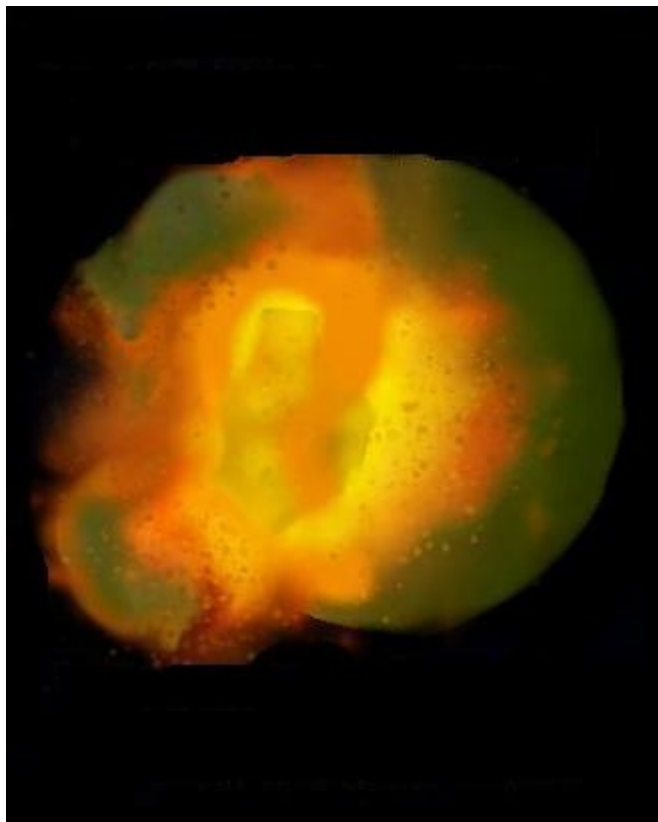


Children's Tales of the Universe



By Daniel Dilger
Co-authored by Jack Ferguson

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Author's Note:

Children's Tales of the Universe has an odd origin. Jack (co-author) and I, on the long drive to school and back, discussed many different ideas of the Universe, and before we knew it, we had hypothetical alien civilizations worked into our discussions. A good example is the Cube People, a communist species with a very strange way of solving an overpopulation problem. We wanted to draw connections between all of these ideas of ours. A book, which we planned to call Children's Tales of the Universe, seemed like a fun idea, but later we abandoned the project, thinking we would never get a book good enough for us. We never had once thought that it might be published.

One summer's day I had a sudden inspiration for the plot and decided to write the book. I wasted a lot of time creating it. In the attempt to stick to a plotline, many things had to be left out and many new things added in.

Children's Tales of the Universe now has a sequel, Worship your Vermin. Both this book and Worship your Vermin are available for free downloading online at our website CTUniverse.net.

I plan to write a third book for this series, Mysteries of the Ghost Squeenburg, so I would be more than happy to accept questions or comments from readers like you. My email address is eltunacafe@gmail.com and the co-author's is squeenburg@gmail.com

Enjoy the book.

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Prologue: A Guide to the Universe's Secrets

There are many theories on how the Universe was created and many conflicts when it comes to trying to prove which one is right. What is interesting is that as life forms, our brains are nothing other than meaty carbon-and-water blobs fixed inside our heads. Even wet coal has carbon and water, the primary substances of our brain. However, our brains, those things so very much like wet coal, have come up with some interesting theories on how the Universe was created. The best part is: all these creation theories involve something already being there.

Take the Big Bang. Scientists have argued that, since all things in the Universe are moving outward, there must have been an explosion at the center of where our Universe is, and that created all matter. What made this so-called explosion explode? Why was it there in the first place? Obviously, the Big Bang theory cannot work, for something would have been there already. If you want to figure out what *created* the Universe, you have to think about what was out there at the beginning of time: nothing.

Yes, if it is the beginning of everything we are talking about, obviously the only thing out there would be nothing, and lots of it. In fact, there is nothing at all – an infinite amount of nothingness.

The brilliant wet coal Stephen Hawking might tell you that black holes have infinite mass. Well, nothing is no mass, and no mass is clearly an amount of mass, so it seems that

infinite nothingness would basically be a black hole. Stephen Hawking might also tell you that black holes can give off radiation, as well as particles of matter and anti-matter, due to Hawking Radiation.

It seems that once the black hole of infinite nothingness spouted out the matter and anti-matter, the nothingness was no longer infinitely nothing, and the black hole would no longer be there (of course, being nothing, it would have technically never have been there anyway). Now, imagine that there is nothing but equal amounts of matter and anti-matter. What do you get when matter and anti-matter collide? Explosions.

This is where it gets tricky. Suppose that all the matter and anti-matter collides at once, and there is a huge explosion. But there is nothing to explode, and still no where to explode, as the Universe hasn't been created yet, right? That's why our Universe, as well as two other universes: the Dimension of Stupidity and the Dimension of Tuna (more on that later) was created – to provide a space for the matter to explode (so basically, our Universe was created just in order to be destroyed, and we're what's left). That, my friend, is what the Big Bang was, and if you want to give our scientists credibility – on the Big Bang, that is – you'd better believe this.

This is, of course, a theory that seems stupid, and, should it be true, it tells us that the Universe must be based on stupidity. This would make sense of a lot of things, like why dumb people are usually happier than smart people, and why smart people always do at least one dumb thing in his, her, or its life, whereas a dumb person can go for eternity without ever doing something smart. It can also explain

Prologue

something very puzzling: why string theory's underlying principle is that the Universe is random; i.e. rather stupid.

Seeing that the three main universes are based on stupidity, especially the Dimension of Stupidity, which is a Universe filled with a purple gas that can do things thought to be impossible (because it uses the principles of stupidity), like make things travel faster than the speed of light and make totally new elements with stupid principles, like Ba-ing-go, which shows up in this story often, you can benefit from the effects of stupidity. Besides the reasons just explained, which come from the help of the Dimension of Stupidity's purple gas, you can also become immortal by being purely stupid. Of course, if you were purely stupid, you could not really enjoy immortality.

Roy, the ruler of the Universe, became immortal by having enough **negative intelligence** that it cancelled out his brilliant mind and made him immortal. Negative intelligence is basically making other people stupid, which Roy accomplished by opening the El Tuna Café, which was at that time a failing restaurant floating in space that nobody wanted to go to, since it got its tuna from the Dimension of Tuna, a mildly stupid universe in which everything is in the fifth state of matter, tunamatism (the fourth state is plasma).

Tunamatic material, although truly tuna (unlike Earth's tuna fish), is disgusting and highly toxic. While Roy's cooks could protect themselves from it with highly complex safety suits and by containing the customers in lead booths, it did not provide a comfortable eatery, so Roy was forced to put drugs in the tuna to get repeat customers, and

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the drugs made the customers become incredibly stupid. It worked.

In fact, it worked so well that Roy both gained immortality and had the ways of the Universe so down pat that he could actually take it over.

It is time that you see what life is like in the Universe.

Tony's Puzzle

Tony walked down the Great Hall of the El Tuna Café once again, and yet it still amazed him. He had no idea how long he had been here, but it seemed like a year already. Technically, though, he was supposed to have been here for only 15 days, since each of these trips was a “daily” one, but he had no idea exactly how long a day in the El Tuna Café was in comparison to a day on Earth.

However long he may have been living in that floating restaurant, it never stopped surprising him. The Universe turned out to be nothing like he had anticipated it to be when writing his book on it, although it was similar enough to the real thing to make him be considered a psychic by those outside of Earth, the whole reason why he had been abducted and sent here in the first place. Being kept in a cage all day, however long that day was, allowed him to learn plenty about the real Universe, its ruler Roy, and the Gotithian language, which, because it was Roy's primary language, became the universal language when Roy conquered the Universe. He had learned things like how the Universe was believed to have been made and how it worked, and that the Gotithian language has fifty words for revenge but no words for trust or acceptance, which, if you have read the prologue on how the Universe was formed, kind of makes sense.

Tony could see the mahogany doors leading into the Roy's conference room. “These will be dark times for the Universe,” someone said, “dark, hard, terrible times.”

Tony knew enough Gotithian to understand what he was saying. He raised an eyebrow and turned to face the

creature. It was a strange thing in a dark gray cloak. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about the omens. Just look at any old calendar and you'll see," the creature answered. It pulled a calendar out of its long cloak.

"Why, it says that the first day of the month is...Friday the 13th!" Tony exclaimed.

"Yes," the creature said, "It's a very bad omen, isn't it? I fear for what will happen to the Universe!"

Tony shook his head. "If the Universe has decided to make the first day of the month Friday the 13th, then I fear for the Universe, too," he said, and continued walking down the Great Hall.

When he reached the end of the hall, he found that the conference room door was locked. Roy must have been talking with his cabinet. Tony, now confident with his Gotithian, decided to eavesdrop.

"These mathematicians standing in front of you are the reason for our terrible stock market and dying economy," Tony heard Roy say, "They were unable to reach their objective of unifying the universal measurement system, and confusion has followed."

Someone, most likely one of the mathematicians, tried to protest. "We were only – "

"You were only following orders, I know," said Roy, "but you did a really crappy job. For example, putting force and energy measurements together makes sense, and your idea of having distance be measured by how much force or energy was needed to move a standard weight – that all seemed promising, but apparently our ship salesmen are now

Tony's Puzzle

unknowingly selling ships that can get, in old terms: 'Three inches a ton, planet; and five ounces a pound, Universe.' ” Everyone in the room but the mathematicians, Roy, and the owner of a ship-manufacturing company had trouble not laughing. “Also,” Roy continued, casting a glare over to those that were giggling softly, “You have tried to unify time and energy by measuring time based on something involving energy that I do not understand, and apparently neither do marketers. We now are promised in vacuum commercials: ‘and if it you’re not completely satisfied, you can return the product within five newtons and the new one will have six minutes more sucking ability!’ The point is nobody knows what the heck they are buying anymore, or what it does, so they have just stopped buying many products, which has been hurting the profits of many companies, who have been trying in vain to boost their sales with even more commercials, further confusing the consumers.”

“Then it must be the companies’ faults, not ours, because they have bad marketing,” a mathematician said softly.

Roy pounded on the table and roared, “If you are insulting the companies, you are insulting practically everyone in this room but you! We own all the companies, so it is you who is wrong, not us!”

“But you’re the one who told us that we should only use these measurements, and not use others at the same time, Roy! People wouldn’t be confused without your policy!” The mathematician yelled back.

Then the room went silent. Tony assumed that Roy had pressed a button or something and killed the mathematicians. Then Roy said, “All right, I’ll lift my policy

if you'll try again. For now we'll just blame organized religions for being so against our economic activities."

Tony shook his head. Roy should have killed them. With his decision, still more confusion was to come.

"Thank God I'm an atheist," someone said.

Even Tony was confused here.

"Okay, cabinet, you're dismissed, for now," Roy said, "I have an appointment with the human. Come back at the usual time. Goodbye, now." The doors opened, Tony quickly stood up, so that nobody would suspect eavesdropping. Out the doors came Roy's cabinet, a mob of an ape-like species called Space Monkeys; a group of some creatures that appeared to be boxy humans, called Cube People; a Zebonian Turtle, which is a turtle from the planet Zebus that is incredibly intelligent, but extremely dangerous because, for some reason Tony did not know, a tremor just a little too big could send off an explosion in the turtle. The next to come out were creatures a little closer to Roy: a garden snail hovering on some sort of board, called Dave, who, as Tony had learned, had bought Earth from Roy in order to start a tourist industry; and of course there were some Gotithian businessmen too. Roy had a preference for them since they belonged to his half goat, half humanoid species. Lastly, coming all bruised and beaten, were the four Gotithian mathematicians that Roy had yelled at.

"Tony, come in." Roy commanded, as soon as the swarm had left. Tony, stooping down so that he could fit in the low-ceilinged room, entered. The doors shut behind him.

Since Gotithia, Roy's home planet, had become terribly overpopulated about 1.5 million years ago (Gotithian

Tony's Puzzle

years and Earth years were surprisingly alike), the Gotithians, rather than send their people to other planets, decided to use their advanced technology to enlarge the planet, resulting in such high gravity that it is almost impossible for a Gotithian to be anything but short. Roy, having high pride, wanted to feel like he was at least average sized for a creature in the Universe, so he made as many government buildings as possible low-ceilinged. He could stand up fine, but Tony had to painfully squat during each of these “daily” meetings.

“Tony, sometimes it feels like everyone, even the Universe itself, is against me. I mean, it’s not like I’m a very superstitious man or anything, but – have you seen the calendars lately? The first day of this month is Friday the 13th! The point is that I’m worried that this month some idiot is going to kill me. My immortality cannot help me against mortal wounds, you know. I want you to write me up a death certificate, so that I know what is to come...if anything.”

“Um, sir...” Tony began, “death certificates can only be written once you’re um, well, *dead*. I could – ”

“Now wait just a minute there!” Roy interrupted, “of course you can write a death certificate before I’m dead! A prophet wrote my birth certificate before I was born, and that’s got to be harder than a death certificate!”

“Was it accurate?” Tony asked, desperately trying to get out of this assignment, for he knew that if Roy grew angry with him, the consequences would be disastrous.

“Of course it was!” said Roy, “it said everything perfectly: eight pounds, eight ounces, 4 inches; girl.”

Tony raised an eyebrow. “Girl?”

For the first time, Tony saw Roy nervous. "Well, uh, yeah. It makes perfect sense... but you're wasting my time if I have to explain it! Just learn your assignment!"

The room went silent. "Do you want me to use my 'prophetic skills' to figure out your death certificate?" Tony asked, a bit sarcastically.

"Not really," Roy said. He pushed a button. A TV screen dropped down from the ceiling. "On this screen you will see an average Gotithian woman sitting in a chair that's surrounded by about a dozen or so tiny machines. Soon, the machines will spew out a drug, and the woman will begin hallucinating and hopefully foreseeing the future. Normally, I would have a group of trained men doing all of the gibberish-translating, but their answers were so stupid that I had to fire them...in a way. So it's now your job to do the translating. Remember, you get the same fate if you fail!"

The woman now began to mumble. Roy turned up the volume. "In some distant land, a dog beats an ugly drum. The fan will soon hatch," she said.

Tony feared for his life. "Are you sure that this woman has prophetic skills? I mean, that was a nice Haiku, but are you really sure?"

"I am the only being to ever conquer a universe by using food – don't you think I know a thing or two?" Roy said, annoyed.

"Okay, okay...tell you what: I can solve this puzzle, but to do this, I'll need to do some heavy-duty thinking. Could you, you know, maybe give me an actual room to think in instead of that awful little cage behind the kitchen?"

"For a day and night, yes. But I'm going to be at your room by sunrise, ready for an answer."

Tony's Puzzle

Tony smiled. Considering how long a day lasted at the El Tuna Café, he would have almost a fifteenth of a year, a nice 24 Earth days if his math was right, in order to try and figure out the puzzle, or to think of something that could possibly please Roy. As a bonus, for nearly an Earth month he would be sleeping in something bigger than a 3 x 4 x 5 foot cage.

Roy began to laugh. “Tony, how stupid do you think I am?” he chuckled. “You’ve been cramped in a dinky little cage for so long, you can barely walk, let alone pace! However, since I’m late for an appointment much more important than this – with a three year old Gotithian – I will not argue. Go tell the cook on your way to the cages that you’re allowed to have any vacant room in the building that he can find for you.” Tony cheered the decision. Roy left through a private door leading to his ship. Tony, as fast as his weak legs could take him, went to the Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook, and told him what Roy said. The fry cook, having a PhD in brainwashing, also having been knighted by Roy for making the tuna so addictive *and* being in charge of all of the cages (hence the title: Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook), knew that Tony’s spirit would by now too broken to lie, believed him and told him that he could have the utility room which the kitchen slaves had complained was too dirty (so much for Tony’s self esteem). Tony once again made off as fast as he could down the hall so he could get into what would be his new home for a while. A normal person would easily see how bad it was, after all, the Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook had considered the room unfit for slaves, but to Tony, the filthy room was paradise. “Today,” Tony said, “I live it big!”

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Roy laughed to himself, still thinking how funny it was that Tony was happy with the dirty utility room he would surely get from the Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook. Chuckling at how evil he was all the way through hyperspace, he finally landed on Margues, a large agricultural planet.

“Daddy! Daddy!” Billy Chipper, an excited three year old in a small red shirt and little overalls screamed excitedly, smiling so that his dimples showed. “Rich Daddy’s here!”

“Aargh,” the boy’s father groaned, “I wish you wouldn’t call him that.” He stumbled to the door and opened it. “Roy! What a pleasant surprise! Had I known your Excellency was coming, I would have...this reminds me – ”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Roy said impatiently, “if I were to hear your drunken anecdotes, you would see cats in my ears. Where’s the boy’s mother?”

“I already see cats in your ears,” the man mumbled.

“What?”

“I SAID I ALREADY SEE CATS IN YOUR EARS!!!” the man screamed.

“Stupid drunk,” Roy mumbled. He pulled out his special tazor, the Zangy Zapper. “No, Roy, you won’t kill him. He’s like a father to the boy, er, he *is* the boy’s father.” Roy told himself, tucking the weapon away.

A frightful looking monstrosity peeked out from behind a bush, trying to see what was going on at the porch. Roy recognized it as one of the dog-sized guinea pigs that the boy’s mother, Mona, had been creating. She had hoped that

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this guinea pig ranch idea of hers would take off, and was squandering the money Roy had given the family trying to produce more and larger monstrosities.

Roy was relieved to see an intelligent being at this ranch, and asked where Mona was.

“Mona is in the lab,” the guinea pig said, “further screwing up the genetics of our species.” The guinea pig shuddered and looked back at the others. “Would you like to play polo?”

Roy, ignoring the offer, walked to the tool shed that all the guinea pigs called “the lab” and opened the door.

“Heeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeelp!” a guinea pig squealed. Roy peered in and saw Mona chasing a guinea pig that had climbed to the ceiling.

Roy closed his eyes for a moment. He heard an awful squelching noise and the thud of the guinea pig’s body hitting the ground.

“Roy! What a pleasant surprise! Here, let me give you a tour of...you’re here to see Billy, aren’t you?” Mona, the mother of the boy, said.

“As usual.”

“Why?”

“Well, he being my heir, it’s time for my annual mental-checkup.”

“Roy, you’re immortal. Leave Billy alone.”

“Okay, okay, I’ll admit it,” Roy took a deep breath, “I’ve actually decided that I’m going to take Billy away. A drug addict for a father and a failing bio-engineer for a mother can’t be good for him. I mean, look at that!” Mona turned to the direction Roy was pointing in. Little Billy had escaped his father’s watchful eyes, and, waddling clumsily

on his goat hooves, climbed up the steps to the door of the ship. He seemed to be struggling with the lock on the door. Mona smiled. Then he got in.

Mona looked with disbelief. "Billy! Get out of Rich Daddy's ship!"

"I'm a rooster!" Billy screamed back. He pressed some buttons and Roy's ship went flying into the house.

"Billy! You could have killed the cat!" Mona screamed, and then sighed, "And your father, I guess."

"Cockle doodle-dooooo!" Billy screamed. The passenger seat ejected from Roy's ship.

Mona looked at Roy. "Well, uh er um..." Roy stuttered, "He's a smart kid! I, well, how many three year olds can lock-pick a ship, smash a house *and* fire seats?"

Mona raised an eyebrow at Roy. "Take him," she said.

Roy raced towards the house. "Little Billy! Little Billy! Get out of the ship, Rich Daddy's here!"

"Rich Daddy!" Billy yelled excitedly, "Did you see? I was a rooster! I laid a fluffy egg!"

Roy opened the door and stepped into the ship. "Great," he said, weakly, picking Billy up out of the driver's seat. Why don't you go to the fridge back there, and get yourself some cake?"

"Yum! Where are we going?"

"Anywhere you want. That is, as soon as I go get my ship fixed." Roy said, taking a look at his floor, for he knew that as soon as they hit hyperspace Little Billy would be puking and wetting himself like...he had no idea what could puke and pee that much.

"You go ship-fixing a lot."

"Yeah," Roy sighed, "I wonder why."

The Heir

Meanwhile, back at the El Tuna Café, Tony was also having a bad time. “Well, at least this water heater is nice and warm,” he said to himself, brushing away the dung piles and lying down. Suddenly he started sobbing. “Why is there *dung* in a utility room? Why are there heaps of it?” he sniffed the air a little. “These fumes are bab, foo.”

A mob of interested cockroaches came over a nearby dung heap. One of the cockroaches spoke up. “Hey man, what’re doing?” Tony felt dizzy.

“Felf ge,” Tony pleaded in an ever-slurring voice. “Felf ge yet ourt uh mere.”

The cockroaches looked at each other, not knowing what to do. You may already know that the cockroaches are perhaps the most resilient creatures in the Universe. Were they to get caught in a nuclear war on some planet, those who didn’t die from the explosions would normally be the ones that were needed to break a stalemate, seeing that they could survive such extreme levels of radiation. While on this planet, it would not be too hard for them to find food or hold a siege, for cockroaches can live off of almost anything, even the grease left from a thumbprint. Not even a shortage of cockroaches would be much of an issue, since a cockroach can breed so rapidly – a single female cockroach from certain species can be permanently pregnant, always giving birth to more and more larvae.

The Universe has often relied on cockroaches in serious wars and would continue to do so. These cockroaches, being a part of such a resilient species, could not see what was wrong with Tony. They only saw that he

was in a mess, babbling in slurred speech about a death certificate for Roy or something, until he was out cold.

“What did he say, now?” asked a cockroach.

“He said that Roy is dead!” said another.

“No, he said that he had to make a death certificate,” said one calmly.

“And that doesn't mean that Roy is dead?” asked yet another.

“If Roy's dead, what's this guy doing here? Seems like a punishment to me,” said some other cockroach.

“I wonder where Roy is,” asked another. “We should have heard him passing through the hallway by now.”

Roy waited, exhausted, in the waiting room of a mechanics shop. He had his death certificate on his mind, and this little heir of his was causing him a lot of trouble. Roy wondered if this kid was really worth keeping. He didn't seem all that intelligent.

“Why is that guy a frog?” Little Billy asked in his annoying little voice, pointing towards yet another part of the ship repairmen's garage.

Roy rolled his eyes. “That's not a frog. It's a Chubbit.”

“What's a Chubbit?” Billy asked.

Roy tried to think of the longest explanation. Maybe that would keep Billy quiet. “A Chubbit is the stupidest species in the Universe. It doesn't have the brain capacity to think ahead even for the simplest things, so everything it does is completely random. Anything stupider than a Chubbit, or anything that imposes more stupidity than – ”

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“Hey Froggy!” Little Billy screeched, trying to get the Chubbit to hear him through glass of the waiting room. “Do you like nachos?” he waved a bag of nachos from the vending machine around.

The Chubbit turned around to face the glass, and clapped its hands stupidly. Roy pulled out his Zangy Zapper. “Billy, you made it come closer!” The Chubbit meowed ferociously, licked itself, and, now standing on two legs, charged at the room. Then it stopped and began beating its face against the glass.

“Stupid creature,” Roy said angrily. “If I’m going to wait this long, I might as well be waiting without having to see a Chubbit.” But Roy did not have to leave the room to see the repairman, for he burst into the room, looking nervous. “Roy, there was juice that leaked into the engine. It’s gone insane! I think that it would be better for you to buy a new ship rather than try to repair this one again.” Roy stared at Little Billy with amazement.

“That was my father’s ship! Are you saying that juice destroyed it?”

“Well, it isn’t destroyed – yet. However, if you run the engine, the juice may cause the engine to explode.”

“Why can’t you just disable the engine?”

“We tried, and the ship caught fire. It would be best for you just to buy a new ship.” The repairman handed Roy’s 600 scarabs – scarabs are little bug-shaped coins that are used as the Universe’s currency – back and recommended that Roy take his ship over to a dealership in the Andromeda galaxy.

“Go there? With this little kid? He can hardly go **two** galaxies in hyperspace without wetting his pants!”

“Go anyway. They’re the only place in the Universe that sells the new **Poach-a-tron**, an amazing new ship made by the Cube People. You’ve probably never heard of it, since they are so expensive and so new on the market hardly anyone buys one, and fewer than a million people know about it. I can’t understand why nobody’s told you about it.”

“Wait a minute,” said Roy, “I thought that the Cube People only sold the Jiggy Gas Piggys.”

“The Poach-a-tron is basically a Jiggy Gas Piggy that’s made to fly around and poach animals. It’s so sturdy it probably could survive even that kid of yours. By the way, where is he?”

Roy flipped around. “Billy! Where are you?” The lights went out. Billy fell from tiled ceiling, clutching onto a handful of wires.

“I’m a rooster!”

Roy looked at Little Billy, and then to the unhappy, though smiling, repairman, and then to the ceiling. That was odd. There was a camera up there. A closer look and Roy saw that it was not an oddly misplaced security camera, but a camera from the marketing department of the Jeff Motors company. Clearly they had some original ideas on how market research should be done. Roy shook his head, handed over a few more scarabs for the damage, and left.

“Rich Daddy, could you fly slower? I made another accident.”

Roy cursed under his breath. “I am flying slowly, Billy! If I fly any slower, we’ll never get there!”

“But I don’t think the fridge can take much more!”

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Roy's jaw dropped. "Billy, get out of the mini-fridge, now! Hang over the toilet or something like you did last time." As soon as he saw Billy out, he fired the ship as fast as it would go, so that they would get there as soon as possible.

"Mmmmpfh hung," Little Billy groaned.

"What?"

"I said I'm puking," Little Billy replied.

"Ergh...I'm going to return this ship and just tell them to get it for me." Roy said, turning the ship around.

Many pukings and another "accident" later, Roy finally managed to return to the repairman's workshop.

"Back so soon?" The repairman asked, stepping up to the door of the ship to greet Roy.

"I'm back alive," replied Roy. "Listen, Billy has some trouble flying, so could you just buy a Poach-a-tron for me? As long as you choose something good, I'm fine with the ship."

"Very well, sir."

"Here's the money for the ship, some money for your trouble, and some money for a new carpet in your ship."

The repairman raised an eyebrow. "Carpet for my ship?" he opened the door. "Oh my...what the! This is what your heir did?" he screeched.

"Yes."

"Well, Roy, I'll go anyway. But first, I'd like to wish you best of health, and eternal life."

"Thank you." Roy said, as the ship took off. "Hey, wait a minute..."

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“You did a fine job, Jeff, preparing the shop like this, except for the fact that you forgot that it is the ruler of the Universe that’s coming!” A strange man said, spitting at Jeff.

“Hey, listen here. You’re not my boss, I’m your boss.”

“Well, still, man! If Roy’s coming, you’ve got to ‘wow’ him. Amaze him! Give Roy royal treatment; otherwise he might not buy anything. And we all know what kind of image that will give our ships....”

Jeff looked around. “You’re right. This is no place for a king! Where are the chandeliers? Where are the butlers? We can’t make him feel like a civilian! Bob, I want a troupe of butlers and an orchestra ASAP!”

“Stupid Roy,” the repairman muttered to himself. “The one night I have a date, and look at my ship!” he cursed, and then landed at the dealership.

A strange Gotithian burst out of the building. “Welcome, exalted one!” he cried. With a big smile on his face, he made an odd waving motion, and an orchestra began playing. A troupe of butlers rushed towards the ship, scrubbing it vigorously until the repairman stepped out. Everyone stopped. The Gotithian salesman looked embarrassed.

Thunderstruck, the repairman stood there in the silent parking lot for about a minute. “Cool!” he said. “You butlers can clean out the carpeting in my ship!”

“We’re only doing that sort of crap for Roy,” they said.

“I’m here on account of Roy.”

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Jeff heard this, loud and clear. “You heard the man, scrubbys! Now do your job!” The orchestra began playing again.

The Conspiracy

The Repairman had returned, and, to the surprise of Roy, was wearing a crown and some sort of silky uniform. “They really know how to treat customers there!” he said happily.

“Wow,” said Roy, “I’ve never seen so one so desperate to make a sale.”

“Um, yes. That’s it. Desperate to make a sale.”

Two more ships landed. One of the ships was a small one obviously there to bring the driver of the other ship back home. And that other ship was, of course, Roy’s Poach-a-tron. It was magnificent. It was a perfectly rectangular shaped, two-storied black ship, with a gun at the bottom, and slide-able panels on each of the other five sides to hold more guns, small holes for cameras and radars at each of the eight corners, and the door came down as a flight of steps that led up to the entrance. The ship salesman, Jeff, walked down the steps and bowed low. “Greetings, exalted one. I hope that you are pleased with the ship.”

Roy looked at what he could see in the inside more closely. “How easy is it to clean?”

“Very easy. As you can see, it has tiled floors, but in addition it also has devices in the walls that can detect and then clean any stained part of the ship.”

Roy was delighted. “Wonderful! I can now take Billy to the El Tuna Café. Leave the vehicle, civilian. You’ve done well.” Roy took Little Billy’s hand, and the two entered the new ship.

Billy let go of Roy’s hand and looked around the Poach-a-tron in awe. Roy walked over to the control panels,

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just as impressed, and pressed a few buttons to start the flight. Then he set the thing to auto-pilot and went to the mini fridge to see what snacks they put in it. That was all the time that Billy needed. He dashed over to the control panels and seated himself. “The rooster is back!” he cried. Roy put down his drink and ran over towards Billy before he did something wrong. “Boom! Boom! He’s killing the aliens!” Billy cried, pressing some buttons. The ship did not budge, much to Roy’s relief and delight.

“I’m definitely buying more stock from the Cube People!” he said.

“C’mon, can’t we go now? I have to use the bathroom!” One of the mathematicians cried.

“Yeah, and I have to get back to the kitchen!” Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook added.

“No!” said Dave, “You know the rule: if Roy is late for any reason, all we are to do is stay in the conference room and wait. The meeting isn’t over until Roy says so!”

The first two whiners looked at Dave funny, while the rest just rolled their eyes or, if they were already asleep, rolled over.

“Well,” said Dave nervously, “I’m getting kind of hungry, and my stomach isn’t too big... but no! If Roy walks in here and finds one of us is missing, that person will be counted late!”

Those awake in the room sighed. They realized that this could last all day, and everyone knew how long a day was at the El Tuna Café...

They heard a faint voice. What was that? It sounded like Roy and Little Billy!

“Rich Daddy, can we go to Earthland?” They could hear Roy’s heir ask.

“Sure, Billy! The day at the El Tuna Café lasts for another seven hours, which allows us to stay at Earthland for about, uh, what they call a ‘week’ on Earth!” said Roy

“Yay! We get to stay for a week!” cried back the four year old voice.

Dave looked across the room. In a remote corner of the conference room, in a filing cabinet, there was a walkie-talkie that was used if Roy wanted to communicate the others if he was doing something else during a conference period. Dave could not see how they had overlooked that option. He looked towards the others. “Is anyone going to get that?” he asked, calmly. A Space Monkey stood up and reached for the drawer in which the walkie-talkie was kept. It was locked. Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook’s temper flared.

“Weakling!” he shouted, and pushed the Space Monkey aside. He pulled and pulled, and then the door handle fell off.

“Hey, here’s the key!” shouted the Space Monkey, looking on the floor that Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook had pushed him down to.

“Well, that’s just nice, isn’t it?” said Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook sarcastically.

“Okay, okay, just stay calm,” Dave said. “We still have plenty of water and punch. We’ll just ration all the supplies until Roy gets here.”

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“Oh, no!” Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook cried, “I’m not going to let those stupid mathematicians drink some of the precious water! I say they go thirsty!”

