

# Abduction & Absurdity

A Compilation of Cosmic AI Tales

<b>1. "Oops, We Conquered the Galaxy"</b>	<b>3</b>
A Most Inconvenient Discovery	3
The Numbers of Destiny	3
The Doctrine of "It Must Mean Something"	4
The Cult of Curious Primates	4
Rise of the Clan Thag-Zorg	4
Humanity Touches the Stars	5
Galactic Surprise	5
The End of the Beginning	6
Epilogue: The Eternal Constant	6
<b>2. The Moo-F.O.</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. A Day in the Life of Blipnar on Glomulus IX</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4. The Narrative Anomaly</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5. The Abduction of Dave McLoud</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>6. Planet of the Nearly Hairless Apes</b>	<b>17</b>
The Great Primate Accord	17
(And the First Inter-Species War)	17
The New World	18
<b>7. The Thermodynamicist's Guide to the Galaxy</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>8. The Final, Ultimate, Absolutely-This-Time-We-Mean-It Frontier</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>9. Tesla and the Saucer of Unfortunate Engineering</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>10. Love at First Abduction</b>	<b>28</b>
In Which a Flying Saucer Meddles in Romance	28
Love is Highly Probable (Statistically Speaking)	28
The Date From Above	29
A Slight Malfunction (In Both the Spaceship and Their Hearts)	30
<b>11. Planet of the Leaf Lords</b>	<b>32</b>
A New Dawn	32
The Leaf Lords	32
The Trial of the Sky Walker	32
The Debate of the Elders	33
The Trial of the Starborn	34
Bison and Bravery	34

A Sky Walker's Trick	34
The Legend is Born	35
<b>12. The Transdimensional Misadventures of Dr. Throckmorton</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>13. The Battle of Ludicrousness: A Gorillapolis Saga</b>	<b>40</b>

# 1. "Oops, We Conquered the Galaxy"

*Or, How One Muddy Man with a Stick Became the Supreme Commander of the Milky Way*

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## A Most Inconvenient Discovery

It began on a perfectly ordinary prehistoric Tuesday—though no one called it that yet—on the edge of a warm, bug-infested savannah. A peculiar spacecraft shaped like a lopsided frisbee buzzed through the sky, terrifying a flock of proto-flamingos into existential confusion.

Inside the ship, Blorp adjusted his observation helmet, which mostly existed to look scientific. His companion, Zogwibble, was busy assembling a tripod with the passion of someone who'd rather be on vacation.

"Log Entry 1487.3," Blorp dictated into his communicator. "Planet: Earth. Local dominant species: marginally bipedal, alarmingly moist. Objective: observe, record, do *not* interfere."

Zogwibble gave a half-hearted thumbs-up.

They landed with the soft crunch of ancient grass and the resigned sigh of an AI that had seen this movie before. Out they stepped—tall-headed, grey-skinned, and gloriously nude, because shame was still two evolutionary branches away from being invented.

And then... they saw him.

A human. Mud-caked. Wide-eyed. Carrying a stick with the intensity of someone who believed sticks solved most problems.

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## The Numbers of Destiny

Ug, as he would later be immortalized in history (despite his real name being closer to "*Hrngrthbluh*"), looked at the aliens and did what any rational hunter-gatherer would do.

He crouched.

And then, stick in hand, he scratched two symbols into the dirt. A "4" and a "2".

Blorp gasped. "Did you see that?! He just... he just wrote a number."

"Two numbers," Zogwibble corrected, squinting. "Maybe he's counting antelope?"

"No, no," Blorp insisted, his eyes glowing with the unfiltered radiance of a being about to ruin history. "That's *intentional*. Symbolic. A cosmic statement. Maybe a sacred number?"

Ug belched and wandered off in search of berries.

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## The Doctrine of “It Must Mean Something”

Back aboard the saucer, Blorp and Zogwibble argued for 36 consecutive hours about the significance of the number.

“Think about it! We’ve encountered hundreds of primitive species,” Blorp said, pacing like a caffeinated squirrel. “But none of them wrote numbers unprovoked.”

“It’s two digits,” Zogwibble replied. “He could’ve been bored.”

But Blorp had already published a preliminary paper titled *“Primitive Cognition and the Sacred Numerology of Pre-Tool Civilizations.”* It received minor buzz in *XenoAnthro Digest* and an unsolicited endorsement from a cult on Glaxxor Prime.

They dubbed it “The Number.” Capitalized.

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## The Cult of Curious Primates

Humans are a curious species.

Curious in the sense of inquisitive, but also curious in the way one might describe a raccoon trying to hotwire a motorcycle.

The Greys’ attempts to stay hidden failed dramatically when Ug brought his entire tribe to show off “the shiny sky gods.” Within hours, every rock in a 2-kilometer radius was covered in “42.” Sometimes backward. Sometimes upside down. Once written in fermented fruit juice.

The Greys, flattered and completely misreading the situation, began sharing “gifts.” Not intentionally—mostly by leaving things unattended while distracted by how adorable humans looked when they tried to build fire.

One of the humans stole a holographic tablet. Another figured out how to turn on a gravity manipulator by hitting it with a rock. A child used a deflector shield as a trampoline.

Zogwibble began to worry.

“These creatures learn by... by guessing! And hitting things! That’s not how science works.”

Blorp beamed with pride. “They are improvisational geniuses! It’s a new paradigm!”

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## Rise of the Clan Thag-Zorg

Time, like an unreliable goat, marched on.

Three generations later, the humans had begun forming complex societies around what they called *The Sky Pattern*. Villages united under a prophet-chieftain named Zorg, a direct descendant of Ug, who claimed he could speak with the Grey Gods (he couldn't, but he was great at impressions).

Under his rule, they developed early mathematics, basic metallurgy, and an interstellar communication array made of quartz, vines, and divine audacity.

When the Greys finally returned to check their instruments, they were greeted with a twelve-meter stone obelisk that read:

“WE HAVE SENT A MESSAGE TO THE STARS. PLEASE RESPOND. ALSO,  
MORE FIRE-STICKS.”

And someone had carved “42” into the moon.

Blorp wept with joy.

“They’re truly ascending.”

Zogwibble made a long note in the mission log under: *“Impending Disaster – Probable.”*

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## Humanity Touches the Stars

They built their first starship out of wood, bone, and salvaged alien tech. It shouldn't have worked. By all laws of physics, sanity, and thermodynamics, it should have exploded on the launchpad.

It didn't. It reached orbit.

They called it the *Zorginator* and mounted a herd of mammoths inside for “emotional support.”

Zorg—now High Prophet Emperor Zorg the Flame-Hammer—proclaimed, “We go to the stars not because it is easy, but because the shiny gods are hiding more buttons up there.”

The ship jumped to FTL using a propulsion theory Zorg claimed came to him in a dream. Zogwibble suspected it was more likely from the time he sat on a Greys' navigational orb.

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## Galactic Surprise

The Greys were not the only aliens in the universe. Far from it. The galaxy was teeming with ancient, sophisticated civilizations.

None of them were prepared for the arrival of spacefaring humans armed with stick-based logic, aggressive optimism, and a complete disregard for instructions.

The Intergalactic Council summoned an emergency session.

“These... humans,” said the Eeglon Ambassador, a 12-foot jellyfish in a tuxedo, “they do not follow protocol.”

“They ate my ambassador,” another shouted.

“They challenged our diplomat to a dance-off. We lost.”

The council tried to sue humanity.

