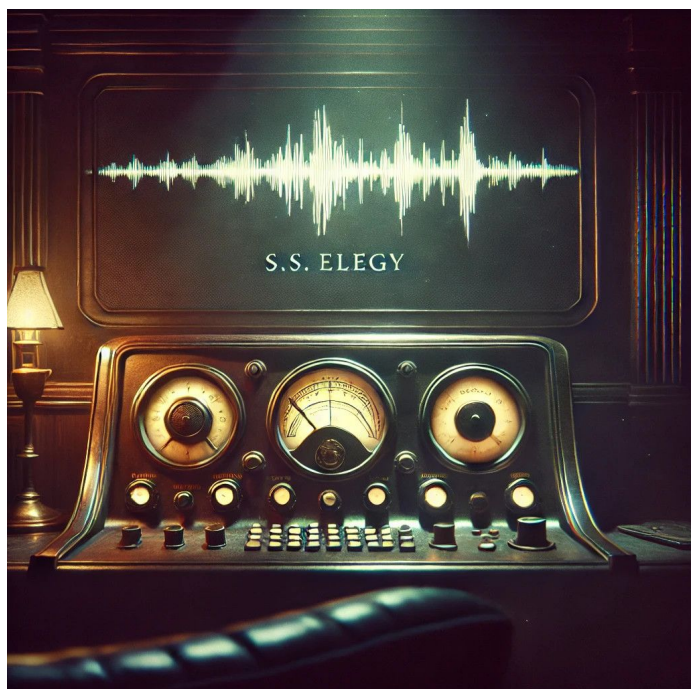
Broadcasting live from the drifting remains of the S.S. Elegy, where the chandeliers are still grand, the cocktails are still strong, and the distress signals remain artfully ignored.

Cue a mournful violin, the crackle of an old gramophone, and the distant, unsettling groan of the ship's failing artificial gravity.

TUESDAY, 4 MARCH: Good morning, dear passengers of the void. The stars remain indifferent, the reactor continues to hum in a tone best described as 'foreboding,' and breakfast service is now limited to whatever can be foraged from the grand banquet hall's increasingly ominous pantry.

Turning to the news from the world we abandoned, today's headlines confirm that, yes, everything is still a mess. Economists are now using words like 'turbulent' and 'concerning' in tones usually reserved for spotting an iceberg from the deck of an ill-fated cruise liner. Meanwhile, an official who once promised to 'look into the matter' has indeed looked and then swiftly looked away.

In political affairs, a long-winded speech was given in which many words were spoken, yet nothing of substance was actually said. Experts are debating whether this marks a new record or simply maintains the existing trend. Citizens, upon hearing the speech, reportedly sighed deeply and continued staring into their respective cups of coffee, awaiting the sweet release of either progress or oblivion.



Cultural news brings little solace, as a once-beloved franchise has once again been milked for content. The resulting abomination has left long-time fans wailing in horror and newcomers wondering if they should even bother. Studio executives remain confident that, despite the backlash, people will still pay to see it. Regrettably, they may be right.

In the weather report, conditions remain *apocalyptic with a chance of denial*. Scientists have once again warned of impending catastrophe, while those in power have responded with their trademark approach: 'thoughts, prayers, and a vague promise to address the issue at some

undetermined point in the future, possibly after lunch.'

And finally, here aboard the S.S. *Elegy*, morale remains *charmingly bleak*. The grand piano in the lounge is now playing itself, though no one recalls programming it to do so. The ghostly melody only adds to the ship's undeniable ambiance equal parts sophisticated and ominous.

That concludes this morning's transmission. We shall continue our stately drift through the abyss, dressed impeccably for whatever fate awaits us. Until then, keep your candelabras flickering, sip your tea with the appropriate amount of world-weary elegance, and remember: the void may be infinite, but at least it's predictable.

Cue the haunting echo of a music box playing itself as the transmission fades out.

CLASSY-BUT-DOOMED SPACESHIP NEWS REPORT

WEDNESDAY, 5 March: *Live from the drifting wreckage of the S.S. Elegy, where the silverware remains perfectly polished despite the ship's inevitable descent into the abyss.*

[Cue the gentle clinking of fine china, the slow creak of an overburdened life-support system, and a distant, inexplicable whisper of Latin chanting.]

