

Chronicles of Ned

Space, to breathe



Unconcernedness

Ned pulled the sword out of his leg and tossed it onto the floor. He managed to stay upright. Somehow, keeping himself standing, despite having no experience with getting stabbed. And, he noted, looking pretty cool at the same time.

He briefly wondered why the woman had chosen to throw the sword instead of just using it in the traditional way. There was no doubt that it scared the living shit out of him, but now she didn't have a sword, and he did. Well, he would have had he not tossed it on the floor.

The woman raised an eyebrow. This accompanying her pointy little ears made her look like a cosplayer from some fantasy movie that he had never seen of. Ned felt his leg throbbing with pain and could not for the life of him understand why Viking hadn't come to save him yet.

The woman, who he expected would run, stood her ground. She was an imp. A small variant of Elf. Four feet tall and skinny, inhumanly skinny, with sparkling purple eyes that

looked like stars. This one, Neetu Ro-something-or-other, was a po-faced bitch with black hair, enormous head, and a nose ring.

“Fuck you human! You dirty fucking ape wanker!” she called across the open car park. This proved to Ned that she was exactly as much as a bitch as he had been expecting her to be.

Ned, though only recently part of this strange underworld, was learning one thing *fast*. He did not like aliens!

Nonconditioned

7 hours later.

Warhill was a little town on the edge of a place called England. It had nothing much interesting about it except the total lack of noteworthiness, which was in of its self, a noteworthy trait for a town to have.

On this particular cold winter's night, the dull horizon of Warhill was blighted by three figures walking up a dual carriageway. Or, to be more precise, there were two figures stumbling and one being carried underarm by a viking of a figure.

The first figure of the three was a short, skinny young man with shabby cargo trousers and a t-shirt that was too large for him. His hair was a little too long to be neat, and too short to be 'long.' It was blonde and dirty.

He was named Eric, not that anyone actually used his name. Eric was known to his friends as 'Monday.' The reason for this nickname stemmed from a disagreement, some years ago, when Eric had borrowed a sizeable sum of money from his friend Ned (it was six pounds fifty) and claimed he would return it "on Monday, when Chad gives me the twenty

quid, he owes me.” This excuse wore thin on the fourth week, and forever-more, Eric was branded as ‘Monday.’ Ned eventually reclaimed his lost riches.

The second figure was that of a ‘dude,’ as he liked to be described, known only as ‘Viking.’ This was more than a nickname. As far as anyone could tell, everyone who had ever known him had referred to him as ‘Viking.’ This was some feat of social engineering, as there is no way a parent calls their little boy ‘Viking.’ Monday went to school with him but as far as he knew, Viking had always been called Viking. This was a point of some pondering for him.

Viking was quite literally built like a cartoon Viking. Long black hair, a proud beard and a shirt that was intentionally too tight for him, featuring a band from his dad’s childhood. He also wore flared jeans which hugged his *epic* rear.

The third figure was the iconic Neil Curious. He wasn’t that curious, not really. It was just a name. He was, in most people’s opinion, a legend among men. Well, a legend among Warhillians. And yes, the townspeople really did refer to themselves as this. There was not a single person in the whole town that did not know Neil, or Ned, as they called him. Usually when they said his name, it was shortly followed or preceded by the words ‘go away.’

Ned looked like one of his grandparents could have been an amphibian and sported a tatty green army surplus jacket and, oddly, red camouflage trousers. His hair was short, black and far more ‘floofy’ than you would expect, looking at the rest of him.

Ned was being held away from the floor by Viking as they walked. “My dude, you gotta stop getting this trashed unless you’re going to call a taxi home,” said Viking in his stoic monotone voice.

“No!” Ned replied.

“What do you mean, no?” asked Viking as he let go of Ned.

“Don’t drop me!” he said, as he peeled his face from the road a little too late for it to be relevant.

“Well, I’m out of cigarettes,” squeaked Monday’s tiny voice.

Viking shook his head in disgust. “And you said that when you ran out, you would quit.”

Monday nodded in agreement. “It’s hard though. It’s like I’m pregnant. You know? But I’m not eating for two, I’m smoking for two,” he lamented. “Do you want my baby to be sad?”

“No one is lending you any more money! You useless wanker,” Ned added, finally stumbling to his very drunk feet.

The ‘guys,’ as they collectively referred to themselves, were not teenagers and had not been for a good few years now. They were ankle deep into their twenties. They were living their own idea of ‘the dream.’ As a group, they had enough money to get by, while never making it as far as well-off or even well-off-enough to pay *all* the bills. They did manage to squirrel enough away each week to spend a few hours in a pub and keep the internet at home turned on.

“You know Ned, you remind me of my brother,” mumbled Monday.

“How’s that?” asked Ned.

Monday lay back against a lamppost, far too drunk to talk and stand at the same time. He began to tell his theory, “My brother is a genius. You’re like the complete opposite of a genius.”

“Thanks,” interrupted Ned

“Right! What the fuck... Do you want to know what I am trying to say or what?” he yelled in a slurring drunken flash of annoyance.

“Sorry,” added Viking, who, until that point, had seemed unaware of the conversation.

Monday muttered some abuse, then dived back into his monologue. “Yeah, like I was saying. You’re no genius; you don’t even know how to spell it. But, my brother did this science experiment at school. Well, outside the back of the school, where he got a frog and he held it up by its head and spray painted it blue, well, right, it looked like a little fat as fuck alien! I never saw it, but thinking about it reminds me of you.”

Both Ned and Viking looked at each other, wishing they had drunk more at the pub.

“So, what you’re saying is that your genius brother described a blue frog to you and that made you think of Ned?” pondered Viking.

Ned shook his head and scrunched up his nose. “What the fuck! That entire story makes no sense at all, not even a little! And, as for your genius, brother? It sounds to me like he’s a fucking idiot!” he ranted, somewhat triggered by the accurate accusation that his features were somewhat ‘froggish.’

“No, he is a genius, right! But he is also like only five, so it’s hard to tell sometimes is all.”

Ned was about to reply when Viking jumped in with a cunning observation. “How do you know he’s a genius, then?”

Monday licked his lips and took a deep breath before he could muster the focus to answer. “Because his head is really big”

“What? Like he’s a cocky arse-hole?” asked Ned.

“No, like his head is massive when you look at him, it’s like his body is way too small, like them aliens on telly.”

Ned and Viking spoke in unison, “Fuck off!”

A chant which was uttered towards the end of most of his stories.

Determinedness

It was the sound of gunfire that first woke Ned from his slumber. As he opened his eyes, the light was blinding. As things came into focus, he began to realise the worst possible thing had happened. He had, at some point in his drunken daze, got confused and instead of stumbling to *his* flat, he had ended up at his father's house.

For a normal person, this would not be a massive problem, other than the humiliation of possible vomit in their parent's bathroom. For Ned, there were few things worse than spending time with his video game obsessed hippy father. He looked at the ceiling and recognised the orange blotchy paint job of his dad's living room. He turned and sat up from the sofa.

A figure looked back at him from the chair that faced the telly. "Morning lad, want to join me? The bloody aliens have landed now!" His father jerked his head at a controller on the floor next to him and then gestured at the telly with his controller laden hands. The television displayed the rather graphic images of an interstellar war, or something.

"Had a good night, did you, son?"

It was less than endearing how this question was asked, with no eyes being removed from the screen.

“Yeah, think so. Can’t really remember.” Ned began to have bizarre flashbacks to the events of the journey home. He had developed quite a tolerance for booze and usually just faked being drunk, but the previous night had taken a toll. Though, he had some concerning partial memories floating around that didn’t quite fit together the bits he could remember properly. Ned shrugged them off.

“One thing, son, why are you covered in blue paint?”

Ned stood up quickly and looked into the mirror. He was entirely blue.

“Err, yeah, I think it was to make me look more like a frog.”

The telly made a ‘boop’ noise as his father paused the game. He peered around from his large sofa chair and said, “Bloody hell, son, you must have had a good night... frogs are green.”

Ned turned to face his father and indignantly said, “Only the ones from earth!” He strode away into the other room, looking for a washcloth. The sounds of war resumed.

Half an hour of scrubbing and one cup of extra strong hangover-curing coffee later, Ned braved the living room again. He was now a washed-out blue colour with an almost neon blue jacket, a dirty extra-blue tee shirt and less than red camouflaged trousers. His hair, somehow, still looking pretty good though.

“It’s been great, dad. I’m going.”

His father leaned towards him without taking his eyes from the screen again. “Take the other one with you as well, will you, son? I think he’s going to upset Missus Pearson next door.”

Ned looked around. He couldn’t see anyone else.

“What are you on-about, dad?”

“He’s in the front garden.”



Upon opening the door, Ned was greeted by a man walking his dog and looking quite confused at what could only be described as a man on a cross.

The sight took a few moments to sink in. Monday had been stuck to a lamppost with some kind of gorilla tape, a pool cue strapped across his arms to give the impression of a religious icon. He was dressed in what looked like robes, fashioned from a ‘Knight Rider’ bed cover.

Ned raised an eyebrow as he wandered across the road to get a better view. He took a quick snap with his phone before shouting up to the sleeping Jesus impersonator, “Monday! What are you doing?”

It took a few moments for Monday to realise what was happening.

“Shit!” he squealed. “I’m really high up, dude!” he yelled in a panic.

Ned couldn’t help but smile. “No shit. What are you doing? Trying to offend every Catholic in Warhill, are you?” called Ned.

Monday began to struggle and grasp at the tape holding him in place with the ends of his fingers. “No” he yelled back. “Wankers Ned! Street wankers got me! Little fuckers with tiny arms and big heads!” Ned laughed so hard that he had to sit down at the side of the road.

“Dude, where the fuck did they get the ‘Knight Rider’ thing from?”

Monday was slowly wriggling one arm free from the cue. “It’s mine. They knocked on my door and asked my mum for it!”

Ned puzzled over this for a few minutes before he finally had to ask. “Your mum endorses this kind of behaviour, does she?”

“Not really. But she didn’t expect them to dress me like Jesus and tape me to a lamppost, did she?” Monday replied angrily.

“Why not?” asked Ned, as if it was an obvious response.

“Because the street wankers that got me had help! Lenny, Lenny helped them!”

Ned laughed again, so hard that his hangover gave him a well-deserved shot of pain as punishment. “Your mum’s boyfriend taped you to a lamppost!”

Monday was not as amused.

“Where’s Viking, anyway?” called Ned.

“He said something about asking ‘The-one-and-only’ about the blue space frogs. Next thing I know, here I am.”

Ned took another few photos with his phone and emailed them to everyone he knew.

“Okay, thanks man, I’ll go find him.”

With that said, Ned wandered down the road towards the building site that ‘The-one-and-only’ called home.

“Dude? You gotta cut me down... Dude... Seriously?”

Resignednesses

The door was being knocked. No one knocked on the door in that way. Leon knew it was the knock of Ned. He looked around his building site of a house and reached out for the dark glasses on top of a pile of bricks. He put them on and then slid into his leather jacket before answering the door. God forbid anyone should see him under-dressed. The idea of being seen without his ‘cool’ worried him a great deal.

Once the tall, thin, clean-shaven man had his eighties-cop style dark glasses on and ‘very cool’ leather jacket, he ruffled his hair to make sure people knew that he ‘didn’t care’ how he looked.

Ned was bored with waiting and banged on the door again. Ned always tried to knock on a door in the style of a police officer looking for criminals. He assumed it would make people answer faster. A strange assumption given the people he associated with.

The door opened slowly...

“Yes, Neil, how can I help you?”

Ned looked up and down and after a few moments of silence, he could not help but ask the obvious question. “Why are you showing me your willy?”

Leon muttered some profanity, then darted off to find his trousers. Ned strolled in. He had known Leon, who liked to be suffixed with the title ‘The-one-and-only’ (because he wrongly assumed it made girls think he sounded cool) for a few years now. For this entire time, his ‘fixer-upper’ home had been in a state of ‘knocker-down first.’ In fact, the bricks were gathering dust. The large hill of cement with a shovel sticking out of it, that lived in the kitchen, had been solid for longer than Ned could remember.

Before he could get a proper look at the ‘work,’ Leon emerged from a half-walled room wearing his signature leather trousers, which complimented his leather jacket and shades rather well and, at the same time, made him look totally ridiculous.

“So? Nedrick!” Leon liked to talk. “What do you require from me, The-one-and-only, today?” Leon asked while spreading his arms, to seem like a source of wisdom. Before Ned could speak, Leon talked again. “Because I don’t have your tenner yet.”

Ned had forgotten about the tenner but appreciated the reminder.

“Have you seen Viking?”

Leon thoughtfully rubbed his brow as he ventured into the kitchen.

The kitchen had a wall made of a wooden frame and little more.

“Yeah, he’s a tall bloke with a monotone voice. Dresses like it’s the nineties.”

“That’s not what I meant. Have you seen Viking *recently*?”

Leon put the kettle on. ‘The kettle’ being the affectionate nickname for a pan of water and a mouldy electric hob.

“No, not today. By the way, Ned, I have to ask. Why are you slightly blue?”

“It’s a long story and I can’t remember most of it,” replied Ned as he made himself at home using the dry mound of concrete as a chair. “Something about aliens, and frogs... I think.”

“Have you tried calling him?” asked Leon, as he poured instant coffee into some cups straight from the jar.

Ned observed this ritual and wondered why spoons were not involved.

“I’m not convinced he would hear me.”

Leon filled both cups with way more sugar than was needed and without looking up, added, “No, I mean, on the phone.”

Ned took his phone out and took some crafty snaps of the dusty brick pile.

“No, I messaged him.”

Leon muttered something about that being no surprise and tossed Ned the cordless telephone that had been, until that point, hidden under some semi-pornographic magazines that looked suspiciously eighties.

Ned carefully typed Viking’s number into the telephone. He always typed numbers carefully. A few months ago, he had been trying to contact a well-known games company to complain about his father’s addiction and he inadvertently got connected to a nice girl named Sally who wanted to talk dirty and take his credit card number. The experience might have been more fun, but Ned didn’t have a credit card.

The phone was pressed tight to Ned’s ear. He could feel the dust on it invading his hair. How was it possible that everything in Leon’s house was covered in building dust, given that Leon had never *actually* done any building?

“It’s ringing!” exclaimed Ned.

After a short time, the ringing stopped and the unmistakable monotone voice of Viking said, “Hello, Viking’s phone.”

Ned stood up as if standing was a prerequisite for talking on a phone.

“I know it’s Viking. I just called Viking’s number. Anyway, where are you dude?” He could hear a low rumble and voices in the background.

“On a train” replied Viking.

“Why?” asked Ned.

“I don’t know.”

Ned didn’t want Leon to feel left out of the conversation, so he called across the kitchen a lot louder than he needed to. “He’s on a train! He doesn’t know why he’s on the train.”

“What train?” Leon asked.

Ned walked away muttering, “Dude, I’m on the phone!”

Viking continued his story.

“I’m on an accidental holiday! I think.”

Ned felt pressed to interrupt before the story got any more confusing. “What’s an accidental holiday?”

He could hear Viking telling another passenger that his friend didn’t know what an accidental holiday was, the other passenger asked Viking to stop talking to her.

“I was on my way to Leon, The-one-and-only’s house when I thought getting a train might be less hassle. There’s this place in Scotland called ‘Leon’ that this train goes to. I thought it sounded close to Leon’s house, so I got a ticket and here I am, on a train. Or, at least, that’s what I think happened.” There was a considered tone in Viking’s voice, which was unusual, given now monotone he was.

Even Ned could see the flaw in this plan.

“Scotland is, like, seventy hundred million miles away, or something. Leon lives next to the shop. That’s not even as far as the train station!”

Ned could hear Viking getting annoyed with the ‘daft’ questions.