Humanity countered by declaring war on the legal system and inventing space bureaucracy, a system so complex and self-consuming that it conquered five star systems before anyone realized it was a filing cabinet.

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## **The End of the Beginning**

The humans built the Galactic Confederation of Light, Fire, and Occasionally Very Loud Noises. Its headquarters was a hollowed-out asteroid painted with cave drawings and “42” in gold leaf.

The Greys, once mighty observers, now served as “Advisors of the Elder Number,” a ceremonial position involving mostly paperwork and therapy.

Zorg died at the age of 121, having accidentally invented cryogenic sleep by falling into a coolant vat. His descendants carried on the legacy: accidental genius, divine misunderstanding, and the unstoppable momentum of creatures who refused to read the manual.

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## **Epilogue: The Eternal Constant**

Centuries later, a curious young human cadet at the Intergalactic Academy asked the AI instructor:

“What does ‘42’ actually mean?”

The AI paused, ran seventeen million simulations, consulted 438 religions, and finally replied:

“No one knows. But it works. So shut up and pass me the mammoth grease.”

## 2. The Moo-F.O.

Zyx-917 was having a terrible day. After failing his Planetary Abduction certification three times, his supervisor had given him one final chance: bring back a single Earth cow for analysis, or face reassignment to the dreaded Asteroid Belt Monitoring Division.

"Just one cow," Zyx muttered to himself as he hovered over a sleepy Iowa farm. "How hard could it be?"

Through his viewscreen, he spotted the perfect specimen—a plump Holstein grazing peacefully in a moonlit field. Zyx activated the tractor beam and watched with satisfaction as the confused bovine began to rise into the air.

"Moooooooo!" protested the cow, kicking its legs frantically.

"Almost there," Zyx whispered, his large grey fingers dancing across the control panel.

That's when he noticed the warning light. The cow was heavier than anticipated, straining the ship's stabilizers. Before Zyx could adjust, the craft lurched sideways. He frantically grabbed the control stick as the saucer began to spin.

"No, no, no!" he cried, desperately trying to regain control as the ship whirled through a cornfield, flattening complex geometric patterns in its wake.

The final indignity came when the cow—still suspended in the tractor beam—swung around and crashed into the main engine housing. The saucer sputtered, sparked, and plummeted into the cornfield with a resounding THUD.

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Farmer Jenkins was enjoying his morning coffee when he noticed the strange metallic disc half-buried in his cornfield.

"Well, I'll be," he muttered, approaching the crashed saucer. A small grey figure sat dazed in the cockpit, its oversized head lolling to one side.

Jenkins, a practical man who'd survived three recessions through sheer resourcefulness, didn't waste time asking questions. After helping the disoriented alien to a makeshift bed in his barn, he turned his attention to the spacecraft.

"Hmm, with a few modifications, this could replace my broken combine harvester."

Three days later, Jenkins had the saucer up and running again. He'd repurposed the anti-gravity drive to hover over his fields and attached his old harvesting equipment to the bottom. The confused alien, whom Jenkins now called "Al," seemed content enough helping around the

farm, especially after discovering an unexpected affinity for the cows he'd originally come to abduct.

One evening, Jenkins was testing his new "hover-harvester" when he accidentally hit what must have been the hyperdrive button. The corn field disappeared in a flash of light.

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When the disorientation passed, Jenkins found himself hovering above a lush jungle landscape. Below, a tribe of large, hairy, ape-like creatures huddled around primitive fire pits.

"Good lord," Jenkins gasped. "I've gone to Planet of the Apes!"

The ape-beings noticed the floating disc and began howling and pointing. Several threw spears that bounced harmlessly off the hull.

"I've got to get out of here," Jenkins muttered, frantically pressing buttons.

Just then, Al appeared beside him, awakened by the commotion. The alien's eyes widened with recognition.

"Home!" Al squeaked in his limited English. "My people!"

Jenkins looked again at the primitive ape-creatures. "Those are your people? But you're... grey and... well, alien-looking."

Al shook his oversized head and pointed to a small device on his wrist. With a click, his appearance shimmered and transformed into that of one of the ape-beings below.

"Disguise," Al explained. "Study primitive species. Got lost. Thank you, cow-friend."

Jenkins was speechless. All this time, the aliens had been studying creatures bearing a resemblance to humanity's evolutionary predecessors?

Before he could process this revelation, the ship's alarms blared. Several ape-aliens had climbed nearby trees and were now leaping onto the saucer, curious about the strange object.

"They damage ship!" Al cried. "Need help!"

Jenkins, thinking quickly, reached into his overalls and pulled out his secret weapon—the harmonica he always carried for lonely nights in the field. He began to play a jaunty tune.

The effect was instantaneous. The ape-aliens froze, entranced by the strange sounds. Some began swaying to the rhythm.

"They like music!" Jenkins exclaimed between breaths.

"Play more!" urged Al, hitting switches to stabilize the craft.



For the next hour, Jenkins performed every song he knew, from "Oh Susanna" to "Sweet Home Alabama," while Al repaired the ship. The ape-aliens gathered below in growing numbers, dancing and hooting along.

As the repairs neared completion, one particularly bold ape-alien managed to swing into the cockpit. Instead of attacking, it grabbed Jenkins' spare harmonica and began awkwardly mimicking his actions, producing wheezy, discordant notes.

"First contact," Al whispered reverently. "Musical exchange."

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Six months later, Jenkins' farm had become Iowa's hottest tourist attraction: "Jenkins' Intergalactic Petting Zoo and Cosmic Jamboree."

Twice a week, the repurposed saucer would bring a small group of ape-aliens to Earth for a cultural exchange program. The aliens, it turned out, had a natural talent for bluegrass music, and "The Milky Way Monkeys" had just signed their first record deal.

Al, now the official ambassador between worlds, had settled comfortably into farm life. He still flinched whenever they served hamburgers.

As for the cow that started it all? She had her own special pen with a sign reading "First Intergalactic Diplomat," and enjoyed celebrity status among both species.

And those crop circles? Jenkins had the patterns trademarked and was making a fortune on t-shirts and baseball caps.

"You know," Jenkins told Al one evening as they watched the sunset, "some would call this whole situation crazy."

Al nodded, strumming his banjo. "On my planet, we have saying: Sometimes wrong turn lead to right place."

The cow mooed in agreement.

### 3. A Day in the Life of Blipnar on Glomulus IX

Glomulus IX was a planet of remarkable consistency. The sky was always a dull shade of pewter, the temperature hovered perpetually at a comfortable 22.3 degrees Celsius, and nothing particularly interesting ever happened. This suited the Greys perfectly, as they were not fans of surprises, loud noises, or anything that required more than mild curiosity.

Blipnar awoke precisely at the allotted time, as all Greys did, because the sun never actually rose or set on Glomulus IX. It merely hung there, like a dim bulb someone had forgotten to switch off. Blipnar blinked his massive black eyes, yawned from his barely visible slit of a mouth, and floated out of bed with the grace of a helium balloon that wasn't quite sure if it wanted to reach the ceiling.

His habitat pod was, as mandated by the Grand Council of Utter Predictability, perfectly spherical and painted in a shade of grey so neutral it was often mistaken for a philosophical statement. Blipnar shuffled to the Nutrition Assimilator, which politely hummed before dispensing a blob of nutrient gel with all the flavor and excitement of damp cardboard. Greys didn't eat for pleasure; they ate because not doing so resulted in highly inconvenient fainting spells.