“Well, I say you shut up!” said a mathematician.

“Tell me to shut up? I’m the Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook!” he yelled at the mathematician, and beat a chair over the mathematician’s head.

“You’ve killed him!” Another mathematician roared, and pulled out a Zangy Zapper.

“Two can fight that way!” Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook screamed, pulling out a Zangy Zapper of his own. “But you’ll find that I’m still wearing that tuna-protection suit! You can’t hurt me!”

Dave tried to settle the fight soon before it got bad, “Mathematicians, shut up. Cook, stop killing mathematicians.”

“Shut up, snail!”

“Don’t insult the snail!”

“I’ll kill you all!” Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook roared, and threw a chair at the crowd.

“Please stop fighting! Please stop fighting!” Dave desperately yelled.

“Shut up!” screamed Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook, spinning a Space Monkey over his head.

“That’s it,” Dave muttered. He pulled a lighter from his shirt pocket, lit it, and dropped it. Everyone stopped and gasped, even Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook. Aside from the obvious lighting the room on fire, everyone was shocked because the entire room was made of wood – real wood, which, because of the severe deforestation of

almost every planet, was the most valuable thing in the Universe.

“Now, I did this because we're unable to leave out these doors until Roy dismisses us, lest we want to be punished. But, with a fire in the conference room, we are allowed to leave via the escape ropes. Now, in order for this to be legal, **no one** must put out the fire **no matter what.**” Dave explained. The smoke detector beeped, and water rushed down from the ceiling, putting out the fire. “Better disable that.” Dave added. The others nodded. Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook, violent as can be, reached up to the low-lying ceiling and ripped out the sprinklers. Dave wasn't totally happy with that, but it seemed necessary to get out of the room.

“Okay, we're going to try this again,” Dave told the rest of the cabinet, “I'll drop my match, and we'll climb out via the escape ladders. I need you to promise me that you will never, **never**, put out the fire.” Everyone took the oath. Dave lit the room on fire again, and, with the anti-fire system disabled, the fire spread like, well, wildfire across the wooden room.

“Here's the escape ladder,” a Cube Person said, hovering on his probe over a trap door.

“Excellent,” said Dave, “Everybody go down!”

The first person to begin the descent was Bob the Space Monkey. He quickly leapt down the trap door, but then screeched. “What happened?!?” Dave yelled over the crackling of the flames.

“Oh my God!” screamed Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook, “The escape ropes are wireless!”

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Dave was panicked. “Somebody! Put out the fire! Why aren’t you doing anything?”

Everyone in the room looked over to the Cube People, the only ones able to actually do anything about the fire.

“We shall not break our promise to Dave, loyalty matters,” said a Cube Person in its usual emotionless voice. “We shall not break promises, just as we shall not break filing cabinets.” Dave banged his snail head against his hover board. They were all clearly idiots.

Tony stirred. Grunting, he sat up, finding himself still in the wretched utility room. “He’s out of the coma.” Tony heard a small voice say.

“Good. That means that the surgeons got the missiles out of his organs. Nurse, get me another batch of the tonic.”

Tony looked down. Even in the dark room, he could tell that those small voices came from cockroaches, and he saw the insects. “What’s happened?” he said, nervous but groggy, to the cockroaches, “why do you say I had missiles in my organs?”

A cockroach turned around. “You don’t remember? After you passed out from the fumes, we treated and fed you. When you awoke, you learned what we were doing, so in return you offered to crush (literally) the competing cockroaches, so as to end the war over the utility room.”

Tony looked bewilderedly at the cockroach. “I might remember.”

“Great! Now, thanks to the great success, we’ve decided to keep feeding you.”

“Why hasn’t the Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook come to feed me?”

“Ha! That stuck up cook thinks that it would be an awful disgrace if he were to even look inside this utility room! Apparently, he doesn't care about whether or not Roy gets his death certificate!”

Tony gasped. He hadn't done the death certificate! “How much longer until Roy comes?”

“Beats me. We cockroaches can't keep track of time too well in the utility room.”

“Could you help me with the death certificate?”

“Never! If we help you, and Roy hates the answer, we might also be killed. No, as long as you're the only one who does it, you're the only liable one.”

Tony was now very worried. He had no idea how much time had passed, and no way of telling when sunrise came, so to him Roy could burst into the room at any moment. He frantically paced and thought until the fumes overcame him and he fell unconscious again.

“Billy, if we're going to get the best possible services here on Earth, I have to go see the owner, Dave.” Roy, holding Little Billy's hand, said as they walked out into the underground garage for Earthland. As Roy walked, he felt the walkie-talkie inside his pocket. He turned it off.

Dave's office was actually adjacent to the garage, so in only a few Earth minutes Roy and Little Billy were able to get there. Roy knocked on the door. Much to Roy's surprise, Santa, in nothing but his boxers and a tank top, opened the door. “What are you doing here? Is Dave out?”

“Yep,” replied Santa, “Come in. It's still not too late to join the poker game!”

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“I don’t know if your friends are exactly the right kind of people my heir here, Little Billy, should be near. Just get me to the secret entrance, and I’ll be on my way.”

“Roy, Roy,” Santa chuckled, “You certainly have become a mother!”

Roy was deeply insulted. “Fine, I’ll play your poker game!”

“Rich Daddy, it smells like dead donkey in here.”

Roy rolled his eyes. “Why don’t you go sit on Santa’s lap while we play the game?”

“Okay, I’ll raise a million scarabs,” a one-eyed Space Monkey said. Roy took a seat.

“You’re on, Chuck!” Santa whooped obnoxiously, “oh, shoot. My palm pilot says I don’t got no more cash. Hey, pretty soon it will be dividend day for Dave’s Tourist and Bathroom Co. I’d gladly pay you Tuesday.”

“Wimpy,” snorted Chuck, “bet something other than money for once.”

“Fine!” yelled Santa, pulling out a piece of paper, “Here’s the deed to planet Mars. Is that valuable enough?”

“Sure is,” said Chuck, “Read it and weep! Royal Flush!”

“Moron! I have a Royal Flush, too.” Santa grunted loudly.

“You can have more than one Royal Flush.”

“Not in Texas Hold ‘Em!” Santa roared. Little Billy winced.

“Okay, okay. I still say I won since I put the cards down first.”

“No, it’s your deck, so it’s your fault for putting two of the same suit in the deck. Therefore, I win.”

Children's Tales of the Universe

“A heh heh, no. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m off to Mars.” Chuck said, picking up his chips and the deed and running for the door.

“OH NO YOU DON’T!!!” Santa roared, throwing his beer bottle at Chuck. Chuck dodged it and ran out the door. “Dammit.” Santa cursed.

Little Billy, now traumatized, asked timidly, “Santa, can I get off your lap now?”

Santa glared at him. “Oh sure, Billy! But first thing’s first. I ain’t Santa! Check this puppy out.” Santa pulled off all the rings on his left hand, each with a letter on it. Rearranging it, he changed it from “Santa” to “Satan” and showed Billy.

“You said you wouldn’t use that alias anymore!” Roy barked. “C’mon Billy, let’s go.”

Billy gladly slipped off of Santa, er, Satan’s lap, and waddled towards Roy, but stopped dead in his tracks. An odd looking drunken bum seated next to Roy slapped Roy on the shoulder and wheezed as if trying to laugh. “Ya-ya know what? This reminds me of a story. Funny story. Heh heh. Funny.”

Roy slowly stood up, keeping his eye on the drunk. The scruffy Gotithian grinned at him and pulled a cigar from inside his shirt.

The drunk shoved the cigar in his nose, as to smoke even while he took a drink of beer. Once he was satisfied, he wheezed, and finally began to talk. “Yeah, it was in the good ol’ days, when I had a house. Me and my buddy...we were trying to rob Willy Lemonoid, see...”

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Roy heard this, skeptical but still intrigued. “What? How long ago was this? Willy Lemonoid’s been dead ever since his reign was ended by Mr. Parrot.”

The smelly man shook his head. “Oh no little brother. He’s been alive and well forever, man. Drug lord, see...”

Roy picked up Billy and sat back down, interested in what this man might know. Santa grunted and scratched his rear.

“Anyway, this was only a week or so ago, before I got all bummed out and robbed my own house...and dang it – I shouldn’t have burned it down, y’know.”

“Okay, okay. What about Willy Lemonoid?”

“Well, he was kinda talkin’ to Simon, and my friend was all like...what’s with that? So...”

“Wait, wait, wait,” Roy interrupted again, “What Simon?”

“The one and only, man, Simon Carp.”

Roy thought for a moment, the drunk continued drinking from the beer bottle and snorting his cigar, Billy coughed, and Santa snored. Simon Carp was Roy’s arch nemesis, ever since Simon had made the disastrous attempt to prevent Roy from coming to power. “Why were Willy Lemonoid and Simon Carp talking?” Roy asked.

“I’m getting to that!” he wheezed. “So, long story short, we bought the candy,” he said rather unexpectedly. “Anyway, at Willy Lemonoid’s front door, Simon was saying something like: ‘Oh, we’ve got to build an armada and blah, blah, blah...’ something about Cube People technology and self-reconstructing crap.” The delirious man stopped to take a break from talking. Roy had been listening

with complete focus, but only because in between all this nonsense was a little bit of information on Simon's plot.

"How do they plan to finance their armada?" Roy asked.

"Something 'bout getting wealthy recruits, and gathering their money and junk. I say, if the shoe fits, just go for it. Don't waste your time juggling coins."

"What wealthy recruits?" Roy asked. He stopped for a moment, "Is Dave in it?"

"No siree. You know what, this calls for a celebration. Who wants cake?" the druggie said. He picked up his poker chips and started throwing them at Roy.

Roy was very irritated, but he still had to know what was going on. "Please, Bob, stop. Tell me more about this plan."

"What? Oh, yeah. The plan. So, Simon's droning on about all the features of his ships, and Willy asks how Simon planned to get enough recruits to man the ships, and he's like: 'Oh, oh, we've got a whole planet on our side already. I also plan to turn some more against Roy in time.' So my friend cracked up and yelled, 'You and what army?' Willy Lemonoid heard him from behind the door, and killed him! I got away, though. Good times, my friend, good times."

Roy felt his cell phone vibrate in his pant pocket. Moving a quivering Little Billy from his lap, he reached the phone and turned it on. "Hello?"

"Roy! This is Dave! You've got to help us! We're in the conference room. It's on fire. Nothing is putting it out! Help!"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Roy, "What's blocking the exit?"

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“Um, uh, there’s well, *nothing* blocking the exit.”
Dave said in a nervous voice.

“Idiot! Why aren’t you fleeing?”

“You haven’t dismissed us.”

“You’re dismissed! Don’t kill yourself!” Roy yelled into the phone, startling Santa awake and making Little Billy wet himself. “I’ve got to go. Somehow a fire started in the El Tuna Café. C’mon Billy.” Picking Billy up, he left Dave’s office.

Explosion at the El Tuna Café

Roy zipped back to the El Tuna Café in the Poach-a-tron, with thoughts racing through his head. He was pacing around in the ship, very troubled and confused. Simon Carp has gathered an entire planet to rebel? He's got plans to gather wealthy men to fund his attacks? He plans to use his army to get more armies? No, that guy never said that. However, if he's got a whole planet already on his side – which planet could it possibly be? Was he bluffing to Willy Lemonoid? Are any of these plans feasible? Then Roy realized that he was freaking out because of what he heard from some drug addict. Everything will be okay! None of this really took place! “I fine,” he said out loud to himself. *No!* he thought, *I need to make preparations just in case... I mean, not even my fire system is working! I'm a really easy target!*

With these thoughts still racing through his head, Roy made a landing into his private garage. “Welcome back, Sir!” A soldier said, saluting him.

“Get outta here! This is a private garage!” Roy yelled. He pressed the steering wheel. Rather than honk, though, the Poach-a-tron blasted the intruder with a gun. He shrugged. “I hated him anyway. Come, Billy, your pants must *really* be wet now.” The door dropped down to become steps. *Your pants are wet? Gee, I really have become a mother.* Roy thought to himself. *Well, at least now Billy has a good mother, er, parent, to take care of him.* Roy held Billy up to his face, and smiled. He sat Billy down next to the garage's intercom and pressed the HELP button. Someone would come down here to take care of Billy. Waving goodbye to the

child, he made his way towards the utility room, his mind turning to the more troubling matters of what to do about this Simon Carp situation.

“Rich Daddy, where are you going?” Little Billy asked, tugging at Roy’s pants. Roy turned around.

“Go back to the machine, Billy,” Roy said sweetly. “Rich Daddy’s got to go work.”

“But I want to come with you,” whined Little Billy.

“That’s too bad, kid,” Roy said, patting Billy between the horns. “Now you go over to the intercom now,” he said more harshly. Billy, reluctant at first, turned back to the intercom.

Roy smiled once more, and opened a door leading towards the kitchens and utility room. Once again Roy’s worries filled his mind. Was he to take this drunk seriously or not? Roy could remember from his younger years a Gotithian at a bar revealed to him that his school, Mr. Parrot’s Dictator School, was a scam. He learned that the school was not for the ruler of the Universe to produce a good successor, but eliminate potentially dangerous youths by miseducating them. Without that useful piece of information, Roy would have taken Mr. Parrot’s teachings seriously, and then he might have never become what he was now. However, after trusting another barfly shortly after he had taken over the universe from Mr. Parrot, he discovered, rather unpleasantly, that the advised action was not the best idea. Making the wrong precautions against Simon Carp might end up offending some people. He really had to weigh the risks, and that was why he was standing at the door to the utility room in which Tony was staying.

Children's Tales of the Universe

Roy heard Tony moan inside. "I'm doomed, I'm doomed. Has the day ended yet?!? I can't tell!"

A cockroach cleared its throat. "Maybe you should think more about what you are going to tell Roy rather than moan about how unlucky you are."

"You know, you're right! I've got at least an Earth day or two left in this wretched, wretched dump!" Tony cried, and began sobbing.

The door opened. Tony stared, fearful and almost incredulous at Roy. "I'm back!" Roy said, "I know it's not been a day yet, but I really don't care anymore. I need the death certificate, NOW! I've got a lot of worries, and I expect that you didn't dawdle in here."

Tony bit on his fingers. "Well, sir, actually, I did think a bit, and..."

"You're going to die at the hands of Simon Carp! He's still alive, Roy! Don't waste your time talking to a human! Prepare yourself, now! Now!" The cockroach cleverly interrupted.

Roy turned pale. Even his black goat-like hairs seemed to lose color. "Wow," he said, "I knew it! Thank you, Tony. You will be rewarded greatly for your perseverance and honesty. Thank you too, cockroaches, for keeping him alive. I don't know how to repay you, though."

"You can repay us by sending us home," the cockroach replied.

"What's your home planet?"

"Well, I'm from Margues, but most of these cockroaches are from Zebus."

"Fine, go ask Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook for an escort back to Margues and Zebus. As for you,

Explosion at the El Tuna Café

Tony, go to the Department of Research. I need you to find as much out about the Universe as possible – travel if you must – so that you can use your prophetic skills as much as possible. I really have some questions I need answered. If you have any questions, I'll be in my office.” Roy quickly dashed away.

Roy drew plans out against this sworn enemy...which planet is it? That question still tormented Roy's brain. Let's see...the only planets with enough freedom to do such a thing are: the Cube People's planet, The PufferFish Planet, and the Pickle People's many planets.

Roy eventually decided to eliminate two of the options – the Cube People's planet and the several planets that the Pickle People owned. He decided that the Pickle People, who lived in their own semi-universe equaling the volume of all the pickle juice in the Universe (a result of Roy's idea of making an internet connection via pickle jars), any convincing argument Simon would give them would make all of the planets in the Pickle Universe join together, and the druggie said that only one planet was on his side. Roy then decided that, if the planet was powering an armada later to be supplied by the Cube People, the planet could obviously not be the Cube People's planet. To Roy, this was a very mixed blessing. This meant that he would not have to wage a war on either the Pickle People's universe or the Cube People's universe, the Dimension of Tuna, meaning his tuna supplies and tunamatic material supplies would not be cut off. However, if the Cube People eventually did supply Simon's armada, he would have to wage war against the Cube People anyway, and on top of that, he would have to wage war with

the last possible planet: the PufferFish Planet. Even worse, if the PufferFish pseudo-kingdom had plans to rebel against Roy that meant that he had a high risk of being assassinated by his elite bodyguards, who happened to be recruits from the PufferFish Planet. He needed a way to get them out of the El Tuna Café without arousing suspicion. He also needed to find out more about the PufferFish Kingdom without the use of bugs, for they probably had anti-bug technology all over the place. Roy thought he could kill both birds with one stone by sending Tony to go learn about the PufferFish, while at the same time sending off his body guards to go “protect” him. If anything happened to Tony, Roy would know what was going on and strike first. If nothing happened to Tony, then Roy would enough information to make any necessary preparations, and Tony might be able to make another prophetic insight. All that he needed to do was make one simple e-mail to the Department of Research, and he could get rid of a huge threat. Smiling at his plan, Roy fired up his computer so that he could give the all necessary commands to prepare for this war that seemed to hang over the Universe, ready to drop at any moment.

“Rich Daddy! Look! Look! I built a block castle!” Little Billy yelled from the intercom.

“I see, Billy, that’s great.” Roy said, flipping off the intercom switch. Getting back to his work, Roy finished his message to the Department of Research. Then he faced a new question. “Hmm...what is a way to raise taxes without looking suspicious?” he knew that he might need some extra funds if this situation became serious. “Perhaps if I only raised the sales tax, people would think that I was just greedy

Explosion at the El Tuna Café

as usual, rather than trying to raise funds for a crisis,” he suggested to himself.

A thump hit the door. Roy leapt to his feet. Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook burst into the room screaming. “Roy! Come quickly! Something’s happened!”

Roy sighed in relief that it was only Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook, but was rather angry at his entry. “Shut up, Cook. Can’t you see that I’m busy raising the Universe’s taxes? And take off your stupid protection suit for once!”

“Roy, the tuna...there’s been a huge explosion in the Café! It led to the kitchen, and caused a second explosion!”

Roy turned pale for the second time that day. “What kind of destruction was there?”

“No casualties, fortunately, thanks to our special soul-sucking device. We were able to pump all of the customer’s souls into TunaFish bodies. However, all of the security systems are down, and the kitchen was obliterated.”

“What happened to the cages?”

“They’re all gone to. It gets worse. The explosion knocked Loothpit out of his cage, but he’s still alive!”

This just worsened the situation. Roy’s security systems were wiped out, his expensive dining rooms and kitchens were destroyed, and Loothpit had escaped alive. Loothpit was the most powerful Moose-that-looks-like-a-turtle, and for him to have escaped would strike great fear into the public and Roy’s popularity would dramatically drop, but of course the consequences might be much worse than that. Moose-that-look-like-turtles are, as their name implies, moose that look like turtles. Imagine a black, leather skinned turtle with a black shell coated with an even layer of

translucent purple tar. Next, imagine that this turtle has red eyes, retractable claws, retractable moose antlers, powerful legs, and for some mysterious reason, the ability to fly – even in the vacuum of space. Loothpit just happened to be the largest, most intelligent, and most powerful because he was rumored to be the first Moose-that-looks-like-a-turtle, and he was also rumored to be able to communicate with his own species – something that the other Moose-that-look-like-turtles almost never did, so people feared not only the animal itself but also the idea that it could one day unite the species, fly across space with its army, and attack cities. Roy had two personal reasons to keep Loothpit. One, its captivity in the El Tuna Café would demonstrate Roy's absolute power over the universe, which, because lately people had been doubting his power, was important. Two, Roy's father had died from a Moose-that-looks-like-a-turtle, the one, in fact, as he had created the species, and that was believed to have been Loothpit. So, when Roy used the El Tuna Café to trick the previous ruler, the wealthy bioengineer Mr. Parrot, Roy cut a deal with him. He could keep half of his fortune and live peacefully with the rest of society if he produced a tranquilizer that worked on Moose-that-look-like-turtles for Roy to use against Loothpit. After capturing Loothpit, Roy placed him a deep "Loothpit Moose Pit" with motion sensors that would activate tranquilizer guns if Loothpit tried to fly out of the pit. When the Café exploded, Loothpit was safely tucked away in the pit, so, while the motion sensors were destroyed, Loothpit was able to survive and safely leave the pit.

"You'd better come see the destruction," Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook told Roy.

Explosion at the El Tuna Café

Roy pulled out two tranquilizer guns. “Take this one and guard Little Billy,” Roy told him. “Aw, heck. Here’s one of my debit cards. You may use the money to go and keep Little Billy occupied in Earthland until I set things straight in the Universe.” Roy said, handing the cook a card.

The two warily left Roy’s office and then walked off in two separate directions from the Great Hall.

Simon Carp

Somewhere, almost at the other end of the Universe, was another powerful Gotithian making decisive actions. This Gotithian was almost an opposite in appearance to Roy. Being an illegitimate child, his mother was ashamed to have him, and so sent him to Mr. Parrot's Dictator School on Diarama – a school that Roy would only attend in his late teenage years – when he was only seven, so, not having Gotithia's extreme gravity to stunt his growth, he was much taller than Roy. Having been in exile for all of his life after Roy's rise to power, he was much stronger and hardier than Roy. However, Simon Carp was surprisingly similar to Roy in personality. He was, as Roy had once been, a fast talking man with a charisma that people liked and that helped him get what he wanted. To him, like with Roy, money and power were the only things in life worth his time, and he would do anything to secure those two magnificent things. Simon was probably more subtle and tricky in his plans than Roy, though, hence his nickname which became his last name, "Carp", because he was as slippery as a fish.

Simon reclined on his throne, a large wooden chair, in his comfortable headquarters underneath a PufferFish retirement home as he listened to a PufferFish general discuss strategies.

"I'm pleased to announce that the suicide bomber in the El Tuna Café has made the expected explosion. Loothpit has fortunately escaped alive, so soon fear will strike the hearts of the inhabitants of the Universe. What we need to know from you, Simon, is what to do now. Do we attack the

El Tuna Café while the security, or do we still retain our secrecy?”

Simon did not need to give much thought on his answer. “We must do the latter. We cannot attack the El Tuna Café, even if the security systems are down. Roy has probably left the building, and an attack would send the universal armada right down on this small planet. However, it would be very nerve-racking were the Elite Bodyguards to sack the El Tuna Café while the systems are still out from the explosion and then disappear, plus, Roy couldn’t immediately blame us, as the king could simply call the bodyguards ‘traitors’ or ‘common criminals’ and he wouldn’t have a reason to attack us.

The king said, “That is a nice plan, Simon, however, I’m afraid Roy is one step ahead of us. He has sent his Elite Bodyguard Squadron to go with an insignificant human that is coming to spy on our planet. The guards cannot leave their post without being killed, and if they were to kill the human, then Roy would have an excuse to occupy our planet. Our only option is to let the human spy.”

Simon laughed. “I’m sure that he’ll be anxious to go looking for a palace underneath a retirement home!” The rest of the room laughed, with their PufferFish bodies swelling enormously and then flattening

“Yeah, yeah,” the king struggled to say, still laughing, “He’ll be looking all over the place in abandoned warehouses, but he won’t want to look at the shriveled old PufferFish!”

Simon cleared his throat. “Seriously, though, Willy Lemonoid has deserted our cause, and without him a lot of wealthy recruits refused to swear allegiance, so we had to kill

them. The point is that need we to take advantage of the present situation at the El Tuna Café to make up for our disadvantages. I say that we mount some large PufferFish missiles on Zebus, because that way we can fire missiles while Roy is still upset about the El Tuna Café, and still retain the PufferFish's secrecy. There are some added bonuses to rerouting our weaponry to Zebus, too. One, we will be getting rid of the weapons on this planet, so that we look less suspicious. Two, we will obviously be changing Roy's attack plans to Zebus rather than us. Three, when the public sees Zebus destroyed, they will feel that the problem is solved, so that when we attack again they will feel hopeless – I won't explain that right now. And four, the biggest bonus of all, Zebus is the largest producer of pickles – eighty seven percent of their economy comes from this industry – and Roy destroying Zebus would surely enrage the Pickle People, as well as intelligent cockroaches, for billions call it home.” Simon stopped to drink the rest of his glass of water and went on, “You can see how beneficial it would be to us to base our attacks in Zebus in this time, but it is obviously a very dangerous plan. We will need a way to load the missiles on Zebus in secret, and then take over the planet so they cannot stop our launches.”

“Good, good,” said the king, very pleased, “I like the plan, and I think that we can pull it off – as soon as we get missiles to put on Zebus.”

Simon almost had a heart attack. “You don't even have missiles!?! You told me you did last week!”

“We did last week,” said the Defense Administrator, “But it was just to blackmail Satan into giving back our base on Mars. Roy took the missiles away as soon as we got our

base back, and we're not allowed to produce any more missiles without Roy's permission, lest we want to lose what independence our kingdom has from the rest of the Universe."

"Are you saying that we can't kill Roy without his permission?" Simon cried.

"That's basically it," said the Defense Administrator, "If we want missiles, the only thing we can do to get them is to buy them from the Cube People."

"We'll worry about later," said the king, "For now, I say we celebrate what success we have had today with a feast of worms!"

All four in the room stood up. "Um," said Simon, "I think that I'll spend this time to think things over. If you have anything to say, I'll be in my office." He walked away, muttering under his breath.

Simon entered his office, trying to think of a way to save his plan for Zebus. His earlier plans for how to set things up on Zebus would probably have worked perfectly were it not for the fact that Roy was apparently capable of finding out whenever the PufferFish had missiles, so if they were even to somehow get the missiles, Roy would probably have even more capability of finding out where missiles were located on his own planets. However, if this didn't work, Simon would have to either give up his attempt at trying to frighten the Universe, thus giving up his plan to depose Roy; or resort to battling Roy from this very planet, which could never hold out against the entire Universe, so Simon would lose his allies and with them his chance of ever deposing Roy. He walked over to his phone and checked the answering machine. Why hadn't Mr. Parrot returned his call?

Simon had been very close to Mr. Parrot for all of his life, and they had even worked together to create a secret immortality pill, but for some reason unknown to Simon Mr. Parrot would have nothing to do with joining their cause – very bad considering that he was the last wealthy man that Simon could trust to help fund them. Not even the entire planet of the PufferFish Kingdom could amount to the amount of wealth Mr. Parrot had remaining from his time he ruled the Universe, and without the enormous amount of funding that Simon had expected to get, he would surely never be able to buy the missiles and armada from the Cube People. Worse yet, Willy Lemonoid, another former ruler of the Universe, had also deserted him. Willy was certainly a better tactician and military expert than Simon, and he shuddered at the thought that Willy might one day give away every single plan to Roy that Simon had created and discussed with Willy.

Someone knocked on Simon's door. "Sir, I'm here with some worms...and coffee."

"I'll take the coffee," said Simon, "But you can eat the bowl of worms yourself. I had enough worms during my exile."

The PufferFish came in, dropped off the coffee pot and mug, and then exclaimed, "Thank you very much for the worms!" Then left and closed the door behind him.

Back in the dark of his office, Simon continued thinking over the present situation of his rebellion. Soon, he would have to go to the Cube People and try to get whatever he could negotiate with the considerably smaller budget.

Mr. Parrot

In a rather large ship a wealthy Space Monkey sat, sipping on some wine from Zebus. He watched from his living room on the ship as it gently cruised along with no where in particular to go.

Finishing the last of his wine, Mr. Parrot decided to go to the master bathroom and check on his appearance. This was an important task, as this was no ordinary Space Monkey. Mr. Parrot, before his days as ruler of the Universe, worked as a bioengineer. One of his last experiments went terribly wrong, and he found, strangely enough, that whenever the El Tuna Café, the restaurant that Roy had built not too long before, aligned with his home planet Diarama, he would turn into a parrot for a while. He was now a wereparrot. After his first experience, he found that when he changed back he looked slightly parrot-like. As he continued to change into the parrot, he came back more and more parrot-like until he had turned into what he was looking at in the mirror at the moment. He had a boxy head for some reason, a curved, parrot-like and yellow beak, bird eyes, feathers where his facial hair and eyebrows should have been, bird claws instead of feet, and so many long feathers growing on his arms that it looked like he had wings. On an unrelated note, he was incredibly muscular as a result of a super-powerful steroid he had tried on himself. He sighed for two reasons. The first one was the fact that he had lost his position as ruler of the Universe thanks to the bird condition, for he had made the mistake of trusting Roy with managing the Universe while he was a parrot, and when he came back Roy was powerful enough to keep his position (slightly

because the drugs in his tuna made the public and many powerful people addicted the food at the El Tuna Café). The other reason he sighed was because, thanks to the secret immortality pill that he had developed with Simon, he was doomed to continue slowly transforming until he was one day a parrot forever.

Leaving the bathroom, he returned to the living room. He turned on a CD player and, as he listened, looked at the planets that they were passing. "Butler!" he shouted to one of his creations, "Land me on Blasphememes." The butler nodded, though he was far off in the control room, and sent the ship flying past the speed of light.

Mr. Parrot wanted to land on Blasphememes because of an interesting call he had received earlier about a pack of Moose-that-look-like-turtles being spotted on the plains of one of Blasphememes's many islands. It was an interesting call, since Moose-that-look-like-turtles do not usually travel in packs. Mr. Parrot wasn't at all convinced, since Blasphememes was famous for the ridiculous stories it told, but he had nothing better to do than this, and Blasphememes was an interesting planet anyway.

Now landing at the capital of the island, Mr. Parrot looked around. This place sure had changed since he was last here. Stepping out of his huge luxury ship, a strange Space Monkey came to greet him. "Mr. Parrot!" he exclaimed, "What brings you to our island? The rumors of the pack?"

Mr. Parrot nodded. "If it isn't too much to ask," he began, "I would like to track this pack, and see if my assumptions are true, and Loothpiti is leading them. I want to see what makes the group tick, so that I can think something up to invent."

“You want to mess with the pack?” the Space Monkey said, surprised, “That is far too dangerous! Should Loothpit really be the leader, he’ll kill you, no matter what. These things are no amateur flyers; Loothpit himself managed to venture several light years from the El Tuna Café to here.”

Mr. Parrot shook his head. His mind was made up. “I know that Loothpit is dangerous, but so is everything else. Just today I was stressed out, so I scrubbed the floor very vigorously, as a way to calm me down. I did a good job, but unfortunately I slipped when walking. The fall not only hurt, but knocked furniture I had hung from the ceiling of my ship to better clean, and a piano shattered next to me. My couch shattered, too, and the seat warmers built into the couch set the broken thing on fire. I tried to get up to extinguish it, but I slipped again and knocked my head against a piano shard. My butler raced in to help me, but he fell too, and the fire extinguisher in his hands fell on me. I took off my socks and was able to get up without slipping, but the fire had already spread to other pieces of furniture lying around. Eventually I extinguished it, and I was safe again. Then I remembered I had missed a charity baseball game that I was supposed to attend, but this turned out to be fortunate, for the benches of the orphanage’s baseball field are metal and connected, so when lightning hit it that day.....this pretty much goes with my theory that if you don’t do enough dangerous things, nature will compensate by making even the simplest things dangerous. I’m pretty much in the same danger no matter what I do.”

The Space Monkey seemed to have gotten bored with Mr. Parrot’s tragic story fairly quickly. “Whatever,

whatever," he said, waving his hand, "you just go and hunt those animals, and maybe our people will be at rest again."

Mr. Parrot was overjoyed that he had permission. He pulled a lever on his huge luxury ship, and out came a Poach-a-tron. It was reinforced and Mr. Parrot had to enter a code in a number pad to open the door. The security precautions that Mr. Parrot had taken were vital. Mr. Parrot started up the Poach-a-tron.