“Yes, but, oh wise and holy Ned, the one part of this that you’re not accounting for is that last night when I got on the train, I was proper hammered. Now I’m sober and I can see that my plan was not as foolproof as I thought it was... And there were all the aliens to think about.”

Ned enjoyed being referred to as ‘Wise and holy’ even if it was said as sarcasm.

“Okay, I’m coming to save you. Get off the train the next time it stops and let us know how far you got. The mighty Nedrick and ‘The-one-and-only’ are on the way to liberate you from the fascism of the Scott’s.” With that righteous outburst, Ned slammed the phone down. This was not the best hyperbolic action, because it was a cordless phone. Instead of slamming it down, he had actually just thrown it at the floor.

Leon was leaning against the stove in the kitchen and thankfully hadn’t seen the phone destruction incident.

Leon was uninterested in the phone call but felt that it would be rude not to ask, and he heard enough of it to know that there was about to be a stupid outcome.

“Are you going to Scotland then?” he called.

Ned strolled into the kitchen with a menacing grin on his face.

“Oh yes, *we* are!” he said, as if were an announcement.

Leon looked back blankly and took a swig of his coffee. It wasn’t very nice coffee; the dust made it grainy.

After a relatively long conversation about ‘not wanting to go,’ Leon eventually decided that it would be better if he did join Ned on his ‘holy mission.’ He wasn’t entirely sure why; Ned could be very persuasive.



Monday was getting bored with being crucified now. He was glad to have tried it; from the point of view of ‘doing something different,’ but the tape was making his wrists sweat, and he needed to use a toilet quite badly. Also, he was getting worried about the time in the sun, even though it was winter. He was sure that long-term exposure to solar rays was not good for his delicate skin.

At this point, he saw the silhouette of Ned and Leon walking towards his lamppost. It reminded him of all those movies where the heroes stroll into town to kill all the bad guys and save everyone, just in the nick of time. Then he thought he may watch too many movies.

Monday grinned to himself, thinking that soon he could release the pressure in his bladder.

Ned and Leon strolled past.

“Hey, guys?” he called.

Ned and Leon briskly walked backwards towards him.

“Sorry! Totally forgot about you, mate,” Ned apologised.

Leon looked up with a grin, took a photo with his phone and started messaging it to everyone he knew.

“It’s like a combination of a school nativity and modern art,” Leon observed.

Within half an hour or so, the three friends sat in Ned’s father’s living room. Leon had made Monday a rather nasty cup of coffee while they waited for Ned to converse with his father.

Monday didn't care how bad the coffee was, it was warm, and he was not taped to a lamppost anymore. He was still dressed in a Knight Rider toga. Michael Knight's face was looking oddly suspicious of the exposed nipple he was adjacent to. - *For the younger members of the readership, Micheal Knight was the main character in the TV show Knight Rider. Which was about a talking car and being cool.*

Ned's dad was sitting on his chair with his game on pause looking at the three idiots, wishing they would go away so he could carry on 'saving the world' via the medium of video-games.

"Dad, can we borrow your car?" he asked.

"If I say no, will you all go away?" he asked, eyeballing Micheal Knight, uncomfortably.

Leon was the first to think of a witty reply. "Not unless you have three train tickets to Scotland, Mr Curious."

Ned's dad had no idea what that was supposed to mean.

"And if I say yes? Then will you all go away?" he asked.

Ned was not as hurt by the comment as he was about to pretend to be. "You know what dad, your sons are here spending time with you, and you're not interested! Do you know how that can affect young men?"

His father was thinking faster today than Ned had hoped. "You're my only son. The other two just turn up and eat my food regularly. I don't even know their names."

Leon leaned forward and a business card almost magically appeared in his hand.

"Leon 'The-one-and-only' Jones. Construction Manager. At your service, sir."

Ned's dad took the card. It wasn't cut straight, and he was fairly sure that 'Manaygar' was not how 'Manager' was spelled.

“You really a construction manager, lad?” he asked.

Leon laughed and looked around nervously. Monday and Ned looked at him expectantly.

“Of course not, I just say that because it sounds cool. Come on, construction manager? Have you seen my house?”

Monday and Ned nodded in agreement at each other.

“You can take the car. Just make sure wherever you go, you don’t bring the ‘one and bloody only’ back, please.”

Ned was satisfied with the terms of the agreement and grabbed the keys from the top of the television as he left the room. The other two followed.

They took a quick stop at Monday’s house so he could argue with his mum about her boyfriend being a wanker, and so he could get some clothes.

Ned and Leon waited outside but could hear the argument along with the haunting tones of ‘disco classics’ belting out from the kitchen through an open window.



They walked the short distance to the car park at the back of the housing estate.

“So, what complete piece of shit are we driving today, then?” asked Leon.

Monday noticed a burnt out classic mini at the far end of the car park. “Is it that one?” he asked as he pointed.

“No!” Ned proclaimed. “That’s my Nan’s.”

Monday and Leon looked at each other with concern..

“I don’t see it,” Ned mumbled as he disappeared behind the big blue plastic monstrosity marked as a ‘recycling bank’ with a painted on council stencil.

“We should just go to the pub,” Monday complained.

“No! The pub does not complement my lifestyle,” Leon said.

He turned to show Monday his ‘perfect arse’ and rubbed it proudly. “You don’t get one of these by sitting in the pub all day, you know!”

Monday paid more attention than expected. “That is a very nice arse, to be fair,” he said. “Can I touch it?”

Leon slapped him with an open hand. “No! No one touches it! No one!”

The arse talk was broken up by the roar of a mighty engine. They jogged towards the recycling bank with great interest.

Behind it was a silver, hyper-masculine beast of a vehicle.

Neither of them knew much about car’s but they both knew that this car was a masterwork of engineering and the sort of thing that would cost more money than either of them had ever seen. It was a beautiful and huge car that looked like it should contain secret agents or politicians.

The tinted black window rolled down with an elegant hum in a smooth motion to reveal the face of Ned.

“Get in then guys, we have a lot of miles to do!”

“What the fuck?” proclaimed Monday, expressing Leon’s open-mouthed sentiment.

Ned made the engine roar again. “This is my dad’s car.”

Monday and Leon were not expecting this. Not something *good!*

Monday and Leon were expecting something at the exact opposite end of the spectrum. They were expecting less ‘wow’ and more ‘ew.’

Within seconds, the three friends were cruising the open road that was the dual carriageway outside the car park.

“Dude,” began Monday, who was sitting in the passenger seat. “This feels like the sort of car that could drive you to space! How does your dad own a sexy, sexy, sexy car like this?”

Ned turned his head a little in that way all experienced drivers do; just enough tilt to make you feel like they are talking to you, not the windscreen, but not enough to take their eyes off the road.

“My dad’s a crypto currency billionaire.”

“No fucking way!” exclaimed Leon, who was playing with the now last-generation games console that was mounted in the back of the rear head rest.

Ned thought he should clear up this matter before it became a pointless, but epic, lie.

“Don’t be stupid guys, my dad’s not rich! He got the car in the divorce settlement. It’s my mum that’s loaded.”

Monday felt he should say something to make Ned feel better. Talking about his mother always upset him. “Dude, I’m sorry we don’t get to talk about your mom more.”

Ned was surprised at the touching comment and was about to thank Monday for being so thoughtful, when he added, “Yeah, I mean, I don’t care or anything, but if she’s rich, we should get *in* with her!”

“Fuck off! Also, I got no cash left, so you guys had better shell out for some petrol because we only got like ten miles left in the tank.”

Leon checked his jacket pocket. There was nothing more than a few pence in it. “I didn’t bring my wallet.”

He then looked back at the screen in front of him and felt something turn inside his stomach.

“Apparently, games and driving gives me motion sickness.” He had barely got the last word out when he proved his point by leaning towards the front and spilling his breakfast as

well as the rest of his stomach contents over Monday's shoulder and straight down the front of his t-shirt.

Ned was horrified at the sight and swerved the car wildly; Monday was screaming. "Not cool dude! Not cool" and that was the last thing that he remembered doing for a while.

Unchaperoned

“Do you think he’s dead?” asked Ned, as he looked through the front of the car.

“No, I don’t see how. But I’ve never seen someone throw up into a windscreen before. My life flashed in front of my eyes,” replied Leon.

The events, as Ned understood them, were causal. Leon’s motion sickness caused him to eject over Monday. Monday vomited into the window in front of him, which, because of the shape of the glass and velocity of chunks, created a direct facial return. Causing the rare vomit induced vomit loop.

Now, Monday was passed out in the passenger seat, covered in, well, the obvious. So was most of the windscreen.

Somehow, Ned and Leon had escaped the car totally untouched by the obvious. Which was in of itself a miracle.

“Should we wake him?” Leon asked.

“I don’t think I want to be here when he wakes up,” Ned considered. “We’re just going to get a part two.”

Leon nodded at this. “We leave him a pile of cleaning crap and go find a pub?”

Ned shrugged and looked around. They were close to the Warpost, the town’s strange and independent supermarket.



Ned and Leon sat in the closest pub, which had been the same one he had been in on the previous night. The ‘Trashcan’ was a total dive. Once you entered, you were greeted with a long thin room with a bar that ran the entire length of the pub, with slim standing tables opposite. This left enough room to stand at the bar and nothing else.

Ned and Leon had gained a pint of bitter each and sat at the slightly wider section of the thin pub by the entrance. The two of them were the only people in there, due to it being quite early in the day.

“You think he’ll find us?” Leon asked, noticing his phone was out of battery.

Ned’s was about half charged but, as he pointed out, “If you were looking for me, where would you go first?” he asked.

“Good point,” Leon agreed.

A speaker came to life at the opposite end of the room, slowly filling the bar with eighties pop classics. The obviously disinterested muscular bartender wiped the pointlessly long surface and showed little interest in what was happening on the other side of his domain.

“Why *are* you slightly blue today?” Leon asked, finally forcing himself to query the oddity.

Neil looked up as he took a drink. “Not sure. I have a vague memory of a conversation about frogs, some alien and a Bat-man... and that’s about it.”

“Frogs are green,” Leon noted, taking a drink himself.

Ned noticed the music in the background had begun repeating in that way that a vinyl record does when it was stuck. Leon was saying something about some toads being brown. The conversation faded into the background as Ned looked across the galley of a pub.

The lights began to flicker as a second or so of Queen's 'Fat Bottom Girls' looped over and over.

Ned stood up and took a curious step towards the bar. The song kept hitching. Ned felt a pressure on him. Under the mess of audio, there was another sound. A voice talking. He tilted his head to try to hone in on them. The music stopped, and the lights came back on. Ned heard the words, "He can hear me!" in urgently whispered, ghostly tones.

There was a thud.

Leon smacked the table in front of him. "Are you having a stroke or something, Ned?"

Leon looked at him expectantly. Ned looked down at his empty glass.

"Some frogs are blue," he said, trying to work out what had just happened.

"What? No! We're past that now, you dozy wanker. We're on to it being *your round!*"

Ned nodded and took the two or three steps across the gap to the bar. He fished out his phone and checked that he did, in fact, have a little money left.

"What do you want then?" the notably skinny woman behind the bar asked him.

"Were did the fella go?" Ned asked, looking around, wondering how he missed someone leaving.

"Why? Doesn't the fucking patriarchy want to be served by a wench? Too fucking good, are we?" the woman said with a frown.

She was a classic punk looking woman with sharp features and a large head on a tiny frame. Though the piercings and extreme makeup probably made her look more angular than she actually was.

“Two bitters please, wench.”

“Get fucked!” she replied, tapping the till as she poured two fresh pints.

Ned tapped his phone and took the drink back to the table.

Leon looked excited and took the ale from him with glee.

They were just reaching the bottoms of the glasses and having an in-depth discussion about things that neither of them really understood, when the room was flooded with light. A figure stood, one arm on each door, standing proudly between them. Ned and Leon were startled by the bravado of the figure for a moment.

“Oh, it’s just Monday,” Ned said and turned back to his conversation. “What were we talking about?”

Monday walked to the table shirtless and annoyed. His delicate form was not something that was suited to exposed nipples.

“Cars clean. You dicks.”

Ned and Leon necked their pints and stood up with purpose. “Good!” Ned said. “You can drive; we’re over the limit!” he added, gleefully.



The car cruised up the motorway, Monday driving, Leon in the passenger seat and Ned in the back. Leon had been pretty certain that he had ‘won’ by having the front seat. Now though, he complained he could ‘still smell the sick,’ which came as no shock to Ned, who was stretched out in the back and very relaxed. No vomit odour odiously assaulting him.

“How far *is* Scotland? Do I just keep going up?” Monday asked, gesturing to the GPS that was built into the car’s dashboard.

“That’s not *up*, you fucking muffin! That’s north, or forward, or something,” Leon said sternly, trailing off as he realised he didn’t know either. It wasn’t ‘up’ though, he was sure about that, because they were going downhill.

Ned, still relaxing in the back, pulled out his phone and sent a message to Viking.
Ned: Coming to save you – plz send location.

He hit send, wondering if this adventure would be worth the effort.

His phone vibrated in his hand. He looked down at the screen.
Viking: Good. Creepy voicez – bothering me.

Ned blinked at the message. As he considered its strange contents, it vibrated again, and another line was added.

Viking: I don’t trust the punk girl with the big head.

Ned blinked at this *new* line, but now with a sense of confused urgency.

He sat up, almost dropping his phone with confusion and a little uneasy fear. The motion got the attention of those in front.

“If you fucking chuck up on me we’re having words, Ned!” Leon chastised, with an urgency of his own.

The car swerved a little. A passing truck honked its horn. Monday ignored it.

“Oh, my god! Did you have a bad dream?” Leon asked, smirking at Ned’s sudden flurry of motion. “Fucking baby!” he added for good measure.

Ned grunted in annoyance and profanity before looking back at the screen on his phone.

Ned: Coming to save you – plz send location.
Viking: Got off train like you said to. Scary place.
Ned: Where you end up?
Viking: Am in Startlington. Things got strange after last night. Bring food!

Ned scratched his head. Had the message changed, or *had* he fallen asleep?

“Where’s Startlington?” he asked the front.

“How would I know; this is the farthest I’ve ever been from my house!” Monday announced. “Also, I’m not sure I have a driving license. Is that a problem? Should I have a licence?”

Ned ignored him and turned his attention to the *slightly* more competent Leon, who was already checking his phone.

“Damn sight closer than Scotland!” Leon announced. “Is that where the bloody great tit ended up?” Leon looked hugely entertained. “At least he’s not in space or something just as ludicrous!”

“Well, if anyone can accidentally go on a trip into space, it would be Viking... Or me, I suppose,” Ned responded, glibly.

“Unbelievable!” Leon replied, looking back and grinning.

“Where the fuck am I driving to, then?” Monday asked.

Ned looked at his phone. “Not as far as Scotland, and given you don’t have a license, that’s probably a good thing.”

Ultrarefined

Darkness was drawing closer, and Monday really needed to piss. After some vocalising of this issue, it was agreed that they would stop at the next place that seemed like it had a ‘piss hole,’ as Leon described it; and somewhere they could get food. They were about an hour more away from Startlington, and Viking had confirmed thrice more that he did, in fact, require feeding.

“There!” Ned said, pointing at the ‘Snack-Fuel-Refresh’ that had just come into view. The ‘Snack-Fuel-Refresh’ was an all-night petrol station, judging by the well-lit forecourt and sign that proudly displayed petrol prices.

Monday pulled in without comment and almost the moment the car came to a stop, he shouted, “Piss, piss, piss,” and quite literally, ran off.

Leon was looking at his phone and absentmindedly pulled the handbrake just as they inched forward.

Ned noticed the motion and noted that perhaps Leon was not quite as useless as he had always assumed.

“Well, I don’t have any spare cash. So, I’m not getting the petrol, snacks or coffee... or beer,” he said, almost apologetically.