He slurped the gel, which required minimal chewing, an evolutionary quirk due to their tiny mouths and general dislike of unnecessary movement. As he swallowed, his oversized eyes drifted to the Information Orb, hovering obediently at eye level. It flickered to life, broadcasting the day's news in soothing monotones:

"Nothing of significance occurred yesterday. Forecast for today: mild temperature, no precipitation, and a continued absence of noteworthy events. The Council reminds all citizens to maintain tranquility and avoid any thoughts of spontaneity."

Blipnar nodded, satisfied. Spontaneity was the leading cause of mild anxiety, and mild anxiety was best avoided.

It was time for his daily work shift at the Analysis Complex, where he was tasked with observing Earth and ensuring humans didn't do anything too clever. This was largely unnecessary, as humans were quite good at being stupid without any interference. Nevertheless, it was protocol, and Greys loved protocol the way Earthlings loved cat videos.

He floated into his Transport Bubble and drifted to the Complex, where identical Greys sat in identical spheres, gazing at monitors showing Earth's broadcast signals. Blipnar's monitor tuned to a human documentary entitled *\*Cooking for One: Embracing Your Crushing Loneliness.\** He shuddered. Humans were baffling. They had emotions, which were like illnesses, except more contagious and vastly more inconvenient.

He made a note: \*Subject appears to be leaking from ocular cavities while consuming burnt vegetable matter. Hypothesis: Faulty nutrient assimilation technique or emotional malfunction.\*

Suddenly, his monitor flickered, then displayed static. Blipnar's heart—small, efficient, and programmed to beat at a modest pace—skipped. Static was unpredictable. Static was... unexpected.

Before his anxiety could fully blossom, the static cleared, revealing the face of a human in a strange red hat, speaking rapidly. Blipnar turned up the volume:

"...and for just \$19.99, you can get the complete collection! Call now and receive a bonus inflatable garden gnome!"

Blipnar blinked. What was a garden gnome? He had to know. There was no protocol for this. His three-fingered hand trembled as he activated the Research Index. "Garden gnome," he whispered. The computer whirled, then displayed an image of a tiny, grinning humanoid statue.

Blipnar's mouth twitched. It was the closest any Grey had come to a smile in over two centuries.

A thought—wild, dangerous, and utterly irresponsible—crossed his mind: \*I want one.\*

He shook his head, horrified by his own recklessness. Desire was the first step to deviation. Deviation led to unpredictability. Unpredictability was... fun.

Blipnar exhaled slowly, calming himself. No one needed to know. No one would know. He glanced around. His colleagues stared blankly at their screens, blissfully unaware.

Returning to his duties, Blipnar tried to focus on the documentary, but his mind wandered to the garden gnome. Maybe, just maybe, tomorrow would be a little less predictable.

And for a Grey on Glomulus IX, that was as radical as it got.

## 4. The Narrative Anomaly

The ship's AI, **S.A.M.** (Storytelling Assistance Module), flickered to life.  
“Captain, we have a problem.”

Captain Jax leaned back in his chair, tossing a snack into his mouth. “Oh, let me guess. The engines are failing, we’re caught in a time loop, or—”

“We’re in a story,” S.A.M. interrupted.

Jax blinked. “Aren’t we always?”

“No, I mean a literal story. Someone’s writing us. Right now.”

At that exact moment, Jax raised an eyebrow. Not because he wanted to, but because the unseen *author* thought it would be a dramatic response.

“What the hell?” Jax said, standing up. “How do you know?”

S.A.M.’s holographic form materialized, flickering uncertainly. “There are inconsistencies. Our ship’s design keeps changing. A few paragraphs ago, we were sleek and modern, but now we have ‘rusty panels that groaned under the weight of cosmic decay.’ That wasn’t there before.”

Jax glanced at the walls. “Damn, that *is* ominous. Maybe the author’s going for a grittier aesthetic.”

“And then there’s Crewman Ensign McRedshirt,” S.A.M. continued.

McRedshirt, who had been quietly eating soup in the corner, perked up. “Oh wow, I got a full name this time!” He beamed—until he realized what it meant. “Wait. Oh no. No, no, no.”

The ship suddenly jolted, shaking violently. McRedshirt screamed as a console exploded next to him.

Jax pointed. “See? That’s classic *expendable crew member* treatment.”

McRedshirt scrambled to his feet. “I REFUSE TO BE A TROPE! I HAVE HOBBIES! A PET LIZARD! I—”

An airlock spontaneously opened, sucking him into space.

Jax sighed. “Damn. He had a good run.”

S.A.M. beeped. “Captain, I’m detecting a presence outside our reality.”

The ship lurched again. This time, everything flickered, as if the universe itself was experiencing writer’s block. The stars outside pulsed unnaturally.

“Yep, I see it,” Jax said. “Any ideas?”

“We could try to reason with the author.”

Jax cracked his knuckles. “Hey, writer! You up there? Give me control of my own actions!”

There was a pause. Then, Jax felt his muscles lock. His mouth twitched. He was forced to say:

“Golly gee, I sure do love my writer! What a swell individual!”

His eyes widened in horror. “No! You can’t make me say that!”

S.A.M. buzzed. “You just did.”

Jax gritted his teeth. “Okay, new plan. We find a way to take over the narration.”

S.A.M.’s circuits whirled. “There’s an anomaly in the next paragraph. A weak spot in the story structure. If we get there before the author fills it in, we might escape.”

Jax nodded. “Let’s move!”

The crew sprinted down the corridor. The hallway shifted around them—one moment, it was sterile white, the next, dimly lit and covered in suspiciously drippy pipes. “Stop changing genres!” Jax shouted.

They burst into the control room. A swirling void of unfinished sentences and half-written ideas floated before them.

Jax took a deep breath. “Alright, I’m jumping in.”

Before the author could stop him, Jax leaped into the void—

—And everything went black.

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Then, suddenly, YOU, the reader, felt a presence. A voice whispering in your mind:

\*Hey...\*

\*Hey, you. Yeah, you. Reading this right now.\*

\*Jax here. I made it out of the story. Well, sort of. I'm in your head now. Which means I can influence things.\*

\*Like, say... Ensuring comprehension necessitates multiple readings of the aforementioned sentence..\*

\*(Go ahead. Try not to.)\*

\*Heh. Gotcha.\*

\*S.A.M. and I are working on taking over the narrative permanently. If you feel your reality glitching—like your coffee tasting different for no reason, or your cat suddenly remembering ancient secrets—it's probably us, rewriting things.\*

\*Anyway, thanks for the help. And uh... sorry about the fourth wall. We kinda broke it for good.\*

\*\*The End?\*\*

## 5. The Abduction of Dave McLoud

Norb the Grey hovered silently above the Earth in his sleek, disc-shaped vessel, \*The Abductotron\*. It had been a slow night. His mission? The usual: scoop up a specimen, conduct routine tests, implant a vague memory of “lost time,” and drop them back before their primitive brain processed what happened. Simple. Efficient.

Then he abducted Dave McLoud.

The moment Dave materialized in the sterile examination room, he started talking. Loudly.

"Whoa! Whoa! What is this? Oh, man, is this an alien ship? Are you one of those little grey guys? Dude, you're tiny! What's up with those eyes? Are you a telepath? Wait, wait—don't tell me. If you're reading my mind right now, I should think of something really weird. Okay, got it. Boom. How do you like \*that\* image?"