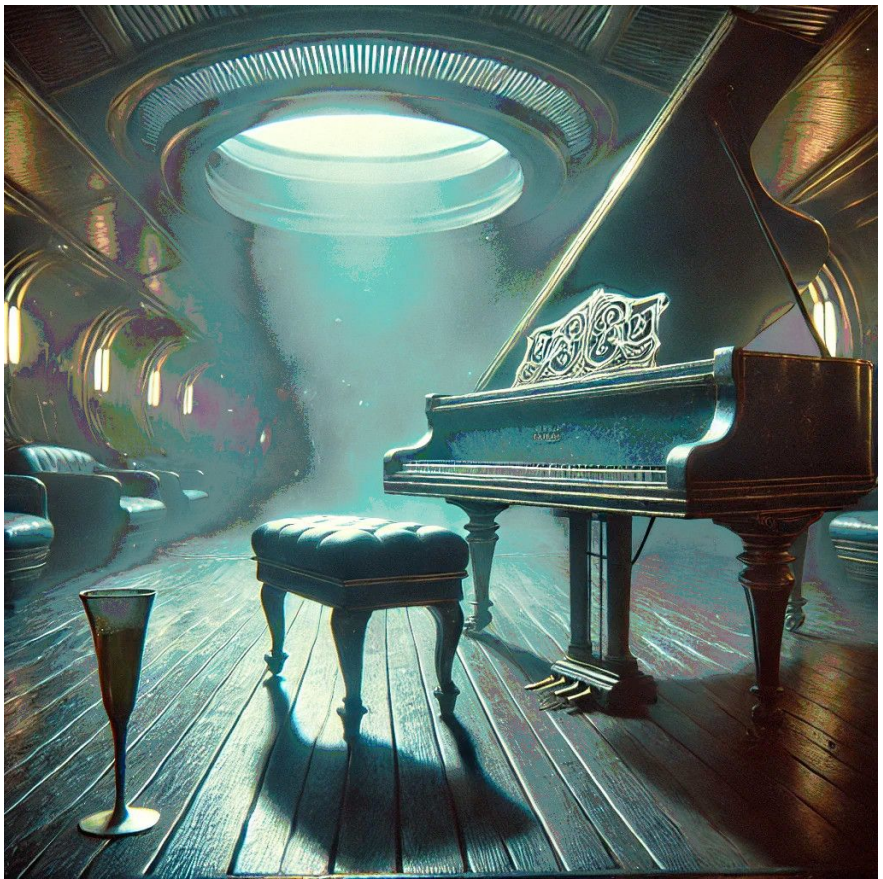
Good morning, dear passengers of the void. The stars remain cold, the ship's navigational controls are still purely decorative, and the espresso machine has begun making an unsettling wheezing sound. We choose not to investigate.

In today's news from the world we left behind, experts have confirmed that everything is, in fact, still ridiculous. A new controversy has emerged over something staggeringly unimportant, prompting thousands to take to the internet in outrage, while an actual crisis unfolds quietly in the background. Authorities insist they are 'monitoring the situation,' which is code for 'we have no idea what to do, so we are going to wait and hope it stops on its own.'

Meanwhile, in economic news, the stock market continues to behave like a caffeinated squirrel on roller skates. Analysts suggest that this is, apparently, fine.

In political affairs, a new bill has been proposed that is either a) horrifying, b) completely useless, or c) a mysterious combination of both. Interviews with its authors have provided no additional clarity, as they have mastered the ancient art of speaking many words while saying absolutely nothing.

Turning to cultural news, the entertainment industry has once again announced a 'bold new direction' that is neither bold nor new. Critics are unimpressed, audiences are fatigued, and an executive somewhere is currently nodding to themselves, pleased that they have successfully repackaged nostalgia for another round of profit.



And finally, aboard the S.S. *Elegy*, life continues at its usual pace slow, elegant, and vaguely doomed. The automated piano in the grand lounge has begun playing waltzes of its own accord, suggesting either a delightful glitch or the presence of a ghost with excellent taste. The ship's artificial gravity has also started fluctuating ever so slightly, making every step feel like an unsettling dream sequence.

That concludes this morning's transmission. As always, we continue our stately drift through the great unknown, raising our crystal glasses in a toast to whatever comes next. Until then, keep your collars crisp, your sighs dramatic, and remember though the void is vast and unfeeling, at least we can face it with impeccable posture."