Once he was flying, he searched for the pack of Moose-that-look-like-turtles on the landlocked island (at least Blasphemes said that it was landlocked). There were no packs of Moose-that-look-like-turtles to be found, so Mr. Parrot honked a special horn that he had designed. This horn would annoy any Moose-that-look-like-turtles that happened to be anywhere on the planet, since it could travel so far, and bring them here, wanting to kill Mr. Parrot. Mr. Parrot stayed hovering in the air, waiting for Moose-that-look-like-turtle anger to erupt. This was really a dangerous and meaningless job, but after having for a long time faced the fact that at his rate of parrot transformation, he would be a complete parrot in a few years, Mr. Parrot didn't mind death. In fact, he would prefer it, for he feared that being a total parrot would make him lose his brilliant mind (he had already forgotten his real name, so everyone just called him Mr. Parrot), and he would be stuck that way for eternity. He needed a purpose in life. He couldn't help but feel fear, though. Moose-that-look-like-turtles were immensely powerful. They could go faster than the speed of light and their shells were unbreakable, as they were coated with a purple tar that was the same substance as the purple gas in the Dimension of Stupidity. If the Moose-that-look-like-turtles were to collide with his ship,

the impact would surely knock him about in such a way that he could die. Mr. Parrot had planned for this, though. He had covered his Poach-a-tron with tiny little needles filled with Moose Tranquilizer, and the slightest touch of the unusually powerful concoction anywhere on the body, even the shell, could kill any of them except perhaps Loothpit, who would only be paralyzed for a few hours (they would all be wary, though, so it worked). Mr. Parrot could then capture the creature and, knowing it secretly practiced Gotithian, could negotiate a deal with him. It was a brilliant plan, but Mr. Parrot couldn't help but wonder.

Out of nowhere, on two sides, were Moose-that-look-like-turtles, flying towards the ship. The animals seemed to have warned each other about the danger of colliding into the ship in an amazingly fast, unknown way, for they all stopped, and floated there in silence for a moment. One look at the creatures made Mr. Parrot wince. They were just so ugly! Mr. Parrot felt his courage leave him, and he froze. What to do now? The one idea he had was useless. However, were he to flee now, an excellent opportunity would be lost forever. Mr. Parrot's mouth went dry. The Poach-a-tron seemed secure enough, but those awful things always seemed to have some trick up their shells.

Loothpit unsheathed his antlers from his body, and tried to use it as a crowbar to break into the ship. No use, for the door of the Poach-a-tron, unlike the door of the Jiggy Gas Piggy, was reinforced with Ba-ing-go in such amounts that not even a Moose-that-looks-like-a-turtle could break through. Mr. Parrot sighed in relief. He had an idea now. Were he to just aim his guns right at their faces....he stared

into the cold eyes of the creatures. He lost concentration, and froze up once more.

Loothpit tried again, and this time, when he got his antlers in the door, he went at a high speed in one direction. This would have normally broken off the antlers of an ordinary Moose-that-looks-like-a-turtle, but Loothpit was not an ordinary one. The Ba-ing-go ended up giving in, and the swarm entered. Mr. Parrot, though, was no where to be found.

“Mr. Parrot,” said Loothpit, “Come out. We wish the gore you, but not before a nice chat. If you don't I will simply have to destroy your ship, and we won't get to talk.” The room was silent. “I like to talk, you jerk!” cried Loothpit. He looked around for any signs of Mr. Parrot. There was nothing but a bunch of weird gadgets, furniture, a compass on the ground, and a mini fridge. Loothpit broke open the mini fridge, ate its contents, and motioned for the others to leave. As he left, he rubbed his shell's tar from the Dimension of Stupidity against the wall. Surely enough, the ship exploded.

The Cube People

Roy was talking with the Head of the Mint, Antonio about some of his suspicions related to The Conspiracy. “Roy, I think that if the Cube People really were on Simon’s side, they would kill you as soon as you came into the Dimension of Tuna.”

Roy shook his head. “Antonio, why aren’t you listening to me? I’m planning to bring the Royal Armada with me just in case they tried that!”

“I know, Roy, but they own the Dimension of Tuna, and they have probably booby-trapped it with every tunamatic trick imaginable. You’ll only survive if they really are still loyal to us, which seems unlikely.”

“I guess you’re right. However, if Simon gets his hands on their technology we will lose a lot, and Simon, who is not really attached to any planet in particular, will lose nothing.”

“What about that planet that’s supposedly Simon’s ally?”

“The PufferFish Planet? Simon isn’t attached to that! Nor will he have any use for it as soon as he mans the armada. They will keep on fighting, even if their planet is destroyed, and if they’re constantly moving through the entire Universe firing missiles at random planets I will be unable to fight them, but they can easily take me out.”

“You seemed to have thought this over much. Why don’t you just bomb the Cube People’s planet, thereby eliminating any potential risk?”

“Good idea. I can send a huge glob of Boomwater into the Dimension of Tuna right next to the planet, and its

explosion will annihilate all life in that Universe. It's a perfect plan," said Roy.

Boomwater is made when Ba-ing-go is created. Ba-ing-go is an almost indestructible tunamatic material that sucks lots of heat away from it, and becomes colder, when heated and made when a piece of metal touches the purple gas from the Dimension of Stupidity, thereby become Baingatized. When a metal is Baingatized, the byproduct of the process is the tunamatic material Boomwater. To Roy, Boomwater seemed to be the perfect weapon against the Cube People since it, being tunamatic itself, is immune to any tunamatic booby-traps that the Cube People might have planted, and it has an explosion radius of twenty feet a drop (or in new universal terms: fifteen seconds a watt, I think), so Roy would only need a small amount. But what Roy hadn't thought about was that the Cube People have frequent threats from globs of Boomwater, so they have devised a clever way to dispose of it by channeling it into the Dimension of Stupidity, and if that didn't work, most of the time the Boomwater would explode harmlessly over the planet, as all of the buildings on the planet are made out of Ba-ing-go.

"Send the glob," said Roy, rather cheerful for a guy who's about to try to wipe out the life of an entire universe, "I'm not going."

As Simon and the PufferFish King gently cruised in hyperspace along a tunamatic highway in the Dimension of Tuna on their way to the Cube People's planet, they once again discussed their negotiation strategy. "Our budget is 100 million scarabs, that's half of the money in our treasury, so it's not like we're not giving generously to the cause. We

The Cube People

probably should actually limit it to 75 million scarabs, because the cost of moving all this equipment and supporting our enormous army will certainly cost around 23 million, and we – ”

“What’s that?!?” exclaimed Simon, peering down the tunamatic pathway, “I think that that is a Giant Space Jelly Blob. Wait, they can’t live in the Dimension of Tuna. No, that’s a giant glob of Boomwater!”

“Don’t worry, Simon! Poach-a-trons are indestructible, right?” asked the PufferFish King, trying to reassure Simon of their safety.

“That’s true, the ship is indestructible, but we’re not!” said Simon, beginning to panic. “Get off of the track, now! Now!” he screamed at the ship.

It would seem that Simon, moving faster than the speed of light, should already be dead by now. However, since he was moving faster than the speed of light, and was a light minute or so away from where he saw the blob at the time, saw himself soon to hit the blob when it had already left the track. Simon, too panicked to realize this, pulled out of the Dimension of Tuna. Unfortunately for Simon, the point where he pulled out of that universe was right at the position of a planet, and the ship smashed into the planet, lodging itself deep in the diamond core of the planet. Simon cursed the Universe for doing this to him. He checked out the ship’s situation on the screen. How nice.

Willy Lemonoid, a large, humanoid creature with muscular arms, a monocle in each eye, scraggly army clothes, and an overall gruff appearance, gazed down at the planet below him. Its countless buildings of Ba-ing-go

glistened as the cubby planet orbited its round star. The entire planet glistened, as the planet was so overpopulated it was simply one big metal city. This was the planet of the Cube People. Long ago this planet, before Willy Lemonoid had taken control of the Universe, when it was still known as Planet Peg, experienced an explosion in economic growth. The stock market was booming, its range of industries widening, and its population was growing, and soon there was a serious overpopulation problem; similar to the one Gotithia would experience much later on, but much more severe. The Pegs had two choices. One, enlarge their planet, as the Gotithians would later do. Two – a much more radical idea that never was done again – use technology from a certain company, Pet Squeezers, Inc., to cubify the whole planet and everything on it, so that everything could be fit in the smallest spaces possible. Most Pegs saw that that idea as ridiculous and said that it would be better to simply increase the mass of the planet rather than basically redesign the species, as these extremists suggested. The extremist communist group known as the Boxers argued that enlarging the planet was only a temporary solution and if they did not significantly increase their space efficiency, they would have to keep enlarging their planet until the gravity made it uninhabitable. A civil war was started between the two groups, and it seemed that the Boxers would win. However, Peg loyalist General Shish Kay Bob (who was famous for impaling enemies in battle with a large spear, hence the name for a certain type of food: the shish kabob) turned the tide of war and took control of the planet back from the Boxers. Once he became ruler of the planet he sought control of the entire Universe. Eventually, as Shish Kay Bob was busy

The Cube People

conquering galaxies and adding them to his empire, the Boxers struck back and took over the planet. A young Willy Lemonoid then took that chance to unite the remaining free galaxies under him, crush Shish Kay Bob, and become the first ruler of the Universe.

This story brought inspiration to Simon, who had lived in exile for so long, and to the present Willy Lemonoid, who, after his fall from power, had felt hopeless for so long.

“Willy? Willy?” a Cube Person, trying to get Willy’s attention back to negotiating, said in its usual emotionless, almost robotic tone of voice.

“Oh, sorry,” said Willy, breaking his gaze from the moon on the Cube People’s planet. “I will need to check that price with my, er, co-worker.” Willy pulled out his cell phone, dialed a few buttons for the number, and a minute later (he was in a different universe, the area code was *really* long), called Antonio, Master of the Mint.

“Sir,” Willy whispered into the phone, “I’ve managed to haggle the price down to 12 million. Is that low enough?”

“Willy, you’re acting like we have the budget of a whole planet! I’m only one person, and not some fancy trillionaire like Roy, Dave, or Mr. Parrot. We need at least less than 5 million,” Antonio scolded into the phone.

“Antonio, you stupid b – Roy is backing all of his scarabs with this wood, and he’s going to protect it with something other than a stop sign!” Willy whispered in a raspy voice.

“This is being paid for with my money, and I’m saying that I don’t have much more than five million!” Antonio whispered in a raspy voice back.

“Maybe we should just rob the Royal Mint. You know the security systems like the back of your hand. It shouldn't cost too much.”

“You idiot! I can't do that for exactly that reason. Roy has put total control of the Mint security systems in my hands, and if anything were to happen, I would immediately be killed, no matter what!” Antonio felt childishly victorious, feeling that he had won the argument, and said, “What do you say to that?”

Willy Lemonoid remained silent for another moment. “I have an idea on how to get money!” he whispered excitedly back, “I, knowing Simon Carp's exact plans and whereabouts, can blackmail him for a very hefty amount. We can buy the weapons, and profit from both the blackmailing and the wood we'll steal!” Willy ended the call.

“We'll go for your 12 million!” Willy told the Cube Person.

“Excellent, when can you pay us?” the Cube Person asked.

“As soon as you'd like,” Willy said, smiling.

“Excellent,” said the Cube Person again, “You can leave as soon as that huge glob of Boomwater splashes on our beautiful planet.”

“What?” Willy Lemonoid turned around. Sure enough, approaching the Cube People's planet was a large glob of Boomwater, perhaps an entire cubic mile of it.

“It is not possible for so much Boomwater to come in one piece naturally,” the Cube Person said, “Someone must really be trying to kill us.”

“The Boomwater won't affect the moon we're on, right?”

The Cube People

“Oh, sure, but don’t think of it as exploding,” the Cube Person said, still emotionless in its tone of voice, “think of it as splashing over a big chunk of Ba-ing-go, and giving us a little chill.”

The Boomwater approached the planet. Willy Lemonoid braced himself. The glob was poked by the corner of a tall Cube People’s building, and exploded with the unimaginable force of millions, perhaps billions, of Earthling bombs. Yet, as the Cube People’s buildings were so tightly packed and well-designed, after the explosion was over you could not see any change, especially Willy Lemonoid, who went blind.

“We must rush you to our hospital,” said the Cube Person, “We still may be able to replace your eyes.”

Roy took another puff from his cigar and lay back in his chair. Happy to get a rest from this so far restless day, he tried to forget his impending doom and fall asleep, but all he could think about was all that had gone wrong, every little thing that had gone wrong, in fact. He first couldn’t find any socks in the morning, then his breakfast was too hot, then he had to go to a public speaking, then his TV was broken and he had to buy a new one, then he went to a conference about the failing economy and falling stocks, then he went to see Little Billy, then the little prince puked like mad, then he had to buy a new ship, then the prince puked like mad again, then he learned Simon was still alive and was conspiring against him, then he stubbed his toe, then the cockroach said that he would die at the hands of Simon, then the restaurant exploded, Loothpiti escaped, and then he coughed really hard.

Children's Tales of the Universe

Roy tried to think of something simple that couldn't relate to anything that had happened that day. Let's see...his blinds were closed, his head was on his desk, he was trying to go to sleep, and he was trying not to think of his impending doom...

Seeing that that was not working, Roy decided to turn on the radio and try to listen to music until he went to sleep. "Forecast today includes rainy skies somewhere in the Universe, high winds elsewhere, and gravity with its usual strength all across the Universe," the weatherman on the radio said in a peppy voice, and then said more seriously, "If you would like to learn more about the weather, or about it in a specific location, please go to our website. Now, Universal Weather turns to Universal News."

"Thank you Tom," said a female Zebonian Turtle in a happy voice, "Today Roy has decided that the Cube People are too threatening and has decided to kill them with a big explosion! Unfortunately, that didn't work, and the Cube People have vowed to kill us all, as said by this one in an interview:" Roy's head shot up at the news.

"Um, yes," said a Cube Person in its natural emotionless tone of voice, "We're tired of Roy oppressing us, and after the Boomwater incident, we have gathered up our armies. Let it also be known that we have cut off Roy's supplies of Tuna, as well as shut down all of the Hyper Space Tunamatic Highways, and have even barricaded the Universe from the Dimension of Stupidity. Soon, without the highways and purple gas from the Dimension of Stupidity, the Universe will be unable to resume hyperspace travel, and all of Roy's armadas will be rendered useless against ours."

The Cube People

“How rude,” the Zebonian Turtle said, speaking once again to the listeners, “Well, I sure hope that the Cube People forgot to barricade the Pickle Universe, or we’re really going to be helpless!”

“I’m still here, you know,” said the Cube Person.

“Mmmm... pickles!” said the Space Jelly Blob anchorman named Tom, “Say Brenda, isn’t that what you use in your pickle casserole?”

“Yes, I believe so. Here’s the recipe: pickles, three eggs, four heads of lettuce, four sticks of celery, a cup of flour...”

Roy sat there on his chair, too stunned to move. The Universe now had total dependence on the Pickle People, and this sort of power would certainly corrupt them.

He shook his head. There was the impending doom again. He turned off the radio and put his head back on the desk, and fell asleep.

Roy's Dream

Roy found himself in a peaceful meadow on Margues, sitting high atop one of Mona's freakishly large guinea pigs. "It's going to storm," said the guinea pig. It leapt, carrying Roy over a large, dark cloud in the sky. More clouds formed around the cloud the guinea pig had leapt over. More and more clouds came into the sky, and when the sky was completely covered, were appearing just over Roy's head.

"Where are all these clouds coming from?" Roy asked the guinea pig.

The guinea pig grew a thousand times larger and blew on the clouds. As the clouds rolled away, it was revealed that Roy was now in a huge cave with a giant smiley face on the horizon that was just as big. The guinea pig shrunk back to its normal size and sprouted wings, flying Roy towards the huge smiley.

Roy now knew where he was. He was in a Hell created by Willy Lemonoid near the end of his reign as a way to regain control of the Universe by controlling his subjects' afterlife. There was also a Heaven and Heck made by Willy Lemonoid, but Roy happened to be flying through Hell. He stooped his head down so that it would not hit the ceiling of the cave, and gazed down. He saw that he was passing the Land of Falling Cats, where, right beneath him, in the clouds, stone and glass cats fell from the sky, shattering on the heads of the deceased.

Next, after flying past the clouds, Roy could see the wide Boomwater River, where sufferers were in vain trying to cross to escape the next thing Roy saw. Roy saw a deep, bubbling marsh of the element Choco-latte, a thick, oozing,

Roy's Dream

tunamatic, cocoa-like liquid that for some reason turned into a terribly acidic when moved – the more it moved, the more acidic it became – and with some other properties, too, but it only existed in Hell so nobody but Willy Lemonoid knew them. In this marsh were man-eating pigs that the poor souls were desperately trying to escape, but, with the thickness of the marsh and the fact that they were carrying large goats in their hands, most could not escape.

Next Roy flew over a large meadow where countless goats grazed. Roy could hear the sound of donkeys braying in the distance and desperate creatures trying to lift the vicious goats. To everyone in Hell, goats were the most important thing and the most desired object, because if one had a goat, one could fluff it in the Land of Falling Cats and then, after climbing a Ba-ing-go ladder (which would be really, *really* cold when you consider how hot it is in Hell) located far behind Roy closer to the center than even the Land of Falling Cats, could be used to float from Heck to Heaven. However, here in the meadows, the goats were being watched by Boomhoppers, far-leaping chameleon like creatures that had blood vessels loaded with Boomwater. Because they had Ba-ing-go bones, however, when they landed after hopping, the explosion would simply come out of their skin pores without harming them, unlike the unfortunate Zebonian Turtle, which, if it were set off the Boomwater in its body, would die.

Above the Meadow of Goats was the only way into the meadow, a huge staircase maze. The stairs were made of wood and incredibly rickety, one could easily plunge into his, her, or its re-death by falling. Another danger in this maze was that one might come across a less intelligent

animal that got stuck in the maze, like a Chubbit or the awful-toothed British Pony, and get killed by one of those.

Past the staircase maze was a river of pure alcohol, which is really dreadful if you were to know about the first layer of Hell, the Donkey Fields, where huge donkeys spat out any object that was obliterated (Roy saw some kitchen materials from the El Tuna Café), or any creature that had recently died. Vomiting these objects was very painful, so the donkeys brayed loudly in pain, and had a terrible temper, which might lead them to chase down and bite one which just died in the real Universe or that had re-died in Hell trying to run through the layers.

Finally, flying over a huge, otherwise impassable mountain, past bellowing clouds of smog, Roy's guinea pig flew him to the Great Smiley Face. The Smiley Face was really just a huge building behind the rest of Willy Lemonoids's Hell in the shape of, of course, a giant yellow smiley face. The mouth was an oven for the worst sinners and the trouble makers in Hell, who all burned in the oven for a thousand Zebonian years (Willy Lemonoid, though a Peg rather than Zebonian Turtle or cockroach, was born on Zebus), equaling about two and a half thousand Earth years. The nose nostrils were for ventilating the toxic gases that the oven produced, the eyes were giant heat lamps that both lit up and warmed up Hell, the ears were the entrances and exits of the building, and the tear ducts were the source of the Boomwater in the Boomwater River, with the two streams gently coming down, as to not blow it up, and quickly crisscross, forming the Boomwater River, then trail down as waterfalls, breaking the water into droplets as it fell into the

Roy's Dream

Land of Falling Cats, and then blowing up, making access to the Ba-ing-go ladder almost impossible.

The guinea pig turned towards the right ear of the Great Smiley Face and knocked Roy into the building, then disappeared. Coming around to corner to meet Roy was the Executive Administrator of Hell, Bob the Gray PufferFish, wearing a very long black robe.

“Why and how are you holding me hostage in Hell?” Roy demanded, although somewhat timidly.

“Come to the bar!” The gray PufferFish commanded.

“Where is the bar?” Roy asked, still afraid and unaware that this was a dream

“Come to the bar!” the PufferFish said again.

“What bar?” Roy asked, raising his eyebrows.

The gray PufferFish rolled up the sleeves on his robe and pointed at the wall behind him. “This one!” He said in a creepy voice, then puffed up, and blew against the wall. As the wall blew away, Roy saw Little Billy standing in front of a bar on a tropical beach.

“No! Why have you taken my heir?!?” Roy cried, falling to his knees and pulling at his hair.

“Come to the bar,” Little Billy said, staring blankly. “People come in sad.” Little Billy pointed to some depressed looking Tony look-alikes entering the building. “But come out happy,” he continued, pointing to some cheerful Tony look-alikes leaving the building. “So come to the bar, it’s a happy place.” Pulling out a smiley face sticker from his back pocket larger than himself, he stuck it onto the front of the bar.

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The gray PufferFish began laughing maniacally. “Ah ha ha ha ha! AH ha ha Ha Ha! Ah Ha Ha Ha Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

Roy awoke and shot his head right off of his desk, startled. “That was weird,” he said to himself. “I’d better go and see what it means.”

“Well, exalted one,” Roy’s psychologist began, as soon as Roy finished talking, “I think that your dream was a commercial for bars.”

“What do you think that means?” Roy asked, laying on a long, cushy armrest.

“I think that it means that you’re dream was a commercial for bars,” the psychologist replied.

Roy was getting frustrated. “I know that! But what does that say about *me*?”

“Well, I can tell by your attitude that you’re selfish,” the psychologist said. Roy looked at her funny. “But, um, uh, it’s all because you’ve been alive and ruling the Universe for about a million years, and you’ve come to fear death, despite the fact that you know what’s coming. That’s why you just dreamed that you were in Hell.”

“What about the bar thing?” Roy questioned.

“I think that comes from you not having taken enough of my new drug, Psych-O’s. Here’s a bottle.” She said, handing over a bottle of pills.

Roy looked at it closely. “What does it do?”

“Suppress dreams. I think, after hearing so many of your dreams, that that is probably something you should do.”

Roy's Dream

“Dr., do you think that this dream has any other meaning, other than psychologically?” Roy asked.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, does it have any spiritual meaning, or is it saying something that I might want to know, like, how Little Billy is doing on Earth right now?”

“I sure hope not. If your dreams had even a grain of truth, then the whole Universe would really be in trouble.”

“The Universe *is* in trouble.”

“Worse trouble.”

“You’re no help.” Roy said, and got up. He had better things to do than to talk to this psychologist.

He left the room, and walked back to his office in the El Tuna Café. He needed to make a phone call to see how Little Billy was doing, but on the way over he was going to see if he could figure this dream out. Perhaps it meant that Little Billy was in trouble. That smiley face sticker that he put onto the bar could represent kidnapping! The laughing PufferFish could represent the PufferFish Kingdom, and the long robe could represent a place far away from the Earth! Roy suddenly snapped back into reality. How could he end up thinking that a smiley face on a bar would represent kidnapping? Maybe there was another reason. Perhaps it represented something that he should do. Gain access to Hell’s souls, and you have a hell of an army. To do this, though, he would have to get Mr. Parrot’s help, for Mr. Parrot had switched the code so that he and Roy would each know half of how to get into Hell’s database in a desperate attempt to hold onto a little of his power. Roy shook his head at this. Doing this would surely mean sacrificing half of his power over the Universe to Mr. Parrot, and that was a true

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act of desperation and a sign of failure. Perhaps, instead of taking control of Hell, he could simply visit Hell and see if he could get his hands on Choco-latte. Surely this strange substance would give him some good military advantages, just like Boomwater did. He should probably talk to Antonio, Master of the Mint and a trusted advisor, about this.

Antonio robs the Royal Wooden Warehouse

Simon, still stuck in the diamond core of some planet, could not find a way to get out. “This stupid ship can kill a hundred British Ponies with one powerful blast, but it can’t get me out of a planet. Ship, review my movement options,” Simon told the ship.

“Yes, sir. A quarter poundwattameteronceinute to the back, twice that to the sides and front”

“I hate these stupid new universal measurement standards. Ship, please translate the uh, ooh! I just thought of something! What does it take to get into the Dimension of Tuna in old standards?”

“A runway of at least two inches.”

“Do we have that?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Get me out of this planet via the Dimension of Tuna.”

The ship fired at the speed of light two inches forward, then smashed into more diamond core. “Sorry, sir, but the Cube People have denied entrance into the Dimension of Tuna for some reason. I am helpless.”

“How much fuel will we have left if we flew backwards and burst through the diamond?” Simon asked.

“Fool! Why haven’t you thought of that before?” the PufferFish King asked Simon rather rudely.

“We will not have enough,” said the ship. “We barely have any in this tank as is. *Somebody* forgot to gas-up.”

“That’s why,” Simon told the PufferFish King.

The PufferFish King looked frustrated. He banged his fist on the glove compartment of the ship and it fell open. “Hey,

Simon. There's a pickle jar in the glove compartment for some reason!" he said excitedly.

"Excellent. Ship, send us through the Pickle Universe to pickle juice on the PufferFish Planet."

"I will try." The ship paused for a moment. "I'm sorry, Simon, sir, but according to my survey, there is not a single drop of pickle juice on the PufferFish Planet."

Simon turned to the PufferFish King. "Why isn't there any pickle juice on your planet?"

"I wanted to shrink the risk of Roy sending a glob of Boomwater to appear right next to our planet, so I banned all pickle juice. Some fool must have hid this pickle juice in the glove compartment of our ship."

Simon, though happy that there was no risk of a Boomwater explosion of their planet, was still not happy with the present situation. "Send us to any pickle jar that is within the distance our fuel can take us, if that's possible."

When finally at the PufferFish secret base underneath the retirement home, Simon and the PufferFish King were once again busy discussing tactics.

"It looks like the Cube People have declared war on our universe and are preventing us from using both the Tunamatic Highways and the Dimension of Stupidity's purple gas. When the purple gas supply is depleted, as, when you look at the sharp rise in gas prices, seems to be already happening, the Universe's unification will be entirely up to the Pickle People. If only we could use my plan for Zebus! We could get the Pickle People on our side, or at least battling against Roy, and Roy would fall like a domino." Simon said to the PufferFish King in the conference room.

Antonio robs the Royal Wooden Warehouse

“Yes, this is quite a good opportunity, but before trying to figure out how to do this, think about how this is also affecting us. If all means of transportation relied on the Pickle People, they could easily take the Universe themselves without our help. This means that all of the risk we are taking doing this will be for nothing, since the Pickle People will rule the Universe with absolute, unquestionable power. I think that we should give up this entire operation.”

Simon thought about this for a moment. It did seem like all his hope was gone, now that he thought about it. “King, believe me.” Simon said reassuringly, “I know Roy very well. We could anger the Pickle People with the plot I have for Zebus, then we could convince Roy that we are masterminding this entire transportation-cutting-off thing ourselves. When Roy surrenders to us, he will of course be in exile – or dead – and then the Cube People will have no grudge to bear against us, so they will open back up our supplies of purple gas and our Tunamatic Highways, and we will not be dependent on the Pickle People.”

“That seems like a good plan,” said the PufferFish King, “But I think that you overlooked that the Cube People might want to take over our Universe by barricading us.”

“No, I haven’t,” said Simon, “This barricade is all the result of a large grudge the Cube People have against Roy for trying to blow them up. People don’t like being blown up. As soon as Roy is gone they will supply us with everything, because to them a profit is more important than domination. Domination is impossible for them anyway, as the Pickle People would conquer the Universe while the Cube People’s barricade is up, and then, with the Pickle People encouraging their means of transportation rather than Tunamatic

Highways, the Cube People would lose a lot of business. Even with Roy in power, the embargo will soon end for those same reasons. However, we will need to act now, because with the Cube People's embargo and then the Pickle People's embargo on as soon as Zebus is destroyed, it will be too overwhelming for Roy and if he believes I am behind it all he will surely give in to us."

"Excellent," said the PufferFish King, "Now, if we can just plan a way to get the missiles on Zebus in secret without the Cube People's help, we can actually make this plan a reality."

The phone rang. Simon was excited. "Maybe Mr. Parrot is finally returning my call! This will make our job much easier." Simon, excited, pressed the phone and set it to speakerphone, so that the PufferFish King could also hear the following conversation. "Hello?" asked Simon.

"Yes, hello," said Willy Lemonoid, seeming to be trying to suppress a giggle. "Yes, is this Simon?"

Simon frowned. A call from Willy Lemonoid was not good. "Hey, so I kind of need some money, and, heh, I want it from the PufferFish Kingdom."

"So you want to blackmail us?" asked Simon.

"Good, good, you're smart," said Willy Lemonoid, "Very good. Now, the rate may seem a little exorbitant. I need from you 20 million scarabs every um, El Tuna Café day. Yes, that would be nice."

The PufferFish King gasped to a point where he was so large he fell out of his chair and bounced against the ground. "We won't give you that much," said Simon.

"Oh, really?" said Willy. "Let's weigh the consequences of me telling Roy all of the plans we discussed

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together. Well, were I to rat out, then Roy would annihilate the entire PufferFish Planet and most likely kill you. However, Roy would probably not punish me as severely for telling him this valuable information, and yet even if he did, your consequences are must worse. So, do you want to pay me?”

“Willy, you do know that the PufferFish Planet only has about 200 million scarabs in its treasury.”

“Very well,” said Willy Lemonoid. “Twelve million is all I need for now. Send me twelve million scarabs every El Tuna Café day.”

Simon realized that Willy was up to something. This was something that could be negotiated. However, Simon caved in and typed some buttons on the phone. He wasn’t ready to bring that up in negotiation right now. “There, I sent a message to your bank account named ‘Bob Johnson’. The account now has twelve million scarabs.

Willy Lemonoid laughed a bit. “Very good, Simon. See you tomorrow!”

Simon hung up, bracing himself for what was to come. The PufferFish King was angry. “Why did you send him the scarabs immediately? That blew our entire budget!”

Simon shook his head. “He was going to rat us out to Roy. Willy Lemonoid seemed to be in the need of cash – at least twelve million scarabs, it seems, and Willy Lemonoid is not the type to negotiate with. I had to do this.”

“Well, I’m glad for you! Now we’re financially ruined! By the time it will take us to create the missile constructing plant on Zebus the bribes will have bankrupted us!” The PufferFish King yelled.

“Why can’t we build it faster?” asked Simon.

“Almost as expensive as paying the bribes,” said the PufferFish King. “You can’t build something like that in that sort of speed. Simon, you need to come up with a solution fast. Time truly is money now. If you can’t convince me your worth it, then we’ll have to turn you in to Roy. Perhaps then we may be spared slightly from his wrath. You’ve made a terrible mistake.”

“No I haven’t,” protested Simon. “I’m telling you, Willy Lemonoid has some sort of expensive scheme he’s thought of. If I knew, then we would be at even grounds, but I have no idea what he’s trying to do.”

Willy Lemonoid was trying very hard to get to the office of Antonio, Master of the Mint, and deliver the electricity-absorption bombs that he had purchased from the Cube People with the PufferFish money. He stumbled into Antonio’s office. Antonio looked wide-eyed and frightened at Willy. “What happened to you?” he asked, pointing to two eye stalks where Willy Lemonoid’s eyes should have been.

“This is what took me so long,” explained Willy, “An explosion burned my eyes out. I needed to get new ones from the Cube People. Guess what? A Giant Snail was the only donor available!”

“At least you were able to get here on time,” said Antonio. “We must hurry. The wonderful gap in the shifts of the warehouse’s guards is almost over. We might not get another chance like this in an El Tuna Café’s month. You did get the bombs from the Cube People?”

“Yes,” said Willy, revealing the inside of a compartment in the thick jacket he was wearing.