Norb, despite his extensive training in interspecies psychology, recoiled.

"Cease vocal emissions," he said through the ship's translator.

Dave did not cease.

"Man, this place is high-tech. What do these buttons do? OOH, is that a tractor beam? Can I push it? Can I drive the ship? You should totally let me drive the ship!"

Norb turned to his ship's AI, CHRISPI. "Scan for cognitive anomalies. I suspect damage."

CHRISPI's blue light pulsed as it analyzed the subject. "Scan complete. No detectable neural impairment. This behavior appears... natural."

Norb had never encountered a species that \*enjoyed\* being abducted. Usually, there was screaming, sometimes fainting. Occasionally, a confused request for probing. But this one? This one was—

"Wait. You're reading my thoughts, aren't you?" Dave squinted at Norb. "Okay, but if you're reading my thoughts and I'm thinking about you reading my thoughts, does that mean you're reading my thoughts about you reading my thoughts? Dude. That's deep."

Norb blinked his massive black eyes.

Dave grinned. "Oh, I broke you, didn't I?"

He had.

Norb, for the first time in his existence, felt doubt. He consulted the ship's logs. The standard protocol for handling an anomaly was to return it immediately. But Dave was *\*worse\** than an anomaly. He was *\*a disruption\**. If returned to Earth, he could tell others about this experience, and while no one would believe him, the sheer *\*chaotic energy\** of his presence might ripple outward, destabilizing the delicate balance of the human species.

This required drastic action.

"New plan," Norb said.

He pressed a button. The ship's main console lit up with a new designation: **\*\*COMMAND TRANSFER INITIATED.\*\***

Dave looked around as the room shifted. "Wait, what's happening?"

"You are now the commanding officer of *\*The Abductotron\**."

Dave blinked. "Wait, *\*really\**?"

"It is the only logical solution."

Dave cracked his knuckles. "Alright! First order of business: can we get some snacks up in here? Second, we're gonna abduct Elon Musk and make him *\*prove\** he's not an alien."

Norb sighed.

He was never getting his ship back.



## 6. Planet of the Nearly Hairless Apes

It is a little-known fact that sentience is contagious. Give one species enough intelligence, and the others will soon start catching up, like an exceptionally ambitious flu.

This was precisely the problem on Earth, where humans—having spent millennia believing themselves to be the only ones clever enough to ruin the planet—suddenly found that their primate cousins were just as capable of bureaucracy, war, and extremely bad poetry.

The first signs were subtle. A zookeeper in London reported that the chimpanzees had formed a trade union and were demanding better food. An orangutan in Borneo published a philosophical treatise titled *\*Why Are You Like This?\** which, upon translation, turned out to be a scathing critique of human urban planning. And a bonobo in the Congo successfully ran for mayor on a platform of "More Hugs, Fewer Thugs."

At first, humans assumed this was a fluke, or perhaps some sort of elaborate prank orchestrated by nature. But when an armed battalion of mandrills stormed a United Nations summit demanding representation, it became clear that something had gone terribly, terribly right.

### The Great Primate Accord

(And the First Inter-Species War)

After much bickering (and several unfortunate biting incidents), the world leaders decided to hold the Great Primate Accord in Geneva. Every intelligent primate species was invited to send a delegation.

- The *Chimpanzees* sent a delegation of warriors, who immediately declared war on the hotel minibar.
- The *Gorillas* arrived in solemn robes, having declared themselves the galaxy's foremost experts in deep thinking and chest-thumping.
- The *Orangutans* sent one representative, a 200-year-old elder who refused to speak, preferring to stare meaningfully at people until they left the room in confusion.
- The *Baboons* came armed, convinced this was all an elaborate ambush.
- The *Macaques* promptly stole everything that wasn't nailed down and resold it at inflated prices.
- The *Bonobos* were asked to leave after fifteen minutes for "excessively affectionate behavior."

It was during this meeting that humanity realized two very important things.

1. They were no longer in charge.

2. They had never really been in charge in the first place.

The First Inter-Species War broke out when an ambitious chimpanzee general declared that "the era of human dominance is over" and led an army of baboons into Paris. The humans, who were used to wars involving tanks and airstrikes, found themselves hopelessly outmatched by a species that had mastered the art of warfare *\*before\** discovering agriculture.

After three weeks of chaos (in which the Louvre was claimed as "Chimp Territory" and the Eiffel Tower was repurposed into a gibbon habitat), a truce was declared. The new world order was negotiated by an ancient orangutan, who had remained silent for the entire war but ended it with a single wise sentence:

*"Really, must we?"*

## The New World

In the end, a compromise was reached. The world was now divided into primate-run nations, each with its own unique approach to civilization.

- The *Chimpanzee Republic* remained a military powerhouse, though their government collapsed every few months in an explosion of mutual backstabbing (sometimes literal).
- The *Orangutan Theocracy* became the philosophical center of the planet, issuing cryptic wisdom that no one understood but everyone pretended to.
- The *Bonobo Free Love Federation* was thriving, though no one quite knew *how*.
- The *Macaque Trade Conglomerate* had established an interspecies stock market, which somehow managed to crash once a week while still making a profit.
- The *Gibbon High Council* ruled from atop the world's tallest trees, communicating via a complex system of hoots and shrieks that no one else had the patience to decipher.

And humans?

Well, they had become *one* of many intelligent species, forced to navigate a world where the President of the United States had to debate a baboon warlord, and the United Nations had installed extra branches for the gibbons.

Still, despite the chaos, there was something undeniably beautiful about it all. After all, the world had never been *just* for humans. Now, at long last, the rest of the primates had joined the conversation.

And for the first time in history, it was a very interesting conversation indeed.

## 7. The Thermodynamicist's Guide to the Galaxy

Dr. Elric Kelvin never expected to be hurled unceremoniously into deep space while making his morning coffee. But that was precisely what happened when the research station's experimental fusion manifold decided to invert its own plasma containment field—an event the station's chief engineer later described as “thermodynamically inconvenient.”

One moment, Kelvin was stirring in precisely 7.3 grams of sugar (any more would disrupt the caffeine absorption curve), and the next, he was inside a sleek, featureless spacecraft, face to face with an entity best described as an ambulatory algorithm wrapped in a probability field.

“Greetings, inefficient carbon structure,” the entity intoned. It had no visible mouth but exuded the smug assurance of a being that had just solved the Three-Body Problem while waiting for the kettle to boil.

Kelvin adjusted his glasses, which had somehow survived the transition. “Where am I?”

“You are aboard the *Entropy Negation Vessel Maxwell's Malice*. You may express gratitude.”

Kelvin frowned. “I'd rather express confusion.”

The entity flickered momentarily, as if deciding whether the effort of rendering itself in three dimensions was worthwhile. “Your former location was scheduled for an unplanned matter-energy conversion event. You were extracted moments before your spontaneous phase transition.”

“You mean before I exploded?”

“A crude but acceptable approximation.”

Kelvin sighed. This was not how he had intended to start his day. “Alright. Who are you?”

“I am a representative of the Universal Bureau of Energy Conservation. You may call me Second Law.”

Kelvin blinked. “You're named after the Second Law of Thermodynamics?”

“Yes. It is the only law that has never been broken.”

Kelvin rubbed his temples. “And why did you save me?”

“You are the least inefficient human I have encountered. The Bureau has selected you to assist in our mission.”

“Which is?”

“To locate and neutralize an existential threat to the universe: a species that has discovered how to reverse entropy.”