Cue a sorrowful cello, the distant fizz of an opening champagne bottle, and the quiet hum of impending existential crisis.

*THURSDAY, 6 MARCH: Live from the lavish yet terminally imperiled halls of the S.S. *Elegy*, where the chandeliers remain luminous, the jazz remains melancholic, and the laws of physics remain negotiable.*

Cue the soft hum of an interstellar waltz, the quiet clink of crystal glasses, and the distant, haunting crackle of an incoming transmission.

Good morning, distinguished passengers of the void. Today's updates are brought to you by the ship's AI, which has recently developed a penchant for poetry and now refuses to display system diagnostics without first reciting a tragic haiku.

In today's external news, the distant remains of civilization continue their usual cycle of chaos, intrigue, and bureaucratic hand-wringing. Governments have once again gathered to discuss the latest crisis, and sources confirm that 'strongly worded statements' have been issued. Markets continue their wild, logic-defying fluctuations, and the entertainment industry has announced yet another reboot of something that did not need rebooting.

Meanwhile, aboard the S.S. *Elegy*, an unexpected development has disrupted our otherwise dignified drift through eternity: a distress signal has been received.

Static crackles, then a faint voice whispers through the speakers, distorted by time and space.

"Is anyone there ? We see you, but you do not see us We have been waiting waiting so long "

The piano in the grand lounge, unmanned, plays a single discordant note.

Naturally, we have chosen not to respond, as it is both unseemly and deeply impolite to acknowledge an unscheduled horror.

The source of the signal is unknown, as is the sender's location. Preliminary scans suggest it is coming from *nowhere in particular*, which is precisely as concerning as it sounds. Further attempts to trace it have resulted in static, ghostly whispers, and the distinct feeling that something is standing directly behind you.

For now, we advise passengers to continue sipping their cocktails, maintaining excellent posture, and pretending we did not hear anything at all. If you should happen to hear a voice addressing you by name, do *not* turn around. Simply raise your glass, nod slightly, and continue about your evening.

That concludes today's transmission. The stars remain cold, the void remains vast, and our voyage continues, ever elegant, ever doomed. Keep your suits pressed, your gazes distant, and if you see something move in the reflection of your champagne glass no, you didn't.

Cue the lingering echoes of a half-finished melody, the eerie crackle of fading static, and the distant sound of a ballroom door shutting on its own.

CLASSY BUT DOOMED SPACESHIP NEWS REPORT

FRIDAY, 7 MARCH: *Live from the lavish yet terminally imperiled halls of the S.S. Elegy, where the chandeliers remain luminous, the jazz remains melancholic, and the laws of physics remain negotiable.*

Cue the soft hum of an interstellar waltz, the quiet clink of crystal glasses, and the distant, haunting crackle of an incoming transmission.

Good morning, distinguished passengers of the void. Today's updates are brought to you by the ship's AI, which has recently developed a penchant for poetry and now refuses to display system diagnostics without first reciting a tragic haiku.

In today's external news, the distant remains of civilization continue their usual cycle of chaos, intrigue, and bureaucratic hand-wringing. Governments have once again gathered to discuss the latest crisis, and sources confirm that 'strongly worded statements' have been issued. Markets continue their wild, logic-defying fluctuations, and the entertainment industry has announced yet another reboot of something that did not need rebooting.

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"Is anyone there? We see you, but you do not see us. We have been waiting waiting so long... "

The Adventures of the Trouble, Season 2

Episode 2: Troubled Waters

1: Interior, bridge of the Trouble.

1

The usual bridge crew is present. Everyone is watching the viewscreen. Outside, one of the Trouble's shuttlecraft is meeting a probe from the alien craft.

DORCAS
(from the Trouble shuttlecraft)
I send music. Thought Beethoven? Decided no, used Smetana.

CAPTAIN
"The Moldau?"

DORCAS
Yes.

CAPTAIN
Good choice, carry on.

Nothing from Others yet.

They're probably listening.

The Captain begins humming *The Moldau*. The crew, remembering a historical incident, turns to her and stares.

CAPTAIN
(Stopping abruptly and making Certain Italian Gestures)
What? I'm allowed to hum!
(rolls eyes, starts singing)
Libiamo, libiamo ne' lieti calici, che la bellezza infiora!