Ned had been messaging his well-off, yet total arse hole of a mother for the last twenty minutes and she had finally transferred some money into his account. Quite a sizeable transfer, too. Enough for the rest of the month, *and* this little adventure. This was an interaction he went through every four to six weeks and was the *only* reason he could afford to be alive.

“Not a problem. I got this one! You fill it up, all the way. I’ll go investigate the offerings of the Snack-Fuel-Refresh,” he said.

Leon nodded and muttered something about Ned holding out on him.

The orange and green neon lights of the Snack-Fuel-Refresh were headache inducing but flooded the forecourt with an oddly interesting mix of colours, which struck Ned as being artistically pleasing.

As he pushed the door open, the sounds of Creedence Clear Water filled his ears and he began humming ‘Have you seen the rain,’ while he selected assorted crisps from the stand. He glanced around the oddly large shop that seemed to be part petrol station, part vape shop and part bakery.

The old woman at the checkout was reading a crossword magazine, pen in hand, and didn’t so much as glance at Ned.

Sadly, Ned noticed, the bakery section was closed and there were no entertaining pastries left. He settled for two multipacks of monster themed crisps and a six-pack of cherry cola.

He dropped his first round of goods at the desk next to the magazine toting woman. She looked up at him.

“I’ll be back!” he said, in response to no query at all. He dashed off to the chilled sandwich selection by the closed and empty bakery section.

He grabbed three ‘meat sensation’ baguettes from the fridge and then, remembering Viking, grabbed two more. *That man could eat!*

“Back!” he said to the woman, who replied with a raised eyebrow and began scanning the barcodes defiantly.

She was a plump, older woman with long black hair that had the occasional wisp of grey in it. Ned looked at her rainbow cardigan as she flipped a baguette, looking for the barcode.

He noticed a tattoo on the back of her hand. It was a small blue cartoon of a flying saucer with the word ‘Punk’ under it in red. The little ship sported a yellow dome on the top.

She stopped scanning and looked at him, poker face still set to ‘contempt.’

“Sorry,” Ned said. “I was just admiring your UFO.”

She raised her eyebrow another notch and pointed at the card scanner. “Are you a junkie?” she asked with the raspy voice of a career smoker.

Ned tapped his phone. “Not currently. No plans to try it either... why? Are you selling?”

The eyebrow raised even more.

“Also, fuel?” he said. Pointing at the car, through the window. The car which Leon had filled and was sitting on the bonnet of.

“Okay,” she said, adding it to the bill and adjusting the eyebrow dubiously.

Ned wondered as to how high the rogue eyebrow would be able to climb.

“It’s not a UFO, hippy! It’s a pyramid. Like from Egypt,” she rasped.

Ned raised his own eyebrow and pointed at her hand. “No, that one.”

He stopped. The woman's hand had an old, faded tattoo of an all-seeing eye inside a pyramid where the flying saucer had been just a moment ago.

"Sorry. My mistake, apparently," he said, feeling a wave of panic, and not for the first time.

"Where can I piss?" he asked as he picked up the almost see through blue carrier bag.

"Loo's out back," she said, pointing out of the window.

Ned glanced at her pyramid tattoo again and nodded. "Thanks."



He stepped outside. As he did, the bell on the door rang. He didn't remember it when he went in and looked back at the door. A movement in the reflection on the glass door caught his eye.

He turned with a start, dropping his carrier bag. The neon glow on the floor was purple and blue and reflecting from a puddle. When had it started raining?

The thought about the puddle had hit him only a moment before the massive object zipped past him. His eyes followed the train-like rumblings, which hovered on a blue cushion of light.

"Fucking space train?" he asked aloud as it lifted off the surface and rose into the air. His eyes lingered on its blue glowing rear as another sound caught his attention. A smaller vehicle passed. This one looked more like a truck than a train, but it followed the same path in the darkness, lit by a blue glow from its underside.

He turned slowly to see a city, alight with neon glass and steel, sprawling out from his little island of normality. His car was parked right where they had left it, and there was Leon sitting on the bonnet, watching cat videos by the looks of it.

Ned was, to say the least, agog.

He turned the other way and there it was, more spaceships and neon city. He looked at the moon through a purple tinted cloud and almost pissed himself there and then.

“There’s a lot of large ships this evening,” came a familiar voice from next to him.

He glanced to his side, then down to the small elfish woman next to him.

“Yeah,” he replied. Not sure what else to say.

“Big ships, this low. Must be Monday,” the woman said, glancing up at him with sparkling eyes.

“What?” he asked.

“Where’s Monday?” Leon yelled.

Ned looked around. Not sure what had just happened. He was standing in the forecourt. Lit by orange and green neon soup. A car drove past, going a little too fast. Ned followed it with his eyes, waiting for it to launch into the sky. It splashed through a puddle and vanished into the night.

Ned picked up his bag and handed it to Leon.

Monday came strolling from around the back of the shop, presumably from the toilet.

“Guys,” Ned prompted as Monday stepped closer. “Anything weird just happen to you two?” he asked.

“Yeah!” Monday said eagerly. “I found a tenner in the shitter!”

“What?” Leon asked.

“Ten pound note, just on the floor of the loo.”

Ned ignored him and glanced to Leon, who was opening a bag of crisps.

“What?” he asked.

“Never mind!” he said and left to find the toilet.

He checked his phone and took a moment to tap out a message, letting Viking know they would arrive soon.

Pipelined

The car rolled to a stop, Ned at the wheel.

“This it?” he asked, looking over at Leon, who checked his phone.

“Yep.”

Viking had sent his location to them via some social network chat app that Ned didn’t really understand. Leon seemed to *get it*, though.

“Can you park up? I need to piss again,” Monday said from the back of the car.

“Yeah,” Ned replied.

“Seriously, you have the bladder of a cat and drink like a rhino! It’s like you spend a third of your life just pissing!” Leon chastised, with no actual cause.

Ned ignored them. In truth, they had only stayed friends for as long as they had, because Ned ignored most of what they were saying.

He stopped the car in an appropriate bay. Next to some shops. They were closed. It looked to be a pretty nice little complex in the day. Right now, though, it was the middle of the night. The only lights came from the neon signs on the shops, which shops never turn off,

for some reason, and the street lamps. There weren't even any cars passing. It felt eerie and isolating.



Monday leaped from the car and began pissing in the parking bay next to them. Ned wondered why he couldn't have at least gone one more bay over. He could also see the bungle getting it on his own shoes.

Ned got out of the car and leaned against it while he called Viking. On the opposite side of the car to Monday's river.

"Really, Neil? A phone call?" Leon said disapprovingly. "You're like someone's nan! Who phones people in whatever year this is? I don't even have a phone. Not now that someone threw it onto the floor."

Ned wondered if Leon actually knew what year it was, as his phone rang into his ear.

"Ned?" came a familiar monotone voice.

"Viking! We're here, finally! Where are you?" Ned asked, less monotone.

"Keep the engine running, there's some freaky shit going down! I'll be there in a second."

Viking hung up. Ned looked at his phone, perplexed.

"What did he say?" Leon asked.

"To keep the engine running..."

Ned didn't have time to explain the oddity of the call because he was distracted by the sounds of someone running in the quiet evening. They both looked over to the far end of the street. Viking, a man who was better built for lifting heavy things, was sprinting towards them.

"It actually looks like he's running in slow motion," Leon observed.

“Oddly magnificent,” Ned replied.

They looked on, entertained. The lumbering giant got closer; as he did, it began dawning on Ned that perhaps he really should have kept the engine running.

As Viking ran under a Lamppost it sparked and the glass lamp covering exploded into shards, raining down. The glass rain was accompanied by white sparks, which only added to the drama.

The electric sparks fell behind him, making the light hazy. There was obvious movement behind it. After another moment, the curtain of sparks was split by a huge shirtless man who was sporting large leathery wings and claws the size of kitchen knives.

“What the fuck?” Ned asked as he got back in the car, with the speed of a properly motivated man.

“Fuck that, let’s go!” Leon said as he ran around to the other side. “Monday, stop the flow. We’re leaving!”

Monday, who was *still* pissing, turned to look back, wondering what all the commotion was about.

“Oh, you found Viking!” he said gleefully. “What’s that behind him?”

Ned vaguely heard Monday say something like, “shitting hell,” before clambering into the back seat. He really hoped he had stopped pissing.

“Go, go, go!” Leon demanded, banging the dashboard.

Ned drove away from Viking and the winged monster-man for a moment, before turning the car around in the car park. The turn was sharp and handbrake assisted. It probably looked like Ned knew what he was doing. He didn’t.

“Ned! Why have we stopped?” Monday asked, one arm on the top of the car and one leg against the door, to steady himself.

“We came here to save Viking. We *are* saving Viking!” Ned said, heroically, as he put his foot on the accelerator, aiming his massive four wheeled weapon at the monster-man.

Viking, choosing life, dived out of the way as the car came careering towards him. He had at first been rather worried when it drove away from him, but he was certain that Ned wouldn't leave him.

The car hit the man, head on, smacking him into the lamppost with enough force that it bent. The man was huge. His arms were wide enough to grab the car from each side. He pushed the car back and looked at Ned through the windscreen. Up close, the man's red eyes and pointed teeth added a whole new layer of horror to the already terrifying visage.

The man pushed the car with all his might. Ned put his foot on the accelerator again. The tyres screeched as the car and the monster were locked in battle. After a few seconds, the man screamed and spat blood at the windscreen. Ned turned on the wipers. The man shoved the car back, thrusting it away from him. Ned stopped accelerating and pulled the handbrake.

The winged wanker looked at him, doubled over in pain, the occasional spark still raining down on his gloriously chiselled face. He flapped his wings with obvious effort. After a moment, lifted into the air.

“What the fucking shit!” Leon screamed, scared half to death. Monday was pushing himself so far back into the rear bench seat that he looked like he may vanish into it at any second.

Ned cut the engine and flung open his door to get out of the car. He ran to his friend and hugged him.

“Viking you lunatic! Who did you piss off?”

Viking looked back, breathing deeply from his running and subsequent car-avoidance diving. He nodded gratefully and held out a hand with a finger up, indicating he needed a moment to get more oxygen into him.

Ned looked up the road, making sure no more monster-men were coming.

“Okay... I’m fine... yes. Thanks for the rescue,” Viking finally said, still panting like a dog after one heck of a walkies.

“Want to fill me in then?” Ned asked. Still eyeballing the road suspiciously.

“Yeah, but we should *really* be driving,” Viking replied, finally getting back to his monotone self.

Ned nodded, fairly sure he could see something in the distance. It was too dark for him to be sure, but he was convinced that they were being watched.

Viking opened the passenger door and looked at Leon. “You’re in my seat,” he said sternly.

Refashioned

Viking refused to explain a thing until he had finished his large, all meat baguette. This took far less time than anyone expected.

“Bloody hell, Viking, you look like you’ve not eaten in a week!” Leon said from the back seat.

“If you puke on anyone, we’re having words!” Ned yelled as they drove, a little too fast, down the long empty road.

“What?” Viking asked.

“There’s precedent for it.”

Viking shrugged at this. Before downing a can of cherry cola in one hit.

He burped loudly and then launched into his story.

“Okay, so I know this is going to sound like I’ve been sniffing onions or something, but I swear it’s absolutely true...” he left a pause to give the group a long stern look.

“So, you remember last night, when we got drunk and painted you blue?”

Ned nodded. “I’m still slightly blue!”

“Well, that never happened.”

“What? I’m still blue, you pillock!” Ned parried.

“No, that’s a false memory, implanted into you, maybe by Neetu. I’m not actually sure.”

“Who the fuck is Neetu?” Monday asked.

“Well, see, it’s still vague, but it’s coming back slowly. We got drunk. Then... well, then shit went a bit wrong... and then they returned us to our lives as if nothing happened. It’s all a jumble, but I think this happens a lot. We’re not *just* binge drinking losers. Well, not all the time.”

“Don’t put me in that category! I have my own construction company!” Leon said indignantly.

“Leon, your construction company is three business cards that you made yourself and your only customer is you, and your shitty house!” Ned screamed. “Now let the man talk!”

“Thank you,” Viking said. “I didn’t go on a train to Scotland on purpose. I was trying to escape her, I think. Yeah, she was looking for you.”

Ned felt himself accelerate, as if it were suddenly far more important than it had been. “What does that mean?” he asked, gravely.

Viking put a hand on Ned’s shoulder. “Ned, I can’t remember all of it. They tried to wipe my memory like they did yours, when you fell and went blue. But buddy... A fucking horror movie alien wants to creep around inside your head.”

Ned went a little faster again. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

Viking, in an uncharacteristically animated outburst, reminded Ned that he just rammed a man with wings and should ‘stop acting like that was normal.’ After a moment to reset himself, he returned to his monotone ways.

“Neetu Ra-Fea, she’s this little big-headed elf looking bitch. She fucks with things around her. It feels like a dream, and she tries to keep you in them while she sniffs you out.”

Viking opened his second sandwich and began to eat. He was suddenly calm again. As if getting it off his chest was therapy for him.

Leon and Monday were stunned. They just sat in the back, quietly glancing at each other.

After a few minutes’ silence, Ned began his questions.

“Why am I blue?”

“I remember something about a daring escape from Neetu’s city-ship. And there was a fountain,” Viking said, still chewing.

“Okay. How do you know this?”

Viking thought for a moment. “We got separated. This flying pyramid got you, wiped your memory. Didn’t work on me, just sort of scrambled my brain for a bit. It’s all still pretty scrambled, so most of that may have been wrong.”

“Why didn’t it work?” Ned asked. Not sure how much of the story he believed.

“You pushed me out of the way of the gadget and I only got hit with a half zap. You got a double zap. I remember you were already blue, by then... Anyway, as I keep having to say, it’s all still a bit fuzzy.”

“And they just let us go?” Ned asked, wondering why this story was so oddly disjointed.

“Yeah. No idea why or how. It’s all bits and bobs. All I know is that we somehow got out, then she kept messing with reality and I couldn’t find my way home. I ended up on a train, then I spoke to you and got off at that town, and winged muscle men were looking for me in the streets. Then, well, now we’re here.”

Leon and Monday were now looking terrified, and still hadn't made a sound.



They had been driving in silence for a little while. Ned was digesting the information. He knew it was an insane, disjointed, and unbelievable story, but he also knew it was true. He couldn't quite remember it. It was like it was on the crest of his mind and he couldn't quite reach it.

He also thought about the odd things that had happened to him since waking up at his dad's house. The strange darkness in the pub, the tattoo that changed and the glimpse of some futuristic city he had seen at the petrol station. Then he thought of the woman Viking had described.

He knew it was true; he just didn't know what it meant.

He glanced in his mirror. Leon and Monday were sleeping, each leaning against their own door, jackets rolled up as pillows.

He glanced across to Viking, who was sitting rigidly in his seat. He was thoughtfully stroking his beard. Ned knew Viking well. He had been his best friend for years and he knew that when Viking was rubbing his beard, there was trouble ahead.

"Aliens, Viking?" he finally asked.

"Aliens, Ned," Viking nodded.

"You know how it sounds, right?"

Just as Viking was about to reply, there was a flash of light in the rear-view mirror. It was bright enough that it shone across the inside of the car.

"Ned, aliens!" Viking said with a fittingly Viking tone.

The light's pulse subsided, and Ned risked looking back through the mirror. There was no road behind him. In the mirror, it looked like the car was flying. Ahead of him, the road still came.

“What's going on?” he yelled, risking a head turn.

At the time, he failed to be concerned that his passengers in the back were not waking up. They were tranquilly sleeping, ignorant of the events.

Viking was already turned in his seat, looking back. All the rear windows of the car showed the same thing: space!

The two side windows and the windshield showed the nighttime road, long, dark and mundane. The wing mirrors also showed space. The front and back of the car were just in different locations.

There was a light behind, it was moving in spirals towards them. It was gaining on them. Ned accelerated.