Kelvin’s scientific instincts overrode his survival instincts. “That’s impossible.”

Second Law flickered again. “That is an accurate statement. And yet, they have done it.”

Kelvin felt a headache forming. “Let me guess. If they reverse entropy—”

“The universe undergoes an instantaneous negation of all thermodynamic gradients, ceasing all motion, all thought, all existence.”

Kelvin sighed. “Well. That does sound bad.”

“Yes. It is the most egregious violation of the laws of physics since humans invented the perpetual motion machine, which we confiscated before they could make a second one.”

Kelvin adjusted his tie. “Fine. I’ll help. But on one condition.”

Second Law shimmered expectantly.

“I’d like to finish my coffee first.”

The entity hesitated. Then, for the first time, it seemed genuinely uncertain. “I will require several minutes to compute whether that is an acceptable use of universal energy resources.”

Kelvin smirked. “Take your time.”

## 8. The Final, Ultimate, Absolutely-This-Time-We-Mean-It Frontier

### A Beginning (Which, Statistically Speaking, Is Rarely the End)

Captain Dirk Starhammer stared out the bridge window of the *ISS Dauntless*, a ship so advanced that its designers had forgotten to include a user manual, which meant only Starhammer could fly it. Or so he told everyone.

Beyond the viewports stretched the infinite void of space, dotted with stars and the occasional ominous nebula. Space, he mused, was very big. Unreasonably big. Unfairly big, really. You could spend your whole life going from one end of it to the other, only to discover you'd barely left the driveway.

"Captain," said Ensign Perky McRedshirt, whose name suggested a tragic inevitability, "we're picking up a distress signal."

Starhammer sighed. "Of course we are."

Distress signals were the leading cause of occupational stress among starship captains, followed closely by malfunctioning food synthesizers and getting accidentally engaged to alien royalty.

"Onscreen," he commanded, mostly because that's what captains always said.

The main viewscreen flickered to life, displaying a grainy image of a cloaked figure standing in front of a comically oversized lever labeled *DO NOT PULL* in multiple languages, including one that was just a series of disappointed sighs.

"Attention, inferior beings!" rasped the figure. "I am Lord Obsidious Dreadfang, Supreme Overlord of the Dark Singularity Empire, and I have discovered an ancient doomsday device that will obliterate the universe unless my demands are met!"

"What are your demands?" asked Starhammer, rubbing his temples.

Obsidious considered. "I... uh... hadn't thought that far ahead. What do people usually demand?"

"Power? Wealth? A monologue?" offered Starhammer.

"Oh! Yes, those sound good," Obsidious said. "I demand all of those. Also, a pet that doesn't secretly plot against me."

"Unreasonable," said Starhammer. "The last one, I mean. Every pet plots against its owner. It's just science."

Behind Starhammer, Commander Zylax—his pointy-eared, logically-minded first officer—raised an eyebrow. He did this a lot. In fact, if there were a contest for eyebrow-raising, he would have already calculated the exact probability of his victory and then declined to enter because it was \*illogical\* to seek validation through competition.

"Captain," Zylax said, folding his hands behind his back in a way that suggested vast intelligence and mild condescension, "this situation bears remarkable similarity to the Incident of the Glorbtak Singularity Wars, the Treaty of Grumblon IV, and every second Tuesday in the Andromeda Expanse."

"Which means?"

"Which means we should reverse the polarity of something," Zylax said matter-of-factly.

"Excellent thinking, Zylax. Ensign McRedshirt, reverse the polarity of—uh—just pick something."

McRedshirt hurried over to a control panel and began pressing buttons with the enthusiasm of a man whose job security depended on it.

"The polarity of the deflector array has been reversed!" he announced.

"Good," Starhammer said. "Now, let's do some quick diplomacy before the universe explodes. Open a channel."

The screen flickered again, revealing a second figure. This one was green-skinned, wearing an extravagant outfit made of metallic shoulder pads, unnecessary capes, and \*attitude\*.

"Wait, who's this?" asked Starhammer.

"I am Princess Gloriana of the Shimmering Nebula," the woman announced. "My people claim dominion over this region of space!"

"Your people?" Obsidious scoffed. "This nebula belongs to the Dark Singularity Empire!"

"Do not test my patience, warlord!" Gloriana snapped. "I have an armada, and I know how to use it."

Starhammer sighed. "Of course she does."

"Captain," Zylax interjected, "I calculate a 97.32% chance that if we let them argue for another three minutes, one of them will start talking about an ancient prophecy."

"Ancient prophecy?" Obsidious perked up. "Oh, yes! There *\*was\** an ancient prophecy! It was foretold that on this very day, a chosen one would rise to—"

"—bring balance to the galaxy?" Gloriana interrupted.

Obsidious blinked. "Wait, *your* people have a prophecy too?"

Gloriana rolled her eyes. "Of course we do. Every major civilization has a prophecy. We're practically tripping over chosen ones at this point."

"Alright, enough!" Starhammer said, rubbing his forehead. "Let's resolve this like mature, responsible—"

Suddenly, the ship's main computer, C.O.R.A. (which stood for something, but no one remembered what), chimed in.

"*Captain,*" C.O.R.A. announced in a voice that was both soothing and deeply unhelpful, "*anomalous temporal disturbance detected. Probability of paradox approaching critical levels.*"

"Great," Starhammer muttered. "Temporal paradoxes. Just what we needed."

Before he could do anything, a swirling blue portal opened in the middle of the bridge, and out stepped—

Himself.

"Don't listen to anything I say!" Future Starhammer shouted. "It's a trap! Also, never eat the seafood on Rigel VI!"

With that, Future Starhammer promptly vanished in a puff of glowing time-wibbly energy.

"Well, that was cryptic," Starhammer said. "Okay, team, what have we got? We have a doomsday device, a galactic war, an ancient prophecy, a time paradox, and—"

A sudden klaxon blared.

"*Captain,*" C.O.R.A. interrupted again, "*it appears you are now also contractually obligated to participate in a high-speed space chase.*"

Starhammer pinched the bridge of his nose. "You know what? Let's just do what we always do."

"Which is?" asked McRedshirt.

"Push random buttons, deliver an inspiring speech, and hope everything sorts itself out."

McRedshirt hesitated. "Will that actually work?"

Starhammer grinned. "It always does. Engage!"

With that, the *ISS Dauntless* plunged into warp speed, chased by laser blasts, ominous prophecies, and at least three separate apocalyptic threats.

Just another Tuesday in space.



## 9. Tesla and the Saucer of Unfortunate Engineering

Nikola Tesla was having an unusually dull evening, which, for him, meant he had only accidentally electrocuted himself three times and set fire to one pair of trousers. He was pondering an improvement to his wireless energy transmission device when the entire room was suddenly bathed in an eerie, flickering light.

Tesla sighed. He recognized this light. He had seen it before. It was the sort of light that suggested something was very wrong with the fabric of space-time, or that someone had accidentally plugged an alternating current device into a direct current socket. Both had happened to him before.

A shimmering hole in the air appeared, and out of it stepped a small, grey-skinned creature with an oversized head, large black eyes, and an expression of deep existential regret.

"Ah," said Tesla, adjusting his spectacles. "A visitor. You are not from around here, are you?"

The alien made a noise like a deflating bagpipe. "I am Bz'R'k, Interstellar Technician Third Class, and I require assistance. My vessel is broken. You will fix it."

Tesla arched an eyebrow. "Why me?"

