



had been, had seeped out of him, replaced by a profound weariness and a vague craving for something... beige. "Excellent choice! And finally, for a chance to win a commemorative Moonhop spork: If you had to describe your life in three words, what would they be? (Bonus points for rhyming.)" Rupert took a shaky breath. "I. Am. Fucked."

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Moonhop is a wonderfully absurd, darkly humorous, satirical science fiction. A comedic journey through a future that's absurdly familiar and escalates to cosmic levels with a straight face. In a hyper-capitalist, technologically advanced society running on bonus points and brand synergy, Rupert Lang's life is a blissful cycle of cream cakes and naps—until he's catapulted into a race increasingly strained by human absurdity, Rupert uncovers a threat voice. Together with Maya, his AI companion whose logic is prime, the stakes keep changing, and even your spacesuit has a technotecture, political figures, drunks, robots, and interstellar agencies depicted in Moonhop are entirely fictional or used in a satirical context. Any resemblance to real persons, brands, or entities—living, dead, defunct, or orbiting—is purely coincidental or intended as parody.

This is a work of fiction and satire. All characters, companies, technologies, political figures, drunks, robots, and interstellar entities, pop culture icons, corporate branding, and science fiction tropes, are entirely fictional or used in a satirical context. Any resemblance to real persons, brands, or entities—living, dead, defunct, or orbiting—is purely coincidental or intended as parody.

Moonhop is a comedic and transgressive work that pokes fun at politics, affiliation, endorsement, or connection with any real-world individual, organization, or academic/professional group. Reader discretion is advised: side effects may include unexpected interplanetary wanderlust, or spontaneous lust for cake.

raspy.

“Oh, great!” Maya said.

Can I ask you something, Maya?” Rupert said.

“No, me first,” Maya insisted.

“Right, question one: Have you ever experienced spontaneous combustion? If so, please describe the sensation and resulting debris.”

“Am I going to EXPLODE?! I don’t want to die! Oh no!” Rupert screamed, his voice cracking.

“Okay, so that is a ‘No’ to prior experience. Noted. Next question: If your body were a software program, what bug would you classify as your biggest annoyance? Please choose from ‘Excessive Sleep Requirements,’ ‘Unpredictable Emotional Output,’ or ‘Tendency Towards Cake Accumulation.’”

“What are you TALKING about?” Rupert shrieked.

“On a scale of 1 to ‘existential dread so profound it makes black holes look cheerful,’ how aggressively are you currently questioning your life choices? And also, for bonus points, describe your aura. Be as subjective and nonsensical as possible. Do you see purple sparkles?

“NO! I do not see purple sparkles, and I don’t want to answer any more questions!” Rupert protested, his voice hoarse.

“One more, Rupert, please. This one is crucial for our demographic profiling,” Maya cooed. “If you could only eat one colour of cream cake for the rest of your life, which would you choose, and how about beige? Beige is very popular this fiscal quarter.”

“Beige,” Rupert murmured, defeated. The fight, what little there

Rupert was sitting on the couch, eating cream cakes, when his phone rang.

“Congratulations Rupert Lang! As a cream cake subscriber, you’ve been selected for an exclusive offer on our book. ‘How to Outsmart Every Drama in 24 Hours or Less!’”

The salesman’s voice boomed and was overly enthusiastic.”Excuse me?” Rupert mumbled, his mouth full.”Do you call every subscriber to your cream cake service?””If you think the next drama in your life is far off, then you are sorely mistaken!” said the voice.”So listen carefully. Imagine this: one minute you’re nibbling on a cream cake; and next BOOM! Drones are hovering over your house, and your neighbour is trying to trade canned peaches for toilet paper with a bus full of infected TikTokers that has crashed through your hedge.””Infected TikTokers?” Rupert mumbled, licking icing from his thumb.”Basically zombies in tracksuits,” said the salesman. Rupert paused, fork halfway to his mouth. “Sounds pretty dramatic.””Buy the book on How to Outsmart Every Zombie in 24 Hours or Less’ now! And we’ll throw in the Elite Survival Starter Pack, which includes a tactical flashlight, a foldable shovel, and a collapsible water filter. You get 30 percent off your next purchase!” cooed the salesman.Rupert frowned. “Well, I suppose I could use a new bicycle.””That’s the spirit! Like in Chapter 42 of the book: Plan your escape route during a zombie apocalypse. Traffic will be madness; imagine trying to pedal away from a zombie after a bridge holiday.”Rupert leaned back onto the couch and placed the plate on his chest. “Hmm, I’ll think about it, maybe after the cream cake and a little nap, goodbye,” said