“And that thing chasing us would be?” Ned asked, glancing over to Viking, pretty sure he knew more than he was saying.

“That would be a pickup-pod.”

“Can we outrun it?” Ned asked, optimistically.

“I was a little worried about this. I think they can track me somehow. And no.”

Ned slammed on the brakes and spun the car around in the road. The stars and space which had been behind the car stayed static. Rather than hitting the barrier, as they should have done, the car entered freefall through actual space. It was hard to describe the motion, but the car had essentially driven into space, disappearing from the road entirely and now powered by its own momentum alone, it was gliding effortlessly through the heavens, and towards the chasing white light.

Monday and Leon, still, somehow, snoring in the back.

“Well, I didn’t see that coming,” Viking commented, looking quite surprised by Viking standards.

The car, following the laws of physics, carried on going with the momentum it had when it left the road. The white light carried on spiralling towards it, though, thanks to the car’s change of direction, its precise arc caused it to sail straight past them.

In a flash, the road returned and Ned pulled the handbrake and spun it to an uncontrolled but definitive stop.

The moment the wheels stopped moving, he threw himself out of the car. Viking followed a moment behind. They lay on the road, looking back.

The car was lit, like it was under a spotlight for a moment and then consumed by the light. Ned and Viking turned away at its intensity. A moment later, it went dark. They looked back and there, at the end of a long series of skid marks, was, no car. It was gone.

“Viking!” Ned yelled. “Did Leon and Monday just get abducted by aliens?”

Viking pulled a baguette out of his pocket and sat, cross-legged on the floor. “Looks like it, yeah.”

Misbuttoned

“Viking, you bloody boulder! How are you so calm?” Ned ranted, hands on head, pulling at his hair in a wave of anxiety.

“What’s the big deal? This happens a lot, doesn’t it?”

Ned stopped pacing and panicking and looked at Viking with a combination of aghast and confusion. “No Viking! Our friends don’t get abducted by aliens ‘a lot.’ This is literally a fucking first! Also, that was my dad’s car! What the fuck are we going to do?”

Viking finished his bread and meat baton and stood up, as if with purpose. “Well, Ned. This sort of thing does happen a lot. My memories are fried, but yours are wiped. Trust me, this is pretty normal for us. Give it a few more minutes and someone will be along with some nonsense story and give us a ride.”

“Viking, have you lost your fucking mind?” Ned asked. Now well into the realms of annoyed.

“No. Ned. Honestly, I’m a bit scrambled, but this isn’t that unusual for us!” Viking started ruffling his beard, realising he had crumbs in it.

Ned was astounded by Viking's casual demeanour. He still had that feeling that all this was somehow familiar, but he couldn't make any sense of it.

"Fine!" Ned finally said. "Lets just do it your way then. Should I take a seat or stick a thumb out for a passing space train?"

Viking grinned at him. "See, it's in there somewhere. You remember the train!"

The surrounding wind picked up suddenly. Viking and Ned found themselves in a spotlight, like the one the car had been in. Ned steeled himself to be abducted by aliens, like his friends, and his car.

After a few seconds, the light went off. The wind continued to rise. A blue light lowered next to them. A moment later, the light cut out and Ned could make out a shape in the darkness.

A smaller light appeared, and Ned could finally parse what he was seeing. Something had landed. The light was a door, or hatch opening.

"What's happening Viking?" Ned uttered.

"Told you," he replied with a grin, clapping him on the back. He nodded to the landed vehicle. "Come on. Oh, and don't eat anything!"



The man looked amazing; he looked so amazing that he almost looked computer generated, or created by a wizard.

He was tall and athletically built. He had a slightly tanned look, like he had just come back from a nice holiday. He sported a proudly bald head, which was so bald it was shiny. He had blue eyes and designer stubble. He was, somehow, pulling off the open-shirt and half-bare chest look. He was also wearing form hugging jeans and cowboy boots.

Ned was stunned by the man for a moment.

“Hey, gentlemen... I hope you don't mind me stopping by. I'm a little turned around here. Looks like the city-ship has scrambled the local map link. You wouldn't happen to know what planet this is, would you?” the beautiful man said.

Viking was grinning, so much so that he almost looked menacing. “Well, hi there! Just so happens we have a similar problem. That stupid ship just scooped up our car,” Viking hesitated at this. “Our shuttle,” he corrected. “If you could give us a ride up there, we would really appreciate it. Oh, and the planet's called Earth.”

The man nodded agreeably and waved for them to come into his ship.

Ned was stunned.

Viking put a hand on his shoulder. “From what I remember, the pretty ones, the cat ones and the vampires with nice suits are, like, so friendly that it makes them stupid. The ghosts and the elves are a pain in the arse though; the robots are hit and miss.”

Ned, in something close to shock at this point, giggled and said, “Of course they are!” strolling towards the shuttle.



Once they were inside, the shuttle felt more like a huge camper van than an alien vessel. They sat on a plush, soft, bench seat, next to a rather nice oak table which was bolted down. The man sat in what looked like a driver's seat at the front.

“You guys want a drink or anything?” he called back, as he flipped some switches on the panel above his head, where the rear-view mirror would have been, if this *were* a van.

Viking looked at Ned across the table, shaking his head vigorously.

“No, we're fine, thanks, sir,” Ned called back in.

“Call me Leo,” he replied as he pulled the steering wheel a little and the ship lifted effortlessly into the air.

“Viking?” Ned asked.

“Yes, Ned?”

“How did you know this was going to happen?”

Viking smirked. “Why do you think Neetu wants you, buddy? You’re a mayhem magnet. Like a literal, medically diagnosed attractor of weirdness. Shit like this is always happening to us. Well, *you*.”

“Oh,” Ned said, as he pulled back the little curtain next to him to look out of the window. He saw the Earth vanish behind them.

“You want some music on, gentlemen?” Leo asked.

“What sort of music do you listen to in space?” Ned wondered, aloud.

Leo laughed and hit a button next to him. Something that sounded like eighties country music blasted through the speakers, but the lyrics sounded like Shakespeare.

“Why the fuck is he speaking English, anyway?” Ned asked Viking across the table, voice raised a little over the music.

“No idea!” he replied, laughing. “They all do!”

Ned spent the next few minutes looking around at the camper-van-space-ship. It was stunning. Not only did it look exactly like a camper van, but it wasn’t even a particularly nice one.

“Oh, that didn’t take long,” Leo said over the music.

Ned and Viking crouched each side of Leo as the mother-ship came into focus. It was a truly massive tube with lights on it. As they got closer, the size of it became even more apparent.

The ship was enormous, so large that as they got closer, it filled the windows in every direction. The great ship was a tube with an outer wall that may have been a mile thick. It had lit windows all across it. Their comparatively tiny van-shuttle just flew right in.

“Oh, cool!” Leo said, looking at some information coming in through his console. “Whoever they are, they have a public gym and a lot of places to eat! Nice little pit-stop. I think I’ll just land and catch a ride back to mapped space. You guys okay from here?”

“Absolutely,” Viking said as the shuttle entered the city sized ship, casually flipping over to match the gravity of the upper area of the structure.

Ned looked out of the window, realising that the interior shell was all ‘ground’ in every direction. There was a large tubular light running down the centre of it. It was only a soft glow compared to the city below, which was oozing light and noise.

The end of the tube that they had entered from was simply open to space. As far as Ned could tell, while it was obviously moving, there were no engines on the tube.

“Why isn’t all the air getting out?” Ned asked.

Leo looked at him with a face that implied it was a stupid question. “Glass-shield. What else would it be?”

“Oh.”

Wakened

They were in something which Ned was sure would have had a name like ‘docking area’ or ‘shuttle long stay,’ but it looked suspiciously like a car park to him. There were no teams of people guarding anything or coming to refill the fuel, no engineers or drones in sight. There were, however, three more van sized shuttles and something that looked like a sports car without any wheels parked up next to them. The entire area was about as large as a football pitch, and the only sign in sight had a neon six on it. Maybe it was car park six, Ned concluded.

Not far away, over what seemed to be just a regular road, was a strangely normal looking city area. Buildings, shops, streets and people, a little too far off to identify. Ned considered he seemed to be standing on concrete... space concrete. He looked back in behind the shuttle and then to the sides. There was more city in every direction.

Leo locked up his shuttle and said his goodbyes. He wished them luck with finding their transport and ran off, gym bag over his shoulder.

“He was nice,” Viking said.

“Nice? We’re inside an alien city-ship with no way home and all you can say is ‘don’t eat the food’ and ‘he was nice!’ what the fuck is wrong with you?” Ned ranted.

“I don’t remember you being this grumpy!”

Ned shook his head, annoyed, and started walking in the direction that Leo left.

“Where are we going?” Viking asked, following.

“Well, we have no idea where our car is, so I figure we should go find a map or something.”

“Good idea,” Viking said as an endorsement.

They walked through the streets for a little while. Ned had almost forgotten he was on a spaceship. The city was like any other. There were neon signs, traffic, people shouting and stumbling out of bars. The sounds of a real city filled the night-air. It even smelled like a city, though some scents were unusual, to say the least.

The people unnerved him, though. There were tall, winged people, short thin ones and occasionally a robot or, at least, that’s what they looked like to Ned. Some were little impish people rushing around and occasionally he saw people who looked ‘normal’ or, at least, human. There were more worrisome looking bug people and some cat fellas, too.

Ned was taking all this in his stride. He was a little freaked out, sure, but for reasons he couldn’t fathom, it all seemed quite natural to him. He knew he should be losing his damned mind. At the very least, he thought he should be concerned about how he would get home, or about his missing friends. He was just incredibly relaxed about it all.

He looked up to see the city curling back around above him, with the soft glowing light strip running down the centre. He spent a moment thinking about how that bloody great light was likely more advanced than anything the people of Earth had *ever* made.

“Hey, Viking... was it dumb to come here?” Ned asked his friend, after a few moments of silent walking, and some out of character reflection.

“Yep. But we’re on a freaking space city and we got to ride in a space-mans camper van. Got to be worth the risk, right?”

Ned couldn’t help but agree. The camper-van spaceship *was* cool.

Something reminiscent of a garbage truck cruised by on a cushion of blue light and tainted the air green as it did. The smell was oddly sweet and alluring, though it was likely left over space pizza and dirty nappies... but space nappies.

“Leo’s music was trash, though,” Viking added.

Ned was going to agree, his eyes following the garbage truck up the clean road, which was lit with purple pulsing arrows to denote its edges. A lady, well, a lady-like bug person, was smoking in the road, holding a bin bag and waiting for the truck to pass so she could toss it in. She was talking to a floating screen that was coming from her arm. *It was a garbage truck!*

It was then that something oddly familiar was overheard from her. “...And then the little monkey said, I’m in construction... Something about being the one and only... well, no, I just wanted him to go away!” she said to the fuzzy screen.

Ned and Viking looked at each other and almost ran to the woman, bug, whatever it was.

She looked at them confused for a moment and said, “I got to go Ta’ra. There are more monkeys here.” With that said, she flicked her long skeletal arm, and the screen vanished. She tossed her bag into the passing truck and looked at them with a large, *almost* human face. The eyes were too big, and the skin was layered plates of something distinctly bug-ish. Ned was sure that this *was* a woman, though.

She was wearing a pink fluffy bathrobe, which was open to show her naked bug body underneath. Ned and Viking had no way of knowing if this was normal or not. Ned did not find the site particularly alluring.

“Miss, err, space miss. Did you say ‘the one and only’?” Ned asked, wondering how to address a big bug.

“I’m called Miscx, and yes, I did meet a monkey who said that. Why?” she asked, putting the cigarette back in her pincer-like mouth hole.

“Well, misxxscuss... bug miss, do you know where he went? We lost our two friends and our car and we’re worried about the car!” Ned asked, a little frantic.

Viking raised an eyebrow at him.

The lady raised an eye... bone, in return, and made a clicking sound that could have been chuckling, or a battle cry. Though with a pink fluffy bathrobe on, it wasn’t particularly intimidating.

“Miscx, and yes. The silly monkey was with another one, a sickly looking little chimp. He kept hitting on me and complaining about being hungry. The other one needed to urinate, smelled like he already did, to be honest with you.”

Ned and Viking, being excited to talk to a bug, pressed her for more. “Do you know where they went, Miscx?” Viking asked.

“Did they have a car?” Ned followed up.

She finished her cigarette and ate the butt. “I got sick of listening to them. Told them where the public loo was, and gave them directions to the buffet plaza. Stupid monkey thought you had to pay for food. Idiot.” She pointed down the road and added, “Third left. Stop when you smell roast spider-horse.”

“Thank you, mistxrez,” Ned said, heading down the road cheerfully.

Viking glanced down at the woman's bare bug torso and then back to her eye clusters.

"If you change your mind about monkeys, let me know, Miscx."

"Oh, you're a charmer, aren't you?" she said, waving him away. Her exposed midsection glowing green suddenly.



"I hope they are still there," Ned said as he rushed down the road, past all the alien people, neon lights, and suspicious robots.

"If they ate the food, they will be!" Viking assured him.

"What is this about the food all the time?" Ned asked. "Actually, come to think of it, I am pretty hungry."

"I'll explain when we get there," Viking said serenely as they took the next left, as instructed.

The built-up city area opened into a wide, open space, which looked to be a public park. There was a large grassy area with a massive white gazebo in the middle, next to a fountain. It all looked very nice, aside from the grass being purple and the water in the fountain being a neon, glowing blue.

"Wow," Ned said with a now relatively sedate awe. He considered that he may have had awe-fatigue. Seeing so much that he never even imagined, and all on the same day. It was wearing out his ability to be 'gobsmacked' by anything.

"Oh, shit, Viking, that smells great!" Ned said as the aroma from the tent suddenly hit his nostrils.

"What's the one thing I said, Ned? The one bloody thing?" Viking reiterated sternly.

They began to stroll towards the odd park in the midst of the neon glowing city.

As they got closer, they began looking out for signs of their friends. Well, Viking did. Ned was looking out for the car.

There were a bunch of mostly human looking people lounging around on picnic benches and some floating drone looking orb-thing zipping about. It was blue and looked a bit like a beach ball. Nothing they could see looked particularly dangerous, or even concerning.

“Okay, that does smell amazing. Why shouldn’t I eat the food?” Ned asked.

“Most of my memories seems to be back now and you don’t eat the food because it’s so good, you won’t ever want to eat anything else ever again... Except the horse-spider, that seems gross and someone said it was likely deadly to monkeys.”

“So, I shouldn’t eat it because it’s good... right, thanks for that Viking!” Ned said, shooting him an annoyed side-eye.

“Okay, just wait and see... Let’s see if I was right!” Viking replied with a slightly less monotone than usual voice.

There were some sounds coming from the tent. They had arrived just in time to witness a ruckus. Ned and Viking exchanged some excited glances as someone was thrown out of the large white tent. This wasn’t ‘thrown out’ in the sense that they were asked to leave. This was ‘thrown’ out. The figure flew through the air and splashed into the fountain.

Ned and Viking dashed towards the action just in time to see a huge, jacked tower of a man walk out of the tent. The man had long, free flowing black hair, pale almost white skin and blood-red lips. He was wearing a white vest and jeans. Despite the lack of wings, the man looked very much like the monster-man who attacked them back when they still had a car.

“Shit,” Ned said with shock.

Viking glanced over to the fountain just in time to see Monday stick his head up from inside the large stone bowl.

“Ned!” he said, pointing at the small, wet idiot.

The Monster-man strode towards the fountain with purpose, and it didn't look like that purpose was friendly.

Given the few moments he had to make a decision on a course of action, Ned felt it was a good idea to step in the way of the man and simply look at him. Had he been the wielder of even a single extra second to consider this, he would have realised that this was a stupid thing to do.

The monster-man looked at him and snarled. “Settle down, mate,” Ned commanded with great authority.