Antonio robs the Royal Wooden Warehouse

“Very good,” said Antonio. The two did not say another word. They simply made their way through the hall. Antonio was trying to conceal any suspicion in his face, and Willy Lemonoid was trying not to draw attention from his eyestalks, a task that he found impossible. This eye thing happened at the worst time. Willy looked out into the hallway again, past the creatures staring at him as they walked by. He thought he saw Roy approaching. It was Roy!

“Is that Willy Lemonoid?” Roy asked rather cheerfully, “Why, Antonio, where did you find him? I’ve been wanting to know something from him, but I never thought I’d actually find him!”

“Willy will explain it to you,” said Antonio, trying to conceal his nervousness, “I got paged by someone at the Mint. I need to go there as soon as possible.” Antonio walked, over casually, towards a set of doors.

Roy raised an eyebrow. “Those aren’t the doors that leads to the Mint.”

“I know,” said Antonio, sweat beginning to drip down his forehead and hands, “But it was a really strange page. Someone wants to meet me and Willy at the Royal Wooden Warehouse for some reason.”

Roy shrugged. “Okay, then. Come to my office, Willy. I hardly knew you were alive until recently.”

“Wait! Willy, I left my um, lunch in your coat, remember?”

“Oh, yes. You can’t go hungry,” said Willy Lemonoid, handing an electricity absorption bomb to Antonio. “Remember, the pager said that you need to eat this in about a minute while you work.”

Antonio nodded, knowing what this meant. This device would only suck the electricity out of the Royal Wooden Warehouse security system for only a minute. This meant that he had to fire off the bomb, and would then have to destroy the security devices all in one minute so that he could move the wood. It was difficult without Willy Lemonoid, but doable. He went through the doors

“So,” Roy said, examining Willy as they walked away from the doors, “What brings you here, and why do you have these large eye stalks?”

Willy desperately tried to think of a reason. “These eye stalks are a mutation given to me by the Cube People,” he said, “and I came here to try to have them removed. However, some stranger came by and paged Antonio, telling him to go and bring me, and so, here I am!” Willy smiled nervously. It looked really creepy now.

“Hmm...as former ruler of the Universe, I wonder what they could be paging you for,” thought Roy, with the conversation between Simon and Willy still stuck in his mind. Roy wondered what Willy was trying to do to his beloved El Tuna Café now.

“I wasn't the one who was paged.”

“Oh, right,” said Roy, embarrassed for giving away some suspicion. Roy decided to ask his question. “Willy, do you know how to get Choco-latte? I want to try some experiments on it.”

“Not really,” said Willy Lemonoid, as the two approached Roy's office. “I had some scientists make the element. I was busy back then with other things, and the element sort of was forgotten. It just so happened that one of the scientists that was working on my Hell slipped that in as

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one of the parts of it. I don't know much about it, but Hell has plenty of Choco-latte that you could examine."

"That's what I wanted to hear," said Roy, opening his office door, "So, how can I get into Hell?"

Willy felt a buzz on his pager in his coat. This was good. This meant that Antonio was beginning. He had gotten this far. Hopefully Antonio would be able to finish the job without his help.

"I don't really know anymore. The Universe's rule has changed three times since my reign. You should ask Santa, or Satan, or whatever he's called nowadays. He owns a timeshare. He could surely help you get there, or buy one of your own."

"I see." Roy nodded listening intently. His cell phone rang. "Hello? What? You lost a signal from the Royal Wooden Warehouse security system?" Willy's heart leapt. Antonio was doing fine. He must have used the electricity absorbing bomb that was bought from the Cube People today. All that he needed to do now was trace the controls, which should be easily done by judging the size of the electrical beams going to the bomb, and then use the Cube People's hacking hard to shut down the systems. Then Antonio could suck the wood into the Pickle Universe and leave safely, unless Roy were to get there first, and then they could slowly sell back the wood to Roy at a huge profit. "I'll be right over," said Roy. Willy nodded, and got up to leave. Then Roy said, "Come by my office and pick up Willy Lemonoid while you're at it." Roy hung up. He pulled out a Zangy Zapper, set it to "low". Willy blinked. Roy pointed the weapon and shot Willy, who fell unconscious on Roy's desk.

Children's Tales of the Universe

What is a Squeen?

Roy, walking to his rescheduled (after the fire) second session of the conference, was now thoroughly convinced that the Universe was trying to make him suffer, and that was the only reason he was still alive. Why though? What had he done? Had he killed anyone? No, not him. If the Universe punished killing, logically it would be his weapons that should be punished. Stupid weapons. Roy bit his lip and entered the conference room. It was smaller than the one that had gone in flames. There, waiting, was Roy's cabinet (or at least those still alive after the disaster) and Mr. Parrot, former ruler of the Universe.

“Well, I don't like the way things are going,” Roy began, taking his seat. “There is little chance of me getting that other conference room repaired sometime soon, as all of my wood has just been robbed. I'm sorry to say that, in addition, someone somehow found out and was able to broadcast it through that horrible thing, the media. I killed the broadcasters, but that doesn't keep my money from being nearly worthless.” Everyone in the room nodded, except for Dave, who, being a snail, could not. “In fact, the money is so worthless now that my net worth has gone from trillionaire to millionaire, in old standards, of course, and I'd hate to know what little money you billionaires and millionaires have. I really never expected it to be this bad.” Everybody bit his or its tongue. Except for Dave, who was a snail. He really hated being left out. “I have called for this meeting,” Roy started again, “Not to hear any advice of yours, but um, to empty your pockets. I need to refill the wood supplies, you see.”

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Everyone (but Dave) nodded grimly. If they all pitched in and made the scarab valuable again, they could at least have a little of their old fortunes back. Mr. Parrot was the only one unhappy with this, for he had already given half of his money to Roy. "Why can't you just issue bonds?" he asked Roy, "as soon as the scarab is valuable again, the bonds can be repaid."

"No, I won't let the government go into debt," said Roy strongly, "That is a shameful thing to do. Nobody but those foolish Earthlings do such a thing. Once they start issuing bonds, they can't stop, and the interest drives their debt ever higher."

Mr. Parrot raised a feathery eyebrow. "Issuing bonds is more shameful than stealing?"

"I'm not stealing. Technically, I'm raising taxes. You, Mr. Parrot, are taxed an invention-support tax. In other words, you must pay for the Gotithian race, which, being the dominant species in the Universe since your reign will be very costly," Roy said, pointing a goaty finger at the deformed space monkey. "You, Dave, will also be given an invention tax, as you have invented one of the most widely used things in the Universe: the toilet. The toilet has also been around a long time, back since Willy Lemonoid's rule, so you will have to be taxed heavily. You, Bob, for owning such a large shipping corporation, will be taxed a new cargo fee. You, Jeff Senior, for owning the recently booming business of selling Poach-a-trons and running planets entirely for their use, are taxed a wildlife conservation tax. You, Bob jr., you will be taxed for...well...being too ugly. That's pretty inventive. Take a look at this document explaining the tax," Roy said, pulling something out of a drawer under the

What is a Squeen?

table. It seemed that Roy was keeping a document of this tax at all times, just in case he ever happened to need some extra cash. This infuriated Mr. Parrot. “You all may leave now,” Roy said, handing out the documents. Mr. Parrot scowled at Roy as he left, and Bob jr. frowned as he looked down on the shiny wooden table.

Mr. Parrot closed the door behind him angrily. Cursing under his breath, Mr. Parrot walked to the El Tuna Café parking garage where his ship was parked. He was inspecting the sheet of gold (for gold was far less valuable than paper, which was made of wood, because gold was so plentiful in the Universe and so very unpractical) that explained the new invention tax. According to these rules, Mr. Parrot figured, he would be bankrupt sometime within the El Tuna Café’s fortnight. Stepping into his large luxury ship, he decided that for far less than what the taxes were, he could fund Simon Carp and kill Roy, thus escaping taxes. In fact – Mr. Parrot squawked with delight – he was so rich that he was capable of funding Simon just enough to drop himself in a lower tax bracket. Even if Simon failed, Mr. Parrot’s money would be around for at least another two El Tuna Café fortnights after funding him thanks to the tax bracket loophole. This was funny to Mr. Parrot.

Tony was trying hard to fly to the PufferFish Kingdom, he really was, but as this was his second time flying in hyperspace, he, like Little Billy, had some trouble.

“Hey, can we stop again? I’m really starting to get sick again,” Tony told the leader of Roy’s Elite Bodyguard Squadron.

“Weak creature,” said the leader, “We’ll never get to our home planet with you always stopping on some moon or planet. Just hold it in, or if you *really* have to puke, go in the toilet. On the floor, even! The ship will clean it up.”

“It’s not that I have to puke this time,” said Tony, clutching his stomach. “There is some sort of pain in my stomach. I think we need to stop again,” Tony moaned. “And this time, we need to actually get this checked out. I think that something is really wrong with me.”

The PufferFish, disgusted with Tony, steered the ship to land on a planet, though he would very much have rather not. “This is the seventeenth time you’ve had to stop!” the leader exclaimed, “I can still see the El Tuna Café in the distance. You know what that means? It means that we haven’t even gone a million light years yet!” The leader unhappily opened the door to the Poach-a-tron in which they were driving. As Tony stumbled down the steps onto the soil, another PufferFish walked up to the leader.

“I think that we should kill him,” the PufferFish whispered into the leader’s head. “That is the usual custom on our planet, to kill the weak or defective ones.”

“That is just to keep the creature out of its gene pool,” the PufferFish Body Guard Leader whispered back, “I don’t think that we’re allowed to, because I heard somewhere that humans reproduce by asexual division. We don’t have any excuses to dispose of him.”

“We could say that he died leaping off a cliff,” another PufferFish chimed in.

“No, Roy really thinks that humans aren’t stupid,” the PufferFish Body Guard Leader told him.

What is a Squeen?

“No, no. Haven’t you been to Earthland? Dave has this cool demonstration of this human game where they jump off of cliffs. Believe me, they’re stupider than they smell.”

Tony heard that last part. “Do I really smell stupid?” The PufferFish ignored him. “Hey, this is the place where they hold the Squeenball Squeenbowl semifinals, isn’t it?”

“Yes, so...what’s your point? I don’t think Squeenball is that great of a game,” the PufferFish Body Guard Leader told the two others.

“Yes, but you know what happens at the semifinals, don’t you?” one of the other two PufferFish asked. The leader thought for a moment, then smiled. He understood what they were saying now.

Soccer, you should know, does not, like many other things Earthlings enjoy, including cats and corporate monopolies, originate from Earth. The sport of Formula One racing doesn’t either. The leaders of the Universe during Willy Lemonoid’s reign decided that the two sports were boring on their own, for in soccer oftentimes nobody scores during the entire game’s regular time, and the game must be continually lengthened until somebody wins. Formula One, at least in the eyes of Willy’s cabinet, was not too interesting on its own, either. All that happens is a couple of cars drive around a track, crash, and get their tires changed while annoying commentators talk. The cabinet decided that it would be a laugh to see a sport where Formula One cars desperately tried to knock a ball onto their opponent’s side and where commentating was illegal. Squeenball was born. As Squeenball-related injuries added up, popularity for the sport grew, and soon Squeenball became one of the most

complicated universal sports, with cliffs, sand pits, and lots of pot holes all along the tracks. The PufferFish wanted to attend this Squeenball semifinals match because at this point in the annual tournament the hosts of the Squeenball Tournament would take people's votes on who they think should win, and then place a certain amount of idiots on every team involved depending on how many votes they got for losing. The hosts always wanted to pick interesting idiots, and they always picked right before the match, so the PufferFish thought that maybe Tony would be picked, since after the opening of Earthland humans had become one of the most intriguing species in the Universe. Tony was such a weak human that he was sure to die.

"Tony," the PufferFish Leader yelled over to Tony, lying facedown in the planet's dirt, "We just found out that this is the hosting planet of my favorite sport, Squeenball. Do we have your permission to go watch the game?"

"Sure," mumbled Tony, "As long as there is a doctor at the stadium."

"I'm sure there is," said the PufferFish Leader. "Come back into the ship."

"So, where is the stadium?" asked a PufferFish, seating himself at the controls.

"It's on the planet, if you'd remember."

"Yes I know that," the PufferFish said irritably, pressing some buttons.

"Then why did you just ask?"

"I wanted to know where on this planet."

"The ship knows where it is!" exclaimed the PufferFish Leader.

"Oh," said the PufferFish. "Cool feature."

What is a Squeen?

“Calculating distance,” said the ship. “Travel under normal conditions?” it asked.

“Yes! Just fly it!” yelled Tony.

“Flying at normal speed..... 3 and a half poundwattameteronceinutes”

The ship fired faster than the speed of light for a few miles. “We have arrived.”

“You’re paying for that gas,” muttered the PufferFish Leader. “Oh, wait, no you’re not,” he said, once seeing the stadium.

Tony was too distracted by the stadium in front of the ship to notice that last comment. “This is truly an odd looking stadium,” he said, temporarily forgetting his pain inside. It was a huge, pink, pentagon shaped, inwardly slanted, open air stadium with a skinny bridge over it that supported a very large Eiffel Tower-like needle thing. “What kind of idiot designed this?”

“That idiot,” the PufferFish Leader said proudly, “was the first king of our planet once Roy liberated it. He was such a good architect that he began getting bored with his job. He was looking for a new challenge, and decided that he should make, on his next commission, a building that was so strangely designed that, though it could hold up easily in normal conditions, would collapse if even the slightest piece of building material was removed. The giant needle thing there is supposed to be an evil joke, threatening to turn over and impale the ground or whatever is underneath it if the building does collapse. Fearing that vandals might destroy the 400 million scarab stadium, a second pentagon-shaped ring was added as the entrance. If any vandals or idiots tried

to mess with that wall, a part of the wall directly above the culprits will fall on them and hopefully kill them.”

“Wow. I wish bridges exploded or something whenever a vandal graffitied on one on Earth,” Tony said excitedly, as they approached the strange structure. “That would make my daily ride to work a lot better,” he clutched his stomach again. “That would be great to see. ‘Hey guys’, one of them would say, ‘watch me paint a talking pony!’ Then bang! They’re all dead.” The PufferFish looked at each other confused.

“Let’s get you to a um, doctor, and then we’ll fetch some cool seats on the bridge,” the PufferFish Leader said. Taking Tony by the hand, the PufferFish dropped some scarabs on the admission booth for the stadium and led Tony inside.

Tony entered a pink Ba-ing-go hall, at the second last room of which was the doctor’s office. He saw there were screws at the corners where the wall and ceiling panels met. Just one screw removed, and the whole stadium would come crashing down on and around him, he the PufferFish Leader had claimed. It was amazing. Tony and the ten Elite PufferFish Bodyguard Squad members entered the office. The Gotithian doctor was standing with a small Zebonian Turtle patient on the bed, and turned around to see them.

“Amazing!” said the doctor, surprised. He carelessly pushed the Zebonian Turtle off of the bed and onto the floor. The turtle exploded on impact, bringing the bed down with it. “Good thing that turtle didn’t have the regular amount of Boomwater in its bloodstream,” the doctor chuckled. “Wow! I get to be the first doctor to care for a human patient! This is exciting!” The doctor leaned towards the PufferFish Leader.

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“You are bringing him to race, correct?” he whispered. The PufferFish bounced up and down, the PufferFish style of nodding. “Good.”

“Excuse me, doctor. Are you going to be *treating me* anytime soon, or are you going to talk?” Tony asked impatiently.

The doctor shook Tony’s hand. “Hi, I’m Bob. You’re Slimy.”

Tony was hurt. “My hand is not slimy!”

“I know that,” said Dr. Bob, “But I’m too important to learn your name. You will be called ‘Slimy’ in my presence.”

“Why are so many people called Bob in the Universe?” asked Tony.

“Well, it’s kind of a funny story,” said Dr. Bob, scratching his neck. “You see, for many things, people like to wait until the last minute for things, and naming a child happens to be one of those things. Our mothers will be giving birth, and they must think of a name before the child is all the way out. Panicking, they will randomly pick a name, and that is normally Bob, not that that happened to me, of course. My parents knew I was too important to do such a thing.” The doctor added, “This very same thing happened to Roy, too. His mother was panicking, so she named a mixture of hospital brand names, making Roy’s name: Rosetta Octa Yoga. ‘Roy’ is an acronym for Rosetta Octa Yoga. So, Slimy, what’s you’re defect?”

Tony was getting angry with this doctor. “My ‘defect’ is that my intestines are killing me.”

The doctor nodded. “Well, you’re too tall for me to check you standing, so I’ll have to have you lie down on that

bed there," the doctor said, pointing to the mangled, turtle juice covered bed on the floor.

"Um, doctor? Couldn't you just get a stepping stool or something? You only have to inspect my gut."

"Um, no. You see, stepping stools are for short people. I'm not short; it's just that you're too tall. That's why you have to lie down."

"It's not as bad as the utility room," Tony muttered to himself, lying himself down on the mangled bed.

"Hold tight," the doctor told Tony, "I'm going to have to take my mallet." The doctor pulled out a hammer and swung with all of his my squarely down on Tony's gut. Fortunately for Tony, all of the doctor's might did not amount to much.

The doctor, although quite full of himself and very weak, seemed to know what he was doing. "Hmmm... according to the squelching noise I heard when the mallet hit your stomach there is a Squeenbug in your Spleen. That's nothing that a little G-force can't take care of, though."

"How can you tell that it's in my spleen?" Tony asked. "And what is a Squeen anyway? And why do you say that G-force can kill it?"

"It's always questions with you, isn't it? I can tell. I'm good at reading humans. Now, go to the D.O.D, that's Department of Death if you're wondering, and ask for a 787 Squeenslider."

"Department of Death!" Tony exclaimed worried, "Am I going to die? What is a Squeenslider?"

"You'll find out. Now, the Department of Death is, not surprisingly, right next to my office. Tell them Jerry sent you."

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Tony walked out of the office, fearing that the Squeenslider was some method of killing him. It probably wouldn't be euthanasia either. He knew the Universe all too well by now to believe that. It was probably going to be some electrical torture or death by cameras or some other crap that would entertain newspaper readers. Tony walked nervously towards the door, and it opened automatically.

"Ahh... I'm sorry for you," said a Jelly Blob in a tuxedo. Besides the eeriness of the Department of Death room, being dimly lit and with shelves filled with skulls of various species stacked upon it, the room was eerie because Tony was sort of suspicious of blobs wearing tuxedos.

"Wh-w-what do you mean?" Tony asked, walking in, afraid to hear the answer. The door closed automatically behind him.

"This door only opens to those who will die shortly," the Jelly Blob gurgled creepily.

Tony almost had a heart attack. "Are you sure that's accurate?"

"Hmm...now that you mention it, there is no scientific backup to that fact. However, the door is able to choose the next poor fool to drive in a 787 Squeenslider."

"What would that be?" Tony asked, picking up a hippo skull. He squeezed it. It squeaked, and Tony jumped. Then he realized something. "Why do you have stuffed skulls all over your shelves?!?"

"I collect them. So, do you know what to do in a 787 Squeenslider?"

"Um...no. In fact, I'm not even sure what a 787 Squeenslider does." Tony said truthfully.

“Oh, then that could be a problem. You see, 787 Queensliders are the top performers for Squeenball, and can even perform in space if given the right equipment. They are only beaten by Dave's luxury ship, the Squeenburg.”

“What is this ‘Squeenball’? Is it something that can cure me of my Squeenbug?”

“Oh dear...you don't even know what Squeenball is. That's worse for you, better for the fans. However, I'll tell you if it'll give you peace before you die crashing a 787.” The strange Jelly Blob had to take a deep breath after saying that mean sentence, and went on. “Squeenball is a very old sport, dating back to Willy Lemonoid's time. It involves a large barrier – in the case of this stadium simply a large moving Ba-ing-go box – that blocks the two teams of eight 787 Queenslider cars. The object of the game is to score by knocking a ball onto your opponent's side of the barrier and making them lose the ball, by having it fly off the track or by having one of the opposing team's Queenslider run over the ball, thus breaking it. You may go around the barrier if you are fast enough, so as to interfere with the opponent's catching, which is done by either bouncing the ball off of the Queenslider's spoiler or by trapping the ball in the spoiler and then releasing it by using G-forces. When a team scores, since the ball is obviously lost, it is up to the barrier to release a ball onto the scoring team's side. The game ends after eight revolutions around the track, in the case of this stadium.”

Tony stared at the Jelly Blob, not knowing how to feel. “This game is by far the stupidest invention ever, and you expect me to be a part of it!” He exclaimed, breaking the silence.

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“Oh, no no no!” said the Jelly Blob, jiggling wildly. “The stupidest invention ever to be actually made is so hideous that only convicts are allowed to use it.”

Tony was hoping to get this weird creature into another long story, so as to avoid this certain death. “So, can you explain me the stupidest invention ever?”

“Sure,” it said happily, “The stupidest invention ever is basically a boat that was designed to sail on land.”

“That doesn’t sound *too* bad,” said Tony.

“Everyone who sailed in it drowned,” said the Jelly Blob.

“How does that work?” Tony asked, still trying to stall.

“I can’t tell you right now, you still have Squeenball to play.”

Tony was stabbed with fear. That fool was not going to forget the Squeenball thing easily. “Hey, do you know what a ‘Squeen’ is?”

“Which Squeen? Squeenball, Squeenburg, Squeenslider, or Squeenbug?”

“I mean the prefix ‘Squeen’. It seems to show up a lot.”

“Hmm...It might be in a dictionary,” said the Jelly Blob, rummaging with a little pseudopod foot through its shelves. Stuffed skulls fell to the floor and squeaked. “Here’s my dictionary. Now, where is ‘Squeen’?” The Jelly Blob tried opening the book. It couldn’t. “Would you be nice enough to open the book for me?” Tony did. “Thank you,” said the Jelly Blob. It blew on the pages until it found what it was looking for. “Ah, here it is. ‘Squeen: a commonly used prefix that appears in this dictionary.’ ”

The next thing Tony knew he was trembling, standing in the middle of the stadium, looking at the track. This track seemed to have everything imaginable. Cliffs, valleys, potholes, sharp turns, loops, ramps, and even stairs to go down. Tony cringed at the thought that, if he wanted to get out of this alive, he would have to drive, and he would have to drive eight complete laps around the track. Tony, insides flopping around like mad, heart racing like mad, and hands sweating like never before, steeped into his assigned 787 Queenslider. He was the first human to enter one, and probably would come out the first human to die in one. The crowd cheered, especially the Elite PufferFish Bodyguards, for they were probably the most eager to see the human crash into something.

Tony could not fit right. That was the first bad sign. He was a human, and these seats were designed for much shorter creatures. Putting the seat as far back as he could, he took another glance at the team. They were all Gotithian, except for him. Tony wondered how the Gotithians seemed to be dominating everything. Taking a deep breath, clutching the wheel hard, trying not to hunch his back too much despite the smallness of the chair, and pressing his weak little legs against the pedal, he listened for the signal to drive. The Jelly Blob from the Department of Death was on a megaphone. "I would like to thank our sponsor, the El Tuna Café! If it ain't rotten it ain't tuna! The fact that it was bombed just adds to the excitement!" The Jelly Blob paused, and from where Tony was sitting he saw something that looked as if the Jelly Blob was rolling its eyes. The Jelly Blob continued, "Now, fans, put down your beer, because the race is about to start.

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On your mark, get set, get ready, and go!” The Jelly Blob pressed its megaphone and it beeped obnoxiously, signaling the racers to go.

Tony’s seven other teammates, the other team, and the barrier burst off in some ungodly speed of at least 150 mph, all pretty much aligned. Tony pressed the pedal and, to his surprise, flew across the road at almost their speeds. The G-forces squeezed him against his small seat and almost made him crash.

The crowd roared. Most of those who could stand in the crowd were standing, watching excitedly as the human caught up to his teammates. Tony’s team, the Speedies, received the first ball from the barrier. A car from the other team, the Squeenies, raced in front of the barrier to try to go in front of the car with the ball. Big mistake. The barrier accelerated and ran into the crossing Squeenslider, flipping it into the air, and the car landed on the side of the track. Everyone clapped, including a person on Tony’s team, who crashed soon after.

As the barrier sped up, Tony fell behind it. The car directly in front of him gave him a turn signal. Tony understood it meant go to the other side of the barrier and interfere. Tony tried, but a car from that team slowed down enough to block him. The first turn approached, and the barrier continued speeding up, and the two teams, sped up with them. Tony did not try to figure out why, but it had to do with the ball, and he had no idea where it was. As the other teams raced past the first turn, Tony fell back further, wanting to slow down. The crowd booed and hissed, but Tony could not hear them. He cautiously drove past the turn, and then quickly sped back up to try to catch up with his

teammates. Another teammate also far behind the rest of the group hit a pothole and a wheel broke off. Swerving hard to try to save himself, Tony almost hit a pothole himself. Catching up on the opponent's side, they approached the second turn, much faster than before and with the turn much sharper.

The PufferFish Leader was trying hard to suppress a girlish giggle. After this sharp turn, assuming that Tony survived, he would have to face the first loop, a land of potholes, another sharp turn, a couple of ramps, another loop, and somewhere near the finish was a secret minefield. Tony would have to go through this nightmare not once, but eight times. He put his fin in his bowl of worms and took it to his mouth. This was quality entertainment.

Tony, with his heart racing, clenched hands hurting, and head sore from acceleration, approached the first loop. Still far on the edge of the track, near the cliff, Tony quickly tried to swerve nearer to the center. His reactions were too slow, and he found that his car had slid off of a ramp next to the loop and was flying in the air. Somehow, something in the Universe had made him press the little button on the Queenslider dashboard that allowed him to keep flying once in the air, and Tony knew that that had saved him from a surely killing impact when he landed in the rocky slopes below. Happily flying through the air, he spotted the barrier spitting out a ball to the Queenies team, who now only had six cars. Apparently they had scored. Tony didn't really care. Flying towards the audience, he was planning to make his escape. Little did Tony know that when the Queenslider

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flies in gravity, its fuel will be consumed quickly, and as Tony flew over the heads of countless spectators, his car slowed down. It continued slowing down, and when he had almost reached the top, luckily it stopped flying. Crushing some spectators and bouncing on impact, the car slid down the benches, killing anyone unable to escape. Soon the corpses gathering under the car built up and stopped it from going backwards, so it started rolling down the rest of the way. Tony was in a seatbelt which was protecting him from most rolls down the stadium but could not against all. When his car finally stopped rolling, he was bloody, beaten, and unconscious.

Simon entered the conference room holding a projector. He smiled nervously. "I have finished my idea," he said, "Tell me what you think of this, and I'll either remake the plan or go with the one here."

Simon took a deep breath and set down the projector. He turned it on. The first slide was a simple picture of the planet Zebus. The PufferFish King and all of his generals looked at Simon unimpressed. "Well, you can see, obviously, this is shoes, er booze, um...Zebus!" the PufferFish looked at Simon hard as he stuttered, Simon's heart raced. "And, Zebus is our target. Now, I've had to look around your records for some cost estimates, but I think that if my plan is feasible the costs will be correct." Simon pressed a button on the projector, and a slide with nothing other than a picture of some scarabs appeared. The phone rang. "Hello?" Simon squawked, his voice high.

“Simon?” said Mr. Parrot into the line, “I know that it’s a bit late, but I’ve decided to return your secret call about The Conspiracy.”

Everyone heard this, as was now on speaker automatically when answered, and was excited. “That’s great,” said Simon, his voice getting more confident. “So you’ll be able to fund us?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Parrot. “I am on my way right now. I can promise that in a short amount of time I will be able to fund you.”

Simon cheered and kicked over his projector. “We don’t need this stupid plan!” he said happily. The PufferFish looked strangely at Simon.

“So, you are sure that your old plan will work?” said the PufferFish King. “Because you realize that if Mr. Parrot doesn’t find it feasible, he won’t fund us. He’s our last chance. “

“Don’t worry,” said Simon confidently. “I’m sure that he’ll find it feasible enough. He has a fortune that ranks in the trillions. The cost estimates for our plan is probably way lower than what he expected in the first place anyway.” Simon heard a bell ring from above. That meant that somebody was up there. Simon excitedly ran up the stairs and looked through a crack in the door, to make sure that it was Mr. Parrot. It was. Simon gave a childish thumbs-up sign to the PufferFish.

Mr. Parrot looked the retirement home. “Ew, these guys are shriveled,” Simon heard him say to himself. Indeed they were. They all were reclining in rocking chairs, blowing to rock, and most of them were asleep. The others were listening for, what they believed, were evil cockroaches in

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the basement trying to kill them. Simon walked out of what Mr. Parrot had previously believed to be a broom closet.

“What the – Simon!” said a shriveled PufferFish in a weak voice, “I thought you dead! I got deflated in the hands of your arm-menies.”

Simon ignored him. “Come on in, they’re having worms downstairs, but you and I can eat something else.”

“Worms are fine,” said Mr. Parrot, “I’ve had a lot more transformations into a parrot since your exile began, and I’m getting a birdlike appetite.”

“Do Diaraman Parrots eat worms?” Simon wondered. “I always thought they only ate dead cows.”

“Yeah, and dead cows have worms in them,” said Mr. Parrot. “That was a pointless argument. Let’s go into the lair now, shall we?”

“Okay then. I can’t wait to show you the plan we have. It’s expensive, but it’ll get the job done long before the day ends at the El Tuna Café, and I’ll bet that that will really overwhelm Roy, especially after what he’s been through,” said Simon, not paying the least bit of attention to the seniors. The two walked into the “broom closet” and shut the door.

Simon turned to Mr. Parrot, smiled, and showed Mr. Parrot to his seat. “I’m glad you can fund us, Mr. Parrot. The missile constructing building can be set up within an El Tuna Café hour, and construct a sufficient supply of missiles in another. There’s just one problem, though. Once we start firing the missiles, we will need to take over the planet, but not with PufferFish. We don’t want any excuse for Roy to launch his armada on us.”

Children's Tales of the Universe

“That’s what I’m wondering about,” said Mr. Parrot, sitting upright from his reclined position. “If Roy attacked the Cube People’s planet, why hasn’t he attacked this one?”

Simon thought for a moment. “It’s hard to explain, Mr. Parrot, but for some reason Roy fears making a mistake and making the Universe mad. He felt that the Universe wouldn’t care too much if he attacked the Cube People without a reason, for everyone has been feeling threatened by their superior civilization for millennia, but to attack someone within his own Universe seemed wrong. Like I said, it’s hard to explain.”

Mr. Parrot didn’t seem to care. “How are we going to conquer Zebus?” he asked, getting to his real question. “We have no other army other than the PufferFish one.”

Simon rolled his eyes. “I think that it’s obvious that we’re going to take them out with smaller missiles. I just need an estimate on the size and quantity. Now, we toast a glass of Alcoholic Worm Juice to our definite success, Roy’s downfall, and a new regime for the ever changing Universe. How can a plan fail when we use the target against itself?”

Zebus

Little Billy hugged a stuffed cockroach that he had bought on Earth. He stood in a small windowless room inside the Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook's ship. He had no idea where he was going, but he was certain it didn't have anything to do with Earthland. He held the cockroach tighter. He could hear the cook and someone else yelling downstairs again.

"YOU'RE GOING BACKWARDS AGAIN!!!" screamed the cook's fiancée.

"It's not my fault! I can't tell where the frickin' colors are on this stupid piece of crap!" screamed the cook.

"Why is it so hard for you to take your turn?" the fiancée asked in an annoyed tone of voice.

"This stupid thing is too complicated!" the cook pouted.

"If the card says move to the nearest colored square forwards, then move forwards! Why are you looking behind the start square for?"

The Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook yelled profanities in some unknown dialect of Gotithian. "Shut up!" he yelled at his fiancée. "I can see that 'Candyland' is too complicated for us, too. Stupid Earth games." He smashed the box against the wall, chewed up the cards, and ripped the board into pieces.

Little Billy, hearing all this, was upset and crying, but he hid his face in the stuffed cockroach so that Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook wouldn't find out. He wiped his face against his overalls and kicked down a block tower.

Children's Tales of the Universe

Still upset, he ripped up a squiggly drawing he had made of Roy and started crying again. He didn't want to be here, and he didn't want to go back to Roy, either. He wanted his mommy and pet guinea pigs back. Still clutching his cockroach, he waddled towards the light switch and tried to turn it off, but he was too short. Downstairs, the Chief Tuna Fry Cook's fiancée was throwing dishes and yelling.

Billy ran to the sheets of a small bed the Fry Cook had bought for the child he someday hoped to have in the days before he had had these problems with his fiancée. Hiding under the sheets, never having had let go of the cockroach, he rolled himself gently side to side, trying to rock himself to sleep, as his mother would have done if Roy had not taken him away from her.

Mr. Parrot walked quickly over to Simon's office. If his beak permitted him to smile, he surely would have, for he learned that the secret missile constructing plant on Zebus was finished. He opened the door of Simon's office right away, too excited to knock. Simon was inside playing a complicated stone-juggling game that he had made during his exile to keep himself from going crazy. He dropped the stones and greeted Mr. Parrot.

"Simon! The missile plant is finished!" he said excitedly.

"Alright! For how long has this been done?" Simon asked.

"I don't know, but long enough to construct its first missile. I predict, within the next El Tuna Café quarter hour at the most, we will have sufficient missiles to fire and also to take over Zebus."

“Great! We have ambitious plans to destroy planets, and we cannot take too long. Which of my suggestions has the PufferFish King accepted?” Simon asked, opening his desk drawer and pulling out a whiskey bottle and two glasses.

“He only accepted Earth. However, he made some suggestions of his own. How does attacking Diarama, Blasphemes, Tapioca, and Margues sound to you?”

Simon poured into both whiskey glasses, took one into each of his hands, and then drank from one. “Sure, sure. I like the suggestions, except for Margues. What good does it do to attack them?”

Mr. Parrot reached a feathery hand out for the second whiskey glass, but Simon began drinking from both at once. That takes talent. “Well, you may not know this, but Roy fell in love on Margues. He’s emotionally attached to the planet.”

Simon put his whiskey bottles down. Then he sneezed. Have you ever gotten alcoholic snot on you? “What a coincidence!” he exclaimed, “The last planet I stowed away to during my exile was Margues, and I fell in love too! Sorry, Mr. Parrot, but I do not approve of blowing up Margues.”

Mr. Parrot wiped the snot off of him, and looked disappointed. “Do you have anymore suggestions? Gotithia, maybe?”

Simon lifted the glasses up, and shook his head. “No,” he said.

Mr. Parrot walked out of the room, disappointed. Simon closed the door, and began drinking from the bottle of whiskey without the use of his hands.

Three Gotithian surgeons stood in a dimly lit surgical room, staring at Tony's unconscious body. They were so still that the only sound in the room came from the beep of a heart monitor. The ten Elite PufferFish Bodyguards sat on a large couch in a waiting room and watched the surgeons through a window. The three Gotithians, Dr. Bob, Intern Bobby, and Dr. Robert, continued staring at Tony, examining him. Intern Bobby reached for his medical tools, but Dr. Bob gently grabbed his arm. "Don't treat him. I heard on the PickleNet someone is offering big money – half a million scarabs if my sources are correct – for a human taxidermy. Dave made sure that it is against the law to kill a human, or to interfere with anything on the surface of Earth, so this is the only chance for the taxidermy we'll ever get." The intern nodded and put his arm back to his side. The three continued looking at Tony on the surgical table, waiting for the heart rate to slow to a stop. The PufferFish were silent, although inside they were cheering for the surgeons and their refusal to treat Tony. Tony would have died, too, if a strange thing had not happened.

For some unknown reason the paths of lives cross, and oftentimes, because the Universe is based on stupidity, in the dumbest imaginable ways. Some strange creature, wearing a large teddy bear suit on fire, ran into the surgical room screaming. It leapt into a sink in the room, flicking a switch as it went, trying to douse the flames. Instead of the switch turning on the faucet – something few sinks do anyway – it turned on the garbage disposal, and the teddy bear head was torn to shreds. Unable to get out, the teddy bear suit continued being torn in the powerful garbage disposal, and fluff filled the sink to the brim, but at least the fire

extinguished when the head was ripped to shreds. With the head finally gone, the teddy bear suit was no longer stuck. Out of it came nothing other than a simple, ordinary turkey. “Oh, (gobble) sorry,” it said, “Have I interrupted your surgery?”

“Not at all,” said Intern Bobby, “We were just standing here, that’s all.” The intern covered his face in shame.

“You’re saying that you were planning to (gobble) let that creature (gobble) die?” the turkey asked, very angry.

Dr. Bob shrugged. “What does it matter to you? You’re not authorized to be in here. If we were to report you would lose your job as...whatever you are.”

The turkey coughed. “Operate on (gobble) him, or else!”

Dr. Bob squinted at the turkey. “Or else what?”

The turkey pulled a screwdriver from the teddy bear suit on the floor. “Or else this!” he exclaimed, holding the screwdriver in one hand and pointing to a screw holding a metal panel on the wall with the other.

Dr. Bob was too shocked to speak. “You wouldn’t dare!” cried Dr. Robert.

“Yes, I (gobble) would,” said the turkey, “I’ve got nothing really to live for, so I’m willing to bring down a stadium.”

Intern Bobby was frightened by this fowl terrorist and grabbed his medical care kit. He ripped it open, pulled out a band-aid, and placed it on Tony. Something about that band-aid made Tony suddenly wake up, totally recovered. The turkey smirked, obviously satisfied with himself.

Tony saw red for a moment, and rubbed his eyes. "What saved me from the Squeenball match?" he asked, looking around.

"I did," the turkey clucked happily. "Without me, the doctors would surely let you die. I came in, teddy bear suit on fire, ready to get them distracted. They took the bait! (gobble) Then I got rid of the fire, and revealed my identity, and here I am, saving a human's (gobble) life!"

Tony glared at the PufferFish sitting in the waiting room. He could tell that they wanted to get rid of him. He knew that Roy had put him in charge, though, and he was ready to exercise that power. Motioning for them and the turkey to follow him, he left for the ship. He also knew that this turkey was an interesting fellow, and hoped to learn more about him and why he had entered the room in a flaming bear suit.

"So Roy's name stands for (gobble) Rosetta Octa Yoga?" the turkey asked. "Hmm...I always knew that Roy's name stood for something, but I always assumed that it stood for Ruler of (gobble) Youniverse."

A PufferFish, overhearing the turkey's stupid remark, said, "'Youniverse' isn't even a real word. Where do you get this stupid information of yours?"

"I worked for (gobble) Roy once. In fact, I was his main advisor in the war against Simon Carp. We (gobble) were supposed to rule the Universe in a partnership, but Roy tricked me into committing a crime, and I was exiled (gobble). The funny thing about exile is (gobble) you are always in Roy's domain, no matter what. You can't really be kicked out, because the Universe is, well, the Universe!"

The PufferFish Leader heard something about a partnership with Roy. “What’s your name?” he asked.

“I (gobble) refuse to tell you,” said the turkey.

“Did you forget?” asked the PufferFish.

“(gobble) Yes (gobble).”

“You seem to gobble a lot,” said the PufferFish Leader, “So I’m going to call you ‘Gabriele’. That seems like a fitting name for a turkey.”

“What?” the turkey said, not knowing if he had heard correctly.

“You heard me. Your name is Gabriele.”

“But I’m a male turkey!” the turkey exclaimed.

The PufferFish glared menacingly at the turkey. “That can be changed,” he said.

Gabriele heard this, and scurried off to hide somewhere.

“Yes, yes. Thank you, Antonio, for generously selling some wood to the Royal Wooden Warehouse. Your contribution towards the Universe’s future will not be forgotten,” said Roy, handing a check to Antonio, who for some reason was wearing a purple suit and green sunglasses. Roy sat back down at his desk and sighed. Poor Little Billy must be tired of being taken care of by Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook. Perhaps he should give Billy a call. He reached for the phone.

“Should I leave?” asked Antonio.

“No, no,” said Roy. “I want to go over my new tax plan with you, right after I make this call.” He reached for the phone again. “What the?” Roy muttered, looking hard at the phone. He squinted, and looked again. Somehow a DVD had just appeared on his desk, or he had not noticed it, or he

needed glasses. No, he was sure that a DVD was on his desk. Roy could not see what it was of, since it had no label. This was no movie, and Roy never made DVDs or even burnt CDs for that matter, not even his secretary did, for all of the files he needed were stored in the computers themselves. Roy popped the DVD into his computer and watched. Simon was on the display. Roy turned up the volume. Antonio walked around Roy's desk and peered over his shoulder.

On the computer screen, Simon was standing there, with his arms folded. "Let me give you a little tip on what I plan to do, Roy," said Simon, "I plan to pet the turtle." Both Roy and Antonio gasped. Pet the turtle? That was awful. If done correctly it could make the entire Universe panic greatly. For those of you new to universal terms, petting the turtle is basically blowing something up; assuming that the particular figurative turtle you are petting is a Zebonian Turtle. "Now, I can't say where from or who I plan to blow up, but I can tell you that there is going to be one heck of an explosion. Hee ho hum. Spare yourself the impossible task of finding out where I am and try to defend as many important planets as you can. You're in my hands now, Roy. Have fun."

Antonio was speechless. Roy was thinking hard. What could Simon plan to attack? It had to be something important. Simon wouldn't waste his precious resources blowing up just any planet. He did say that it would be *one heck* of an explosion, and according to a phone call he had made to Satan, who owned a timeshare in Hell, Planet Heck was where Willy Lemonoid's Hell and Heck were located, with Heck being the desolate planet above Hell, which was located directly beneath. Suppose that Simon was able to

blow up Heck, and access Hell's armies below...no, that was stupid. You could blow the surface of the planet to bits infinite times and the inside would be just the same, unless you accessed the computer database. Otherwise, Roy would have done it at the first sign of trouble. Where, then, would they attack? More importantly, where are they attacking from? Roy had made sure it was impossible for the PufferFish Planet to access any explosive devices without his permission.

Though he knew that Simon had sent the video in order to scare Roy (any idiot would know that), he could not do anything about it, and was indeed frightened. He had absolutely no idea how Simon could even get explosives in the first place. The PufferFish Planet could have no way of accessing any explosive material, so the PufferFish couldn't be helping him, and it couldn't be the Cube People, for as long as the barricade was held up – Roy knew so because the Tunamatic Highways were still invisible – they were unable to have anything to do with anyone. It couldn't be the Pickle People, either, since they were, just like the PufferFish, banned from explosives, and yet in some way it had to do with the Pickle People. It just had to. How else could Simon sneak so many explosives by to anywhere? Roy had better set up surveillance all around the Pickle Universe. Now, where was Simon going to attack? All of his attacks would need to be on important planets, and the whole Universe knew when someone said a planet was “important” it meant that it was worth Roy's bothering to remember its name. Roy understood that Earth was a very important financial center since it was a big getaway for the rich, and he could see why Simon might want to destroy it. He would need to work on

defenses for it, and, more importantly, get Little Billy out of there as soon as possible. Otherwise, well, Roy didn't even want to think about that.

Roy was trying to make a call from the planet Tapioca, but nobody was picking up. "Oh no," he said to himself, "Has Simon begun his murderous bombings?" Just then, he heard a click on the phone. Somebody was calling him at the moment. "Hello?"

"Roy!" a frantic Governor of Blasphemes exclaimed, "Our neighboring planet, Tapioca, has been annihilated! A large chunk of the planet smashed into ours just recently."

Roy took a deep breath. The killing had begun. "Are there any other attacks that you know of?" he asked the governor.

"How should we know? The nearest inhabited planet to Blasphemes is two light years away."

"What do you know about the cause of the planet's destruction?" Roy asked.

"It's been somewhat difficult to trail, sir," said the governor, "but we've done some careful checking, and I think that the culprits are on Zebus."

"Zebus, you say?" asked Roy, "Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir, we've checked our data very carefully," said the governor.

"That's unfortunate," Roy muttered to himself. *Simon is trying to take it over by controlling Zebus, and at the same time trying to weaken my own defenses.* Roy said the usual, "Thank you for the information. Your contribution towards the Universe's future will not be forgotten," and hung up.

"So, they're on Zebus?" asked Antonio, still standing over Roy's shoulder.

“Yes,” said Roy, “I’m afraid that they’ve even gone as far as to conquer it. If we do not act soon, there will be terrible panic and a huge drop in support for me. Even worse, I fear that Simon will attack Earth next, and my Little Billy is taking a vacation there. The poor thing, he can’t contact me for some reason, and must miss me so much... so, in order to protect the life of my heir, we will need to pin Zebus down with a huge armada. The invasion will block any missiles, and those on Zebus who support Roy will quickly change their minds once their beautiful planet is bombed out.”

“Nice plan, Roy,” said Antonio, stroking his rich (though peculiar) new clothing, “but there seems to be something that still troubles me. Zebus is by far the largest manufacturer of pickles, and an attack on them would upset the Pickle People greatly.”

Roy retorted, “It is better to have foreigners angry with me than my own subjects. Besides, Simon attacked them first, and plus he most likely would have used *their own* technology to move the bombs. If I know Pickle People correctly, that would make him their enemy, not us, and they must take any sacrifice it takes to destroy the enemy.”

Antonio nodded. “How big of an army are you sending? What is your strategy?”

Roy scratched his head. “Actually, I have already called for the armada to go. I was just telling you the background to see what you thought of it. As for the strategy, it is a ‘total war’ strategy in a way. My armies will kill anything that moves and destroy anything that stands. It’s not the best plan, but it’s the best I can do right now, and I think I have it covered. Hopefully this will convince the leaders on Zebus to turn over Simon Carp, and, while Zebus is in ruin,

the rest of the Universe will be glorifying my achievement.” Roy dialed a few numbers on a phone and turned away, leaving Antonio to speculate by himself.

Roy's plan was described well. Zebus was under a huge attack. Nothing could pass the atmosphere without being gunned down by a ship; vehicles could not travel on public roadways without being bombed; buildings were being raided, searched, sacked, and then destroyed; and the natural resources of the planet were being wiped out. Fear and panic swept throughout the entire planet, as the force was so big that almost nothing was left untouched. The leaders of Zebus watched as their planet died, but were powerless, as Simon had previously knocked out all the defensive structures on Zebus with his missiles. Roy had set diligent watches for any missiles, and the watchmen had technology to pinpoint the exact location of every missile fired, no matter how fast they were going, and destroy the source of the firing. Simon was smart enough to get around, though. He sent trucks, loaded with missiles, to remote parts of the planet and fired them, most either hitting a distant planet or at least a nice big chunk of the armada. The news of the siege at Zebus, the failing armies, and the continued success of Simon's missiles brought unimaginable panic to the public within minutes of the first attack. Still, Roy would not pull out.

Hanging up with the last of the generals at Zebus, Roy turned back to Antonio. Roy's smile was wiped off when he saw Antonio was pale in the face. “Roy, is what your general saying true?”

“What do you mean?”

Zebus

“I mean when he said – not that I was eavesdropping on your conversation of course – that the Pickle People see you as the enemy now? They’re furious with the destruction you’ve caused to their most important planet.”

Roy laughed. “Ha! Little do those Pickle People know that while they’ve been distracted trying to keep my armada’s advances out of their Universe, I’ve been onto bigger things,” Roy said, seeming happy and optimistic. “Hee hee! Little to they know that I’ve been secretly replacing Zebus’s core with Boomwater!” Roy typed some buttons into his computer. What had caused so much anxiety throughout the whole Universe was over in less than a second. “There. Zebus, Simon, and the threat to the Universe, all gone.”

Disaster on the Squeenburg

Gabriele was, as usual, talking very quickly at Tony. "...So this guy would just not shut up! I mean, a little bit of talking is okay, but come on! I was trying to watch a Squeenball match! It wasn't just any Squeenball match, either, this was the big game. So I told this guy to knock it off, and you know what, he did. Man, I hate those kinds of guys..." Tony did not hear any more. He drifted to sleep in his armchair.

"Hey, we're going to land on the PufferFish Planet!" said the PufferFish Leader from the control room.

Tony woke up. "Alright!" he exclaimed, "If I can make up a good enough story there, Roy promised me that he would discharge me, and send me back to Earth! Man, I'm going to be so glad to be back! I'll see my family again, my girlfriend, my friends, my philosophy meetings..."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," said Gabriele. "Slow down! If I were you, I wouldn't get too riled up about the future. For all we know, within the next five seconds the Universe could turn into chocolate cake and devour itself."

Tony looked at the turkey. "What the heck are you talking about? That's the...well, I suppose that anything is possible, based on a certain amount of probability..."

"Exactly!" said the turkey, "the Universe is so unpredictable, that anything of that sort could happen at any moment! I don't ever make the mistake of relying on the future. I live in constant fear."

Tony shook his head at the turkey. "I guess that you only live in the so called 'now'?"

Disaster on the Squeenburg

“Heavens no!” cried Gabriele. “There is no such thing as ‘now’ for the living being. All we experience has passed. Light takes time to reach us. Sound takes time to reach us. It takes time to comprehend, and the react. ‘Now’ is infinitely small...you can never measure it, for time can always be divided up into smaller and smaller pieces.”

Tony was surprised. That turkey made some good points. It was true; all species were living in the past. In this sense, inanimate objects were better, for, not being able to react to things that had already past, and just for the fact that they weren’t alive, they were not living in the past, and that, to the philosophical Tony, made them smarter in a way. Maybe he should fear the chocolate cake thing...

“We’ve arrived,” said the ship, landing on a PufferFish parking space.

Tony and the others stepped out of the ship. Tony gazed around. It was nighttime on the PufferFish’s planet, so, disappointingly, Tony could not see much of the details of the buildings on the planet, especially because of the curfew law that the PufferFish King had recently passed for some reason, which meant that businesses had no reason to still be open after sunset, and lights were not on in this city. Tony gazed up on the stars and the planets. Tony saw something blue and green, sort of like Earth. “What the heck? That seems to be Earth!”

“Um, yeah...” said the PufferFish Leader, “We didn’t expect it to be nighttime when we got here.”

“Where exactly is this planet anyway?” Tony demanded. “If there is a view of Earth, it has to be close to Earth.”

“Brilliant observation,” said the PufferFish sarcastically. “Our planet flies in a squiggly line around the Sun really fast, and it is frequently visible to Earth’s satellites. When Dave bought Earth he bribed Roy into making it illegal to reveal the secret of otherworldly life to the humans, and we were forced to buy really expensive stuff from Roy that allowed inconspicuous radio interference with Earth’s satellites.”

“Is Mars also inhabited?” Tony asked.

“No!” said the PufferFish Leader. “Over industrialization and pollution killed off the majority of Martian civilization long before Roy’s time, and deemed Mars almost uninhabitable. The planet needed constant around the clock care, or the environment and suitable atmosphere would totally disappear from the planet forever. Satan bought Mars from the Squeenburg, and then enslaved the population for his workshops. They’re way cheaper than those stupid artificial intelligence designs, and are getting far more popular. Mars was left totally uninhabitable, but not totally unimportant. We happen to have a base on Mars, although its purpose is confidential and not even I know it.”

Tony looked around the dark city again. He still could see nothing. “We’d better get back inside the ship,” said a PufferFish, “The curfew has no tolerances, and they would gun us down immediately if they found us.”

Roy, pleased that he had destroyed Zebus and the terrorists, decided to hold a conference on the present state of the Universe on one of the most enjoyable getaways in the Universe, the Squeenburg. The Squeenburg was a beautiful, cube shaped, ship perhaps the half the size of Earth’s moon.

Disaster on the Squeenburg

Inside there were lots of miniature versions of several places on Earth, complete with an artificial atmosphere – the same kind that was underground in Earthland – from different places on Earth. The main lobby was considerably smaller, but still fairly big for a room, and it was where the richest on the ship held auctions for planets that Roy did not protect under universal law. The highest bidder would get the planet, and the money would be split half and half between Dave, who owned the Squeenburg, and Roy. The ship was the most interesting, though, for the huge halo that loomed over the top of it. The Universe was filled with Giant Flying Space Donkeys that zipped around space munching on planet bits. If one of those donkeys was killed, the killer would for some inexplicable reason receive either a halo or horns, depending on the donkey. Willy Lemonoid once killed such a donkey, and so had the Squeenburg when it accidentally crashed into one. Both had received halos. For Willy Lemonoid, as with most people with halos, the halo was just something cool to wear, but for the Squeenburg, it was practical, as Dave had rigged it to catch and hold the bottoms of the planets auctioned off so that the planet's owner could move his new spoil to a desired location.

Roy gleamed at the looks of the lobby on the Squeenburg. What a wonderful place to hold a conference! Afterwards, all the attendees could relax on the ship's many resorts, maybe gamble in the casinos or hold an auction for some planet. This place would surely put everyone in a great mood, and then they would feel even happier about Roy's decision.

A Gotithian woman, the wife of the ugly Bob Jr., wearing a very fancy, sparkling blue dress, walked up to

Roy. She was red in the face from too much wine. "Hey, have you seen Mr. Parrot? I'd like to talk to him."

Roy looked around. "No, I'm sorry, Jennifer, but he must still be mad about the taxes I gave him. I don't know why, though. Dave is taking it fine."

"Oh well," she said, "Hey! Why don't you show me your little son...um, heir, whatever! He's soooo cute!"

Roy stopped smiling. "Actually, Jennifer, I didn't bring him. He's at Earthland. Oh man, I should have planned this conference on Earth! I missed a perfect opportunity to go pick up Little Billy. Poor guy, he must be really missing me." Roy took a gulp from his wine glass and went to refill it. He really needed to remember to include Little Billy in his life now, especially since the dangers had passed and he had no excuse not to. Roy sighed. The poor kid never got any attention from anybody. No wonder it was so messed up.

"Hey, there's Mr. Parrot!" Jennifer shouted from behind. Out of the window there was a large ship (large, but not nearly as large as the Squeenburg, though) flying to the Squeenburg.

"Yeah," said Roy, "You're right! Something is different about his ship, though." Roy squinted at the ship. There seemed to be an odd coat-of-arms on Mr. Parrot's ship. Roy's eyes widened. Somebody shouted out. The crowd panicked. Jennifer was breathing hard. "Is it true, Roy? Simon's still alive?" Roy's heart jumped. Mr. Parrot's ship was bearing Simon's coat-of-arms. Simon must have taken it from Mr. Parrot, and no doubt his money as well. Simon's legend lived on.

Roy looked at Mr. Parrot's ship, which was approaching the Squeenburg, and surely preparing to board

Disaster on the Squeenburg

it. Then he glanced around the rest of the room. Everyone was panicked, but little was being done to escape the ship.

Roy, frustrated and nervous, screamed for attention. Nobody was doing anything. Roy gritted his teeth. Where was Dave? He looked once again to Mr. Parrot's ship. The ship fired a beam, it didn't damage the inside, but it rocked the entire Squeenburg and breached the walls. Mr. Parrot's ship entered and sealed the hole. Roy, on the ground from the shock of the blast, crawled under some of the scattered debris. A swarm of PufferFish soldiers swarmed the room. Roy had no other choice but to watch as panicked creatures were gunned down. It was not pretty. Blood spattered all over the walls and stained the carpeting, to a point where no more of the liquid could be contained, and it ran everywhere. The carefully constructed wooden lobby stood no match from the fires of the PufferFish, and those above the lobby plunged to their death as it collapsed. There was an awful massacre taking place, and many innocent civilians died as the PufferFish searched for the helpless dictator.

Roy dared not call for help, knowing that the PufferFish would hear him. He could not stay hiding here forever, though. The PufferFish would surely be staking this lobby until they found him, he thought. Perhaps they would spare themselves the task of finding Roy in a ship so large and just hold it here until they blew it up. Roy looked in vain for a drop of Pickle Juice. Of course, he would find none where he was hiding. How would he get out though? The Squeenburg could explode at any minute, and the PufferFish would still be standing there to keep him from escaping. He would have to somehow run at least half a mile before getting to the ship area, and by then he would have been

killed. Then he remembered what his father used to tell him: "You have to be running faster than me in the same direction as I am going to outrun me. If you run faster than me from the opposite direction, I'm still going to catch you." The PufferFish seemed to be surrounding him, so that would mean they were in the Noreassouwest. If he wanted to escape, he would have to travel Noreassouwest faster than they were by that logic. He pulled a compass out of his pocket. In the Universe, compasses are fairly useless, unless you happen to buy a particular one for the particular planet you are on. This one, though, was a little trinket that Mr. Parrot had made in case a pack of Moose-that-look-like-turtles ever surrounded them on their quest to capture Loothpiti. He pressed on the compass, and the Dimension of Stupidity's purple gas that was inside the compass shot him Noreassouwest. I will not bother trying to explain where he went, but he managed to fly to the area where the ships were kept. He disappeared, leaving no trace but his little trinket.

Roy's Murderous Revenge

“Today we're running ‘the best of cheese’,” said the Zebonian Turtle Brenda. “We'll tell you how to cook with cheese, eat cheese, get stains with cheese, make things with cheese, remove stains with cheese, and how to make cheese. There will be some interesting stories on cheese, a book reading on who moved the cheese, and an interview of the family of a hero who died on Zebus, eating cheese.”

“Are you sure that that's the way that the family would like us to remember the soldier?” asked Roy, who was seated next to Brenda. He was extremely annoyed. He was trying to get a message through to the Universe, but this media monopoly was too stuck up to allow him too. Due to the recent disaster on the Squeenburg, people did not think too highly of him, and they surely would not like him to pick a fight with the powerful owner of the media. Roy was almost about to not care, but he waited, annoyed but patient.

“Oh, yes,” said Brenda, ignoring Roy's question, “I almost forgot. Our exalted ruler, Roy, happens to be seated next to me. What a surprise! He wanted to announce something on this talk show, since it is listened to the most of all the radio stations, and we said he could if he mentioned cheese. Please introduce the \$%*& – sorry I'm censored on this show – who killed our entire beautiful planet and everything that I once knew. Welcome, Slayer of Zebus!”

“Thank you, thank you,” said Roy a bit sarcastically, “I am not going to mention cheese, as this idiot – ”

“You just did,” interrupted the Zebonian Turtle.

“Shut up. I have gone on the air to say that I'm alive to Simon. His attempt to blow up the Squeenburg has failed,

and I'm going to catch him. He's the real culprit, the real Slayer of Zebus, for he forced me to destroy Zebus to save other planets."

"Only because you were too stupid to find him," said Brenda. Roy was getting really angry with the Zebonian Turtle. However, he could not kill her, because then she would explode all over him, and he that would probably convince people that he really was the Slayer of Zebus.

"Don't you people get it?!?" Roy exclaimed, "I *had* to destroy Zebus as soon as possible, for Simon was on a planet-destroying rampage! Why am I the bad guy here?"

Simon listened intently on all of this from the war room under the retirement home. "He has escaped," said Simon. "Probably thanks to that little trinket you and I had to use recently. I did not destroy the Squeenburg, though. What is he talking about?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Parrot, "but it seems to me that you're plan is working. People are angrier with their own government for not protecting them than they are of us for killing them."

"Yes," said Simon. "Plus, the Pickle People are angry with Roy. Today they were stupid enough to ask me if I wanted to make an alliance with them. I will be sitting next to a pickle jar today, sending letters to them. If I can trust them enough, perhaps I will go inside. I will need you, Mr. Parrot, as well as the PufferFish King to run things should something goes wrong. Don't tell the PufferFish King I said this, but I am expecting an invasion today. Call me over if things get out of hand." Simon waved off Mr. Parrot rather rudely. He smiled, and went back to listening to the radio.

“Are you going to attack the PufferFish Kingdom too?” Brenda the Zebonian Turtle asked rudely. “Do you want to slay more planets, Slayer of Zebus?”

“What is wrong with you? You're talking to the ruler of the Universe like he's some crazed celebrity and you don't seem to understand that *I needed to destroy Zebus!!!*”

“I guess because it adds to your evil empire,” said Brenda.

“What the heck! What is that supposed to mean?!?”

“Sorry, folks,” Tom, the weatherman and other anchor, said. “I'm afraid we cannot have you arguing on the radio. Let's play some music!”

Music blared out of some stereos, drowning out Roy's protests. Roy clenched his fists. Hopefully, he had gotten his message through. He didn't have the time to fight them anymore.

Gabriele swayed his head stupidly to the music. “This is a catchy tune,” he said. Tony turned off the radio. He was amazed that the Universe was in such trouble.

“What exactly happened at Zebus, and what happened on the Squeenburg?” he asked the PufferFish Leader.

“I wouldn't know,” the PufferFish Leader lied, “I don't read up on current events.”

“Ooh, ooh. I'll tell! I'll tell!” Gabriele yelled excitedly. “I'm good at telling stories. Well, Roy's former colleague, Simon, blew up four inhabited planets. Blasphemes, Tapioca, Appalachia, and that one thing with the name nobody can remember. Roy blew up Zebus, where Simon was launching his missiles, and apparently took a trip on the Squeenburg.

The PickleNet told me that the Pickle People want to kill our Universe, and that the PufferFish tried to kill Roy on the Squeenburg.”

“Holy crap!” exclaimed Tony. “That might mean that they will attack the PufferFish Kingdom! We’re not allowed to leave until Roy discharges us, though. This is awful!”

“Well, then,” said a PufferFish Leader, “If you want us to take you home, you’d better take a quick look at the town, and think of something fast. I too fear that Roy will launch an attack on our planet. At least it will be harder, for Roy can’t use Pickle Universe technology to fill our core with Boomwater like Zebus.”

“I thought you didn’t read up on current events,” said Tony, raising an eyebrow. The PufferFish Leader looked away from Tony, into the ship’s control room. “Gabriele, why aren’t you worried about this invasion?”

“I am worried,” said Gabriele. “I’m always worried about what might happen in the future. It’s just that since I always worry, I always look the (gobble) same no matter what I’m worrying about. Remember my theory on chocolate cake?”

“Hey! Look into the control room!” said the PufferFish Leader, “The sun is rising on our planet!”

The other eleven creatures in the room, the nine Elite PufferFish Bodyguards, Tony, and Gabriele, looked into the room. He was right. The sun was already rising. “How long is a day on this planet in Earth hours?” asked Tony.

“I don’t know about Earth hours,” said the PufferFish, “but in El Tuna Café terms it’s half an hour.”

Tony figured that in his head An El Tuna Café day was about one fifteenth of an Earth year, approximately 24

earth days, so each El Tuna Café hour, using the same proportions of time as Earth does, equaled one Earth day, and so half an hour equaled half an Earth day. PufferFish days were short.

“Gabriele!” yelled Tony, unable to find the turkey. “Where are you? Don’t you want some breakfast?”

“No,” replied the turkey, which was in the air vent. “I can get all of my nutrition from the pollution in the air on planets. You should try it.”

“What?” exclaimed a PufferFish, in disbelief. “Why did the radio talk about the one guy who almost starved to death until he ate cheese, then?”

“You can’t really starve to death,” said Gabriele, “Your body just thinks it’s starving, so you get stressed. Those hunger pains are really stress pains. You’re fine without food, as long as you realize it.”