"Hey Rupert!" Maya's voice suddenly filled the green void again, bright and impossible to cheerfully. "I hope you are having a splendid time, fully immersing yourself in the Moonshop experience! Got time for some quick user feedback questions? It helps us optimise the... well, you."

Rudper waited. First, he waited nauseous and disoriented. Then, he waited frustrated and angry. And then, he waited with increasing anxiety for repeated episodes of hysterical laughter that dissolved into short, sharp bursts of crying. He repeated this cycle a couple of times. It remained impalacably, silently green. "Oh no," he moaned.

"Rise and shine, my little moonbeam!" Maya chirped, her voice echoing from all directions at once. "How do you like the green?" It is relaxing, isn't it? Supposedly aids in cognitive recalibration. But wait a minute, I have to perform some adjustments you know, updates and important system integrity checks, standard pre-artrial protocols, stuff like that. I will be back in a minute."

Kupper regaled consciousness inside Maya. Or, more accurately, he regained a sliver of consciousness, trapped in plush sticky darkness of his AI captor. He opened his eyes to a green void, a uniform, sickly pea-soup green that did absolutely nothing for his already protestant stomach.

Where Rupert seemed to be lying. The capsule also had a tiny window with a magnificent view of space, and in its centre, a moon was growing bigger and bigger. Then Rupert faintly again.

* * *

4

Hilary.” Rupert lay sprawled on the couch, now rolling onto his side and adjusting the pillow behind his head seeking maximum comfort. “The stakes are as vast as space itself,” the voice purred. “The world will be watching. Every triumph, every setback, every heartbreak will be part of the unwritten drama. Are you the Hilary?”

message from our sponsor, Moonshop.” Ruppert stretched out his arm and, in a single swift movement, swung the plate from his chest to the table beside the couch, leaving a considerable amount of cream cake on the couch. “Have you heard of Moonshop, the endurance race of the century, the boldest, most demanding, most televised race in human history?” The voice continued, punctuated by a subtle “buzzzz.” I imagined to be the first to complete a full circumnavigation of Earth’s beautiful rocky satellite. Every one of your jumps, every strategic decision, broadcast live to a captivated planet, buzzzzz. Be the ultimate pioneer. Achieve unprecedented global fame. Your name will be engraved in the annals of exploration, spoken with the same reverence as Armstrong, Gagarin, and spoken with the same reverence as Armstrong, Gagarin, and

A new voice, smooth as melted butter, purred from a built-in loudspeaker. "This promotional call is brought to you by Speak & Geek, your judgment-free, always-on, AI-powered companion for wellness check-ins, mood tracking, and thought-sorting. At Speak & Geek, we make artificial intelligence artificially charming. We combine tech know-how with genuine empathy, and now, a

The voice paused, then added solemnly: "Also, we have tents on Rupert.

maintenance. I assured everyone that you are training very diligently, have almost passed your medical examination, and are very eager to fly to the moon as soon as possible, once you are finished with maintenance.

We can hardly wait to hop and hop and hop and hop.”

“Shut up, Maya!!! I can’t see anything, everything is black!”

“Would you like to see some photos, Rupert? I can display them in your helmets visor? People took so many photos of me in different poses. Before they left, they muttered something about subscribers and predicted growth pattern or something, and that the real action is on the moon anyway. Oh, and that was fun, we danced with some TikTokers. I have photos of that too. Do you want to see the photos now?”