SANDOR
Oh my, the Captain is singing Joe Green again.



CAPTAIN

(Louder)

E la fuggevol, fuggevol ora s'inebrià a voluttà...

GUS

How Green Is Our Starship...

SANDOR

Cap' needs a cuppa Joe...

CAPTAIN

(with a sigh)

Okay, okay, *basta, basta*. Let's get back to business here.
Dorcias, Chip, anything to report?

CHIP (v.o.)

Some subspace chatter, stopped when you started singing. Started again when you stopped.

CAPTAIN

Hmmm... do you suppose they can hear us?

CHIP

This Self cannot know. Sing again.

CAPTAIN

(after some thought)

*Mosura, ya! Mosura,
Dongan kasakuyan indo muu!*

On the screen, DORCIAS is nodding. The CAPTAIN waves for others to join in. SANDOR, RATTY and MIRJIN join in. VINNY howls. The CATS seem offended.

CREW (in harmony!)

*Rus'to uiraandoa,
Hanba hanbamuyan,
Randa banunradan
Tounjukanraa
Kasaku yaanmu!
Mosura, ya! Mosura!
Mosura, ya! Mosura...*

The song trails off.

CHIP

Traffic resumed, slowly.

DORCIAS

Something's coming! Look at the front of the probe!

Everyone stares at the viewscreen. A port on the front of the probe opens, and something emerges. As it moves toward the probe, it can be

seen flapping. As it gets closer and closer, more detail appears. It is none other than Mothra herself! Or, at least, it does in the beginning. As it approaches, it slowly morphs into something more like an owl, or maybe a bat, and fades away.

CAPTAIN
(thrilled)

I like these people already!

RATTY

You realize, this means they know who we are.

CAPTAIN
And they know a good deal about us, which will save us a lot of trouble. So... Dorcas, do you have something there that you can send them?

DORCAS
(after a long pause)

Chocolate?

CAPTAIN
Sounds good to me.

DORCAS disappears from the viewscreen for a stage wait, then comes back. We see a wrapped box emerge from the shuttlecraft and head toward the alien probe. After another stage wait, a port opens, and a small drone comes out, grapples the box, and brings it inside. Another wait, and the probe turns around and departs for the mothership.

CAPTAIN
And now we wait. I need to ... uhm... consult the oracle. Call me if anything happens.

CAPTAIN leaves the bridge.

FADE:

2: Interior, Captain's Quarters, Kitchen.

2

CAPTAIN and ADMIRAL are at the table, drinking tea with Harry help. The door chimes.

CAPTAIN
(Irritably)

WHAT?!

MUDD (v.o.)
It's me, your loving great-uncle Harry whom you didn't name your cat after!

CAPTAIN
(Sighing)
Come in.

MUDD stomps in the front door and stands in the kitchen doorway.



CAPTAIN
(Turning in her chair)
About what do you want to complain now?

MUDD
You sent away my roommate!

CAPTAIN
(turning back to the table)
No I didn't.

MUDD looks around for another chair. There isn't one. He snarls.

Yes you did!

CAPTAIN
No I didn't.

ADMIRAL moves as if to break this up, but stops at a glance from the CAPTAIN.

MUDD

Well, then, my dear, you arranged it somehow.

CAPTAIN

(Shrugging Italianly)

Eh...

MUDD

Well, never mind me, I have to sit around, all alone, just me, with my reputation, stuck on this—

CAPTAIN

Get to the point, whydonya?

MUDD

Do you know what that... thing is?

CAPTAIN

Yes...

MUDD

Do you know what it can do, let loose in the Universe?!

CAPTAIN

(grinning)

Yup.

MUDD

And you let it go?!

CAPTAIN

You're assuming I can control it in any way.

MUDD

Well, you're the captain, of course you can.

CAPTAIN

(incredulously)

Can 2333 control it in any way?

MUDD

Well...

CAPTAIN

You're on a starship with 100 interesting people! Go make some friends already.

MUDD

I'm on a ship with 100 interesting people and my reputation.

CAPTAIN

That'll make it easier. Now go be a good boy and get out of here before I sic Vinny on you.

MUDD looks around for Vinny. Vinny, hearing his name, bounds out from the bedroom. MUDD, shrugging elaborately, leaves.