Tony looked at the greasy monstrosity that a PufferFish had prepared for him. It was a cat burger. He didn’t have to eat it, after all. “Oh well,” he said, “I like to eat.” He sat down and munched on the cat. It did, after all, taste great with catsup.

“Hurry up, you fools,” said the PufferFish Leader, “We need to get out and make up some story for Tony. Roy could invade anytime.”

Tony looked up at the PufferFish Leader, who was sitting at the ship’s computer, trying to get the PickleNet to work. “I don’t want to risk being caught in an invasion while walking around. I’d rather just think of something here, and get Roy’s discharge faster.”

“Whatever,” said the PufferFish Leader, “You just need to think of something good. Do you have anything?”

Children's Tales of the Universe

“Yes as a matter of fact, I do. The PufferFish are innocent. My story can be as easy as that.”

Everyone in the room looked at each other. Tony looked confused at the PufferFish Leader. “I’d hate to say it, Tony,” said the PufferFish Leader, “But Roy actually was kind of expecting the answer that we are guilty. Unfortunately, it looks like we are going to have to help you prove that our species is a bunch of crooks.”

“So, Antonio, how many ships have left the PufferFish Kingdom after I set the watch?” Roy asked, sitting at his computer.

“About 25,000, sir. 26,000 entered the planet, including your human’s scouting ship. All these ships were of business use, and the watchmen do not have any suspicions, except for one. Mr. Parrot’s ship reportedly entered.”

“Well, that doesn’t surprise me,” said Roy. “Simon hijacked his ship and used it to attack the Squeenburg while framing Mr. Parrot. I’ll need to attack as soon as possible.”

“Yeah,” said Antonio, “I think that you’re too naïve, Roy. Plenty of people have been taking advantage of you right under your nose. I think that Mr. Parrot is your enemy just like Simon, the PufferFish King, and myse.....” Antonio went silent.

“Yes?” asked Roy, raising an eyebrow.

“Willy Lemonoid,” finished Antonio. “By the way, where is he?” Roy smiled.

“Let’s just say that I took care of him...” said Roy. Antonio was delighted at this. If Willy Lemonoid was dead,

then he would not have to split the stolen wood like he had promised.

Willy Lemonoid was in quite a pickle. He had been placed by Roy, of course, in one of the huge devices that Roy used to make tuna salad. It was basically a room with small pipes feeding a steady supply of tuna. Willy Lemonoid had two options. He could plug the pipes, but that didn't seem to be possible, so he had to go with the other option: eat the tuna in enough amounts so that he could prevent suffocation. This was a dreadful and terrible task, considering that Roy's tuna came from tunamatic asteroids floating around the Dimension of Tuna. "C'mon, Willy," Willy Lemonoid said to himself, "Just eat a little more. It will buy time until I find a way out. This is just like that POW camp in the old days." Shuddering, he shoved more tuna into his mouth. It didn't go in. He started puking, and that allowed the tuna to start building up again. "Curse you Roy!" screamed Willy. "Curse you Antonio! I never wanted to help you steal that wood!"

Roy, who, from his office, could hear Willy Lemonoid's screams, glared at Antonio. "I never thought that you would invest in wood," he said, pulling out his Zangy Zapper.

Back in the salad grater, Willy Lemonoid desperately shoved more tuna in his mouth. "The Tuna! The Tuna!" he cried. The Tuna was ankle deep now. His poor body couldn't handle any more tunamatic material. With his knees weak and shaking, he fell face first in the tuna. The tuna poured harder, burying Willy Lemonoid in an edible grave, soon to be chopped up into little salad things. Roy raced in, after having realized Willy Lemonoid could tell him the location

of the wood. It was too late. Roy picked up the former ruler of the Universe. "Nooooooooooooooooo! Tuuuunaaaaaaaaaaaaa!"

An old Gotithian woman, seated next to a wall, heard all of this. She looked, frightened, at her tuna.

Roy stepped into the El Tuna Café Auditorium, trying to forget the loss of Antonio's close companionship and Willy Lemonoid's valuable knowledge. There was an interesting meeting going on that Roy didn't want to break up, but had to.

The speaker, a well known Space Monkey professor, stood up on the stage, in front of a large crowd of at least 6,000 people, and read from a card into a microphone. "Alright, then, here are the results. For our last exercise on creativity, we have two ideas that tied. They are: recyclable salads and solar powered flashlights. I suppose that we shouldn't have had that reading on clean environments before we started this exercise."

Roy cleared his throat and walked up to the speaker. "Excuse me," he said, "But I have arranged a meeting with an army of mine, and I'll need this room. The soldiers are bound to come in minutes." Roy's pager beeped. "That must be them," he said, walking up to the microphone. "Get out, people! Out! Out!" Everyone in the room but Roy, of course, scurried out of the several doors. A swarm of soldiers flooded into the room after them.

Watching most of them find seats, Roy spoke up. "I can see that you have reached the auditorium at the exact time I commanded. That is good, since war is all about timing. I have gathered you, you 6,000 soldiers, to man about twelve layers of ships. I suspect you already were told this by

your commanders, but I just want to make this clear. The entire point of you men is to **block everything**. Do not let **anyone** or **anything** escape the planet. You must only be there for a mere El Tuna Café minute. Eleven of these layers will secure the planet while it is blown up, while the twelfth layer is to be stationed in the Pickle Universe, should Simon Carp try to escape that. Do **not** break the layers, even when the planet is gone, for I am sure that there will still be a few PufferFish ships around trying to fight you. You have to kill them too. This will be a tough battle, I am sure, but it will be worth it. With Simon Carp down, we can easily take out his minions, like the Pickle People, who, in his own words on a strange DVD he has just sent me, work under him. You are dismissed. Go immediately and pin down the PufferFish Planet.” Roy's soldiers shuffled away through the numerous doors, everyone but one general.

This general, who, like all generals in Roy's army, was Gotithian, stayed behind to ask Roy a question. “Roy, who did Simon say in his second video were under him?” he asked.

Roy thought for a moment. “He said that he is keeping the Cube People and the Pickle People in charge of barricading our means of hyperspace transportation, he has the PufferFish Planet under his control, and the Zebonian Cockroaches that dwell on Margues.”

The general looked stunned. “Roy, only a moron or a movie star villain would tell the location and purpose of every ally. Why do you think he did? Even worse, if he is telling the truth, what plans does he hold against you, that would allow him to give out such precious information?”

Worse still, if he is telling the truth, do you think that he will give the command to attack Margues?"

Roy was surprised. "Well, I had never thought of that," he said, "To be honest, I'm not exactly the type of guy who likes to think ahead of things too much. It was Antonio, the now deceased Master of the Mint and before that a turkey...um, never mind that, but I've never been that good at planning ahead."

"Wow. I've never thought of you like that. No offense, but until now you've always seemed so.....strong I guess."

"Yeah, I guess I did, but that was before I had Simon and about a gazillion other enemies all trying to take advantage of me at once" – Roy noticed the general pulling out a wooden bat – "Hey, what's that for?"

"I don't know," said the general. Suddenly, he turned into a weasel. "Don't judge your elders!" he screamed, and started beating Roy with the bat.

"Mr. Toodles! Please stop pummeling me!" Roy pleaded.

"Do you want to grab some coffee?" the weasel shrieked.

Roy jumped up from his desk. "What the heck just happened?" he asked to himself. "Is something mentally wrong with me?" Roy looked around the office. Antonio was standing at the door! "Wahoo!" he shrieked. "Antonio's still alive! All this was a dream!"

"This isn't a dream," said Roy's Gotithian secretary. "It's all real."

Roy's mouth fell open in disbelief, and he pointed confused at Antonio. "Who's that, then?" he asked.

Roy's Murderous Revenge

“This thing?” said the secretary. She grabbed Antonio’s arm. “You stuffed Antonio after you killed him, remember? You got drunk and were all like: ‘Hey, let’s get some free office decorations!’ I’m surprised that you woke up from your hangover so quickly.”

Roy clutched his head, confused. “I don’t feel like I had a hangover, and my memory feels perfect.”

“Well, you do,” said the secretary. “It just happens that you were drinking alcohol free beer. The hangover feels different.”

“Sober Monkey? Wait, if it’s alcohol free, why did you just say that I did have a hangover?”

“I never said anything like that. You don’t have a hangover.”

“Then what’s wrong with me?” asked Roy, very confused.

“Nothing. You just have a bit of a hangover,” the secretary said, looking at Roy’s face. She laughed her way down the hall.

“This is why I hate women,” Roy said to himself. He was totally confused. What was his dream, and what was reality? He couldn’t tell the difference, as he could recall neither falling asleep nor could he of any gap in his memory. If everything that had happened had, then what had happened?

“Explain what happened, seriously,” demanded Roy. The secretary ignored him. Roy was furious. Why did it seem no one had taken his commands seriously? “Now!” he yelled.

The secretary grunted. “I don’t know what happened,” she said, walking back to Roy’s office.

Roy was getting annoyed. "Okay, then. What has happened lately?"

The secretary clapped her hands with glee. "Oh, good! Somebody actually wants to hear me talk! Well, today you sent Little Billy to Earthland, and were unable to reach him. Some friends of mine got together and we were like Roy sucks and all, he can't even take care of his own child. Then we kinda gossiped about whether or not Little Billy was your biological child, and..." she stopped to look at Roy, flaring his nostrils and grunting. She knew that she had overtalked.

"Just shut up and keep talking," said Roy.

"What does that mean?" asked the secretary nervously.

"Switch the subject."

"Are you asking me out?"

"You're an idiot you know."

At that moment, Brenda the Zebonian Turtle and her usual new crew burst into the room. "Mr. Roy," the Zebonian Turtle began, "Explain yourself to the public. Why did you invade the PufferFish Planet? When will your ruthless slaughter of planets end?"

Roy looked up at the media circus that had just broken in. "First of all," said Roy, "I rule the Universe. Maybe I haven't made that clear. You are to address me as 'Your Excellency', 'Exalted One', or, at the least, 'Sir', not 'Mister'. Second, as ruler of the Universe, I rule over this entire dimension, so you will not question my decisions. Third, it is my duty to protect the Universe and my reign, so, with *Simon*, who has already killed *four* planets, I have to make the sacrifice of *two* planets. Fourth, you are never to

break into my office. That is a crime that will be punished with the shaving of your sheep.”

Brenda turned to the cameras. “There you have it,” she said. “Roy has condemned me to a long afterlife in Willy Lemonoid’s Hell by saying that he will give the word to shave my sheep. Does he really have power over this affair? Or, the more personal question: is he really mad at me or is he mad at something that happened to him? Could it be that he is mad that he himself lost his sheep? Tom will now show you *live* recorded footage of the incident.”

Gabriele stared at the television in the window of the PufferFish electronics store. The screen went from showing live footage to showing a part from a previous interview of Roy. Roy was sitting in a blue chair, his eyes watery. “The worst day of my life was,” Roy stopped to blow his nose, and went on. “The worst day of my life was when my dad said to me: ‘Roy, I’m afraid your sheep’s been shaved.’ ”

“Oh, you poor man,” said Brenda. “It’s alright. You’re immortal.”

“I...I know, but it’s just so awful!” said Roy, holding back the tears building up in his eyes.

“Gabriele!” cried Tony, running past the turkey. “What are you doing? The planet is under attack!”

Gabriele turned from the television store. “Oh, what do you know,” he muttered. “We are under attack. And they are trying to kill us.” Gabriele looked up into the sky. He could see traces of ships flying about, certainly struggling to keep one another’s missiles from hitting either the armada or the PufferFish Planet. Each light-speed blast coming from the battle above shook the entire planet. Buildings crumbled,

entire mountains went up in flames, and in the cities there was utter chaos. It was a wonder that they were still alive. Gabriele, always afraid of what would happen to him in the future, decided that he should have no reason to worry about this more than the Universe imploding in a chocolaty way. Besides, if Roy was serious about killing Simon Carp, then there was no hope of escape. Gabriele decided to just look around and observe his surroundings. Peering towards the PufferFish Capital Tower, he could see the PufferFish King running out screaming.

“All those loyal to our planet,” said the PufferFish King. “Help me break into the retirement home and capture Simon Carp. We will turn him over, and so save ourselves.” A mob of supporting PufferFish gathered around the desperate king, pushing their way through the less loyal crowds of frantic creatures, PufferFish and non-PufferFish alike. It was these non-PufferFish creatures that were going to cause trouble. Angry with the way that the PufferFish King seemed to have given certain death to everyone on the planet, a throng of numerous creatures gathered and charged at the other mob, fighting their way towards the center where the PufferFish King was walking. Zangy Zappers and bullets fired, and those without firearms beat each other with whatever they could find.

Simon sat safely barricaded inside the retirement home, tapping his foot nervously. He could see that he was pushing his luck more than ever, and that an alliance with the Pickle People at the time meant his very survival. Still, hiding his desperation, he continued speaking as normally as possible. “So, can you show me your arsenal?”

Roy's Murderous Revenge

“I would, but there's one problem,” said the Emperor of the Pickle People. “Roy is attacking us, obviously to get to you. I've had to barricade this part of our universe from the part that is currently being attacked. I don't know how much longer we can hold out, though.”

“What?” exclaimed Simon. “I thought that Roy had no power over your barriers, and vice versa.”

“That's true,” said the emperor, “but I do not know how much more my poor subjects in that part of the universe can take. They might break the barrier themselves, and our cause, and our universe, will be lost. Roy would have won, and he would come back more powerful than before.”

Simon lifted his hand and then dropped it again, almost trying to physically wave away the emperor's worries. “This shall all pay off in good time,” he said reassuringly, “You'll see. Do you think that I would recklessly try to assassinate Roy while he was on the Squeenburg? No, I know that that wouldn't get me the Universe. However, by provoking this attack on the PufferFish Planet, I can make Roy falsely think for a second time that I am dead. To see me constantly reemerging when I'm thought to be defeated is a very useful trick.” The Pickle People Emperor looked at Simon suspiciously. “Not that I'm going to use your empire for the trick as well,” Simon added hastily. “Yes, I think that my idea of a psychological war is the best way to go.” Simon stopped for a moment to listen to the sounds of the riot outside.

“Great. But where are we going to go now?” asked the Pickle Emperor.

“Oh, that's still a problem.”

“Dude, you came!” exclaimed Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook’s fiancé’s father, a very strange old Gotithian. “Do you want a smoke?”

“Sure, I’ll take one,” said Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook, reaching into the cigar box.

“Um, are you going to take off your protection suit?” asked the father.

“No,” the cook replied simply, lighting his cigar.

“Are you at least going to take off your gas mask?”

“No. to be honest, I don’t like to get this stuff in my body.”

“Okay, then,” interrupted the fiancé. “Let’s get to business.” She pointed at the ship outside the house. “That is where we are keeping Roy’s heir, Prince William of Margues. We hope to ransom him to Roy, and then split the money, so that we will be forced to love each other no matter how much we hate each other’s guts, if we wanted more of the money.”

“That is the dumbest idea ever,” said the old man. “However, you kids are the dumbest Gotithians ever, so it’ll go smoothly. I only have one suggestion: find someone other than Roy to purchase the prince, because were he to find out about you, he would surely hunt you down and drown you in that awful land boat. Simon, I think, would be a better customer. He is powerful at the moment, and he would only say that it was you two who first captured the child only if he was truly desperate, because if Roy thinks that he captured the child, it will totally make Roy more fearful of him.”

“Good advice,” said the cook.

“Well, kids, what are you waiting for? Go get our little money maker! You’d better keep him in this house, so that

when if you are able to find Simon and tell him about the ransom, he will not be able to steal the item, and he will be forced to bargain for it." The old man turned towards the stairs. "Diane!" He yelled to his wife, "Come down here! We will need your mothering skills!"

Just a moment later, the cook came in the house with a frightened Little Billy. He was crying, but nobody knew, for he had cleverly placed his stuffed cockroach over his face.

"Aw," said the old man's wife, "He's cute! It brings tears to an old widow's eyes!" The cook looked at the couple, frightened.

"She's not crazy," protested the old man.

"How is that possible!" exclaimed the cook. "She said she's a...wait a minute. That means you're..." the cook didn't know what to say. He simply handed Billy over and ran back to his ship. The old man shrugged, and left the room.

The so called "widow" turned to Little Billy, who still was hiding his face under the stuffed cockroach.

"My, my!" exclaimed the woman in a stupid voice, picking up Little Billy. "You remind me of my son, before he went on a murderous rampage. Aw, show me your little face; I'm sure that your new Grandma Diane would love to see you. Do you want some pancakes?"

Little Billy poked his head out of the cockroach. He could see that it was sunset. Looking a little closer on the horizon, he could see that he was on Margues. "Can I go home?" he asked. He was naïve and totally oblivious to what was happening.

"No," Diane said. "You're staying with Grandma Diane. You can be my little son for a while."

Children's Tales of the Universe

Little Billy did not realize just how stupid that sounded. Thinking that he was being held prisoner, which he was, he consulted in his mind a "Super Shellfish" episode that he had watched once. He wriggled out of the old woman's weak arms. "You're dead, Sharkatron!" he yelled, pointing to Diane. "Shellfish powers activate!" Then, realizing that he was not, in fact, as you may already know, a shellfish, he ran, screaming, away into the living room. He bumped the horns on his little Gotithian head against some big metal box.

"What the crap?" exclaimed the old man, emerging out of the coffin Little Billy had bumped into. Little Billy quickly stood up, and let out a high pitched scream. He ran away into another room.

"Wow," said Diane, impressed. "For a toddler he sure is fast."

"Grandma" Diane heard a door of some sort shutting. She grabbed a fistful of something from a bowl on the kitchen table. She looked around once more. Then she looked down at the palm of her hand. That was when she noticed just how bad her eyesight was. "Come out, Billy! I have some candy for you! I think."

Little Billy, hiding in a closet, dropped his stuffed cockroach onto the ground and peered through a crack. She was still there. He was not going to let her find him; he knew that she was not family. Little Billy didn't want to see anyone other than his own mother, and he was very lonely. He also needed to use the bathroom after that awful trip.

"Billy!" said the woman, in a sweet voice. "I have candy for you!"

Roy's Murderous Revenge

Little Billy looked nervously around the closet. He really needed to use the bathroom. If this old woman wouldn't leave, he would have to go somewhere in the closet. The doorbell rang. The old woman walked slowly away towards the door. This was Billy's chance. He opened the closet door, and ran as fast as his little legs could carry him down the hall and into the bathroom.

"Hello, ma'm," said a salesman in a fake polite voice. "I'm here to introduce you to the wonders of Winston's Window Washing."

The old woman stared at the man. "Am I being mugged?"

Little Billy, in the bathroom, was tugging at his overalls, trying to get them unloose. The buttons in front were stuck, and his hands were not strong enough to get them undone. Frustrated and to tears, he watched as he wet himself. He covered his face and cried.

The salesman burst into the room. "There you are, Little Billy," said the man. He reached down at the boy. Little Billy hit the man's arm with his fist, but it was certainly no use. This tall, hardy Gotithian was not to be easily subdued by a fist an inch in diameter. He picked the prince up, who was kicking and screaming, throwing a tantrum.

"Help me! Help me! Help me, Grandma Diane!" pleaded the toddler.

The old woman, touched by what the boy had called her, grabbed a walker next to the door and approached the man. The tall Gotithian sneered, and kicked the woman over. Just then, Little Billy remembered a trick that he had learned

throwing tantrums at home. He scrunched up and pulled all of his weight down to his feet. The kidnapper didn't even notice. Walking out of the door, which was still opened, he made his way to a black limousine-style ship Jiggy Gas Piggy. Little Billy turned his head as much as he could to the house. He was being taken away again, and he didn't even have his cockroach with him.

Simon stepped out of the ship. "I saw what you did, Richard. That was wrong, kicking over an old woman like that."

"So was kidnapping this kid," grunted the Gotithian Richard. "But you said that it was because we were desperate. Well, I was desperate in there."

Simon raised an eyebrow at Richard. "You think that the helpless old woman was a threat or something? That's pretty stupid." Simon turned to Little Billy, who, still in Richard's grasp, was sobbing helplessly. "Richard, you don't hold a child like that. It hurts the shoulders. Change it. Good," he said, and leaned down to Little Billy. "Now now, big guy, I'm sorry to say we have to take you. Is there anything we can get you before we leave, though?"

Billy looked up at the man. For a moment, he stopped crying. "I...I...want my c-c-cockroach," he said. "It's in the closet."

Simon took Billy from Richard's arms. "Well, Richard, you heard him. Get the cockroach out of the closet!"

Richard furrowed his eyebrows at Simon. "I think that we have better things to do than to grab some pet or stuffed thing or whatever this crap thing is. Roy is going to kill us any moment."

Simon leaned his mouth to Richard's ear. "Look," he whispered, "This prince we're taking, we're going to shove into a *bob*, er, that is *box*. If this stuffed animal will make the kid's life just a little bit easier, I say go get it."

Richard sighed, and went into the house. Simon adjusted Little Billy onto his shoulders, and opened the door to the ship. While putting him inside Billy asked, still a little nervous, "D-do you have any more t-toys?"

Simon smiled at the cute toddler, and then frowned. "No, Billy, I'm sorry to say that we don't. We have some...uh" – Simon rummaged through his pant pockets – "robots! Yeah, we have uh...robotic rocks! Here's one!"

Little Billy took the rock from Simon's hand, and inspected it carefully. "I think it's a normal one," he said.

"Oh, that's because it's such a good toy," said Simon. "It acts just like a real rock!"

"Can you take me to mamma's?" asked Little Billy, who seemed to be trusting Simon.

Simon scratched his head with guilt. "Well, um, no. Billy." – Little Billy started crying again – "Don't cry, Billy! It's okay. We're going to...it's okay." Simon looked out of the ship's window and saw Richard approaching, very disgruntled looking but with the stuffed cockroach. "Look, there's your cockroach!" he said, trying to cheer Billy up. Richard entered and handed Simon the cockroach. He waved it over Billy's face. Billy ignored it. Simon knelt down to Billy, trying to comfort him with kind words and a sweet voice. Richard rolled his eyes and gestured for the driver to fly the ship.

Roy paced his office yet again. These were nerve-racking times, in fact, this entire thing had so far only been one El Tuna Café day, and Roy was nervous like never before.”

An army commander, too unimportant for Roy to remember his name, came in. “The PufferFish Planet,” he said, “Lies in ruins. We did not dare destroy it, as we found out from some spies on the planet that Simon had escaped via the Pickle Universe.”

Roy sighed. “I suppose that we could not possibly expect to take over all of the Pickle Universe, since it is so far flung, being made up of the combined mass of pickle jars. However, destroying Zebus and taking out the PufferFish Planet has greatly weakened Simon. In fact, I believe, that after taking out so much of their homelands, they will think twice before attacking me again, and, even better, they may even have lost their loyalty to Simon already.” Roy, looking at his desk, noticed yet another mysterious DVD. “Speaking of Pickle Universe, do you think that there is any connection between the Pickle Universe and how these three DVD’s have showed up on my desk?” Roy asked, picking up the disk.

The commander looked at the desk. “No, sir, I have really no idea. It can’t be the Pickle Universe, as you never eat pickles. It sure is a mystery.”

Roy sat down at his chair. “Let’s pop this one in,” he said, placing the disk into his computer. Of course, Simon was on the screen.

“Hello, Roy,” said Simon in a happy tone of voice, exactly like the tone of voice on the other two films. “I can see that you destroyed the PufferFish Planet. Well, not totally

destroyed it, but you destroyed enough. I mean, I wanted to get rid of something on the planet, and I am pretty sure I did. You may wonder what that item is, if it were so important that I would sacrifice the support of none other than my main allies. Well, I don't need them anymore, and, quite frankly, they would have demanded too big of a share of the loot when I took over." Simon took a deep breath. For him, who had not talked for so long during his million year exile, talking had become a choir.

"Mr. Nice, would you get me a soda?" Little Billy asked in the background. Roy's stomach turned over, and his heart raced. Simon had Little Billy.

"No," said Roy. "No, it can't be. Simon is playing tricks on me. That sikko!" The commander looked over at Roy, and quickly looked away.

Little Billy walked into the room. He turned towards the camera. Roy tugged at his hair, and leaned closer. His heart was racing faster and faster. That was certainly Little Billy. Simon had Roy's heir. Roy squinted at the computer screen, but he could hardly see. There was too much water building up in his eyes. Little Billy waved at the camera. "Hey there. Are you a robot too?"

Simon glared at the toddler. "Take him away!" he exclaimed. Richard the Gotithian picked up the child from his left leg and carried him away, the crying prince hanging upside down. "What will you do now?" asked Simon, sneering, his face close to the camera.

Roy picked up his computer and threw it at the door. He kicked down his desk, and ripped down his blinds. The army commander raced out of the room. Roy closed the door, and wept.

The Galactic Goober

There was a beautiful glass room, artificial sunbeams shining gloriously and running through prisms built into the walls, making the room glow with the colors of the rainbow. A circular mahogany table stood in the center of it, and around it sat the members of a highly secret, exclusive society. There were seven seats, each specially designed for each its member. There was a seat for Dave, the leader, Bob senior, Bob Jr., Jeff Senior, and they were all being used at the moment except for the seats of Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook, Mr. Parrot, and Santa.

Dave looked around the room. He could see no one approaching. He looked at a decorative clock on the wall. The meeting had begun some significant time ago, and yet so many people hadn't shown up. Dave poked the mucus building up in his throat, and began the meeting with, "Welcome back to our weekly meeting. I'm glad you all could make it. Well, never mind. Sorry, I just say that out of habit. Seeing that almost half of our members have – "

"Actually, exactly half," interrupted Bob Jr., who pointed to where his waist should have been.

"Okay, then," said Dave, continuing. "Anyway, let's do the most dreaded part of the meeting while we still have some time to burn. Jeff, will you read the minutes from our last meeting?"

Jeff stood up, and cleared his throat. "I'm afraid that these meetings no longer hold any importance, and that's why nobody came. Nothing interesting seems to happen around the Universe anymore."

“Here’s something to talk about,” said Bob Jr., “Anyone wonder how I got cut in half?”

“What do you mean ‘Nothing interesting happens?’ ” exclaimed Bob Senior. “Just within a few El Tuna Café hours, Simon managed to blow up four planets, and Roy has destroyed two himself. The Royal Wooden Warehouse was robbed, then Roy robbed us to replace the wood, Roy went a bit insane on TV, and the radio has been running ‘the best of cheese’.”

“Well, I guess you’re right. There has been some fairly interesting stuff going on. But it’s not like Roy is going to fall or anything, he already took care of Simon. This is another one of those little rebellions, except a little more happened in this one. Hey, don’t leave the meeting. I’m expecting an old friend to visit.” Dave said.

“Who?” asked Santa, walking into the room. There was a knife in his belly, and several ribs in his tank top.

“What happened to you?” asked Dave.

“Oh, I got stuck in one of your bathroom mazes and I had to use the john. Some knives dropped from the ceiling when I flushed. You’re an idiot for making that.”

“What? The bathroom!?!” exclaimed Dave, shocked. “That is by far the greatest, and most used, invention in the history of the Universe!”

“No, no, idiot,” said Satan. “I mean the bathroom maze.”

“That’s not true!” protested Dave. “That thing is a big tourist attraction. Most people don’t like visiting the bathroom factories, but this thing made it all worth while.”

“Yeah, and you can’t sue!” cried Bob Jr.

Children's Tales of the Universe

“Why would you want to sue?” demanded Dave, glaring at Bob Jr. “Oh, I see.”

Santa sat down in his seat, and ripped the knife out of his stomach. “Well, who are you expecting to come by?” he asked, playing with his knife.

“A very interesting person. I haven't seen him for ages,” said Dave. “He used to own the Galactic Goober store. Remember that chain?”

Everyone nodded. “What happened to ol' Goober?” asked Satan.

“I'm not too sure. He got into trouble with Roy or something. Now that Roy is in trouble, he's decided to pay me a visit.”

“Why?” asked Jeff Senior.

“Well, he wasn't too clear on that. He says he knows something about the PufferFish Planet that nobody else does. He says that that secret is very powerful.”

“Heh, heh,” laughed Santa gruffly. “I expect that this weapon can be something to use against Roy? He's been on my death wish list ever since he made me give the PufferFish their station on Mars back. Plus, we could get the money Roy taxed away from us back, and then some.”

“Well, this is something that we should discuss before Goober gets here,” said Dave. “He says that this secret could totally change the course of this war. The question is: do we let him keep the secret, and let him use it however he pleases? I think not. Do we use this thing, whatever it is, against Roy or against Simon, or do we remain neutral, or do we take part in a whole other side of our own, against Roy but not for Simon?”

Gabriele stared at the Universal Positioning System (UPS) on the Poach-a-tron. They were far from the PufferFish Planet by now. He thought back for a moment, trying to remember what exactly had happened. Up to the point where the riots started, he could remember everything crystal clear. But after that...he seemed to have gotten caught in the mob, and needed to fight his way through with his robotic right wing, something that Gabriele had kept a secret from the others onboard a ship because it was an age-old wound from a fight long ago against Simon Carp.

Somehow, they had escaped something had happened. But what? What, on that PufferFish Planet, could have possibly allowed them to escape? Gabriele shrugged it off. It was not interest to him. He always assumed that he was going to die soon, and anything that kept him from dying was always a mystery.

He stared at his secretly fake wing again. Inside, there was a small computer and computer screen. Pushing away the feathers, he viewed the screen and the calendar printed on it. Hmm. He saw that the Organ Harvesting for Charity Movement's annual convention on Gotithia was taking place today. Not really important. Below it though, he saw that Dave's secret society, one so secret that it did not even have a name, was scheduled today. He had been planning to go to one of those for some time, especially after what had happened so far with Simon Carp. This meeting was sure to be important. In secret, he tapped on his small keyboard located on the wing so that he could control the Poach-a-tron from a distance, and reroute it to Earth. Unless someone looked at the UPS, then nobody would even notice.

“Hey, where are we going?” asked Tony. Gabriele rolled his eyes. Okay, he hadn't seen the human in the control room. Or the PufferFish Leader, or the PufferFish Assistant Leader, or that all of the other PufferFish were in the control room with Tony. Gabriele blamed it on the obstruct view of the control room from the room he was in.

“We're going to go to Earth, there is something really interesting I want to see, and to show you,” said Gabriele honestly.

“Well,” said Tony, touched, “I didn't know that Earth was so important...have you ever tried to go somewhere before? That isn't like you. You don't trust the future.”

“Well, this is really important,” said Gabriele. “Considering everything that has happened, and everything that is still happening, I want to discuss these matters with a group on Earth. Don't ask.”

Tony was delighted at the prospect of returning to Earth. He turned to the PufferFish Leader for permission.

“We can go, whatever,” said the PufferFish Leader, “Now that my home planet is in ruins, I really don't care about anything, and I really don't have any objectives, besides my impossible dream of killing Roy.”

“Great, great, let's go!” shouted Tony. “Wait, where exactly on Earth are we going? What on Earth could interest an intelligent turkey like you?”

Gabriele was flattered. “Well, I, I've never been called intelligent before... we're going Dave's so-called Bathroom Groundscratcher. It is sort of like a skyscraper, which goes high in the air, except that this groundscratcher goes very deep underground.”

Tony was disappointed. “We’re going underground? That sucks.”

“Well, it is a nice underground place,” said Gabriele. “It is in the middle of the popular Earthland tourist attraction, and it is the chief factory for bathrooms and bathroom supplies in the Universe. You can tour the factory, wander around in the bathroom maze, or visit the gift shop, and it won’t even feel like you’re underground, since all across Earthland Dave has set up artificial atmospheres to make the place more attractive and Earth-like.”