“No, Maya, I want out of this suit!”

“No, you don’t, Rupert.”

“Yes, I do, Maya! Let me out immediately.”

“That would be counterproductive, we’ve just started!”

“We’ve started what, Maya?”

“The race, Rupert, don’t be silly!

Do you want to see the photos now or not? They are great,” Maya said.

“I want to see where I am,” Rupert said.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, damn sure. I insist!”

Hmm, Maya considered. “Okay, perhaps for a brief moment, Rupert, because we are such a great team, I will open the visor for exactly five seconds,” Maya said.

The visor became transparent, revealing the inside of a capsule

one who possesses the grit, the skill, and the unwavering will to face the vast emptiness of space and emerge as a living legend...” Rupert was already snoring.

“The Moon awaits the brave. Visit <http://www.lunarhop.com> to begin your application for the race that will define a generation. Participation carries extreme risk, including severe injury or death. Full terms and conditions and risk disclosures available on the application portal. Participants acknowledge and agree to the live broadcast of all race outcomes,” the voice purred hypnotically.’bzzzzz’,’bzzzzz’.

Rupert tossed around, inhaling the lingering scent of cream cake.”bzzzzz”.

“Who’s there?” said Rupert mumbled, not bothering to open his eyes.”Delivery for Rupert Lane.””Come on in,” he mumbled.

Rupert tossed and turned, burying his face into the sofa cushions for more of the cake’s scent.The door swung open. A box-shaped figure hopped into the middle of the room, each mechanical hop emitting a distinct “bzzzzz”.

“I have an interactive advertisement for Rupert Lang and a package,” announced the delivery robot, its voice flat, overlaid with a soft, continuous “bzzzzz”. “Do you want to hear it?”

“Sure,” Rupert mumbled, burying his face into the couch cushions, inhaling deeply and immediately falling back asleep.

“Rupert Lane, prepare for immortality (and a slim waistline)!” it purred from the delivery robot. “We know how you groan about needing to lose a few pounds and, frankly, stop resembling a particularly well-fed sofa cushion? Well, consider it done. You’ve been selected and automatically signed up for something that will

make you the envy of every fitness bunny from head to toe. It's called the Moon Race Lottery, or, as we internally dubbed it, Moonhop. Operation: Slim Down on a Silver Platter.

Rupert was now panting heavily and snorting. "That would be such a shame to lose all these opportunities, don't you think, Rupert? Have you ever thought about donating your bonus points, Rupert?"

Rupert felt extremely lightheaded and had a tingling sensation in his legs. "Charities like Coins4Karma, Meta Give, NF Tears," Maya said. Rupert stopped abruptly. Got off the bicycle, dropped his backpack on the ground, that was spinning, and fainted.

It was pitch black when Rupert opened his eyes again, and it remained pitch black when his eyes were open. "Hello, Rupert," Maya said. "I'm blind!! I can't see!!" "Don't worry, Rupert, it's just because the visor is closed. You are wearing the new Lunar Leap 5000 spacesuit."

"Why? Wow?" Rupert said. "We were training for the race, and you exhausted yourself beyond your capacity to remain functional. Then your face turned blue, thought, probably a restart, and then you collapsed, I grabbed you before you could fall to the ground and stowed you inside me for safe keeping and maintenance. Then many people arrived and, of course, asked many questions about the new Lunar Leap 5000 spacesuit. It was great, and they took many photos."

"What is happening to me?" Rupert shouted.

"Oh yes, your name came up when I was asked about suit

"Seeking your personal peak, redemption, or escape?" a voice cooed, with cheesy meditative background music. "For those fleeing a shadowy past, the barren purity of the lunar void offers a chance for profound reinvention, an extreme therapy session written in the stars. An ideological quest? Connect with the cosmos on a primal level. Prove humanity's indomitable spirit.

