

First attempt at a humorous sci-fi adventure story

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A shopping mall boutique is taken over by aliens who abduct customers. (Characters very loosely drawn on Jill and Alexis from Resident Evil.

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1 - Nails and things

When the shopping mall opened that day, little did Jill and Alexis suspect anything had changed since the previous day.

The two fourth formers were in Penelope's Nail Boutique at the mall. They sat side by side and chatted about the upcoming school prom as they waited for their manicure to begin.

Afterwards they were to meet Holden and Vincent, two brothers who were not only the girls' boyfriends, but also the reason Jill and Alexis had got to know each other (after Jill had met Holden six months earlier).

Alexis finished a text while she was listening to Jill and pressed 'send'.

"I've asked Vince to meet us here as soon as he can." she said as she replaced her mobile phone into her shoulder bag. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Whatever." answered Jill with a shrug.

*

"Will these two be suitable?"

"Eminently so."

"Action the virtual shop window then."

As the two employee manicurists beckoned them to take their places at the counter Jill and Alexis had no idea that they had become completely invisible from outside the boutique.

*

Although still quite young, Jill and Alexis had each been to Penelope's to have fingernail decoration applied several times. This time, however, something felt different about the touch of the manicurists as they started work on their fingernails. Both girls noticed how cold the manicurist's hands seemed, even through the latex gloves they were wearing.

When their nails were finished Jill and Alexis were still the only customers in the boutique.

"Cold hands, warm heart, eh?" whispered Jill to Alexis as they got down from their stools and prepared to cross over, as they normally would, to the shop's pay point. "I think those two could maybe do with a blood transfusion." replied Alexis.

Their mildly mocking banter was curtailed however as they suddenly found themselves severely

impeded in their ability to move. It was as if their feet and arms were being held by invisible forces.

They turned their faces alarmedly back towards the counter. There was nothing there. No counter. No manicurists. Instead all they could see was what looked like the inside of a lunar landing module equipped with just two seats.

"Please take a seat." spoke a not unpleasant voice that appeared to originate simultaneously inside each of the girls' heads. There was no option but to obey.

For a few seconds, Jill and Alexis distinctly saw Vincent peering into the boutique's window. They called out to him. He momentarily appeared to pause as if he had heard them.

The next instant nothing was visible to the girls of Vincent or anything else. There was only blackness. Total blackness.

*

"Quick!" shouted Jill. "See if you can call someone on your mobile phone! Call nine-one-one!"

"Alright," Alexis replied taking the device from her handbag. "But if I call the police, what do I say? ... that we think we're being abducted by space aliens?"

"You're right. They'd think it's a hoax call - or a crackpot. Do you remember the time I had to call 911 because you'd got your head stuck in the school railings? It was hard enough to convince them anyone could be that stupid when that happened."

"Thanks for reminding me about the railings, Jill. But you and everybody else laughing and giggling in the background when you were reporting the incident didn't help." pouted Alexis.

"Whatever." Jill replied. (Jill was fond of the 'whatever' word - especially when challenged over something she'd just said.)

"OK. Call Vincent then. He **has** to believe us," Jill continued, adding thoughtfully, "but if he doesn't, **don't** for heaven's sake say anything about dumping him. Something tells me we might need his help sooner or later."

*

"Ladies, ladies. Can I have your attention please."

It was the voice in their heads again. (At 14 years of age Jill and Alexis weren't yet accustomed to being addressed as 'ladies'.)

Alex decided the grown up thing to do might be to ask the voice for a few answers.

"Look whoever you are, what we want ... what we'd really appreciate ... is an explanation of what's happening and where the flagnod you're taking us?!"

"Flagnod? Hmm? Where have I heard that word recently?" responded the voice.

"Monsters versus Aliens?" Alex suggested.

"It's a new film." added Jill.

"Yes. Now I remember. I went to see it last week while awaiting new orders." the voice continued. "Good film. But you know, normally it's the aliens who win."

"Whatever." groaned Jill with a yawn. (She really couldn't care less which were stronger - aliens or monsters.) "Now, can we please have our explanation?"

"Very well." continued the voice. "But first put your mobile phone away."

"No!" protested Alex. "I was just about to call my boyfriend."

"How thoughtful of you." the voice said with feigned sincerity. "But there's really no point your trying to call anyone."

"Why not?" both girls said simultaneously.