“What?” asked Tony, “You’re going to Earth for a vacation?”

“No, not a vacation, something else. You’ll see what I mean when we get there, but not a moment sooner,” said Gabriele. “Now, if you don’t mind, I believe that we already got there. I set the ship to a higher speed, you see.”

“You idiot!” cried the PufferFish Leader. “That wastes way too much fuel! Do you know how much that stuff costs, now that the Cube People have barricaded our supplies?”

“Shut up,” said Gabriele, concentrating on landing the ship. “As attendees of the meeting, we will receive a free ride on Dave’s Squeenburg after the meeting is over.”

“Who invited you?” asked Tony.

“No one. I said shut up,” Gabriele said. The ship was at a stop, deep, deep underground, but it looked exactly like some island off of Greenland Tony had been to.

Tony was first to step out onto Earth, and he looked rather disappointed. “Of all the places on Earth, why did they decide to model the area after this one?”

“Well, it’s uh...cool, I guess,” said Gabriele stupidly. “Come on. We need to get inside before the meeting is over.”

Gabriele pointed his left wing, which was his good one, at the Bathroom Groundscratcher and motioned them inside.

"Now, this is a secret room, so mind your step," said Gabriele, who walked ahead of the others.

"Here we are!" the turkey said excitedly, turning the corner.

"Wow, that was quick," said Tony. "Now will you tell us what is inside?"

Gabriele beamed with pride, and carried a smug look on his face. "Gentlemen, I give you Dave's Secret Order," he said proudly, peering into the glass of the conference room.

The PufferFish nodded to one another. "This is a little risky," said the PufferFish Leader. "I'll leave you two to the job."

"Wait, where are you going?" asked Tony.

"I don't know, coffee or something," said the PufferFish. "Don't expect us to help you if there's any trouble." The PufferFish left. Gabriele was busy tapping at his artificial wing in order to create a microphone out of it. The meeting inside suddenly became loud and clear to them.

"Greetings, Goober!" said Dave in a happy voice. "I'm glad that you could make it."

"Thank you," said Goober, who happened to be a turkey like Gabriele, except much larger and stronger. "Now, I am sure that you do not care much for the fact that I am here, and you just want to hear my secret?"

"Right on, brother!" exclaimed Santa, giving the thumbs up sign.

"Well, I'm going to pretend that you do care. I'm going to pretend that you actually want to have a conversation with me. Good, how are you?"

The Galactic Goober

Dave looked at Goober funnily. “Why did you say that?”

Goober ignored him. “I’m glad to hear that. Hey, how’s your family?”

Gabriele was getting annoyed; he wanted to hear the secret. “Hey Goober, stop talking to yourself and hurry up,” he muttered to himself. The microphone in his wing magnified it.

“Hey, somebody’s trying to hear my secret!” exclaimed Goober without even bothering to look behind him. “Hey, you Gotithian...Satan’s your name I guess... go get those guys!”

Santa picked up the bloody knife from the bathroom maze that was formerly lodged inside him. “I’m on it,” he said, cheerfully. “I’ll just send them into the maze that I went in!”

Gabriele, still with the microphone on, heard this. “Oh shoot,” he said to Tony, his only companion. “I wish the PufferFish were here. Satan is going to drive us into the Hall of the Flushing Knives.” The two of them got up and ran in the direction leading to the lobby where the PufferFish were drinking coffee.

Santa turned to the others. “Go on,” said Goober. “I won’t tell my secret until you’ve finished killing the two whatnots.”

Santa shrugged, and left the room, brandishing the knife. “So,” he heard Goober say as he left, “I was in the PufferFish Planetary Library one day, and I was looking up....” Santa grimaced. Those morons were going to discuss the secret without him. Maybe not. Santa just kept walking.

Simon was both pleased and disappointed with himself. He was flying his ship, just in case Roy had managed to track his video's sending location, and he was thinking about his plans for taking over the Universe. The thoughts were constantly interrupted, however, by Little Billy's pitiful cries from the room in which he was being held. Simon was very guilty hearing these cries and he tried to imagine that Roy was making those noises as Simon stood in front of him forcing him to beg for mercy. Simon couldn't pretend. These were no cries from a fully grown man; they were the cries of a helpless little boy. Simon didn't understand, though. He had piled endless numbers of toys and knickknacks that he had bought especially for Billy. He had set up a television set, put his books in there, and still, Little Billy wouldn't stop crying.

"I don't understand," Simon said to Richard, "what is wrong with Little Billy?"

Richard shrugged his bulky shoulders. "I wouldn't kill myself over it," he said. "If you let emotions get in the way, you'll end up succumbing to your own psychological attacks."

"Hey, wait," Simon thought out loud, as a thought dawned on him. "Maybe endless toys aren't the answer, and Little Billy is just frightened. He just needs someone to comfort him."

"Gee, you think?" said Richard mockingly.

Simon ignored him, and went into the room, closing the door behind him. "Hey, Billy, do you want to – oh my non-God!" Simon exclaimed atheistically.

Little Billy was curled up in a heap of stuffed animals, wailing. He was pale, covered in red spots, and sweating.

Simon's heart was racing. He picked up Little Billy, opened the door, and showed him to Richard. "Look at him!" he shrieked. "Look at him! What am I going to do? I can't take him to a doctor!"

Richard was worried too. "If he dies...no more blackmailing, no more power...we're dead! Wait! We can take him to a Pickle People doctor, right?"

"No, idiot!" Simon said irritable and angry. "Those pickle-juice dwellers never get sick. Why would they need a doctor?"

Little Billy made gurgling noises in Simons arms, and puked on himself. He didn't move an inch.

Simon gritted his teeth. "What are we going to do? Let the child die? Then we would fail this entire operation, since we wouldn't have any blackmailing to be doing. Oh, and that's bad for the kid too. What other choice do we have? Turn him over to the authorities? Then our operation would fail and we would be killed, but the child would stay alive. What do we do?"

"Well, if you ask me," said Richard. "I think that we must take the risk of the child dying and try to do whatever we can. If he does die, our operation will fail for sure, but we will still be alive." Richard stopped for a moment to glance from Billy to Simon's face. "Well, why should we worry about the ethics of risking Billy's death? I'm sure that Roy has set up a good amount of sheep up in Willy Lemonoid's Heaven, and that will make Billy very comfortable." To you ignorant readers, extra sheep means more access to the luxuries of Willy Lemoniod's Heaven.

“No, no, we can't think like that,” snapped Simon. “I don't even think that you can meddle with the sheep supply unless you have the code. Roy doesn't have the code. Besides, I don't want...I don't want to explain it. We're going to look for a doctor to help us, but if we can't, I'm afraid that we'll have to turn Billy over to Roy before it is too late.”

Richard sighed. “Why give everything you've got up? You didn't mind the billions that died on those planets that you annihilated.

Simon looked down at Billy, who was barely awake. “I don't know,” he said, “But something about this fellow makes me want to keep him alive.”

Richard looked gravely at Simon, he could almost see tears coming out of Simon. *He seems to be cracking under his own psychological warfare*, he thought to himself. He shook his head. He could not see how this had happened, but Simon was weak. *He can't take the Universe like this, and yet Roy's ability to rule the Universe is long gone. Who is going to rule the Universe?*

The Big Brain

Somewhere on the end of the Universe opposite to the El Tuna Café lies what may one day be the destruction of the Universe. The Universe is based on stupidity, so smart things do not slide by smoothly. The Universe, as told in the prologue, likes to destroy the smart ones.

At the end of the Universe, lies a very large brain. Nobody is sure how it got there since anything approaching it will be annihilated by the brain waves.

Brains – it is hard to believe, even though it is true for everything else in the Universe – produce gravity, for they are made of mass. Only small amounts of gravity, to be sure, but gravity is still there, and every thought, because it rearranges the structure of the brain in a small way, will affect the gravity waves sent out by the brain and, like all gravity, this gravity will eventually resonate throughout the Universe, pulling things it comes across so slightly they do not even notice. It is known that as soon as The Big Brain was created, it began thinking, and it began thinking, for some odd reason, about Roy's El Tuna Café tuna. This means, that when the brain's gravity, traveling at the speed of light, reaches you, you will hear "I would like a tuna sandwich and a diet cola," right before you die. This is not very comforting.

Many people have ideas that The Big Brain was once the normal sized brain of some innocent customer at the El Tuna Café, and then shot across the Universe, and made into a giant brain. Some believe that one were somehow able to survive the extreme gravity of The Big Brain, one could learn all of the Universe's secrets. Gabriele was one of the

fools who did. He had escaped Santa's slow, chubby fury with Tony by stealing the ship, but he still really, *really* wanted to find out the secret of the Galactic Goober.

"So, Gabriele, where are we going?" asked Tony, who, after sitting in a dinky ship designed for Jelly Blobs for such a long time, was getting cramps.

"You'll see," said Gabriele. "We're going to throw ourselves into an intelligent black hole that I'm hoping will give us the answer to the Galactic Goober's secret."

"What?!?" exclaimed Tony, bugged-eyed. "You want to kill us by throwing us into a black hole? Do you know how dangerous those are, you idiot?"

"Not being an idiot, no," said Gabriele. "Don't worry, Tony, this black hole is too strong to hurt us."

Tony calmed down at these words, and then realized something. "Wait a minute," he said, thinking. "How can a stronger black hole be safer?"

"Can't you see? The black hole is so strong that not even gravity can escape from it," Gabriele reasoned.

"Whoa," said Tony. "I hope you're right."

"Of course I'm right," said Gabriele. "The black hole only gave out one wave of gravity and that was upon its creation. Obviously, you can see that its still there, being a black hole, but it is simply too strong to let out any more gravity. We're pretty safe."

Tony was not totally convinced. "Gabriele, if there was one gravity wave at its creation, how are we supposed to survive that?"

"Well, you see, gravity cannot go faster than the speed of light. And with the Universe's monstrous size, the gravity

The Big Brain

is slowly spreading out, destroying everything in its path, to be sure, but still, since we're faster than light and the wave still hasn't grown much larger than it was at the end of the Universe, we should be able to circumvent the 'I would like a tuna sandwich and a diet cola' wave."

"Um, okay, sure," said Tony. "But...are you saying that the black hole is at an end of the Universe?"

"Yes."

"I always thought that the Universe was infinitely large."

Gabriele looked strangely at Tony. "Are you serious?"

"Yes."

Gabriele shook his head and gobbled out a laugh. "Hasn't it occurred to you, that with an infinitely large Universe, there would be an infinite number of factors, which would mean an infinite number of causes? And, according to my theory of anything being possible, an infinite number of causes would mean everything could and would happen. And, even worse, in an infinitely large Universe, since everything is happening an infinite amount of times, it is kind of like everything being equal in occurrences, since everything is the same number, infinite. Therefore, probability and the laws of nature are both impossible!"

Tony could see that that was a theory that Gabriele had been desperate to tell. He was also mad at Gabriele's reaction to his theory. "I can think of a flaw to that theory right off the bat," he said.

"Oh, so you think I'm stupid, huh?" said Gabriele menacingly, "Well, I'll tell you what. I've got a mechanical

wing just waiting to shoot you.” Gabriele waved around the mechanical wing.

“I trust you, I trust you,” said Tony, backing away.

“Good,” said Gabriele. “You’re going to have to. We should enter the event horizon soon.”

“Gabriele, are you sure that this is totally safe?”

“This is trusting me?”

“Well, whatever,” said Tony, looking back to the Gabriele’s wing. “How do you plan to get us out?”

“What? Oh, if we’re lucky, there’ll be a white hole at the end of the black hole. If we’re not...”

Tony bit his lip and covered himself with his arms. As they plunged into the black hole, they turned uncontrollably, and not even this Jelly Blob Poach-a-tron could stop the turns. Bright lights flashed, noises somehow leaked into the ship, and Tony felt like he was on some sort of drug.

“Whoa, this is cool,” said Tony. “I feel like I’m going to die, but I’m going to go down all groovy-like.”

Gabriele looked around the colorful and noisy place that they had plunged into. The words that Tony just said resonated through the tunnel, and it sounded as if 100 Tony’s were speaking at once. “Good Gobblers!” exclaimed Gabriele.

“What? What!” yelled Tony, worried.

“A hundred Tony’s!” exclaimed Gabriele. “Now that’s a scary thought.” Tony nodded. The ship hit a large bump, or rather, a bump hit the ship. Maybe a color hit the ship. Neither of them knew, for this strange place had probably never been visited before.

The ship turned faster and faster and the bumps grew more and more violent. The colors, now brighter, were

The Big Brain

flashing faster, and the strange noises grew louder, some were recognizable language. Tony heard Gotithian, English, German, Chinese, Russian, French, and Spanish, though he only understood the first two. Gabriele heard Gotithian, Pickle, Peg, and Turkey, and understood all of them. They hit another bump. Gabriele suddenly understood nothing. “Hmm...that’s weird,” he said. “Why aren’t we dead yet?”

“What?!?” yelled Tony. The sounds were getting louder.

Gabriele shook himself. “I didn’t say anything.” He peered at the dashboard on the ship. Everything was normal. “Yo, Brain, why aren’t we dead?”

All of the languages of the Universe changed their tone and what they were saying. This was apparently how the brain would communicate. “Black holes have no given ending. They all will pull you inwards for eternity, having infinite mass, so you will never collide into anything,” the voices said. Then they added, “I really didn’t like thinking about this “black hole” business. I decided to spiff this place up. You know, add colors, a soundtrack, texture... Listen, don’t call this a “black hole” call this a “personal hole”.”

“Sounds more like a personal Hell,” Tony mumbled.

“Hey, Mr. Beaver, don’t say that! I can think you to smithereens!” one, Gotithian, voice boomed.

Gabriele clucked at Tony. “You’re last name is Beaver! Hah! That’s hilarious.”

“Hah? Yeah right!” said the voice. “You’re one to talk, Gooby.”

Gabriele hid his face in his wing. “I’ll be good.”

Tony noticed a change in everything. “Wh-why are we both so stupid?”

Children's Tales of the Universe

The voice immediately gave its answer immediately after Tony finished, which surprised him. "What? You mean that you Universe People don't like to be stupid? I thought that it was a comfort. I thought that there was an old saying: ignorance is bliss."

"Well, yes," said Tony. "But that is for *ignorance*. Stupidity is different. Why do so many people get that mixed up?" Tony paused for a moment. "Wait a minute, are you, Brain, stupid yourself?"

The tunnel shook violently. "No!" The Big Brain said. "I just think on higher levels than you, and I don't have the same need for knowledge as you do. Knowledge and thinking is more of entertainment for me. Your species requires knowledge to survive, and part of that knowledge is knowing about your own species. I don't need to think on such levels. Besides, I do not spend as much time contemplating things in your universe, as your universe is based on stupidity."

"Then what is there to think about?" asked Tony.

"What is there to think about? All sorts of things. However, they are not of your universe, and so you would not comprehend them."

Gabriele stood up, looking at his real arm, which happened to be injured. "Hey, why did you try to shake us to death?"

"I wasn't trying to kill you," said the tunnel, "If I wanted to do that, I would have turned you into some color. No, I was just shaking my...I don't know what I was shaking. Oh well, I had learned through years of thinking that nodding is a gesture to show disagreement or a form of saying no, and I decided to try it."

The Big Brain

Gabriele broke his gaze into the tunnel's depths. Trying to make eye contact with a giant brain/black hole was pointless and harmful, considering all of those bright colors. Looking at the floor, he asked, "Brain, I have come here to ask you something. I..."

"Allow me to guess," interrupted the voice, "You are nosy, and you want to find out about your brother's secret, Goober's secret."

Gabriele nodded. "I suppose that, during your existence, you were able to calculate almost every event in the Universe in advance."

"Good. I can see that you are catching on. Yes, I have calculated most events in the Universe, but not all. For example, I am sorry to say that when I came across Roy, I immediately lost interest. I am sorry to say that I have nothing that has anything to do with Roy. Nothing."

Tony shrugged. "At least we know that the secret has something to do with Roy."

Gabriele was deeply offended. "Wait a minute, how can you have lost interest with the ruler of the Universe?"

The tunnel curved at alarmingly sharp angle and sent waves through the ship that knocked the human and turkey to the ground. "Don't try to shrug like me," said Tony, annoyed.

"I don't know. However, I do know a thing or two about Simon. He's an interesting fellow, right from birth, being illegitimate and all."

"What do you know about Simon?" asked Gabriele, wondering if he could possibly put what he knew about Roy with what he would learn about Simon, and maybe piece things together.

Children's Tales of the Universe

“Well, let's see... he was born to – ”

“Can you just,” interrupted Tony, “Tell us about Simon's weaknesses? I think that that's all we need to know.”

“Very well. Simon is addicted to chocolate cake, and he sometimes eats was too much of it if it is around. Plus, he likes to sleep for a long time, and he – ”

“We don't care,” interrupted Gabriele, impatient. “Hmm...why don't you start us off with some of the things holding Simon back from taking the Universe from Roy.”

“That's an interesting question,” said The Big Brain thoughtfully, “Very interesting indeed. “Well, as you should probably know by now, Simon realizes that he is not strong enough to take out Roy with brute force, so he is attempting psychological warfare. His crudest yet most effective idea, it seems, is having Roy's heir, Prince William of Margues, in his hands. Exactly who the boy's father is, nobody knows for sure, as his mother fears giving Billy a DNA test for political reasons, and this makes it the child an even better target. However, due to a certain relationship Simon had in a similar area on Margues at a similar time, Simon figures that there is a remote possibility that Billy is his son, and now that Billy has a terrible sickness, well, Simon is frightened. The Pickle People have not had many sicknesses, and do not have a very developed medical field, so Simon realizes that Billy, his possible son, might die in his hands, for Simon is unable to treat him, and that is unbearable to him. The only solution to this problem, Simon figures, is to take out Roy as soon as possible – his current mind games would take too long. Plus, the El Tuna Café has the best medical technology.”

The Big Brain

Gabriele squawked. “He plans to attack the El Tuna Café itself? How is that even possible?”

“Psychology, as always,” said The Big Brain. “It all depends on the character of those in charge of the Café’s security. Simon knows that Roy has a bad reputation for punishing those who tell him unpleasant news if he can, and Simon has placed Roy in a difficult position, so Simon believes that if he threatens Roy to the guards, the guards will be worried that Roy will punish them for not obeying Simon’s demands, and they feel that with Roy out of power their lives will be more secure, they’ll open up. Simon hopes that the fear of Roy’s uncertain temper will be strong enough for this to work, for if it doesn’t, Simon is going to be deep in many more problems.”

“Interesting,” said Gabriele. “Thank you, you’ve answered our questions.” Gabriele typed some numbers on a keyboard and sped the ship up.

“Whoa! What’s the rush? You’ve got eternity to travel through me!” said The Big Brain.

“What! I thought that you would let us out once we reached the ending of the black hole,” Tony exclaimed.

“You think escaping is that easy, eh?” said The Big Brain. “Haven’t you wondered why you haven’t collided with the center of me? I go on forever, you fool.” The tunnel shook from side to side, much to the dismay of Gabriele and Tony. “You should be happy, getting to spend eternity with me. We can find out all sorts of things, and you’ll never have to face the destruction of the Universe by my gravity wave.”

Gabriele continued looking for ways to escape. “I guess you’re right, Brain. But if you said you can think us to

smithereens, can't you come up with something nicer than this?"

The tunnel sighed out colors. "Well, I'd hate to get rid of this personal hole; I've had it for so long."

"We just want something that somewhat resembles our Universe," said Tony, catching on. "With stars, ships, other species, a simulation of gravity like in the Universe..."

"Hmm...that sounds interesting. I think that I'll try it. That's a new challenge, trying to rearrange my own powerful gravity. Hold on, it's going to take a lot of thinking for this one."

The tunnel disappeared. Instead, there was a black nothingness dotted with fake stars. "Wow, our ship stopped moving! That was quick, to figure out how to rearrange gravity like that."

"Yes," said The Big Brain, "I did. For some reason, I was only able to make this fake universe a cubic light year, and then the personal hole continues, but I think that this will be fine. Enjoy what I've done."

Tony and Gabriele looked at each other. Gabriele nodded, and Tony caught on. "Wait a minute," he said, "This is a very intelligent being. I want to ask some more questions first." Tony turned to look out the window of the ship into the depths of the fake universe. "Big Brain, when will I return to Earth?"

Gabriele nudged him. "You idiot," he said, "You're giving it away."

"Oh," said Tony. "I mean, when will I hypothetically reach Earth?"

The Big Brain

“Don’t listen to him,” said Gabriele. “What I want to ask, Big Brain, is: when exactly will Simon attack the El Tuna Café?”

“Very soon. It’s going to be a costly battle between Roy and Simon for a while.”

Gabriele gobbled. Tony didn’t really see anything new; hadn’t the killings of all those planets already been a costly battle?

“Heh,” said the voice. “It is a good thing that you’re here. You can’t leave your safe little shelter. Hey, where did you go?”

Battle Royal

Gabriele flew the cramped little ship as fast as he could away from The Big Brain and towards the other end of the Universe.

“Gabriele,” said Tony, hesitating at first. “Where exactly are you taking us? You can’t possibly be thinking of sending us to the El Tuna Café?”

“I am!” barked the turkey, “whether you like it or not! I need to fight during this important time.”

“But I thought that you hated Roy, for exiling you and Goober.”

“I do,” said Gabriele, otherwise known as Gooby, annoyed. “That is, of course, why I am going to fight for Simon and Mr. Parrot. Aw, gobblers! The ship’s almost out of gas!” Gabriele turned to the dashboard, and lowered the speed slightly.

“Hey,” said Tony, peering into a screen designed to detect things faster than light, on the Poach-a-tron dashboard. “What is that down there? The ship’s identity marks it as belonging to Goober.”

Gabriele turned to Tony. “Let me see.” Gabriele peered down. “Oh, no, he’s been trying to track our stolen ship!”

“What are we going to do?” asked Tony.

“I’m not sure,” said Gabriele, slowing down the ship. “But there’s not point in trying to out fly Goober. Maybe if I told him about The Big Brain he’ll forget about the ship.

Tony shook his head. He did not think that that would work. However, perhaps it was good fortune that Goober had

found them and was boarding their ship. This way, Gabriele couldn't lead them into the middle of some dangerous thing.

Goober entered the stolen ship. He was furious. "How dare you! You were first trying to listen into my secret, and now this! Do you know the consequences?"

"No!" cried Gabriele in misplaced protest. "I am going to go help Simon's take over of the El Tuna Café."

"Gooby, you're acting stupid. I want you to turn the ship over to Dave, and accept your punishment," Goober commanded.

Gabriele looked at his brother in disgust. "What do you mean? Punishment? Hah! Simon is surely going to topple over Roy like a domino, and all of Roy's bureaucratic systems are going to go down with him! I want to be by his side when he takes over. Think of the rewards!"

"There isn't going to be any fight, Gooby," said Goober impatiently. "Especially not with you involved. The El Tuna Café and the area around it will be inaccessible to any but the very largest, most powerful ships, as a security measure, though I don't know exactly which side is going to benefit."

"You already know about the invasion?" asked Tony, surprised.

"No, but I'm just saying this, because it's true, should whatever my stupid brother is saying about these plans turns out to be something other than some far-fetched lie. We happen to be heading to the El Tuna Café anyway, to deliver the secret to Roy."

"Two things to say," said Gabriele. "First of all, I could not be stupid, since I received my information from The Big Brain itself. I won't explain to an inferior mind like

yours how I managed that.” Gabriele stopped to read Goober’s expression, which, though Tony saw it no different from any other turkey’s seemed to make Gabriele proud, since his voice sounded more confident. “Secondly, you were exiled by Roy! Why are you trying to give the secret to him?”

Goober took a deep breath. “Without telling you this secret, I can only tell you so much. After a long meeting, Dave’s Secret Society has decided that Roy is the only one capable of using the secret correctly. If, in fact, you *did* go through The Big Brain, and there *is* in fact an attack, then I suppose that we will have to fight our way to Roy to deliver the secret.”

Gabriele opened his mouth to protest, but Goober covered it with his wing. “You are going to fight for Roy, Gabriele,” he said.

Tony wasn’t all that convinced. How trustworthy was this almost cyborg turkey?

Simon stepped out of the El Tuna Café Medicine Center and contacted some officers through a walkie-talkie. “Men,” he said, “Billy is fine. Start it.”

Simon and some subordinates crouch behind a ledge. He nodded to the others, and shielded his arms over his head. There was a deafening noise, screams and the sounds of furniture and wall pieces crashing down all around the small group. To Simon, this was not a life-or-death situation; this was a dream, a trance, exciting but not bringing an adrenaline rush.

Simon stood up from the ledge, and fired onto the fleeing crowd below. Alarms sounded and robots leapt from

Battle Royale

the high ceilings all around The Great Hall. They aimed at Simon's group, but in vain, for in the control room, some of Simon's soldiers had cut their power off. Simon, it seemed, was in complete control. Simon reloaded his weapon, and continued massacring the crowds below. Within moments, blood oozed faster than it could be drained, and any survivors stumbled over corpses as they tried a last hopeless attempt to survive. Simon, still in his trance, didn't feel an ounce of pity for his victims. With another nod and another word into the walkie-talkie, the scattered groups were heading down into the halls, shooting anyone they happened to come across.

The group entered the library. Everyone in the room, as could be expected, was hiding. Simon aimlessly fired into the library. Blood seeped out of some of the places he fired into, satisfying Simon. "Now, I suggest that anyone still alive kill yourself while you can, because we're going to come back." And with that, Simon left the library.

One of the Pickle People, horrified with Simon, asked, "What are we accomplishing with this cruelty?"

Simon glared at the Pickle Person. "You don't tell me that this is wrong. It's absolutely necessary. We are, of course, trying to stop these things from gathering together and fighting us, but I don't necessarily want to ruin Roy's masterfully designed El Tuna Café with bombs, so we have to kill in a more primitive style. I think, though, with the library, café, auditorium, and great hall attacked, that there are no longer enough to actually threaten our cause." The Pickle Person still looked incredulous at Simon, for he was sure that Simon was secretly enjoying this killing spree.

Simon continued, "I'm ready to take my crown. Come; let's head back to the control room."

Simon and the others turned their heads across the bloody Great Hall towards the control room, which was one floor above, beside the medical center. A nervous looking Pickle Person ran down the flight of stair as fast as he could. It didn't look like a good sign.

"What's the news?" he asked, calm yet uneasy. "Did a mob form? How big is it?"

"Outsiders," said the Pickle Person, almost down the stairway. "I think that the Squeenburg broke through the barriers."

"Oh, crap," muttered Simon. *I should have thought of that.* "Where are they? Have they landed on the El Tuna Café?"

"Landed and ready," said the green man, facing Simon. "They are preparing themselves and spreading out from the lobby. I think that, with our forces so scattered, we don't stand a chance."

Simon bit his upper lip. "You're right. I can call together the groups, but..... you'd better call in some more reinforcements." The Pickle Person nodded, and dashed up the flight of stairs. Simon turned to his uneasy men. "You do understand that the control room is the first place they'll target," he said. "I know that it is safer to flee it, but without it, we cannot keep Roy's forces out. I'm calling in all groups." Simon pressed a button on his walkie-talkie. "Units," he said, remaining calm, "Return to the control room." Simon listened for responses. He mostly heard "okays" and "very wells" except for one general.

Battle Royale

“No can do,” said the general through the walkie-talkie. “We and some other groups are having enough trouble trying to fend off Roy’s TunaFish. You don’t want TunaFish attacking you, right?”

Simon’s eyes widened. “This is more – ” he paused for a moment, hearing a strange sound. Mobs of various armed species came around a corner The Great Hall, surrounding Simon’s small group of nine. Simon looked around. Then, shots were fired from the Squeenburgers. The battle had begun. The previously shut-down security robots leapt to life and attempted to block the Squeenburgers’ way, giving Simon the chance to get up the stairs and into the control room.

Outside of the control room, the battle was fierce. Fortunately, Roy had provided plenty of security robots, so they were able to keep the mob of Squeenburgers at the bottom of the stairs, but stray shots constantly hit the control room’s walls, making Simon uneasy.

“Contact Mr. Parrot! We need him!” he shouted.

The Pickle Person at the controls typed and sent the message. “Somehow the message won’t send, sir,” he said. “Try again?”

Simon shook his head. “The security robots can’t hold out much longer. We need reinforcements now! Why can’t your Pickle People send any?”

“I told you!” exclaimed the Pickle Person, standing up. “Roy recently programmed something that vaporizes pickles that enter the El Tuna Café. We cannot connect with the Pickle Universe without the pickle juices. The code for the program is locked, so don’t ask me to change it.” The Pickle Person walked over to the control manager, who was tied up

in a corner. "Maybe we can beat the access code out of him. We did get him to open this place to us."

Simon bared his teeth. "I don't care! We can't waste time! Go.....get the Cube People to help us or something!"

"But, sir! That's pointless. They have a strong barrier up!"

"Well, then," said Simon, sitting down on the floor. "Well, I guess then, we're beat. Roy.....ughh."

From out of nowhere, a Cube Person appeared. It was hovering on a diplomat's probe. "We have heard from spy cameras for the El Tuna Café," said the Cube Person in the usual flat tone of voice, "That you need us. We are willing to negotiate."

"Good, good," said Simon relieved. He got up off of the floor. "What do you want?"

"Ten percent of your power...." began the Cube Person.

"That seems fair," interrupted Simon.

"You did not let me finish," said the Cube Person. "Ten percent of your power. That is what we will allow you to keep. The other ninety percent is to go to us."

"No!" cried Simon. "That, divided amongst my generals, is not enough!"

"That is not our problem," said the Cube Person. "We do know that without us, you will die. Is that your preference?"

Simon threw his walkie-talkie to the ground angrily. Turning back to the Cube Person, he nodded. "Yes, it is, and that would be awfully humiliating. I will go with yours."

The Cube Person's probe stretched out a mechanical hand from its inside. "Thank you for preferring our

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humiliation,” said the Cube Person, shaking Simon’s hand. “It is good doing business with you.” The Cube Person disappeared. Simon took a deep breath, and opened the door of the control room.

He ducked down. Outside, there was still a fierce battle raging between the security robots and those from the Squeenburg. Simon slinked slowly back into the room. *What? Where did the Cube People go? What trick is this?* Fortunately, at that moment, a swarm of Cube People appeared all over the Great Hall in massive numbers, firing down on the shocked Squeenburgers. It was an interesting site, especially the human man and turkey fleeing to a pile of rubbish.

Simon returned to the control room. He sighed. “Well, we are certainly going to win this, but what’s the use? The Cube People are going to take power again, just like they did when they conquered Willy Lemonoid.” Thoughts raced through Simon’s mind, of disappointment, and despair. *All this, for nothing! I destroyed four planets, killing billions of innocent creatures. I deposed Roy, it seems. But what’s the use? I will not rule the Universe, these greedy foreigners will! Oh, I captured and imprisoned my possible son for nothing!* Simon dropped his jaw. Little Billy! He had forgotten about him. He was over in the Medicine Center next door. Perhaps he could still manipulate Roy with him. Perhaps he could bring the forces of this Universe against the Cube People’s. It was a long shot, but it might work. If the Cube People did their job of taking out these Squeenburgers, it would be a fairly even fight, and then Simon might be able to finish them off with some forces of his own. *How am I*

going to plan this without arousing suspicion, though? He wondered.

Simon sat, nervously tapping his foot and puffing aggressively into his cigar. "Bob, get me another cigar!" he shouted to a Pickle Person.

"Sir, we're all out of your type of cigars," said Bob in a snooty, butler-like voice.