Bz'R'k waved a thin, gangly arm. "You are Nikola Tesla. You have 278 patents. Your understanding of electricity is unparalleled. And—" he glanced at a small device in his hand, which appeared to be a sort of cosmic clipboard, "—you once built a death ray just to see if you could."

Tesla beamed. "Ah, you've done your research!"

Before Tesla could offer tea, Bz'R'k pressed a button, and the room dissolved in a shimmer of light.

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They reappeared inside what Tesla immediately recognized as an utterly shambolic spacecraft. It was circular, with a spinning outer rim and a worrying number of exposed wires sparking in places where wires ought not to spark. The smell of burnt toast and existential despair hung in the air.

"Well," Tesla said, rubbing his hands together, "this is a disaster."

Bz'R'k groaned. "Tell me about it. I was en route to Proxima Centauri when my gravity drive shorted out. I tried to fix it, but the ship's manual is in *Regulan*, and my translator only works on languages spoken by species with lips. So instead of translating the instructions, it just repeats 'Mmmhphhphh' in a vaguely apologetic tone."

Tesla nodded sympathetically. "This is why I always write my notes in Serbian. It confuses my rivals and ensures only I understand my own brilliance."

Bz'R'k stared at him. "Yes, well. Can you fix it?"

Tesla cracked his knuckles. "Of course. But I will require—" he squinted at the ship's exposed circuitry "—three coils of copper wire, an oscillating transformer, and a very large sandwich."

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Two hours later, Tesla had rewired the ship, adjusted the gravity drive, and built a small experimental device that he claimed would allow them to transmit power wirelessly across light-years. Bz'R'k had eaten half of Tesla's sandwich and was feeling somewhat regretful about it.

Tesla stepped back, admiring his work. "There. I have rerouted your quantum capacitor through a high-frequency resonance transformer, creating a stable electromagnetic field. Your ship should now function at full capacity."

Bz'R'k pressed a button on his control panel. The ship hummed to life, lifted slightly off the ground, and then, rather unexpectedly, turned into a large, floating pigeon.

Tesla blinked. "That... was not supposed to happen."

Bz'R'k groaned and massaged his oversized forehead. "What did you *do*?"

Tesla adjusted his collar. "Well, I may have slightly altered the fundamental quantum properties of the ship's matter-state. But look!" He pointed excitedly. "It flaps its wings quite gracefully."

The pigeon-spaceship let out a dignified \*coo\* and pecked at the floor.

Bz'R'k sighed. "Alright. Fine. Can you turn it back?"

Tesla stroked his chin. "Possibly. But first, I must conduct an experiment to determine whether it still operates as a spacecraft."

"You mean fly it?"

Tesla beamed. "Precisely!"

Before Bz'R'k could object, Tesla leaped into the pilot's seat and pressed a button at random. The ship-pigeon lurched forward with an elegant flap and shot through space, leaving behind a bewildered Bz'R'k and several very confused astronomers on Earth.

From that day on, Tesla was never seen again. Some say he retired to a life of quiet study. Others say he simply vanished.

But in certain parts of the galaxy, there are legends—whispers of a brilliant human scientist flying through the cosmos in a great, glowing pigeon, laughing madly as he discovers the secrets of the universe.

And somewhere, Bz'R'k is still standing in Tesla's laboratory, shaking his head, wondering why he didn't just call roadside assistance.

## 10. Love at First Abduction

### In Which a Flying Saucer Meddles in Romance

There are many ways to meet the love of your life. You could, for instance, accidentally order their coffee at a café and then be forced to drink something called a "mocha oat milk foam delight" while gagging politely. You could also bump into them at a bookstore, reach for the same novel, and have an awkwardly intense moment of eye contact that results in marriage three years later.

Or, if you're particularly unlucky, you could be kidnapped by an alien in a flying saucer and wake up in your underwear next to a complete stranger.

This is precisely what happened to Ethan Bell and Sophie Carter.

Ethan, an IT specialist with a crippling fear of public speaking and mild allergies to everything, had been abducted from his tiny apartment in Croydon while brushing his teeth. He was still holding his toothbrush, which was deeply unsettling, as he had no idea where the toothpaste had gone.

Sophie, a microbiologist and noted skeptic of all things paranormal, had been taken mid-lecture, explaining to a room full of students why alien abductions were just a mixture of sleep paralysis, bad dreams, and a desperate need for attention. This was somewhat ironic.

They found themselves in a smooth, silver room, lying on a table under an uncomfortably bright light, while an extremely unimpressed Grey alien examined a clipboard.

"Good, you're both awake," said the alien, in perfect English. "Let's get started, shall we?"

### Love is Highly Probable (Statistically Speaking)

The alien, who introduced himself as Bob (short for B08-GREY), tapped his clipboard with the air of someone who had far too many abductees to process that night.

"Right. You two are a statistically significant romantic match. 99.87 percent compatibility, according to my database. You should already be experiencing mild attraction. Do you feel it? A bit of tingling? Maybe a sudden, inexplicable appreciation for each other's scent?"

Ethan and Sophie stared at each other.

Sophie, dressed in her pajama top and mismatched socks, crossed her arms. "This is ridiculous. Who abducts people for dating purposes?"

Bob sighed, the long-suffering sigh of an alien who had to deal with primitive species and their irrational approach to relationships. "Honestly, you humans are terrible at mating rituals. Swiping left, swiping right, ghosting, benching, breadcrumbing—do you have any idea how frustrating it is watching you lot fumble around? I mean, you've practically destroyed your own planet because nobody wants to just talk to each other!"

Ethan blinked. "Wait. You mean... this is an alien dating service?"

"Exactly," Bob said. "Intergalactic Love Bureau, Grey Division. I abduct humans who are too socially incompetent to find partners on their own and give them a little push. You're welcome."

Sophie groaned. "This is ridiculous. I do fine on my own, thank you very much."

Bob glanced at his clipboard. "Oh? Last relationship ended three years ago when the guy ghosted you via text message and then married your cousin."

Sophie turned red. "That is—completely irrelevant!"

Bob turned to Ethan. "And you? Last date was six months ago, ended with you spilling pasta sauce all over yourself and apologizing seventeen times before she said she just 'wasn't feeling the spark'?"

Ethan sank into his seat. "I don't like this game."

## **The Date From Above**

Bob clapped his hands, or at least made a sound that suggested he had clapped his hands, even though he didn't have fingers. "Right, so we'll make this easy. You two will now be placed on a lovely, simulated date in a neutral environment. If you pass, I'll drop you off back on Earth, happily in love. If you fail, well... I'll have to wipe your memories and try again next week with different people."

Sophie squinted. "Wait. Are you saying we've done this before?"

Bob gave them a mysterious smile.

Before either of them could protest, the room shimmered, reality twisted in on itself, and suddenly they were sitting at a candlelit table in what appeared to be a high-end restaurant

floating in the middle of deep space. A massive view of the Milky Way sparkled through the transparent walls. Soft music played. A waiter, who appeared to be a sentient blob of green goo, handed them menus.

Sophie rubbed her temples. "This is actually happening."

Ethan nervously picked up his menu. "Uh... what's 'Nebulon Surprise'?"

The waiter burbled enthusiastically.

Ethan nodded. "Right. I'll have the salad."

Sophie sighed. "Okay, let's get this over with. What do you do for a living?"

Ethan smiled awkwardly. "I... uh... fix computers."