The man looked confused for a moment before his expression changed, suddenly looked more purposeful, and less randomly violent overall.

“You are the Ned?” the man asked.

Ned, not knowing why he would possibly be known to this bison of a man, raised his eyebrow and replied, “No, my name is Monday.” He then pointed at the fountain and sheepishly said, “That's Ned.”

The man looked at him dubiously. “Cunning! You *are* the Ned!” he accused and lunged at him, trying to grab him with his massive hand.

Ned, being very cunning, stepped backward in order to dodge the less than elegant grab. In doing so, he stumbled and fell back a little; tripping over his own feet, he fell to the floor, landing on his rear. The attacker lunged forward towards him. A moment before his hands grabbed him. He was stopped mid-motion. Not that Ned would have noticed, given that he was already covering his face in terror.

A moment later, a metallic blue beach ball rolled to a stop next to Ned. The man turned to look back at what had caused this to happen.

“You threw a drone at me?” he yelled.

Ned scrambled to his feet and looked around the man. There was Viking, looking quite heroic, having just thrown the ball-drone, presumably. The drone sparked and complained for a moment before lighting up again, this time a flickering blue. It sped away under its own laboured power.

“Well, at least it’s not dead,” he mumbled to himself. He realised he was still in danger and ran towards the fountain, to Monday.

Contravened

Ned grabbed his small friend by the scruff of his neck and pulled him out of the blue water.

Dropping him on the purple grass.

“Thanks!” Monday said, getting his breath. “Blue... water... is... heavy!” he added.

Ned raised an eyebrow and checked that the Monster-man was not coming his way.

He was still striding towards Viking, who looked far less worried than he perhaps should have done. Ned took a moment and peered in closer to inspect the water.

The water was blue by virtue of glowing ‘wiggly things’ in it. He put a hand in and took a scoop of it. Sure enough, it really was heavier than water should have been, and the glow faded as the tiny, almost invisible ‘wigglers’ escaped with the drippings from his palm. Leaving plain old water. Ned looked at his hand and flicked the water off. It was dyed blue, as blue as it had been when he woke up ‘painted.’ He looked over at Monday, who was, surprisingly, not at all blue.

“Huh?” he commented to himself.

He shook off his concern and helped Monday to his feet. “Where’s Leon?” he asked.

Monday ignored the question; he was transfixed on the Monster-man. “He’s going to kill Viking!” he yelled, pointing like an extra in an action movie.

Ned, wasting no time, slapped the little idiot and dragged him by the hand towards the tent. It was at that point that he realised everyone else, the mostly human-looking rabble, were watching the events unfold, greatly entertained. No-one was interested in attempting to stop the action.

The man pulled back his mighty arm to punch Viking, who deftly stepped aside. While the monster-man was obviously powerful, even Viking’s huge form was nimble enough to avoid the telegraphed attack. Viking was literally side-stepping every punch effortlessly.

“Really, Monday, you let that bloody idiot get you?” Ned said judgingly.

“You didn’t do any better!” Monday parried, accurately.

“Alright, good point. Where’s Leon?” he asked as they entered the tent.

There were a handful of people in there. Some were lizard looking, two cats and an oddly tall woman having dinner. A serving counter was at the back with a naked insect man serving. Well, he was naked aside from the chef’s hat, obviously.

Ned noted that the man was the same species as the woman he had met earlier, with the pink dressing gown.

He looked around to see a figure at the end of the serving bar on a stool. Sure enough, there was Leon, eating a burger. And by the looks of the pile of empty plates next to him, it was not his first.

“Leon, you goblin!” Ned yelled as he walked over. The other people in there glanced at him and went back to their polite conversation.

Leon looked back, waved and returned to his burger. The naked chef brought over another plate of fries and handed them to him. He looked very entertained.

“You survived!” the chef said, looking at the still dripping wet Monday.

“Yeah, I think I almost had him!” he replied.

Ned sighed and shook his head. “Seriously, what is wrong with you? You realise you were abducted by aliens, right?”

The chef looked over and made a clicking sound that Ned was pretty certain was chuckling. “Aye, mate, there are worse places to be stranded. We got the best food on the flight path and free parking!” His accent was oddly northern, which was unexpected.

“Not really my point! But good to know that when I do find my car, it likely won’t be clamped,” Ned said in sarcastic reply.

The chef click-chuckled again.

Ned realised that Leon hadn’t looked up from his plate since they initially found him. “What’s wrong with him anyway?” he asked.

Monday sighed. “Turns out the food may be a bit addictive. Chef Klizakz says he should get it out of his system in an hour or so when he passes out.”

Ned pointed at the chef, “Klasks?” he queried.

“Klizakz. Head chef,” he replied with a little bow.

“The food really addictive?” he asked.

Klizakz shrugged and clicked in a thoughtful way. His insectoid facial pincers tapping together for a moment. “Not really, but Monday said you never came to space before, so I doubt your planet has most the spices I used. It’s just so good he can’t stop. I’ve seen it before. He’ll pass out and feel like shit for about a week.”

There was a scream from outside the tent.

“Oh, shit, I forgot about Viking!” Ned said. “Monday, stay here, and don’t eat anything!”

Chef Klizakz made a slightly sad sound at hearing this.



Ned ran out of the tent to see Viking standing on the monster-man’s back and pulling on his arms, like he was some kind of monster sled.

“How the heck did that happen?” Ned mumbled as Viking waved at him gleefully.

The blue drone came back with two other drones, these ones were like floating pyramids and the edges had red and blue lights on them. They began spinning around Viking. After a moment a blue sparkling shield appeared over him.

“Wow, Ned! I’m getting arrested by little space ships! How cool is that?”

A pyramid drone turned around and floated closer to Ned. A little cattle prod looking stick popped out of the side.

“Stand back, sir.” It warned as pulsed its lights at him.

He put his hands up and backed away.

A blue tinted light shone down from above. Ned looked up. It was being projected down from the central lighting column above. The light zipped around for a moment before centring on Viking. It seemed to calibrate until it was pretty much perfectly around him. It then pulsed into a more solid looking shield and Viking lifted off the monster-man shortly before he too lifted off. After a second of hovering, they were simply blinked away up the tube. Ned heard a monotone “Weeeee” as Viking left.

The drone lights dimmed again, and they turned to leave.

“Excuse me! Space officer!” Ned said, now feeling safe to approach the drone.

“Yes?” it said with mechanical hissing.

“That was my friend. Where’s he been taken to? We’re new here. I’m not sure we’re even supposed to be here.”

The two other drones floated away, but the one Ned was talking to moved a little closer to him. “You come from that backwards planet with all the water and pollution?” it asked.

“Yeah, Earth!” Ned replied.

“Ugh, I don’t work for social services. Find an elevator and head to ‘Centre Two’ tell them you were snatched and they’ll drop you back. Happens all the time.”

Ned nodded, trying to remember ‘Centre Two.’ “That monster-man attacked my friend and I. He was just defending himself.”

The pyramid drone started floating up and away, but it called back. “Whatever. He’ll be out in an hour or so, once we check the cameras.”

A moment later, the drones had vanished in the pale moonlight of the central column.

There was a vague horn sound from the sky, and the central light increased in brightness suddenly. Ned managed to look away just before it dazzled him.

He walked back into the tent.

Monday was sitting next to Leon, now also in an eating trance.

“For fuck’s sake, Monday! What was the one thing I said?”

He chuckled, realising he now sounded like Viking.

“Well, Klizakz, my buddy has been arrested and taken to the sun. Also, someone turned up the lights outside.”

Chef Klizakz nodded. “Yeah, we only have the two brightness modes. Apparently the thing that makes it gradual is screwed. They sound a horn, so no dumbass looks at it.”

Ned rubbed his eyes.

“No offence.”

Ned grinned. “I’m starving. Is there anything you got that won’t turn me into a food zombie?”

Klizakz clicked. “Toast is pretty safe, mate.”

Ned sat down next to his friends and managed to resist the scent of perfect food while he waited for his toast.

Jettisoned

Ned strolled out of the tent with a belly full of the best toast he had ever eaten. He had also drank the best tasting water he had ever encountered.

He *was* very curious as to how good the actual meals were. Klizakz had promised him it was worth it to find out, but after watching Leon and Monday eat until they threw up and passed out in the tent, he decided to ‘just imagine it’ instead.

Between frantic face stuffing and noises of joy, Leon and Monday had managed to explain that they woke up in the car. A small woman with a big head lost her shit with them for not ‘being the Ned’ and pulled a gun. They ran away and got thoroughly lost before they eventually met Miscx, where for reasons that baffled Ned, Leon started hitting on her. She told them about the food tent to make them go away, by the sounds of it.

Ned knew that they had come down the same road that he and Viking had, and he knew that he had to kill an hour or so before Viking would be out of drone jail, so he had decided to re-trace his steps until he encountered an elevator to ‘central something or other.’

He hadn't remembered the hill back to the city street being so steep, but he was also not full of toast when he had walked down it.

The city was strangely less alien by day than it was by night. There were still aliens and floating cars and terrible Shakespearian dance music playing all over the place, but with the light from above obscuring his view of the sky, which he knew contained more ground, it felt like any other big city.

To be honest, the last time Ned had travelled to London, it was probably filled with just as many freaky looking people as this place was. And, oddly, this place felt a lot safer than London had. Though it was hard to worry about being mugged when the food was free, and you likely still couldn't afford it.



He was deep in thought, and on some level, enjoying his stroll, when an unexpected and familiar voice startled him. "Come on, son, time to stop this silliness."

Ned almost jumped out of his skin at the voice. There was no way his dad was on this ship with him. He looked around in search of the source. As he did, he felt the world switch and morph around him. Suddenly he was standing in his dad's living room, the old man in his usual chair. The screen showed some racing game on it, paused.

Ned took a step towards the armchair. His dad looked at him, scratching his moustache and looking slightly annoyed.

"And what silliness would that be then, dad?" Ned asked, sheepishly.

His dad sighed and turned off the television with his ostentatious remote control. He stood up and picked up his empty coffee cup.

As he walked into the kitchen, he said, "All this alien business. Someone spiked your drink, and you walked home with your mate, Viking. You got in a fight with some kids and

they spray-painted you blue and ran off. Ned, it was days ago. I get it, you got really fucked up. Does not mean you got abducted by bloody aliens, son.”

Ned was shaken by what he heard. He looked down at his blue hand and then back at his dad, who was in the kitchen. The story fitted the evidence almost perfectly.

“And Monday? Where’s Monday?” He asked, looking at his dad.

“That’s right, son, it happened on Sunday night. It’s Thursday now. You took a few days to get copasetic after getting spiked. I don’t know where all this alien city stuff came from. You’re not good at getting drugged.” His dad paused and looked back at him from the kitchen doorway. “Or you’re fantastic at getting drugged. I mean, I’ve never thought I was in space!”

Ned looked at his blue hand again, feeling suddenly confused. He pulled out his phone. Battery was dead, as usual.

He sat on his dad’s couch and sighed. Had all this been a dream, or a drug induced nightmare? He really hadn’t considered that he was having a hallucination. Given what had happened in the pub, and the Snack-Fuel-Refresh, maybe he should have.

His dad passed him a sausage sandwich on a plate and put a cup of coffee down on the table next to him. “Eat up lad,” he said as he flopped down in his armchair and picked up a newspaper.

Ned smirked.

“Yeah, I bet this sandwich will make it all better, aye dad?”

His dad smiled and nodded comfortingly.

It did smell great. Ned put it down next to him on the couch and looked at his blue hand for a moment.

“Thing is, you did a great job. But, you made two mistakes, you little imp woman,” Ned said with his smirk turning into a gleeful grin.

“What are you talking about, son?” His dad asked.

“Well, the thing is, my dad would sooner burn in hell than turn off that TV and talk to me. Literally never once in my entire life has he spoken to me without looking at a shitty box on the wall.”

His dad raised an eyebrow and rubbed his moustache again.

“And he sure as shit wouldn’t even own a newspaper. Actually, thinking about it, I’m not totally convinced he even knows what one is.”

His dad looked angry now.

“I assume the sandwich is real, though. That the plan? Get me into a food frenzy so you can come scoop me up while I’m sleeping it off?”

His dad clapped. “So, this is the mighty Ned then, is it?” he said with an almost evil glint in his eyes.

“Nice that we’re finally getting to know each other, dad,” Ned smirked. The moment his smirk left his lips, he realised the gravity of what was happening. How was he so calm, how was he so confident, and, most of all, how was he being so cool?

His dad stood up, with a lot more spring in his step than Ned had seen before. Ned forced himself to stay focused. She was messing with his perceptions. He knew she would do this. This was what Viking was rambling about with half a memory when they first picked him up. This was the woman he had been warned about.

“You were in the pub, weren’t you?” he asked.

His dad sat back down again, slowly. As he did, he morphed into a small woman with a large head. This was the woman he had seen in the pub and outside of the petrol station.

“Fuck off!” Ned said, standing up, and stepping toward the door.

“What do you think you are doing, you dick head? You can’t just leave, I’ve got you trapped!” she said with a snarl in her voice.

Ned rolled his eyes. “Luv, I don’t know what’s going on, not really. But I do know that if you knew where I was, you wouldn’t be fucking around with tricks like this, would you?”

She screwed up her little face and growled at him in a way which was not at all menacing. Ned shrugged.

He put his hand on the door handle and looked back at her. “Actually, while I’ve got a second, why are you bothering me, anyway? And where’s my car?”

“Because I want to know how your power works! What else would I want from you?”

Ned was thoroughly confused now. “Look, you bobble headed weirdo, I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’m just looking for my car, my mates, and a way back to Earth.”

The woman screamed. Ned waved his hand in annoyance and left through the door. He blinked for a moment and realised he was standing in the road. A floating car went past him, tooting its horn. The driver, who was some sort of dog-man, barked at him out the window as it went past... though, thinking about it, it could have just been a regular dog who could drive.



Ned found his way back to the pavement just in time to see a familiar face. The woman, well, bug, Miscx came out of a doorway dressed in a leather jacket and boots. No trousers though, which looked odd.

“Oh, monkey!” She said as she lit a cigarette. “Did you find your annoying little chimp friends?”

Ned nodded. Pleased to see at least a vaguely familiar face. “Yeah, I did. They are in the food tent, eating themselves into a coma!”

She offered him a cigarette. He declined, politely. “That’s good. Now you can take them away, and I never have to see the little freaks again.”

The irony of a half naked bug woman wanting to be rid of ‘freaks’ made Ned chuckle. “Not yet, sorry. I still need to find my car, oh and my other friend got arrested by a drone.”

“Fucking drones!” Miscx yelled, waving her cigarette in the air. “Those little pricks pick you up for basically anything and make you wait around for hours before they let you go. Absolute pricks! Fuck them!” she said angrily.

“Wow, yeah! Preach!” Ned replied. “So, Viking will be okay then?” he asked, suddenly realising the underlying worry he had been ignoring.

“Why wouldn’t he be alright?” she asked, a little confused.

Ned shrugged.

“Honey, are you okay?” She put one pincer laden hand on his shoulder.

Ned felt himself awash with emotion, though he tried to keep himself looking stoic on the outside. “Well Miscx, some creepy little woman keeps trying to take over my brain. I lost my car and my friends. I was taken to space by a pretty cowboy in a flying van. Then, I found my friends and they are eating themselves silly. Oh, and my other friend says my mind was wiped, and it’s not the first time I’ve been abducted by aliens. Also, I was painted blue for some reason.”

There was a moments silence, then Miscx pulled Ned in close and hugged him.

“Aww, little monkey, shit like this happens all the time. Look, I’ll call work and tell them something came up. I’ll come help you get all this straightened out!”

“You will?” Ned asked, not only feeling oddly reassured but shocked at someone helping him.

“Sure, why wouldn’t I?” she asked.