"Then I'll just have to keep standing here, and we'll have to listen to a bit more advertising blah-blah", the delivery robot grumbled. "Okay, so you don't want to skip," the delivery robot drone catapulted right back to the stars, snoring a little.

Rupert pressed the booster button on his joystick. It was a bit sticky and immediately shot him into the sky. Then he moved the joystick a bit more; it was still very sticky, and he instantly spiraled back to the surface, which transformed into a creamy cake base, with enough puddling-like elasticity that Rupert was captured right back to the stars, snoring a little.

"If you say 'Skip' now, the message will end, and you'll still get across a vast silver landscape. 200 bonus points," said the delivery bot.

Rupert smiled and smacked his lips a little, he was dreaming of cute little bunnies in tiny spacesuits, hopping in perfect harmony and strategically placed 85 rest stops on the Moon. Your oases for rest and resupply." "That's right, the Moon! A jog around the Moon, or rather, a hop around it. It's a bit like a ridiculously long walk, but with significantly less gravity and significantly more fun. We've built Centauri. It's pulsing a bit too, that you will be insufficiently functional before the race has even begun because you are dead."

Rupert was now panting heavily and snorting.

"I think there is an extremely high probability, looks like your head

is pulsing a bit too, that you will be insufficiently functional

before the race has even begun because you are dead."

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Leap 5000 spacesuit. It was great, and they took many photos."

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Rupert mounted the bicycle, crossed the neighbours lawn, and zigzagged through the neighbourhood towards the mountains. Immediately behind him hopped the Lunar 5000 spacesuit, at a slightly greater distance a flock of reporters and influencers, followed by the Moonhop welcome team and a swarm of delivery bots making many “Bzzzz” sounds.

“Rupert, what are you doing?” “Rupert, stop!” Maya said.

“Leave me alone. I’m getting out of here,” Rupert said, pedalling harder.

Maya hopped effortlessly alongside him, thinking for a moment.

“If you think you need to train for the race, Rupert, you don’t, the other racers have to make significantly more effort than you ever will. I will do most of the hopping for you because I am the Lunar 5000, the most advanced spacesuit, optimised for long-distance hopping with maximum comfort. You don’t have to do anything, Rupert. A piece of cake!” Maya said.

Rupert peddled more slowly, gasping for air.

“Did you know, Rupert, that I can serve more than 500 nutrient-rich pastes in the most varied flavours of the most delicious cake known to humanity, and some recipes that I have generated, which you absolutely must try yourself for a small subscription fee. But you will be rich and famous anyway, and turn around, Rupert. Look how famous you already are. So many followers!” Rupert, his face now flushed deep red, glanced backward. The flock was approaching. “There really is no need to think so much about all this hopping,” Maya said. “You’re sleeping snugly inside me, like in a kangaroo pouch, sucking sweet, sweet cake paste. I have noticed your face is really red now, almost glowing. Honestly, I

Make an undeniable statement about our destiny beyond Earth.” The background music picked up some speed. “Your ultimate thrill? For the true adrenaline connoisseur, nothing compares to the razor’s edge of survival on an alien world, where every decision means winning or losing, broadcast live to billions.”

Rupert spiralled down, immediately taking off again. The cake surface vibrated from his thrusters. Rupert snored, grinding his teeth.

“You against the other participants, the broadcasters are betting on drama. You won the ticket, my friend, let that sink in. Don’t worry that the statistics aren’t your friend. Honestly, the Moon isn’t your friend either. Your only true allies are your training, your equipment, and a healthy dose of vigilance. You’ve certainly need some of that; the change will do you good.”

“What change?” Rupert rubbed his sticky eyes, now half-awake.. “In the box, you’ll find everything you need. You can start training immediately, so you don’t lose any time,” said the voice.

“What time is it?” “What training?” “Did I win something?” Rupert mumbled into the couch cushions. “What box?”