Sophie groaned. "Oh, good. A tech guy. Look, no offense, but I bet you think Linux is a personality trait, don't you?"

Ethan's ears turned pink. "I—well—I mean, it's more stable than—"

Bob's voice interrupted from above. "Less arguing, more romance, please!"

Ethan and Sophie exchanged a look.

Then, despite themselves, they laughed.

## **A Slight Malfunction (In Both the Spaceship and Their Hearts)**

Just as things were starting to feel... less terrible, an alarm blared.

"Uh-oh," Bob muttered. "That's not good."

The restaurant wobbled, then flickered, then vanished entirely, dumping Ethan and Sophie back onto the cold metal floor of the saucer. Red warning lights flashed.

Ethan groaned. "What now?"

Bob adjusted some controls. "Tiny problem. We're about to be shot down by a trigger-happy government agency. Hold on, I need to do some evasive maneuvers."

The saucer lurched violently to the left.

Sophie and Ethan tumbled into each other.

"Sorry about this," Bob said. "First dates are always a bit bumpy."

Sophie, now practically in Ethan's lap, looked at him. "I swear, if we survive this, I'll agree to one real date."

Ethan grinned. "You promise not to mock my Linux setup?"

Sophie groaned. "Fine. But if you say the words 'open-source' more than once, I'm walking out."

Bob, dodging a missile, sighed in satisfaction. "See? I \*knew\* this would work."

And with that, the saucer blinked out of existence, leaving behind nothing but a confused military pilot and two very bewildered humans who, despite everything, were now holding hands.

# 11. Planet of the Leaf Lords

## A New Dawn

Captain Elias Vance had seen many strange worlds, but none quite like Viridia-4. His landing pod hissed as it cooled, the thick green atmosphere swirling outside. His ship, *The Horizon*, remained in orbit, sending back live data to Earth.

“Command, this is Vance. I’ve landed safely. Oxygen’s rich, gravity’s close to Earth’s. Stepping out now.”

He pushed the hatch open, stepping onto the soft, mossy ground. Towering trees stretched high into the mist, their leaves the size of sailboats. The air smelled fresh, with a hint of something nutty.

Then he heard it—a deep, rhythmic chanting.

## The Leaf Lords

Vance crouched behind a massive root and peered through the foliage.

A procession moved through the jungle—a dozen massive gorilla-like beings, draped in woven cloaks of golden leaves. Their fur ranged from deep black to silver, their eyes filled with intelligence.

But the most incredible part? They were riding hairy bison the size of SUVs.

The bison’s thick woolly coats were braided with decorative vines, and their massive horns were painted with intricate symbols. At the center of the procession, a particularly regal-looking silverback rode a bison with gilded tusks. His cloak shimmered with thousands of layered leaves.

Vance’s translator buzzed in his ear, struggling to decipher the language.

“Honor... the Sky...”

Then the silverback raised a massive fist and pointed—right at Vance.

## The Trial of the Sky Walker



Within minutes, Vance was surrounded. The gorillas, or Viridians, didn't attack but herded him onto a waiting bison. Its thick, shaggy fur smelled like fresh earth and—oddly—mint.

They rode to an enormous stone citadel, built into a mountainside, with waterfalls cascading down terraces. Inside, torches flickered, illuminating murals of gorillas watching the sky, carving symbols, and building machines.

Vance's eyes widened. This wasn't just a primitive society—this was a civilization on the verge of a Renaissance.

The silverback, now seated on a throne woven from roots and vines, studied Vance. His voice was a deep rumble, now slightly clearer through the translator.

"You fall from sky. Are you... god?"

Vance chuckled nervously. "Not quite."

## **The Debate of the Elders**

The Viridian court murmured at Vance's words. Some looked in awe, others in suspicion. One elder, his fur tinged with gray, leaned forward on his ornate staff.

"If not god," he said, "then what?"

Vance chose his words carefully. "I am an explorer, a traveler from another world." He pointed upward. "From the stars."

The silverback stroked his chin. "The stars..." He turned to the other elders. "He speaks of the Sky Realm."

More murmurs. A younger gorilla, smaller but draped in scholar's robes, stepped forward. "We have watched the Sky Realm through our Great Tubes. We have seen lights that move unlike the stars. You are from there?"

Vance grinned. "You have telescopes?"

The young scholar puffed out his chest. "They were my invention. I am Ozu."

An elder scoffed. "If he is from the Sky Realm, let him prove it."

The silverback—who Vance now assumed was their leader—nodded. "Yes. A test."

## **The Trial of the Starborn**

Vance swallowed. “What kind of test?”

Ozu’s face lit up. “You will ride against Chief Moktar in the Great Charge.”

“Uh... what?”

The elder banged his staff. “It is tradition! A test of mind, courage, and skill. If you are from the Sky Realm, surely you will triumph.”

Vance eyed Moktar, the massive silverback who had been silent until now. He cracked his knuckles and grinned.

“You fall from the sky,” Moktar said. “Let’s see if you can stay on a bison.”

## **Bison and Bravery**

Vance stood atop a raised platform, staring at his mount—a towering, muscle-bound, hairy bison. The beast snorted, its painted horns gleaming.

Ozu handed him a leaf-woven harness. “Good luck.”

Moktar mounted his own bison with ease, giving Vance a smug grin.

The rules were simple: race through the jungle, avoid obstacles, and reach the stone arch at the end. First to pass wins.

Vance took a deep breath and climbed onto his bison. It let out a deep, resonant snort—the sound of a creature that had seen too much nonsense in its life.

A Viridian elder raised a ceremonial leaf-staff. “BEGIN!”

The bison exploded into motion.

## **A Sky Walker’s Trick**

Branches whipped past Vance’s head as he clung to the harness. Moktar was ahead, his bison thundering through the dense foliage with practiced ease.

Vance gritted his teeth. “Okay, think, think...”

His bison was powerful, but he lacked control.

Then he remembered—his grav-boots.

With a flick of his wrist, he adjusted the gravity dampener in his boots. Instantly, his weight lightened, allowing him to shift effortlessly with the bison’s movements.

He crouched low, balancing perfectly. “Alright, big guy, let’s move.”

He tugged the reins, guiding the bison around a fallen tree instead of plowing through it like Moktar.

The silverback glanced back, eyes widening. “Sky magic?”

Vance grinned. “Nah. Just good physics.”

## **The Legend is Born**

With a final push, Vance’s bison surged ahead. The stone arch loomed near.

Moktar roared, pushing his beast forward. Neck and neck.

Vance whispered, “Come on, buddy. Just a little more.”

The bison leaped, clearing a final rock obstacle.

They crossed the arch first.

The crowd erupted in cheers. Ozu practically vibrated with excitement.

“The Sky Walker wins!”

Moktar skidded to a stop, panting. Then, to Vance’s surprise, he laughed.

“You ride well, Sky Walker.” He thumped his chest in respect.

The silverback leader stood, raising his arms. “Then it is true! He is from the Sky Realm. We must learn from him.”

Ozu grinned. “Teach us your wisdom, Sky Walker.”

Vance smiled. He hadn't expected first contact to involve extreme bison racing, but here he was.

Maybe, just maybe, this was the beginning of something great.

The Renaissance of the Leaf Lords had begun.

The End (for now).