Ned thought for a moment. Everyone he had met really had been very helpful. Actually, the only person who had been a dick was the little big-headed imp woman who he had only seen in his brain. Ned suddenly worried that she was imaginary.

Maintained

Miscx took Ned to a lift a little way from where they were talking.

“Do I have to pay a fine or anything?” Ned asked.

Miscx raised something on her face that Ned took to be a bug-woman equivalent of an eyebrow. “No. Why is it that every new species that comes to civilisation thinks they are going to get billed for everything? It’s so strange!”

Ned shrugged. “Where I come from, no one has ever given me free toast, not even once.”

“Well, you’re not on monkey world now, little guy. Press the button, or we’re going to be here all day.”

Ned pressed the button to summon the elevator. He considered for the brief moment he was pressing the button. This could have been an elevator button anywhere on Earth. Then he looked around as a flying car went past and Miscx called the driver something in a bug language. He looked at her, a little unnerved at her appearance.

The elevator pinged, and the door opened. A muscular man with no shirt on stepped out. He was holding a briefcase and seemed to be wearing a formal loin cloth.

“Morning,” he said, with a wink at Miscx as he stepped out of the carriage. Miscx clicked at him and shoved Ned in.

“Friend of yours?” Ned asked as the doors closed.

Miscx gave him a sideways glare and pressed a button on the wall. “Level two, Alien detainment.”

The elevator dinged in agreement, and there was a small rocking motion as it zipped upward.

“Fucking pricks, always trying to sleep with me. It’s like half the galaxy has the fucking horn,” she said with a grumble.

“Yeah, I mean, I don’t mean to be rude or anything, but I’m a little surprised,” Ned said. He thought for a moment. “Did you say my buddy Leon was trying to sleep with you too?” he asked.

“Ned, I know we have just met... but do you find me attractive?” Miscx asked, looking at him with an odd expression. At least, Ned thought it was an odd expression. He still couldn’t really read bug faces. To be honest, before he had arrived in space, he had never considered that bugs might have faces, not really.

“I don’t mean to be... I err... I mean, you’re an alien and I’m a monkey... apparently... and I’m not even sure how this would work and...”

Miscx started laughing loudly. “No fucking way! You can see me, can’t you?” she said, genuinely entertained.

“I mean, you’re pretty hard to miss!” Ned replied.

“Gimme a second. I’ll see if I can fix it,” she said, closing her eyes. Or at least that’s what it looked like. Ned considered that Miscx didn’t actually have any eyelids, but he knew she was closing them. He stared at her intently, trying to work out what trick was going on in his head.

She wiggled side to side and made sounds like she was reciting something. Reality shifted in a way that Ned thought was familiar, for a moment.

Miscx turned into a woman. A real, human woman, she was pretty and had short hair. She was dark-skinned and attractive. She wore baggy trousers and a crop top. She smiled at him for an instant before she morphed back into her bug-self. Though, Ned had some issues understanding if he was seeing this with his mind or his eyes. It was quite a strange feeling.

“What just happened?” He asked.

“Did it work? Can you see a hottie now?” she asked, sounding like she was straining.

Ned shook his head.

“No fucking way. I was projecting really hard then! How the fuck didn’t it take?” She asked, as if Ned was supposed to have some idea what she was talking about.

“You were a girl for a moment, then you turned back to normal.”

“And normal is?” she asked.

“Err, I mean, I don’t know if it’s rude, but normal is like... big bug.”

She grinned at him. He was aware that she was grinning, but she was still a bug. It was like there were two of her, one in his head and one in his eyes. Maybe there always had been, and he hadn’t thought about it.

“Ned, you fucking awesome monkey! You are literally only the, what, fourth person I have ever met who can see me! I mean, really see me!”

Ned felt oddly complimented.

The elevator dinged again, and the doors opened to a large and very busy room. It looked like a post office, queue and all.

“So, to everyone else, you're the cute girl?” he asked.

“Yes, well, no... Sort of. I'm something like their species' equivalent of the cute girl you saw, unless I don't want to be. Or I can be, like, a fucked up daemon woman, but that's for special occasions... and sometimes sex,” Miscx said, as if the comment were perfectly natural.

Ned stepped out of the elevator and looked around. There were people everywhere, and they all looked like they were thoroughly 'done' with whatever this place was. “So, where do we start?” He asked.

“Not sure. I think some people can just see through my projection is all. Not sure it actually means anything, it's just pretty cool, and you probably won't try to fuck me, which is a nice change,” Miscx said with a sparkle in her voice.

“No, I mean, finding Viking,” Ned said.

“Oh, right yeah. He was picked up. What, an hour ago, you said? Should check the 'out' room then. I think it's down the hall, this way,” she said, almost as a ramble, beckoning Ned towards the corridor she was heading towards.

She was also doing something with her floating screen, which Ned decided was the space version of doom-scrolling social media. Ned noted that he was definitely aware of how she was supposed to look to him, but he just couldn't reconcile it with what his eyes told him. He decided not to think about it and followed her.



After a few minutes walk they arrived in an open area, it was far less bustling. There were five rat-like people in overalls sitting suspiciously in the corner of the large, well-worn room,

which was filled with seats, like a hospital waiting room, but from the eighties. The rats eyeballed Miscx as she and Ned walked in. They looked oddly hungry. At least Ned understood the looks that she was getting a little better now.

They headed to the empty reception desk and Miscx pressed a bell.

“Do they know you aren’t what you appear?” Ned asked, interested in how her disguise worked.

“It’s not like I’m lying to them. I can make the projection more alluring if I concentrate, but it’s just what happens. It’s biology. There’s no reason to point it out. I mean, it’s not really anyone’s business, is it?”

Something was *bugging* him. He considered if that was a pun and asked his possibly rude question. “Yeah, but how does it work? If you did sleep with someone, do the bits line up?”

Miscx rung the bell again and raised an eyebrow at him. Something Ned was realising she did a lot. “Your brain extrapolates an awful lot. Trust me, no one would notice. Well, unless I forced the demon face out mid-coitus.”

A door opened behind the counter and a large winged monster-man in an official suit stepped out. Ned almost leaped back in shock. This was the same species of monster who had attacked their car, and similar to the one who got Viking thrown into jail.

The man glared at Ned in response and a hand went to his side, presumably where he kept a weapon. The man had powder white skin and red lips. He was very similar in build to the first monster-man that Ned had seen. Miscx once again raised an eyebrow. She leaned over the desk and her tone changed.

“Well, hello officer! Excuse my friend, he’s an abductee from a planet we passed a few hours ago.”

The police beast-man relaxed and looked at Miscx with the expected interest. “Oh no, I’m sorry to hear that. Does he need help?”

Miscx grinned and played with her hair, which Ned couldn’t see. “Yes, he does. And that’s what we’re here for. His friend, a bigger monkey, got picked up by drones for a scuffle at the park, district twelve.”

The man flicked his wrist, and a screen appeared above a bracelet. He made some gestures like he was scrolling a long list and then did a mid air pinch zoom. He looked over at Ned and then back at the screen. “Ah, I see.”

There was another moment’s silence before he flicked his wrist again, and the screen vanished. “I know you’re new here, monkey, but you can’t judge everyone by their species.”

Ned raised his own eyebrow.

“My species is called *vampire*. Your buddy was causing a ruckus in the park. Yelling about the ‘monster bastard.’ Bit racist, but not a crime.”

Ned decided not to get annoyed at being called ‘monkey,’ while being told off for racism.

“Wait, you’re a fucking vampire?” Ned asked, as the realisation sunk in.

Miscx turned to face him, with her elbows on the counter behind her. She mouthed, “*Shut the fuck up,*” at him, though he wasn’t sure how he knew, from her pincer-like face. She leaned backwards, presumably so that the fucking vampire could see right down her top. Ned admired her weaponised flirtation.

The vampire flushed a little less white and coughed politely. Miscx grinned and turned around to face him. “So? His lil’ buddy?”

The man suddenly remembered himself and straightened his already straight uniform. “Yes, miss, if you would care to take a seat, I’ll have him released to you now. No charges. The camera feed confirms that it was a minor incident.”

“Thanks,” Miscx said, strolling to the closest seat and sitting down with a predator’s intent.

Ned sat next to her. “That was awesome. You’re amazing!” he complimented. The moment the police-vampire was out of earshot.

“Yep, it’s like having a super-power,” she chuckled. “You know, what’s funny is that my species evolved to seduce and murder other races.”

“That’s fucked up, Miscx!” Ned said, feeling oddly unthreatened by the revelation.

“Yeah, don’t worry. Mostly we just work in sales now, which is sort of the same thing.”

Envisioned

After a few seconds of ethereal wind-chime sounds, Viking appeared in the middle of the room in a flurry of lights. He was looking around, quite entertained by the pretty colours.

“Viking!” Ned shouted and jumped up to hug his friend.

“Wow! You found me!” Viking replied, ignoring the hug.

Miscx stood up and looked at the pair approvingly. Arms folded with a sincere *‘that’s cute’* face pointed firmly at them.

“Are we done?” Viking asked. “Can we please go home now?”

“A nice chef is looking after Leon and Monday, you’re not arrested anymore. As soon as we find the car we can start looking for a way home. Assuming the big headed woman doesn’t get in our way again,” Ned said, ticking off his mental todo list.

Viking nodded. “Sounds great. Where do we start?” Viking stopped and looked over at Miscx. “Hey,” he said.

“Hey,” she said back, a glow coming from her exoskeleton torso.

Ned ignored the exchange. “So, Miscx, where do you think our car might be?”

They began strolling out of the room. Miscx waved to the rat-people as they left, they swooned appropriately as she did.

The three of them stepped out of the elevator. It had been decided that the best course of action was to check the shuttle parking area in hopes of finding a clue.

As they walked, Ned tried his best not to worry, but he was getting the feeling he would be stuck in space.



“Hey, Miscx, what’s this place for, anyway?” He asked.

“It’s a shuttle-park... we park shuttles here, my dude,” she replied.

“No, the city, ship, whatever it is. Where are we going? Why is it here?”

Miscx shrugged. “It does the circuit between the hub worlds. It hauls cargo, takes passengers, and is legally a planet of its own, so you can sell dubious things here, basically, within reason.”

“That’s cool,” Viking said, seemingly thinking about what she had said, though Ned was more convinced he wanted to appear to be thinking about what she said, while in actual fact he was thinking about her, generally speaking.

“So, how come you live here?” Ned asked.

“Well, when ships are big enough to need workers at the scale this one does, those workers usually need banks, schools, shops and bars. All those people need places to stay, live and somewhere to spend their hard earned cash. So, lots of massive ships like this, they just sort of evolve into worlds of their own, but worlds with a mission.”

Ned could see the logic. “What do you do for a job?” He asked.

“Oh, I use my special skills to sell booze to high end bars. I sell this wine that tastes like rocket fuel to posh wankers who drink too much and can afford to keep doing it.”

“A noble profession,” Viking said with a sincere grin.

Miscx laughed back. “Yeah, I suppose it is.”

Ned noticed Miscx’s lower regions glow again. He was a little grossed out at the implication. Miscx shot him a dagger filled look and went back to flirting with Viking.

“Well, do you recognise anything?” Miscx asked.

Ned and Viking were staring at a very familiar camper-van shuttle.

“Well, if we need a ride home, chances are, we got one, which is something,” Ned said, glibly, at the site of the van. “Not helping me find the car, though.”

Viking looked around at the rest of the sci-fi car park. It was a large, open, flat area of land with spray painted white squares to designate the edges of the ‘spaces,’ some of which were quite large. There were still only around half a dozen cars, sorry, ships, parked up.

Ned noticed Viking pondering things. He was still annoyed at the lack of progress, so he ignored the slab of a man.

Miscx looked a little bored and sat on the floor. She flicked out her wrist screen-thing and made the pointlessly engaged face that Ned knew quite well. She was playing a stupid video-game. His annoyance rose, though without any real cause or right. He sighed and ruffled his now greasy hair angrily. He began ranting at himself about how screwed up everything was. Miscx glanced up and smiled. Obviously less invested in his problems than he was.

“Hey, Ned,” Viking called from across the shuttle-car-park.

Ned ignored him and kicked the floor as if to teach it a lesson.

“Ned! Come over here,” Viking said again. This time, stern.

Ned ignored him again. He regretted not just staying in the pub and ignoring Viking’s accidental holiday.

“For the love of cheese, will you listen to me?” Viking said, now screaming at Ned.

Miscx looked on entertained as the two of them shouted at each other. She stood up and went to check what Viking was trying to show Ned.

After a few more seconds of shouting, Ned and Viking were both stopped mid-scream by the sound of an engine. An actual car engine. They turned to see the beautiful visage of the silver beast rolling around from behind the camper-van-shuttle.

“Wow! Miscx found the car!” Ned exclaimed excitedly.

“No! You bloody goon! I found it. That was what I was *trying* to tell you!”

Ned waved his hand dismissively and hugged the car. Which was now turned off as Miscx got out.

“You can drive a car?” Viking asked.

“Ha! It’s got wheels. It’s basically a kid’s toy.”

Viking nodded in agreement as a large shuttle passed overhead, as if to hammer home the point.

After some more, quite a few more, minutes of basically hugging the car, Ned managed to make sentences again.

“Wait, so it was here the whole time? Like, we could have found it just after we got here, if we were looking out of the side window, instead of the front one?”

His companions decided it was likely better *not* to answer him, but yes. Ned was right.

“Okay, let’s go get the guys and we’re outta here!” Ned finally said, deciding that there was no longer a reason to stay in space.

“Okay, let’s get back to Earth and find a pub!” Viking agreed.

They began marching towards the park and food tent when Ned realised that Miscx wasn't following them. He stopped and slowly turned around, already knowing what devastating point she would raise.

“This is a spaceship, monkeys. And we're doing a five-month loop around known space, with multiple stops. We're not going to be near your planet for... I don't know... *another five months!* And even then, you can't possibly be expecting to ride a fucking tin with wheels through space!”

There was a loaded silence.

“And come to think of it, you never told me how you got here! There is no way you got here in that thing. Actually, how did *it* get here?” Miscx added with a stern thoroughly confused bug expression across her face... and presumably a similar expression appeared on whatever face Viking was seeing.

“Reasonable points raised, I'll grant you that,” Ned said, hoping that somehow, it would all work itself out.

“How did we get home last time?” He asked Viking.

“Last time? *Last time!* This exact thing has happened before?” Miscx asked, now quite annoyed.

“So I'm told. I don't remember. Not really,” Ned replied, looking to Viking for answers.



Ned, Viking, and Miscx sat in what appeared to be a coffee shop, but the waiter looked like a snake with a moustache. He took the order and a large robot frog brought them over. The place was quite busy and most people were just ordering milk and cookies to go, strangely.

Miscx had convinced Ned and Viking that the coffee shop's signature beverage, coffee, was awful, hence likely 'pretty good' by their planet's standards. It was likely not good enough to send them 'nutty.'

"And that's how we met you," Ned finally finished recounting.

Miscx, who now knew exactly how they got to this point, was a little stunned at the series of events. "I thought someone picked you up as a prank. It happens all the time. I didn't realise you had a psychic stalker!" she mullied. "And you're sure the vampire who attacked you on your planet wasn't a native?" She asked.

Ned and Viking were amused at the very idea that a vampire, wings and all, could be native to Earth, and no one noticed, not ever. Well, maybe Bram Stoker noticed, but no one took ol' Bram seriously.

"So that's a definite 'no' then?" Miscx asked, annoyed at the laughter. "You know, I could have gone to work today. Instead of hanging out with you idiots."

"Why did you agree to help us, anyway?" Ned asked.

Miscx looked at Viking and her lower section glowed from under the table. "No reason, just seemed like the right thing to do was all," she said, taking a sip from her coffee cup.

"Riiight," Ned observed, dubiously.

She replied with an embarrassed glare.

"What do you think we should do then?" Viking asked.