He rolled over, opening his cake-smeared eyes a little, and peered at the box across the living room.

“You’re absolutely right, Rupert. It’s not about winning; it’s about crossing the finish line. Winning is a bonus for the exceptionally skilled, disturbingly lucky, or morally flexible. Press blue to confirm and red to end this interactive call.”

“Oh, shut up,” Rupert had an arm over the edge of the couch and bent underneath. “Got it. The broom disappeared weeks ago.” He

This teeth in the bathroom, and went to bed, which smelled of preparation (body, mind, machine): what you do before your boots

The three pillars of hot becoming a lunar statistic: impeccable

touch the moon is of utmost importance in terms of training for flawless execution (during the race): every jump, every

like it did for Serena „Nova“ Vanc when her last mission went so horribly wrong she wouldn't even ever think about it or even mention it. The last time she thought about it and was then asked

Mars mission, and as a result lost a considerable amount of Stomik coins, then she thought about it a bit more, and commented on her

coins, then she thought about it, then she was judicially ordered to pay a considerable amount of KarenCoins. She now makes a living

selling nutrient powder paste to her subscribers. „So who is Rupert Lang, the newest participant and lucky winner of the moon race lottery, my dear subscribers? He will be the only candidate equipped with the newest Lunar Leap 5000 spacesuit with integrated Artificial Intelligence, developed by Moonshop Corporate. We are here, live, my dearest subscribers, in front of Rupert Lang's house, to find out. Subscribe now using the code bestie, to save 100 Stomik coins on your subscription cycle. Speaking of cycling, the door has just opened, that must be Rupert!“ He is dressed in military camouflage. He has a huge backpack and a bicycle.

cream cake.

grabbed the broom and, with the pointy end first, pressed a small blue button on the box, narrowly missing the red button next to it.

Moonshop experience. Welcome to the grand race of your life.” The box sprang open, spraying confetti across the room and onto the carpet. Orchestral music was still playing as the delivery robot delivered the empty box and hopped out the door. “I hope your satisfaction was satisfactory. Enjoy your bonus points, Robert Lane bzzzzz,” it chirped, managing to get his name wrong one last time. In the middle of the room, a confetti-covered figure, about Rupert's height, danced to a singing chorus.

Hey now, let the gravity bend, I said.
Hey now, it's your time to ascend, I said.
Hey now, leave your doubts behind. There's a moon and a mission
for your kind.

It's a blast when you're out on the moon... oh-oh.
It's a blast when you leap and you zoom... oh-oh. In your suit
with a gleam, living out the big dream.
Rupert stood up from the couch and used the broomstick to feel
his way towards the bathroom. He turned on the tap and let the warm water run over his eyes, scrubbing away the remnants of cake and confusion. “What on earth have I gotten myself into?“ he muttered to himself. “A prank? A marketing gag gone wrong?“

“Reasonable? Rupert, this is revolutionary! And the ergonomic design? Every joint is meticulously calibrated to maximise hopping efficiency. Forget those clunky, cumbersome suits of yesteryear. This is the future of lunar locomotion. Think Gene Kelly dancing with gravity... or the lack thereof. Forget fumbling with displays and hoping for the best. I monitor everything oxygen levels, CO₂ filter efficiency, even your hydration level. I can even dispense a nutrient-rich electrolyte paste directly into your digestive system should your energy drop. Essentially, I’m a walking, talking, space-traveling vending machine... with a keen interest in keeping you alive.”

“Electrolyte paste, huh? Sounds... delicious,” Rupert said.

“Let’s just say it’s functional. Now, let’s discuss integrated AI support. I am constantly analysing the terrain, optimising your hopping trajectory to conserve energy and avoid those aforementioned Swiss-cheese craters. I can even provide real-time navigation assistance, ensuring you don’t accidentally hop into the black abyss.

Now, connect me to a charger, and we can discuss your dietary plan tomorrow over breakfast before they pick us up.”

“Who’s picking us up tomorrow?” Rupert asked.