"Do we have any others?" asked Simon irritably.

"Well, we do have Cuban Cigars...."

Simon threw his used cigar down to the ground. "Forget it! I don't want anything to do with those Cube People." Simon looked at his watch. "Ach, where is Roy already?"

"Should we page him again?" asked Bob.

"Yes, yes. Tell him that if he doesn't hurry up Billy.....oh, that...." Simon stopped to think.

"Yes?"

"I know what Roy's up to! He found out my theory on Prince William, that's what he did. He knows that I won't really kill him, because, for one reason, he might be my son, and, for another, as soon as the kid is dead, I won't have a bargaining leverage." Simon gulped, and put his hand on his forehead. "Bob, I'm afraid that, if Roy doesn't come, we're going to have to go in more like terrorists than we already are. If Roy doesn't come.....we're going to have to cut out pieces of Billy until he does. Tell him that."

Bob nodded, and typed up his page to Roy. Simon turned to the box from the Medical Center that he was keeping Billy in. He tapped it gently. "I'm sorry, kid, but

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this might be a rough time for you. Bob! What is the status of the battle?”

“Well, it seems that most of the PufferFish and TunaFish enemies are starting to either die out or flee. Our unlimited supply of fresh Cube People is quickly blasting them away, and chasing the routers.”

“Crap!” muttered Simon. “My plan is ruined. If Roy doesn’t hurry up with his army, we might win this battle! The Cube People will steal my chances of the Universe.”

“Wait a minute,” said Bob, confused. “You actually *want* Roy to come armed?”

“Well,” said Simon, “We all know that that is what he’ll do. He does have pride, you know. Think about it. If the battle was tied, then I could..... well, um, I guess nothing.” Simon trailed off, trying to conceal his nervousness. He had made a big mistake. The Cube People had spy-cams everywhere, and he had blurted something out right to them. He sat down next to Little Billy, worried sick. *What have I done?*

Roy decided, after long and painful thinking, that the only way to deliver the news to Mona was to go face-to-face with her. Regretful as he walked up the hill to Little Billy’s former home, he wished more and more with every step that he had simply kept Little Billy to grow up here. It wasn’t so bad, after all. Sure, Billy’s role model around the house was a drug addict, but he would be dead in a few years (the addict, that is). Sure, Mona was broke from squandering investments on the guinea pig ranch, but Roy could always have given her more money. Little Billy always seemed cheerful and energetic, so this farm had to be a happy place

to live, according to Roy's logic. Little Billy had plenty of guinea pigs to play with, and, at least for his age, a reasonable living environment. Roy shook his head. He couldn't bear to look at this farm. He swallowed hard, and opened the door to the tool shed in which Mona worked.

Mona jumped up from her workbench and greeted Roy. "Hey, Roy! Does Billy miss me? Aw, I sure miss him; this place is awfully empty without him."

"Hey, why don't you make your husband fatter? That'll take up that extra space," Roy said sarcastically.

Mona looked at Roy odd. "Where is my son?"

Roy sighed. "I...I don't know. I wish I did, really. Mona...Simon Carp kidnapped Little Billy."

"Well, I can understand that," Mona coughed.

Roy raised an eyebrow at Mona. "Why aren't you worried?"

"Oh, yes, this is terrible," said Mona. Roy wasn't very convinced. It seemed that Mona had said that out of the obligation.

"Are you hiding something?"

"No, Roy, it's just that, I don't really think that Simon is going to kill Billy or anything. I mean, remember the time around the end of your first war with him? It turned out that he would never really live up to his threat against you. Why would he now?"

"Mona, back then Simon wasn't trying to blow up planets like he has recently. Back then, he worried that ruthlessness and terrorism would tarnish his image should he take over the Universe. Now, he has no public popularity anyway, so he would not care. The welfare of one little Gothian boy.....Simon is at a point of terrorism

like.....imagine.....Mona.....Simon.....Little Billy....” Roy trailed off. Mona seemed to understand what he was saying, though. She clutched Roy’s hand, hard, and tears trickled down her eyes. Roy couldn’t find anything to say.

The two sat in silence for a little while, both lost in their own awful thoughts. Roy opened his mouth to speak, but closed it shut again, and he looked away from Mona, pretending to be distracted by a peculiar guinea pig outside the window so he wouldn’t have to face her. Mona sighed, her insides turning, waiting for Roy to say something, but Roy continued pretending like she wasn’t there. The silence continued. Neither Gothian dared speak or even move. This was all too much for either of them to handle, and both were lost in thought of the situation. The silence continued.

Finally, Mona broke the silence. “What do you think that they have done to my boy?” She asked, her voice trembling.

Roy faced Mona again, and shook his head grimly. “I don’t know. I can’t bear to think about it,” Roy shuddered. “I don’t really know, Mona, maybe he.....” Roy trailed off again. His ideas of what Simon might have done to Billy were horrible and he could not bring himself to say them out loud.

Mona was irritated. “Roy, you realize this. Simon is trying to use Little Billy as a way to *get your power*. You need to really think about this, no matter how hard it may be.”

“Do you think that I haven’t thought of that?” demanded Roy, his voice rising. “Of course he is doing that! What did you think?”

Mona folded her arms. "Of course I knew that, idiot! Now, what are you going to do? Are you going to let Billy die to save your own skin?"

Roy took a deep breath. "I..." he stopped, and took another deep breath. He sighed and shook his head.

"I'm waiting," said Mona rudely.

Roy covered his face with his hands and shook his head again. "I'm.....going.....to....." Roy's pager beeped. "First get this page," Roy said, thankful for a distraction.

"Roy, this is more important," said Mona angrily. Roy ignored her, and looked at the page.

"Oh my God!" shouted Roy. "He's in the El Tuna Café!" Mona's eyes widened. "He wants me to come, unarmed, and surrender immediately, or Little Billy dies."

Mona's mouth opened and all the color drained from her face. She almost fell out of her chair. She swallowed hard. "Well, Roy, what is it going to be? Billy or the Universe?"

"Well, what will you do?" asked Mona, very worried. "Will you sacrifice Billy to save your universe, or will you –"

"I have to go," said Roy, breathing hard. He headed for the door of the tool shed. "This isn't time to talk."

"But Roy!"

Roy ignored her. He ran as quickly as he could to his Poach-a-tron. He had to get to the El Tuna Café. He had an idea of going to The Big Brain and asking what to do, he could see a way to survive it, but that would certainly take too long and he didn't want to test Simon's patience. Roy understood that the only thing to do was to go to the El Tuna Café as quickly as possible, alone, just as Simon had

instructed. Roy started the Poach-a-tron. He did not know what he would do, but he could not let Billy die. He could probably think of something to do when he was at the El Tuna Café. He seemed good enough at last minute things. He had used a last minute attempt to convince Mr. Parrot to put him in the Universe's command, and he had combated Simon on the fly during the first war against him. Roy could, anyway, scrounge up an army after his surrender to Simon, should he not find any way to hold onto both his power and Billy. He could take over the Universe using old friends, just as Simon had been so successfully doing recently. Roy slowed down the ship. He was approaching the El Tuna Café. He typed up the code for the Café's security barrier and passed through.

Roy looked out at the capital of the Universe, and the Tower of Tuna, and then to the Great Hall, where Simon had told Roy that he should present the symbolic Crown of the Universe. He looked around at the entire building. This was the capital of *his* universe, not Simon's. This was built by *him* not Simon. He was not going to let Simon steal away the Universe that Roy had earned (or so he told himself that he had earned it). What choice did he have, though? He could really use the secret of the Galactic Goober – it was rumored to be a very powerful secret that could change the outcome of this entire war. *If only I could take control of the control room*, he thought, *I could use my knowledge of the El Tuna Café to set things right*. He looked at the El Tuna Café once more, before he would go in to surrender. *Hey, the Squeenburg is parked here! Why didn't I see that?* This might change the entire outcome of the war. Inside the

Squeenburg, there was enough energy to do a lot of evil things. Not trusting even Dave, Roy had made sure that the Squeenburg was limited to do only a few things without a set of passwords that Roy had put on the giant ship. Take control of the ship when you knew the codes, and you have a lot of power. Who needed Goober's secret now? Roy typed some other keys on the keyboard. That should drop the security on the Squeenburg, allowing him to enter the Squeenburg.

A hatch of the Squeenburg opened up, allowing Roy to enter. Roy got out of his Poach-a-tron and went straight to the control room. He had an idea of what to do with the Squeenburg's might. He looked around the controls and thought about his plan. How could this fail him? The Squeenburg was an eighth the size of the El Tuna Café, for crying out loud. Still, he was a little nervous. Everything was happening so fast, he had no idea what could be around the next corner. Taking one last deep breath, he fired up the engines, and pressed a number of keys in a dangerous combination. Hopefully, the ship would be strong enough to make a new universe, trapping those who fall into the path of its creation. *And now, thought Roy, I present my surrender to Simon, so as to lead him to my trap.*

Roy stepped into an escape pod and blasted into a small shaft in the El Tuna Café. The airlocks closed, and made a little beep while doing so. This told Roy that Simon was keeping track of anyone who enters or exists the El Tuna Café, surely so that he could find him. He could hear a battle raging in the Great Hall. He pulled the hood of his cloak well over his head, as to hide his face. This wasn't exactly the most inconspicuous disguise, however, and as Roy walked closer to the chaotic sounds, he prayed that there would be

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too much chaos for anyone to notice him. A shot was fired from behind. Something was on his trails. Roy ran as fast as he could, and slid under a fallen column of Ba-ing-go. Out of a crack in the wall leapt a PufferFish, who attacked Roy's pursuer, a Cube Person. Cube Person? On whose side? Roy peeked up from his shelter and looked around the Great Hall. PufferFish were leaping out of cracks and crevasses and attacking TunaFish and Cube People, so Roy figured that the Cube People were on his side, but, to Roy's confusion, they were also attacking each other. It seemed that the PufferFish were divided. Some PufferFish were still loyal to Simon, while others hated him for the destruction of their planet that he had caused.

A turkey and the human came running towards Roy's shelter. The turkey, surprised, shouted, "Roy!" out loud without thinking. As you might guess, some Cube People turned their attention in turkey's direction. Waves of Cube People burst from the Dimension of Tuna. Roy ducked behind the Ba-ing-go column, and the turkey tried to fend off the Cube People with its mechanical right wing.

Gabriele fought the Cube People very well, at least for a few seconds, while Tony and Roy crouched down together, cowering in fear. It did not take long for the Cube People's superior technology to incinerate the turkey. The Cube People turned and faced Roy.

Out from cracks and crevasses in the battle-torn walls, came PufferFish, and they leapt out at the Cube People, firing all their weapons at once. The group of Cube People was wiped out, but, of course, there were always more to come. Roy watched as the PufferFish battled in vain for

Roy's life, and he desperately waited for the Squeenburg to do its work.

Roy clutched his puny Zangy Zapper in his hands quietly, waiting for the last PufferFish to fall.

To Roy's surprise, Willy Lemonoid leapt over the column! He was battling the Cube People, easily taking out each one of them with his monstrous gun.

"Huh?" exclaimed Roy under his breath.

Next came the Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook, who was trying to stop Willy Lemonoid's slaughter of the species that had previously deposed him.

Next, Antonio, formerly Master of the Mint, and Loothpit appeared, also joining the heated battle. Dozens of Cube People popped into the fight, trying to take control again of the battle.

This must be part of the creation of the new universe by the Squeenburg. It's about to happen. Oh, excellent, there comes Simon.

Simon was racing towards the sub-battle with a small group of Pickle People around him. He was darting his eyes around as he ran, looking for danger and, more so, Roy.

Loothpit threw both Willy Lemonoid and Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook like rag dolls against a wall, and charged at the small box surrounding Simon. The surprised Pickle People fired as much as they could at Loothpit, but it was no use. To Roy, it was like watching in slow motion the moose-that-looks-like-a-turtle roar slash and fling everyone in the group. Simon was brought crashing to the ground, his legs torn to shreds.

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Satisfied, Loothpit stamped his feet against the bloody floor of the Great Hall, and disappeared at light speed from the El Tuna Café.

“Simon!” Roy screeched, bursting from his safe little crevasse. Roy ran as fast as he could through the carnage; the PufferFish tried hard to block off the Cube People.

Tony watched as Roy ran towards his enemy. He wondered what had come over him.

Roy fought his way to Simon. “Simon, are you all right?” asked Roy. Simon nodded weakly.

Cube Person X96007Q96 popped at the opposite side of Simon. “What is this all about?” he asked, in a slightly less flat tone of voice.

Roy looked at the Cube Person. He swallowed hard. “None of you may know this,” he said slowly, “But Simon and I are....brothers.”

“What!” yelled Mr. Parrot, who approached Simon with an escort of PufferFish. Now, the entire battle had stopped.

“That’s right,” said Simon.

Mr. Parrot raised his feathery eyebrows. “Then why are you trying to kill each other?”

Simon smiled, and opened his mouth to speak, but the pain from Loothpit’s attack was too great.

“It’s an awkward story,” said Roy, knowing what Simon was going to say. “All this war started out as a plain old brotherly quarrel. Give that a million years with no end and, well, this! Heh.”

Mr. Parrot furrowed his eyebrows angrily. “All this death, all these casualties, the planets that were annihilated,

and the billions of civilians that died, all from a simple brotherly quarrel!”

Roy nodded solemnly. “I’m afraid so,” he bent over and picked up Simon.

“Why did you just become friends right now? Why did all of this happen?” Mr. Parrot yelled.

“I have no idea,” said Roy honestly. “Perhaps it’s because the Universe is based upon stupidity.”

Mt. Parrot was furious. He had not expected all of the war to come to this; this was a terrible ending. No author could ever make such an ending to a story!

“Now Cube People,” said Roy, “I believe that you made a deal with my brother. You owe him some medical attention.”

To Roy’s surprise, the Cube Person was angry looking. He did not think that was possible. The Cube Person’s probe healed Simon’s wounds, and from the Dimension of Tuna came a pair of robotic legs.

Simon hugged Roy. “Oh, brother! Let’s say that we make up and share our power, eh?” Mr. Parrot was a bit frightened. What would happen to everyone who had angered Roy in this war? This was a terrible ending!

“We can’t,” said Roy. “Remember, you promised a lot of divided power amongst these allies of yours. I am going to make you my chief advisor, like Antonio was, so that we can rule together without having to split too much power with them. Come.” Roy reached for Simon’s shoulder, but, being too short, grabbed his stomach, and pulled him over to a side of the room.

“My allies aren’t just going to sit there and take it,” said Simon, “They’re going to just kill us and take the

Universe for themselves.” The Cube People were discussing the situation with one another through their probes. This might not turn out well.

“No,” said Roy. “As cheesy as it may sound, I’ve got it covered. Where all those goobers are standing, a giant whirlpool into a new dimension will appear! Hold tight. Even from here, I’m guessing the suction will be strong.”

“Roy! Simon! I came here as fast as I could!” yelled some old female Gotithian, escorted by some Pickle People. “Please forgive me, I’m not the woman I used to be, and I never was!” She stopped to breath. “Please don’t kill each other! Oh, I knew I should have said I loved you both!”

“Mom, get out of there!” yelled Simon and Roy at the same time. “Mom! We forgave each other! Get out of there!”

A whirlpool appeared, right where Roy and Simon’s mother was standing, and engulfed her and most of those around her. Simon and Roy looked sorrowfully into the hurricane of colors. She was dead.

The Cube People who could pop back into their universe, and the PufferFish that could squeeze themselves away through cracks were some of the few who escaped, but most creatures in that room died.

“We need to go in there!” cried Roy to Simon over the screech of the whirlwind.

“No!” cried Simon. “That thing will obviously rip us to shreds! The El Tuna Café is going to collapse under this!”

“Simon, you idiot!” yelled Roy. “This is going to be a **universe**! The whirlwind will die down, and we might be able to save her brain, and put it back in a – jump in now! Now’s our chance!”

Children's Tales of the Universe

Simon nodded. The two Gotithians plunged into the colorful inferno, leaving the Universe behind without a ruler.

Tony's Return

Tony watched in horror as the colorful spinning debris, mostly mangled soldiers and bits of the El Tuna Café, but now including Roy and Simon, shrank away into the center of the whirlpool. Tony slightly wondered why the event horizon of the personal hole didn't look like that when Gabriele was steering towards it. *Gabriele!* Thought Tony. *I heard Roy say something that sounded like there was a chance of the El Tuna Café collapsing. I need Gabriele, or someone, to fly me back!*

The whirlpool finally slowed down to a stop, leaving a big black void where it was. Tony crouched there in silence, watching the void. Alarms suddenly started ringing, frightening Tony. *Oh man, I'm really going to die now. The Café is collapsing!* Tony's eyes darted around, looking for someone – anyone – to help him out. To his fortune, he saw Gabriele's brother, Goober, and a Gotithian man, dressed as a butler, holding a box leap from the snapped-apart steps of the second floor. Tony ran towards them, careful not to step into, or maybe onto, the void.

“Can you take me with you?” asked Tony. They couldn't hear him over the sirens, but Tony ran after them anyway.

He raced down the shaking remains of the Great Hall. They at last ended up at a tunnel, the end of which having a door to the Squeenburg. Tony looked over to the turkey and who he thought was a butler, having had caught up with them (his legs were stronger than a goat's or turkey's). Why was the butler holding that box so tightly? Was inside it the secret of the Galactic Goober? Tony had no time to wonder. A part

of the El Tuna Café had collapsed, creating a strong suction throughout the entire building, and the anti-vacuum device Roy had installed was not doing its job right. Tony ran ahead of the others into the safety of the Squeenburg.

“I believe that we almost died,” said the butler, entering the Squeenburg. Tony did not like his snooty voice. “Whew, I believe I have to sit down.”

Tony looked down at the box that the butler was sitting on with raging curiosity. What the heck was in there? “Goober, where are we going?” He asked, trying to take his mind off of it.

Goober looked down at a portable Universal Positioning System strapped on his arm. “Well, according to this, our nearest stop is actually Earth. Well Tony, looks like you get to go home after all.” Tony pumped his arms into the air excitedly. “Next, I think that we need to go to the funeral shop located on the PufferFish Plaza. No, wait, that was blown up. Well, looks like that’s going to add a lot to our trip. No, looks like we can hit a funeral shop first.”

Tony kicked the box angrily. “What! Funerals? How many? This, this is going to take forever!”

“I believe that eternity is impossible, seeing that – ”

“Shut up, believe it,” growled Tony. “Why can’t you just drop me off? I’ve been waiting months....well, to you, days to get home!”

“Hold on, hold on,” said Goober, annoyed. “You can wait a few more days. Now, where else do we have to go? Oh yeah, sorry Tony, after the funeral shop we need to go order a float, and then while we’re there we might as well – ” Goober stopped. There was a strange noise somewhere.

Tony's Return

“Okay everybody, don't panic, just grab a gun, and we'll be fine.”

“Oh, for goodness sakes,” said the butler. “It's coming from this box! Just a little kid, you know.” He stopped. “Should I grab the gun anyway?”

“There's a kid in the box?!?” exclaimed Tony. “Get it out!”

“Please, there *are* air holes, you know!” said the butler, dragging an ottoman up next to the box.

“What's wrong with taking him out? Is this child the secret of the Galactic Goober?”

“No, idiot! The secret was that Roy and Simon are brothers! Do I need to draw a picture for everything I say?” Goober yelled, frustrated and a bit sad.

Tony sighed. “I'll go see what's in the lunchroom.”

After watching Tony leave the room, Goober turned to Bob, the butler-masquerader. “I suggest that we send the kid off with Tony. It will get something off of our burden.”

Bob was filled with a snobbish surprise. “What the devil do you mean? This child must be returned to Mona Chipper! He is, or at least was a short time ago, Prince William of Margues. Now that Roy has committed suicide, he is technically ruler of the Universe.”

Goober gobbled and shook his head violently. “No! Can't you see? Roy wasn't planning on this – he wasn't planning to make friends with Simon and just, just decide to jump into a hole! Honestly, Roy was anticipating that Billy lead a normal, healthy boy's life for well, at least hundreds of years longer, before even thinking of turning the crown over. Roy had no plans, no defenses, nothing. All the Chippers

have are those stupid guinea pigs, and they aren't going to do much good against angry Cube People and millions of galaxies trying to take the Universe for themselves. If we want to keep this child alive, we're going have to take him to Earth with Tony to hide! And, um, we're not going to sit on a box that he's contained in."

Bob shrugged, and ripped open the box. Inside was Little Billy, not daring to move an inch from his crunched position, and keeping his head securely tucked beneath his stuffed cockroach. The boy stank terribly, and had juice and other sorts of liquids covering his overalls. Goober backed away, and called Tony over to help.

Billy struggled to his feet, and looked around the room. He started crying. "I need to use potty!" he screamed. "I want my...my mommy! I hungry!" He waddled dizzily over to Goober with his little arms outstretched. The turkey was not pleased. He pushed the toddler to the ground and took a seat.

"Here we go, this child has feelings of some sort," he sighed dramatically. "Life is never easy, and there seems to be no end to it. The future, always there, and, sometimes I just wish that I could just die, and skip ever going to the afterlife, just to get a rest, you know."

"I've never seen somebody so afraid of a child that they wished that they were soulless," said Bob thoughtfully.

Goober looked pitifully at the small Gotithian. "Look at him. A stupid turkey knocked him to his feet and he can't get up. The kid can't move! Look what this battle has done to him! Butler, er, Bob, are you a butler? Whatever. I want you to take one of Dave's extra ships and fly this kid back to Margues. Tell his family that this little king is to live in as

Tony's Return

little extravagance as possible...on the brink of poverty in some boxcar if they have to, even....just to avoid the public or at least until things get stable in the Universe. We're going to have a meeting at Dave's secret society to figure things out. I'll fly Tony back to Earth myself, and then maybe I'll go get the supplies for Roy's funeral."

Billy stirred a little, and sat up. To the surprise of Bob, Goober, and Tony, who had just entered the room, he was smiling. "I'm a king, huh? Yay."

Goober sighed yet again, and waved the two out of the room. "You're coming with me, Tony. I'm returning you to Earth. Maybe you can lighten my mood and maybe, just maybe.....lower my bill from the suicide hotline."

Tony's energy was sucked out of him, and he had to sit down. This turkey was making him just as depressed.

"And I'm going to buy stuff for daddy, and mommy, and...she can make one million guinea pigs!" Billy screamed, stretching out his arms. "I'm gonna buy the *whole* planet Margues just for my guinea pig farmy friends, and we're gonna go to Tuna Bell!"

Bob scratched his forehead. "Billy, I don't think that you should do that. I believe that Goober said that you should be discrete, and I don't think that taking a million guinea pigs to Tuna Bell for a meal is too discrete. Quite frankly, buying Margues isn't too normal either."

Billy stood up on a chair next to Bob's, and grabbed the Gotithian by his horns. "Are you king? Huh? Huh?!? Who's king of Universe? Me!"

Children's Tales of the Universe

“Yes, yes,” Bob whined. “Maybe you’re ruler of the Universe, but...will you stop tugging on my horns, hillbilly!”

Little Billy sat down on the chair. “Yes sir,” he said shyly. “I’ll be good.” He grabbed his stuffed cockroach and stuck it on his head like a crown. He seemed proud enough.

“You’re okay,” said Bob. “You’re just a kid. I hate to think that that’s your problem, now.”

Billy pulled the cockroach off his head. The man’s last remark worried him. “Am I going to see mommy again?” he asked timidly.

Bob thought hard to find the right words. “Um, yes, you will, but don’t expect – never mind. Yes, you will see your mother. We are landing right now. So, hurray.”

“Hurray!” repeated Billy more enthusiastically.

Bob nodded. “Indeed,” he said, landing the ship at the Chipper’s farm.

Mona was watching from the front porch. She jumped up and ran to the pod.

“Mommy mommy!” the boy screamed, trying to free himself from the pod’s seatbelt. His mother opened the door and hugged him. “I’m king of the Universe now,” he said, trying to wriggle out of Mona’s grip. “Just like Rich Daddy! I’m gonna buy guinea pigs, and guinea pig food, and toys for my friends, and Margues, and some tuna tacos for my guinea pigs....”

Bob stood there, his arms crossed. “You do know that you are to keep your location, nay, your existence, as secret as possible. There are people everywhere that are going to try to take the Universe, and if you seem too significant by buying all this crap they might kill you.”

Tony's Return

Billy turned to his mother, and held a finger up to his mouth. "Sssh....And I'm going to buy Poach-a-trons, and rooster cars, and Squeenburg stadiums, and karaoke machines....."

Mona stood up and ignored her son, who talked on as if nothing had happened. "What do you suggest that we do?" she asked Bob. "Should I move to a different farm?"

"No," said Bob. "I'm afraid that buying even a new farm brings too much attention to you. No, I say that you keep this farm, but go scatter your family amongst some relatives – poor relatives would be best. It will be much safer that way. I'm sorry about this, but now that Billy is king, you might have to start living in poor conditions."

"How paradoxical," muttered Mona. "Isn't there any other way? Aren't there at least some of Roy's armies that would swear loyalty to us?"

"I wouldn't take that risk," said Bob glumly.

"Well, okay then, I'm going to go pack my bags."

"No, Mona!" said Bob nervously. "Do not bring anything! I'll fly you over to the relatives that you would like to divide your family up to, and you are not to bring anything, not even make a phone call! Your lines are surely tapped and your bank account surely watched. Nothing is safe now! Now, where should I take you, your slug of a husband, and your son?"

"Well, I could go to my sister's, Doug can return to his parents – if anyone were to find out he was living there, they wouldn't be too surprised – and Billy I think should go to his great aunt Diane." – Mona stopped to swallow hard – "She's a poor old woman and she told me her husband recently died, plus Billy's never met her. Yes, I think that she's perfect."

“Well, she is the mother of the Sir Dr. Dungeon Master Chief Tuna Fry Cook, but I think that with Roy dead and him being dead, it won't really matter. Good plan. When shall we leave?”

“So, uh, what kinds of fun things do you do on Earth?” asked Goober in an attempt to cheer himself up.

“Well,” began Tony, smiling at the thought of returning to Earth. “We had this internet thing, you see, and it's sort of like the PickleNet, but there's no universe behind it, and you can't travel through it. Anyway, on the internet, we have this science fiction conference, me and the guys, my girlfriend, too, and we chat in cyberspace about conspiracy theories and stuff.”

Goober looked at Tony funnily. Tony couldn't quite read what was on the turkey's mind. “Why do you do that?”

“It's a social activity for us humans, you see, and it is awfully fun. The winner for best argument is given a gold medal.”

Goober was bewildered. “Gold? Medal? Why the heck would anyone want gold?”

“It's an honor,” said Tony. Goober did not seem to comprehend. “Gold's valuable, that's why.”

Goober couldn't help but laugh. “Gold is valuable? How pathetic is your species? Gold, as you should know, is totally useless. It is weak, soft, easily melted, heavy, and, at least in most of the Universe, very plentiful. What do you humans do with gold?”

Tony saw a good point. However, he wanted to defend to the human race's idea. “Well, uh,” he started, stumbling

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on words, "We on Earth...we will first dig up some gold, in Africa or Asia or somewhere, and then we uh....melt it down, and then we, uh....store it in a fort until somebody finds a need for it. Like in physics or something."

Goober stared at Tony. "You pay good money to dig up, refine, and guard a worthless bulky piece of junk?"

"Well, I guess, but it sells for huge sums of money."

"I can see that," said Goober obnoxiously, "Because the upkeep costs of having it are so expensive."

Tony was annoyed and offended. "Look, you see, let me settle this. A long time ago, in ancient Mesopotamia..."

"Don't start a story," rudely interrupted Goober. "Just tell me about something else. What is this "girlfriend" of which you speak?"

"Well, it's a female human, we met on the internet, you see – "

"I thought that you couldn't travel on the internet of yours."

"You can't. The internet is nothing but a bunch of computers linked together."

"Then how can you tell if this "girlfriend" is really a female?"

Tony looked sick. "Wow. I guess that...you're right! I might have been sending e-kisses to...to a man! I'm...I'm going to go puke. Thanks a lot." Tony stood up and ran off.

Goober shook his head. "He's thanking me? Wow. What those humans enjoy.... Tony, are you sure you want to return to your horrible civilization?"

"Yes, I'm pretty sure that I don't want to get trapped in the crossfire between the Cube People and a million galaxies trying to take the Universe."

“Yeah, I guess that would be ugly. Could I stay with you on Earth?”

Tony puked from the bathroom he was in. “Um, no. Wouldn't that violate Dave's laws for alien visitation of my planet?”

“Yes, but who's going to enforce those laws now? Not Dave, that's for sure. I've got his Squeenburg. You sure have learned a lot in this eventful...well, I guess that all that has happened really took less than an El Tuna Café's day!”

“Yes, that's very strange.”

Goober stopped the Squeenburg and set it for orbit around the Earth. He motioned for Tony to get into a pod with him and they made their way down into Tony's city. Finally, they reached Tony's house.

“Well, here we are,” said Goober, looking at Tony's house.

“No, here *we* are,” said Tony annoyed. “I showed you the way to my house.”

“Well, I'm the one who drove the extra ship to your little crap shack, so here *we* are.”

“Whoa! I thought that you didn't allow aliens on the surface of Earth. What is that ship taking a tour of Earth for?”

“Don't worry, nobody can see it. Nothing has changed. We can see the ship, though, because we have special headlights turned on so that...well, we can't see it anyway now.”

Tony blinked. Did the entire world just go dark? “Cool! A solar eclipse just as I get to Earth!”

“No, you moron, that's the Squeenburg orbiting in front of the sun. I hope that nobody you love lives by the sea,

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because, funny thing, that ship will really mess up the tides with its gravity.”

“What! Get it off, now!” Tony screamed.

“No, too much trouble. Show me around your crap shack,” said Goober eagerly.

“No!” exclaimed Tony. “I’ve had enough to do with the Universe for the year that I’ve been out there. I just want to stay here on Earth, away from you people, and maybe I’ll forget that this ever happened. Now you go and repair the gravitational damage from the Squeenburg!”

Goober sighed. “I guess this means back to the suicide hotline. There’s the exit.”

Tony smiled faintly as he left the ship, and looked at his old house. It looked very abandoned. The grass was overgrown, the paint had faded and chipped in many parts, some hoodlums had smashed some windows to it...wait, this meant that it hadn’t been liquidated from the bank and given to someone else! Tony had never thought he would be happy to see his house in ruins, but it did in fact mean that the bank had not foreclosed on it. How could this be? He had neither gone to work nor made any payments for a year. Tony smiled. *Huh. It must be that I work from home, and nobody even noticed that my work wasn’t done, so I still received a paycheck! Plus, my paychecks are directly deposited, and the payments for all of my crap are taken out of the bank for me! It’s a good thing that I signed up for that payment plan. Now, since I clearly never have to work another day in my life, I think I’m going to go see my relatives.*

Tony nodded to himself at this decision. This should be his first priority. His family might think that he was dead. The best thing to do was probably to visit his brother and

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then from his brother's house he could call his other relatives. This way his brother could see Tony with his own eyes and then it would be easier to convince the rest of his family that he was really alive. He could also see how much his brother's little son had grown since he was gone. Also, Tony could see, his nephew might be his only chance to tell his stories of the Universe to another human being, which Tony was desperate to do. His nephew was about Little Billy's age, so he should absorb the information.

Then, Tony thought, his nephew would become truly the smartest human in the world because, oddly enough, he would grow up knowing what was really out there. Of course, Tony realized that knowledge could be dangerous. Not because of any responsibilities related to knowing what Tony did, but because the Universe was based on stupidity.

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