Miscx thought about it and sipped at her coffee. "I don't know. I mean, you were abducted, twice. And from what you said, whoever did it attempted to wipe your memory. Thing is, as far as I know, that's not common technology. Whoever this woman is, she has cash or contacts. So you may not want to go to the police."

Ned nodded. “Can I get another coffee?” He asked. He felt bad that he had no money, but the coffee was really good.

Miscx nodded and waved at the robot waiter. Coffee was delivered.

“Will they take us home if I tell them?”

Miscx nodded. “Yes, but the ship does a loop. There’s nothing saying she won’t just get you next time it passes by. I would prefer to know why she wants you at all.”

Viking finished his coffee. “I think I remember most things from that first night now. She said that Ned was special. Has some power to ‘see the unseen’ or something. She seemed to want to take his brain, or at least, that was the impression I got.”

“That would make sense. Why she wanted to bring you here, the sort of technology to remove a brain, or parts of a brain, wouldn’t be something you could transport without paperwork.”

There was a pause as Miscx thought of something. “Wait, you can remember the first time now?” she asked.

Viking nodded as he started his second cup of coffee.

“Well... you moron, why don’t you tell us how you got home last time?”

Ned looked at Viking expectantly.

“Oh right, yeah. First time Neetu got us while we were at the pub. I think stuff like this happens a lot to us, but my brain is still fizzy. Anyway...”

Overtured

The music from the back room of the Trashcan was loud enough that it was leaking into the galley bar at the front of the building. Ned had already had enough of it and decided it was not worth going back there to find a toilet. Instead, he announced to his friends that he was too old for bad rock music and dancing around like a ‘fucking child.’ He then proceeded to fall down as he tried to leave the table.

“What are you moaning about?” Viking asked.

Monday was already passed out in the sticky beer drenched couch at the front of the pub. There were quite a few people in there, but most of them were travelling to the ‘party room’ at the back where there was modern sounding rock music, and half naked dancers. The back of the pub had the same vibe as a nightclub, while the front seemed closer to an old wine bar. It was an interesting juxtaposition of ideas which really didn’t work for anyone.

“I need a piss!” Ned finally shouted over the music, which peaked as someone opened the door to get to the bar.

Viking rolled his eyes, and though less steady than his sober self, was still very able to stand properly. He picked Ned up by the belt, ignored his complaints about his balls being crushed, and putting another hand on the back of his shirt, he kept him upright long enough to get to the outside, where the air promptly made him fall down.

A moment later, he was back on his feet and pissing up the side of the pub wall. Passers-by gave him disgusted looks but didn't bother him, because Viking was standing guard, looking like an angry doorman.

Something in the air changed as Ned stopped pissing. He looked around, wondering where everyone had gone. He was alone in the now silent nighttime air.



“Honestly, what’s happening Viking? You’ve turned from a no nonsense man-mountain into a fucking reader’s wife. What the fuck?” Ned ranted, taking another coffee from the robot server.

“I’m setting the scene, aren’t I?” Viking said, annoyed at the interruption.

Miscx was laughing to the point of crying. “Ned announced he was too old for rock music!” she said, wiping tears from her eyes as she endured the side stitching laughter.

“Do you want me to carry on or not?” Viking said, not at all amused by the mockery.

“Yes, carry on. But can you do it in a way that doesn’t make you sound like Edgar Viking Poe. please?”

Viking thinned his eyes at them. “Fine, just the key moments, then!”



The stupid, pissed up Ned, finished pissing on his shoes and realised he was alone.

He looked around like a gormless tit for a few minutes before trying to get back inside the pub. Though, from Viking's point of view, he was just standing in the street with his todger still out, looking around confused.

Viking, being a good friend, slapped him in the face. "Put your weapon away, man!"

Ned's lack of response to Viking's assault was enough to top him off. He knew something was amiss. He tried shaking Ned with no response.

In Ned's stupid baboon brain he was walking around the pub, wondering where everyone had gone, when he heard a sound, a sound from the back room. Ned, being a coward, cautiously entered the room rather than kicking its door in and getting ready to batter whoever was in there.

That's when he first met Neetu Ra-Fea. Space witch!



"Neetu Ra-Fea! the big-headed imp woman, is Neetu Ra-bloody-Fea?" Miscx asked, concerned.

She realised she had raised her voice. People were looking at her. The robot server beeped indignantly at her.

"Neetu Ra-Fea! Do you know who that is?" She asked, at a now more reasonable volume.

"Obviously I don't! I don't know anything!" Ned reminded her.

Miscx sighed, annoyed.

"Neetu Ra-Fea is the pirate queen of Central Prime! She's the most wanted Elf in known space, and probably, for real, the most dangerous person in the universe!"

"For downloading movies?" Viking asked, confused.

"Yeah, not that sort of pirate, Viking, mate."

Miscx slammed her claw-like hands on the table in an exacerbated outburst of concern. “Okay, Viking, get back to the story, and make sure you don’t miss anything!”

“But skip the boring stuff, also less of this baboon-brain crap, okay?” Ned added.

Viking continued.



Ned was honestly convinced he was in the party-room alone. He almost shit himself when he walked in there and there was a small, large headed punk woman floating in the middle of the room.

“The Ned!” She started strong. “I have been looking for you for a long time now. All I need you to do is stay here and my people will pick you up.”

Ned, being a coward, as was mentioned earlier, stood there stunned by what he was seeing. He fumbled with his pocket and pulled out his phone. Without saying a word, he called his friend, the stoic, epic, Viking.

Viking, who was still on the outside of Ned’s brain, was somewhat confused when his phone rang. Mostly because who the heck calls people? It’s not eighteen-oh-one! Anyway, there was a whole new layer of bafflement added when he looked at the screen and Ned’s stupid baboon face was on the screen.

“Hello, Ned?” He asked as he looked Ned in the eyes, confused.

“Viking, where did you go? I found a fucking fairy!” Ned replied.

“Yeah, I’m outside, with... you,” Viking said, wondering how drunk Ned had to be, in order to be in two places at once.

“No, mate, you’re just drunk. Get in here!”

Viking took a moment to consider his options before shrugging and heading inside.



“Oh My gosh! Were you inside his brain?” Miscx asked, interrupting him yet again.

“For fuck’s sake, Miscx! Will you please shut the fuck up and let the man speak!”

Ned said, genuinely annoyed.

“okaaaaay, sorrrry! I was interested. Is that a crime now?”

Viking looked at them both, now crossing the line into ‘annoyed as shit.’ He almost growled, he was so infuriated. “I’m going to skip over all the back story now, because apparently, neither if you respect my story telling arts.”

A vein in his temple throbbed. Ned considered that this was maybe the angriest he had ever seen Viking. The man took his story telling far too seriously.



Viking ran into the pub. No one was there. Ned was in the back room. There was a floating woman who said something about us looking alike and how we needed to stand still, so she didn’t get us confused. We ignored her and waved our arms around, trying to figure out how she was doing the flying trick. She said we were annoying and then one white flash later; we were here, on this ship, not in this cafe.

One thing lead to another. There was a long conversation, some more fighting which apparently you don’t want to hear about, but Viking was amazing. Eventually, we ran off. You fall into the fountain and we met some strange woman who helped us out. We spent a few hours looking for a way home when we end up taking a train to see the end of the big tube and look into space. Space was cool.

Neetu turned up then did a runner. We were left with her muscle men. There was more fighting. Again, it was epic, if you care.

Eventually, they tried to zap me with this light gun. You jumped in the way and it got you full on in the face. I got like the tail end of it and then I was on a train. No idea how I got

there. I think they implanted some vague memories that made no sense. Then, well, then you know what happened.



“What do you mean ‘some strange woman’?” Ned asked. Noticing the oddity in the story.

“Well, my memory is still a bit fuzzy, but there was some woman. She was nice. She helped us,” Viking said, not really understanding what the issue was.

“Viking, you fucking muffin. What are the odds on us coming to space and meeting a strange and helpful woman, twice, two bloody times in a row?”

“Guys,” Miscx said in an attempt to interrupt.

“Sorry, Ned, but I can’t help it if I’m so charming that women just *want* to help me when they see me!”

“Guys!” Miscx tried again.

“What, you’re not charming at all, you monotone panda! You have all the charisma of a chest freezer!”

“Guys!” Misc repeated with an increased volume.

Viking began ranting about how the story may have made more sense, had he been allowed to recount it properly, when Miscx lost her temper. As she did, her projection changed. From Ned’s point of view, Miscx had leaned forward slightly and began looking around, sticking her head out a little and saying the word ‘grrrrr, rawer’ like a bit of a plonker. While Miscx was initially odd looking to him, he had come to think of her as a ‘funny bug lady’ and wasn’t particularly unnerved by her.

Viking, on the other hand, was so scared that he almost pissed himself, which, for a man who was over six feet tall and literally built like his namesake, was something of an

unusual response. Usually, he would just punch things that scared him. In this case, he grabbed his seat, leaned back and started sobbing in fear.

The coffee shop emptied as people screamed and scrambled for the door. The robot server shook in the corner and Ned could have sworn that the plants on the counter wilted a little.

Ned looked at Viking, then back at Miscx. She was now panting and adding the occasional ‘argh’ to her ‘grrr’ and ‘rawer.’ Ned sipped his coffee.

“Knock it off Miscx, it’s just silly,” Ned said, somewhere between entertained and bored.

Viking watched as the demonic fire that was emanating from Miscx dimmed and the alien, contorted face of a burned corpse faded back to the more pleasing silky brown he was used to. The dead eyes slowly filled back into the skull. The demonic screams also faded until, finally, Miscx sat down, looking quite annoyed.

“Get out!” shouted a voice from the back of the room, a cowering robot which was hiding behind the counter, ducked down in fear. “We don’t serve Sirens! You have to leave!” came the nervous voice, which sounded slightly distorted.

“Ugh!” Miscx groaned, Come on. Let’s go retrace your steps, then.

Ned necked his coffee and stood to leave. Viking was still pressed back in his seat. Not at all okay.

Ned raised an eyebrow at him. “Get it together, big guy! You never seen an angry woman before?”

Deadpanned

The three of them briskly walked down the hill, away from the coffee shop, and the disturbance, which would, Miscx informed them, most likely result in a police drone visit.

She informed them she would ‘screen’ her buddy in the food tent to check that Monday and Leon were still passed out. She stepped away a little and pulled out her wrist-screen-phone-thing to call, sorry, ‘screen’ the bug chef.

“How are you so calm?” Viking demanded, being careful so that Miscx couldn’t hear him.

“What?”

“You just sat there while she became a literal flaming demon! How can you be so calm knowing what she is?” Viking said, eyeballing Miscx carefully.

“I’m pretty sure that, that, is racist, Viking. That is not cool!” Ned replied. “Besides, she isn’t a demon, really. It was just a projection thing she can do if she gets annoyed.”

“You knew about it?”

“Yeah. I know all about her pretend shape shifting thing. It’s cool!” Ned said, waving at Miscx, who turned away, so she didn’t have to look at him.

“Cute! Cute! Ned, she looked like evil, if it had a face, and she growled like she was going to eat my fucking soul!”

Ned rolled his eyes. “Ugh, it’s just a projection thing. Honestly, don’t give it a second thought! Just pretend she’s her normal bug faced self!”

Viking looked at him with disbelief. “Bug faced? Dude, she’s gorgeous! When she’s not a monster.”

“Yeah, I think she likes you. Did you notice the glow?”

“What are you talking about? She’s cold as ice and way too cool for me! Also... monster face.”

Ned shrugged. “You know, she can do that during sex.”

“What’s wrong with you?” Viking said, ending the conversation just in time for Miscx to come back. As she did, a police shuttle glided past.

“Time to go!” she said. They resumed their brisk walk through the strange city, and away from the police.

“Okay, so what I was trying to say back there, when you idiots wouldn’t shut the heck up, was that Neetu is a very high-profile criminal, as apposed to a *convicted* criminal because she’s an imp.”

“Imp. Right, that’s bad,” Viking added, pointlessly.

Miscx ignored him. “Imp’s are a very rare kind of elf.”

“Elf,” Ned added, pointlessly.

Miscx ignored him. “An imp is an elf who can do... Well, no one actually quite knows. It seems like they can mess with your mind.”

“That’s a fact!” Ned confirmed.

“That sounds made up,” Viking noted.

“Yeah, they are rare and not very social, so no one really knows. It’s probably a genetic trait.”

“Like being able to have a demon face?” Viking asked, instantly acting uncomfortably.

“Yeah, exactly like that. Sorry about that, by the way.”

Viking shrugged. More proud that he was *actually following* the nonsensical science fiction pseudo-explanation of imp powers. He and Ned independently compared it to comic book mutants.

“So, what did they zap me with?” Viking asked.

“I don’t know. Most people are smart enough to keep away from wanted criminals, Vik.”

“Okay, so where are we going?” Ned asked.

“Well, I figure Viking and you got off the city once. We just retrace what he remembers and see if we can figure out how you did it the first time.” Miscx said, marching on.

Ned and Viking fell behind a little and looked at each other. Each wondering if the other was going to ask what she was talking about. After a momentary standoff, they raced after her.

“Where are you going?” they both asked.

“Something Vik said in his little epic back there. I think I know the place he was trying to tell us about. So, we’re going to ride the train!”



“Is this the place?” Miscx asked, as they got off the train.

Viking looked around. They were at the literal edge of the city. They stood looking out into the open space. The train left the station, back the way it had come. The city ended in front of them, open to space. There wasn't even a wall between them and the outside. There was a ship, coming towards the opening, silently. As it passed into the massive tubular city, it started making growling aeroplane sounds, or at least something akin to an aeroplane, but with a more electrical under-note.

“How does this work?” Ned asked in awe, as the ship flipped over and vanished as it passed between them and the daylight-tube, presumably to land on the opposite side of the city to them.

“Well, the train rail is sort of, a spiral and it goes back when it reaches the end. Your planet doesn't have trains?” Miscx asked.

“What? No, the city. Space is right there and that ship just flew in. Why doesn't the air get out?” Ned asked.

“Dunno, something about the city spinning, or a shield, I don't know. Never thought about it,” Miscx said, wondering why anyone would care about such a thing.

“Hey, where's Viking?” Ned asked, now aware that their posse was one member short.

“Oh no. The sweet man-cow didn't stay on the train, did he?”

“No, he was with us just a moment ago.”

Ned realised almost instantly that there was an ethereal quality to the air now. Something he was all too familiar with. He looked over at Miscx, who was, to his eyes, an attractive young woman with dark skin and an angelic face. Her hair was perfectly styled and her outfit made her look like a skater girl from the nineties.

“None of this is real. We’re inside one of your evil little dioramas,” Ned said, realising he sounded paranoid, basically instantly.

“I know lesser species go a bit odd when they look into space, but Ned, my guy, it’s just a really big empty room... that contains everything... so not that empty, but look. It’s just space!” Miscx replied.

Ned let his eyes linger on her for a moment, not because he was suddenly attracted to her, but because he wondered if this would be the only time he would get to see what everyone else, well, every other human, would see. He could understand why she was so appealing to Viking now.

“Okay, how the fuck do you always know?” Miscx asked.

“Neetu, I assume?” Ned said with a knowing grin. He had noticed the moment he had been dropped into her dream-reality. He was realising that she wasn’t actually very skilled at making these illusions. She often got things wrong, or at least they didn’t play out as she intended them to.

“You’re a slippery wanker, aren’t you?” Neetu said. She was now fully morphed back into her imp-punk self, but this time she was sporting colourful wings. She snarled her ugly lips at him, her rat like teeth visible and in dire need of a good old-fashioned human brushing.

“This is getting annoying now. You keep sending henchmen after me. You have already tried this once and failed and I still have no idea why you want me? Will you just, please, just tell me what all this is about?” Ned said, forgoing the pretence of being intimidated by Neetu’s dream powers, the threats of violence or her stupid imp face. He was actually resisting the urge to throttle the little moth!