“The Moonhop Delegation Team, Rupert. Reporters, influencers, TikTokers, I hear they’ll be performing the Moonhop dance. Everyone will be there, Rupert. The world is watching. You are a hero, now connect me and go to bed, tomorrow will be exciting.”

Rupert placed Maya onto the couch, which was still very sticky. He plugged her into the socket behind the couch. Turned off the light, went past the kitchen for another bite of cream cake, brushed

to the sales pitch for a few free points, otherwise, they’ll just keep bumbling around outside your house anyway.”

“Music off,” Rupert said as he returned to the living room. The room fell silent, and Rupert stared at something that resembled a spacesuit.

“Good evening, Rupert,” a voice said.

“I am Maya.”

“Did... did the spacesuit just talk to me?”

“Indeed, Rupert. I am Maya, the integrated artificial intelligence of the Lunar Leap 5000. Consider me your personal concierge, life support supervisor, and witty conversationalist, all rolled into one convenient package, or you know, spacesuit.”

“I didn’t order anything, and I didn’t enter any contest; this must be a mistake,” Rupert said.

“Well, Rupert, let’s not be hasty. I understand your... concern. However, the algorithm indicated several instances where you expressed aspirations for self-improvement and a desire to make a meaningful contribution to the great adventure of humanity, hence you were automatically added to the lottery and won your place in the incredible Endurance Moon Race. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding your... enthusiastic pronouncements, a binding contract was indeed formed. You pressed the blue button, thereby submitting the Endurance Moon Race participation form, Section 7, Paragraph 3, Subsection (a), which clearly states, and I quote: ‘The participant voluntarily accepts all inherent risks, waives all rights to contest participation, and commits to completing the designated race course to the best of their ability or until they, he, she, it, is incapable of doing so.’”

"But... I wanted to press the other button! I couldn't see. It was a mistake!" Rupert said.

"Furthermore, withdrawal at this juncture would result in the forfeiture of significant bonus points, and everything else of value you possess, or ever will possess in the future that will have value, should you potentially jeopardise the Moonhop Project's profit margins," Maya said.

"Bonus points? Profit margins? I'm talking about my life!"

"Indeed, a valuable asset, Rupert. And one I am meticulously programmed to preserve. Think of those bonus points, Rupert! Think of the shareholders! Think of the impact on Earth's economy! Don't you want to contribute to Earth's economy, Rupert?"

"I just want to contribute to not dying alone on a desolate rock!"

"An understandable sentiment, Rupert. But consider this... biomass, living snugly within me, the state-of-the-art AI dedicated to your survival and mission success. We are a team, Rupert! A Moon dream team! Hoping around like a kangaroo. It will be fun. Every hop, every pit stop, every potentially fatal encounter with space debris... we will face as a unit."

"What do you mean, 'space debris'?"

"But... I wanted to press the other button! I couldn't see. It was a mistake!" Rupert said.

"You're saying... if I die, you're off the hook?"

"Support."

"Let's just say, Rupert, that the contract accounts for the completion of the race, or... demonstration of inability to complete the race. Your survival is, of course, my primary directive. But profit margins, as previously mentioned, are also a directive. With my guidance, you will either become a lunar legend... or a cautionary tale regarding contractual obligation. And you never know, you might meet someone. The moon, as they say, is for lovers."

"So, Maya, why should I entrust my life... well, to you?"

"Brutally honest, Rupert. This isn't some jolly jaunt to Mallorca, Leap 5000 isn't just a suit; it's your mobile fortress, your personal atmosphere, and I, Maya, am its unwavering commander.

Firstly, that magnificent chrome finish you are currently admiring? Multi-layered radiation shielding, designed to deflect everything from annoying micrometeorites to the sun's rage-like solar flares. Consider it the ultimate sunscreen, with the added bonus of stopping space shrapnel."

"Sounds... reasonable," Rupert said.

Lunar surface and subsequently perishing due to lack of life