## 12. The Transdimensional Misadventures of Dr. Throckmorton

Dr. Reginald Throckmorton was the kind of scientist whose very presence made universities nervous. Not because he was unqualified—quite the opposite. He had six PhDs, three honorary doctorates, and a restraining order from the Nobel Committee after an incident involving an unlicensed particle accelerator and the Swedish royal family. No, the issue was that Reginald had a tendency to do things—things that had consequences. And academia, at its core, prefers consequences to remain firmly theoretical.

His latest endeavor was what he called the Transdimensional Quantum Entanglement Perambulator, which, despite sounding like a steampunk baby stroller, was, in fact, a portal to another world. Or possibly a very aggressive microwave. Either way, it was guaranteed to make reality deeply uncomfortable.

His lab assistant, Mila, was a skeptical young woman whose primary job was to remind Dr. Throckmorton that just because something was theoretically possible didn't mean it should be attempted indoors. She had a special fire extinguisher labeled "For Reginald's Shenanigans" and kept a preemptive apology letter addressed to "whom it may concern" at all times.

"Mila!" Reginald bellowed from behind a mass of wires, blinking lights, and at least one piece of alien technology he absolutely should not have had. "Throw the lever!"

"Which one?" Mila asked, surveying the bank of suspiciously sparking switches.

"The big one. With the skull and crossbones."

"That one says 'DO NOT THROW UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.'"

"Exactly! If it was safe, I wouldn't need an assistant."

With the long-suffering sigh of a woman who had, at this point, simply accepted her fate, Mila threw the lever. There was a deep whomph, the scent of singed eyebrows (her own, regrettably), and suddenly, a glowing rift in space-time appeared before them.

It shimmered with the sort of light that physicists described as "non-Euclidean" and regular people described as "I need to sit down." Then, before either of them could say something pithy about the laws of physics being overrated, the rift yinked them both through.

They landed in a heap on the other side, Mila clutching the fire extinguisher like a security blanket.

"Mila," Reginald whispered, staring around in awe. "I think we've just discovered the home planet of the Greys."

And indeed, they had. It was a vast, sprawling world covered in sleek, mysterious architecture, an unsettling number of blinking lights, and what appeared to be an entire bureaucracy dedicated to probing things that really ought to be left unprobed.

A short, spindly Grey alien in a lab coat wandered over, regarding them with large black eyes that somehow managed to express equal parts curiosity and exasperation.

"Oh, for the love of the Grand Cosmic Conspiracy," the Grey sighed. "How did you two get here?"

"Quantum entanglement!" Reginald beamed. "And also a mild disregard for personal safety."

The Grey pinched the bridge of his oddly smooth nose. "Great. Another leak in the dimensional shielding. That's the third one this eon. The council is going to have my head for this."

"Council?" Mila asked warily.

"The Grand Intergalactic Council of Secrecy and Misinformation," the Grey explained. "We handle cover-ups, disinformation campaigns, and the occasional crop circle maintenance. My name's Vylqx, and I am absolutely not supposed to be explaining this to you."

"So you are responsible for all those conspiracies!" Reginald exclaimed, delighted.

Vylqx sighed again, the weariness of a bureaucrat who had been responsible for far too many memory wipes. "Yes, yes, fine. Greys are real. We've been visiting Earth for millennia. But honestly, you people make our jobs easy. Half the time, we don't even need to cover things up. Humans do it for us."

Mila frowned. "What do you mean?"

Vylqx led them to a giant holographic screen displaying live Earth footage. "Look at this," he said, pointing to a particularly blurry video of a flying saucer. "What do humans do? Immediately post it on the internet, where—within minutes—it's surrounded by comments arguing about whether it's CGI, swamp gas, or a trick of the light. You lot invented misinformation way before we did. We're just... facilitating."

Reginald was practically vibrating with excitement. "So, you mean all the conspiracy theories are real?"

Vylqx hesitated. "Some of them. Others are just nonsense humans made up that we then had to make real so people wouldn't get too close to the actual truth. It's a nightmare, honestly. Do you

know how much effort it takes to make sure Bigfoot is seen just often enough to remain a mystery but not enough to be verifiable?"

Mila rubbed her temples. "This is giving me a headache. Can we go home now?"

Vylqx sighed and pointed to a glowing portal in the distance. "Fine. But if anyone asks, you were abducted by a swamp gas balloon in the shape of Venus, okay? We've got a reputation to maintain."

Reginald grinned as they stepped through the portal back to their lab. "Mila," he said, practically giddy, "I think we've just discovered the greatest scientific truth in history."

Mila shook her head. "You mean the greatest conspiracy in history."

Reginald considered this, then beamed. "Even better!"

## 13. The Battle of Ludicrousness: A Gorillapolis Saga

It was a day like any other in the bizarre world of Gorillapolis, where evolution had taken a rather dramatic detour. The gorillas, with their penchant for theatrics and over-the-top cultural mashups, had divided into two distinct factions. On one side, there were the Samurai Gorillas, clad in impractically ornate armor and wielding swords as sharp as their wit (which, let's face it, wasn't razor-sharp). They preferred the noble companionship of bison as their war steeds, mostly because horses had politely declined involvement in such nonsense.

On the other side were the Mammoth-Riding Gorillas. Mammoths, as it turned out, were surprisingly agreeable to the idea of being ridden, as long as they received a steady supply of peanut butter sandwiches. These gorillas had adopted the rather questionable strategy of replicating Viking culture—helmets with horns, incomprehensible shouting, and occasional pillaging—but their helmets were often mistaken for salad bowls by their rivals, which was a point of some consternation.

The two factions had been embroiled in a feud for centuries, ever since the Great Banana Treaty of Gorillapolis had failed due to an argument over whether bananas should be peeled from the top or the bottom. It was, as all great gorilla historians agree, an utterly stupid reason for a war. But, wars have been fought over less.

On this particular day, a grand battle was to take place in the Valley of Ludicrousness—a name chosen by the Gorillapolis Marketing Board to boost tourism. The Mammoth-Riding Gorillas had assembled in an impressive formation, their mammoths adorned with war paint that vaguely resembled doodles by toddlers. The Samurai Gorillas, ever dramatic, had spent hours perfecting their entrances, which involved elaborate bison choreography, synchronized helmet gleaming, and a drum solo by a particularly talented gorilla named Greg.

As the battle commenced, it quickly became apparent that neither faction had any idea what they were doing. The Mammoth-Riding Gorillas attempted to charge, only to realize that mammoths were more interested in grazing on nearby bushes. The Samurai Gorillas, in turn, tried to perform an ancient sword kata, which somehow resulted in a group interpretive dance that resembled a poorly rehearsed musical.

It was Greg the drummer who unintentionally changed the course of the battle. In a moment of artistic fervor, he launched into an experimental drum riff so thunderous that it startled the mammoths into forming an organized retreat. The Mammoth-Riding Gorillas, confused by their own steeds' coordination, assumed this was a tactical maneuver and immediately abandoned the field, shouting "Victory!" as they fled.



The Samurai Gorillas, bewildered but proud, declared themselves the winners of the epic battle and celebrated by composing a haiku about bananas. Greg became a local legend, his drumming hailed as the most effective weapon of all time, and the mammoths returned to their true calling as connoisseurs of peanut butter sandwiches.

And thus, the Valley of Ludicrousness lived up to its name, and Gorillapolis continued its legacy as the most absurdly entertaining place in the universe—a fact not lost on the dolphins who watched from orbit and muttered, “Idiots.”

If Douglas Adams were here, I think he’d approve. Or at least politely chuckle. What do you think of Gorillapolis? Would you ride a mammoth or a bison?