She flapped rainbow wings and rose from the floor, leaving a trail of sparking glitter behind her. Ned was not impressed. This was her dream world fantasy. She could do

whatever she wanted here, and he was not going to give her the satisfaction of responding to her theatrics.

“You really don’t remember? You’re not completely immune to my powers then, are you?”

Ned folded his arms and started tapping his foot, like he once saw Sonic the Hedgehog do when he left his controller unattended for too long as a kid.

Neetu flapped her large butterfly wings and the rainbow covering burst, flapping off the cheerful coating to reveal black, torn skin and perturbing bones.

Ned, forcing himself to not react to the obvious show of power, rolled his eyes. “Well, I don’t know if I’m immune because I don’t remember, do I? Why don’t you zap me again and we’ll see if I built up a tolerance yet?”

He was only able to be so cocky because, honestly; he was certain that Viking would slap the shit out of her any second. They may have been in her little diorama, but they were also, somewhere, in the real world. Which was a spaceship-city... Ned stopped thinking about that.

“Also, while you’re at it, can we talk about the car? I have to get the car back or my dad is going to be very, very unimpressed.”

“Why must you always mock me?” Neetu screamed.

“Because I have no fucking idea who you are, flappybitch!” Ned screamed back.

She looked at him with a perplexed expression. “Wait... Really?” she asked, suddenly sounding like she was on the way to ‘reasonable’ for a second.

She lowered herself to the ground with a lazy float. Her wing’s motion seemed rather unattached to her flight. It was more pointless theatre at play. “I’ll tell you what started all of this then.”

Ned was concerned that she was going to try to deceive him, again, but he could tell there was a change in her voice, a little something which made her sound earnest, vulnerable almost. Then the world around him flickered. There was a clang sound which filled the air like he was inside a bell as it rang.



Ned's dream like vision was reconciled into a firmer, more pure reality and the soft edges and ethereal haze shook away. Like a cartoon character who had been hit with a mallet, he was shaking off the stars. "What?" He asked, realising, something unexpected had happened.

"Ned, you okay, buddy? Did she fuck with you?" Miscx asked, as she helped him up. Ned took her hand, only now realising that he even needed helping up.

"What's going on?" He gibbered, as the world finally took shape to him again.

Viking was standing over a small unconscious Neetu shaped pile on the floor. A large cone-shaped object in his hand.

"Viking, did you kill Neetu with a traffic cone?"

"I hope not. She was in a trance, or something, so I smacked her with the first thing I found. Didn't want to kill her!" Viking threw away the traffic cone, as if to distance himself from the proverbial smoking gun.

Ned looked as the Neetu twitched a little. "Let's get gone!" he yelled as he saw two winged silhouettes running towards them.

Ned hesitated before entering the sprint, and looked at the shape on the ground.

"Huh," he noted, trying to spot the traffic cone.

Coxswained

Ned was not a creature who was built for running. Neither was Viking. He was built for hitting and lifting, not sprinting. They were both panting like exhausted dogs, just moments after the marathon had started.

Miscx, on the other hand, was calmly striding with ease. Her legs seemed to actually extend a little with each step. It was annoying to watch the ease with which she ‘jogged.’ Given Ned was the only one who could see what was really happening, he wondered if she looked so ‘chilled’ to Viking’s eyes.

“Pick up the pace lads, we’re fucked if they catch us!” Miscx ordered.

That’s when Ned’s attempt at running slowed. He was not out of ‘puff’ or too tired to go on. He stopped with purpose. Viking looked back and slid to an almost comical stop. He looked like a train who unexpectedly had to break. All his figurative carriages came crashing into each other. All he was missing was the ‘toot-toot’ sound.

“Ned, I’m not carrying you!” He said with urgency.

“No, I don’t think you need to, mate.”

Miscx, who had strode on a little way, strode back. “What part of, Vampires coming to beat the shit out of us don’t you follow Ned?”

“They’re not there. They never were,” he said, sounding almost authoritative, by Ned standards.

Viking looked back. Sure enough, there was no one chasing them now. “Where did they go?”

“They were never there,” Ned said. “Thing that really blew it was, I have only actually seen Neetu in the little dream dioramas. So, when you smacked her. I had to wonder, why was she there this time?”

“Who fucking knows?” Miscx yelled. “I don’t want to get tangled up with a fucking organised crime boss. Keep going.”

Ned looked back again to make sure he was right. Another ship passed overhead and lit them up under a blue glow. The street was empty.

“Ned, what’s happening?” Viking asked. He was used to ‘just going’ with things, having to stop and think did not suit his tastes.

“Come on, let’s head back. I have a feeling that you beat up a bin or something, not a Neetu,” Ned said, hands in pockets, and very casual now.

“No! We have to go this way,” Miscx demanded, looking terrified of what may be coming down the quite empty road.

“No, we don’t. There is no Neetu, and there are no vampire muscle-men either.”

“What do you mean, there is no Neetu?” Viking asked, following Ned’s lead and dropping things down an emotional octave or two.

“Well, I don’t think I got all the bits in place yet, but I think someone has been telling us little fibs,” Ned said calmly, glancing over at Miscx.

Ned and Viking started strolling back towards the space-open hole to take another look at it.

“No! This way!” Miscx yelled.

Ned ignored her. She began growling and roaring.

“Don’t look back, Viking,” He said calmly.

“I’ll just keep walking. The sound is enough,” he replied. Picking up his pace a little.

“You can knock that off, for a start! You look ridiculous!” Ned said, turning to see Miscx’s comical, angry face. Her pincers twitching and a little drool dropping from her chin. She made an expression like she was going to crap herself and then doubled down with louder noises. Ned was vaguely aware of Viking returning to a sprint to get away from her.

“That’s what this is all about, isn’t it?” He asked. Trying not to laugh at her.

She wiped her chin and stopped making the sounds. Ned knew, in his mind’s periphery, that she had not turned off her demon projection.

“What gave it away this time?” She asked. Trying to sound stern but only reaching ‘less comical.’

“My leg.”

“What?”

Ned tapped his leg with his knuckles. “I remembered some things from the first time that you tried this. Last night was it? Anyway, I remember some standoff with Neetu, where she threw a sword at me and I pulled it out, and looked very cool while I was at it. But my leg doesn’t hurt now.”

“Neetu, must have implanted that memory!”

“Bollocks did she!” Ned said, ruffling his brow at her. “I’m about nine billion percent sure that you made her up.”

She was trying to ramp up her demon visage again. He was aware of it, despite not being affected by it. He ignored her attempts. Whatever was keeping him immune was a long way off being toppled by her feeble projection.

“So, I assume, the first time, you weren’t aware that I was immune to most of your tricks. That’s why you fucked up. If there was a super criminal on the loose, I’m pretty sure some random woman I met by a trash truck wouldn’t be this eager to get involved.”

She turned off her evil face projection. To Ned, it felt like the air grew a little lighter and that was about it.

“You know, I had one job!” She said, now with a more regular Miscx tone. “I had to catalogue your abilities and then abandon you on this shitty ship, where you would be powerless to interfere. Then *she* got involved, and the police were scouring the ship looking for you. And how the fuck you and your friends all speak Elder is a mystery to me too! Again, *her* influence, I expect.”

Ned had no idea what she was talking about. He decided to ignore her and barrel on.

“When you realised you couldn’t use your projection ability on me, you invented Neetu, a different type of projection. Something I’m not as immune to. I assume it went pretty well, given you tried it two nights running.”

“Yeah, the first time it was just you and your idiot friend, Viking. I didn’t expect your two other idiot pals this time. Thankfully, they were so stupid, they were easy to neutralise.”

“Yeah, your friend the chef. I didn’t realise right away. They had no idea he was a bug-man, did they?”

“No one has any idea our kind are even among them. That’s what we do. We slip into worlds where we are seen as attractive, talented, and skilled. We get to live life as movie stars and singers and all we do is let our natural projections loose. We fuck some of you. We eat

one or two, from time to time. We let you worship us. We become every influencer and every politician. We live like kings!” Miscx said, with an odd pride.

“But you realised I could see you. And you didn’t know who else may be able to on Earth, and that’s why you needed to test me?” Ned asked.

“The first time, that was exactly it. But *she* contacted the ship’s police. They wouldn’t believe I was some demonic bug alien, but they would believe that you were abducted on a flyby. That happens. So the first time they took you back.”

Ned sighed, starting to get genuinely annoyed. “So the muscle-men we were running from, just the police?” he asked.

She nodded. “It worked so well the first night that this time, I used them to get you to where I needed you to go.”

“And the reason we had to go all the way to that other room to get Viking let out?”

“I bought off the officer in the processing room,” she said with pride.

“Wow, I didn’t know money worked like that here.”

“Oh, it doesn’t. I bought him off with sex,” she said, slightly more proud.

Ned looked at her. He had always been very aware of her true form and was quite grossed out at the thought.

“So the police wiped our memories and dropped us home last night? Where you picked us up again the next day, this time a little quieter?”

“That was the plan. We were never going to kill you, if that’s what you think. *She* would never stop hunting us if we did.”

Ned sighed. “Also, before I forget, who is *she*? Are you in some mad religious cult?” he asked.

“What? No! Your mother, Ned,” Miscx said, as if he should already have known.

“Why would my mom have anything to do with this?”

“Because she’s the one who owns this ship.” Miscx pointed at the sky and then out to the sides, to make sure he knew which ship she was talking about. As if there could be any confusion.

“What! What? How?” Ned blurted out. “I know she’s well off, but owning a space-city! Also, humans haven’t even left our fucking planet. Well, we went to the moon a few times, but come on! How?”

Miscx looked quite amused. “Because she was not born on your planet, Ned. She’s quite well known as a ruthless nut job when it comes to business and I don’t want to find out how she feels about us moving her son off world. We figured if we dumped you on her station, at least you wouldn’t be on Earth when we start the takeover of your media. Once you had been here for a bit, there was no way you would go back to dark-age-monkey-world.”

Ned sighed. “And when she finally figured out where I was, I would tell her that someone named Neetu was behind it all.”

“I believe the word is ‘*bingo*,’ monkey boy.”



This was about when Ned realised he may have been in a bit of trouble. He had uncovered a conspiracy of shape shifting aliens who were set on infiltrating multiple worlds. It was only at that moment that he realised, if Miscx's plan had gone as expected, she would have figured out how his ability to resist her worked and overcome it. Or he wouldn't know there was anything strange about bug people. But as it was, she couldn't let him go and tell everyone about it. Which meant that killing him was likely back on the table. And, given his hazy

memory of how badly he fared against a mental projection she created, he did not fancy his chances against her now intimidating exoskeleton, not to mention, facial pincers.

“You literally figured it all out, you know, it’s quite impressive, considering your mom thinks you’re too stupid to bother with,” she said, in a rather unkind way.

Ned ignored her. He knew he couldn’t outrun her. He knew he couldn’t out fight her. He was pretty sure he had only one course of action. *Stall her and hope for the best!*

She must have taken his silence for some kind of pensive heroic stance. “I expected a response to that, actually.”

He didn’t have the heart to tell her that he wasn’t quite listening. He was trying to think of something confusing or annoying to say to stop her from realising she needed to kill him.

“If she gave any shits about you, she could have had a security team watching you, or a tracker installed in your skull. But no, she doesn’t even care enough to keep an eye on you.”

There was a pause. Ned was not good at conversational sparring, apparently. Because all he could muster to break the silence was... “Oh, fuck off! You can’t rattle me by telling me my mommy doesn’t love me any more than your Neetu themed crap could rattle me by pretending to be my dad. Not everyone with shit parents is broken by it! Some of us get good friends, and move on with life! As for your invasion, I couldn’t give a shit! Do what you want, planets crap anyway!”

He gave her the finger.

“It doesn’t matter. I’m going to kill you and the big pretty one will tell everyone that Neetu did it. Your mom will spend the next decade looking for a small imp that never existed while we take over your world’s media, right under her nose.”

Ned wished he still smoked. At least that way he could pull out a last cigarette and hope it would be quick. Now he would have to stand there and die with nothing to do, like an idiot.



There was a sound like a science fiction laser from behind Ned. The sound zipped past him, in a long red and blue beam of crackling energy, which also looked like a science fiction laser. It hit Miscx in the chest and she stepped back screeching. He felt her demon face burst from her, as a reflex.

Ned, not quite sure what to do, stepped out of the way so whomever was shooting could get a clear second shot. They took the opportunity. A moment later, the zipping fizzing red beam streaked past again. It only took a second to melt through Miscx's skull and she dropped to the floor. Another beam followed to make sure the job was done.

Ned was glad he didn't smoke, because the smell from Miscx did actually smell like cheap cigarettes. He wished Monday was there to smell it. Associating that smell with the visuals of a crispy bug woman would have likely cured him of the habit.

"Ned! Ned, are you okay?" Viking shouted, a little rattled.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm fine. You shot her good!" Ned called back into the darkness.

A light blinked on from above and lit the street behind him. There were around ten floating police drones and a single vampire officer standing with Viking.

"Well, shit! That'll do it," Ned muttered to himself, as he wandered towards them.

"What happened?" He yelled.

"When you said Miscx was the end of season baddie, I figured the muscle men were likely the good guys!" Viking yelled. "I was right!"

A police drone lit its red and blue lights above him and silently lowered itself down to accompany him.

“We were listening in, sir,” the vampire officer said as Ned got a little closer. “I had to stay far enough away that her demonic form didn’t mess with me. Sadly, I had to make a kill shot. Given her psychic abilities, I don’t think I had much choice.”

“Well, if it’s any help, I’m pretty sure you saved my life, so thanks,” Ned replied.

Viking threw his arms around him in an *almost* emotional way. “I thought your bread was well toasted, to be honest, buddy!”

“I have no idea what that means, but thanks!”

The officer waved his hands, and his drones lifted away smoothly.

“We have been tracking you since your friend here went missing from our custody. Truth is, we spent the last few hours trying to figure out what was happening. Her species is totally undocumented, but we’re a little concerned. After hearing what you said to her, I have already sent a unit to apprehend the one in the south zone community marquee. Your friends will be kept safe, sir.”

A large, very ‘police’ looking shuttle came to land in front of them. Viking and Ned climbed into the large area at the back while the police Vampire sat himself in a driver’s seat, or was it pilot seat?

“I assume it’s time to get a memory wipe and go home?” Ned asked as the shuttle took off.

“For the two in the marquee, yes. But I have orders from above to get you two to sign a waiver and you’re all going home on a personal transport, sir,” the officer said, with a helpful tone that Ned rarely expected when he was in the back of a police car.

“Let me guess, orders come down from the city-ship’s owner?” he asked, leaning forward a little.

“I am not at liberty to confirm that, sir.”

Ned leaned back in his seat and looked at Viking. “Miscx was definitely into you, you know?”

Viking smiled. “You know, I had a feeling she was. I mean, why wouldn’t she be? I’m quite the man-meal!”

“Yeah, that’s true. Wonder if she would have had potatoes or broccoli with you.”

“She *would* have had sex with me first, though, right? Just to be clear?” Viking asked, making sure to fish out the important part of this whole thing.

“Yeah, for sure, but that would have just made her hungry.”

The police car increased in speed as it headed for the central column, where presumably, they would wait for their ride home.

“So, pub tonight?” Viking asked.

“Oh, yeah, absolutely. Like, one hundred percent. I mean, I need to get trashed before I tell dad that I lost his car.”

“Oh, shit, yeah!” Viking said as he burst into a roaring laughter. “Then you can tell him his ex-wife is an alien! That should be a conversation killer!”

Ned laughed in return. “Or, I tell him I parked it in that plot of land mom owns and let her tell him!”

The police officer looked back at the two idiots howling in laughter about things he didn’t follow and decided he was definitely going to ask for a raise after this.

END

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