"Because my dears ... mobile phones are useless from inside a wormhole."

"Did she just say 'wormhole'?" gasped Jill turning to Alex. "Eeeww!!!"

"Gross!!!" exclaimed Alex.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed the voice. "Not a wormhole an earthworm would make ... a wormhole through space and time."

The voice smiled (though of course the girls couldn't see that since to them the voice was an invisible 'presence').

"Whatever." muttered Jill feeling another yawn coming on.

"What the heck!" added Alex starting to get in one of her huffs. "It's still a wormhole. And I say wormholes are **very gross indeed!**"

*

"OK. If you're not happy with calling it a wormhole, perhaps you'd prefer to call it by its technical name?" said the voice.

"And what might that be ...?" asked Alex not in the least phased by the voice's change in tone.

The voice cleared its invisible throat.

"For your information, where I come from the apparatus is known as a 'molecular-space-time-vector-transportation device' ... or 'mstvtd' for short."

"Cool!" said Jill.

"Far less gross than wormhole!" added Alex.

"Whatever!" said the voice realising further explanation was pointless. (Jill gaped momentarily on hearing the voice use the word 'whatever'.)

"It is time for your passage through the mst... er ... through the device. You must be induced to sleep."

Jill and Alex were about to congratulate themselves at having won the wormhole debate, when gentle sounds started to fill their heads. As they did so they felt the seats they were sitting on began to recline.

In a matter of seconds sleep had overcome them.

*

Alex and Jill were simultaneously having the same dream. They were on holiday together but things had gone distinctly pear shaped.

In the dream they were being arrested for sending illegal text messages (or maybe it was for having their fingernails decorated with subversive body art!)

"Alex! Wake up!" Vincent's voice sounded excited.

"Jill! Wake up!" so did Holden's.

Their first thoughts were that Vincent and Holden were on holiday with them and that they had been arrested too. However, it soon became apparent that where they were was no holiday destination.

But the four of them were certainly being held captive by someone ... or something!

2 - First steps in the new world.

[br]Vincent and Holden briefly explained to Jill and Alexis what had happened to them at the mall to bring them here.

It was a similar story to Jill's and Alex's, except the boys had been dual racing each other on Formula One at the arcade. Strange things had started to happen during the race. Voices in their heads. Then sleep inducing sounds.

They had awakened in the room all four of them were now in. Jill and Alexis were already here but were still in some kind of deep sleep. For some reason the drug (or whatever had been used to render them unconscious) seemed to have had a greater effect on the girls.

"Maybe we were simply given higher doses than you two." suggested Jill, feeling she ought to say something in support of girl power.

"And I just finished having my period." added Alex. "I always get extra tired when that happens."

"Er? What's a period?" Vincent asked cautiously.

Holden gave his brother a sideways embrace.

"Er ... you and I need to have a little talk bro." he whispered comfortingly. "Remind me as soon as we get home, eh?"

The girls giggled.

"Whatever." said Vincent, before quickly changing the subject by asking. "Maybe we should set about seeing what there is around here, eh?"

*

The room they had woken up in had the form of a small dormitory with two pairs of bunk beds.

At one side of the door were two illuminated buttons - one green and one blue. Vincent pressed green. Immediately the door slid open.

"Well, wha' d'ya know. Green for go!" Vincent said with a grin.

They emerged into a short corridor which, in either direction, led to a stairway - one going up, the other going down.

There were no windows, so they had no way of knowing whether up or down would lead them out of the building.

"Which way shall we go? Up or down?" asked Jill.

"Well," offered Alex. "assuming we're more likely above ground than below, I say we go down."

"I'm for going down also." seconded Holden, adding. "I get claustrophobic just thinking we could be somewhere subterranean."

All eyes were on Vincent.

"This is all wonderfully democratic," sighed Vincent, "but I hope we aren't going to make EVERY decision this way."

"Jill looked first at Alex, then at Holden then asked. "What do you two think?"

"Ok, ok. make mine a 'down' too!" Interjected Vincent somewhat brusquely. "That makes three votes for 'down' - a majority - now, can we PLEASE get going?"

*

Vincent led as they started to descend the stairs. At the bottom of the first flight of steps the number 68 was painted on the wall in large figures.

"Maybe we should have gone up." remarked Jill, thinking most buildings don't usually go higher than seventy or eighty floors.

"Nahh!" insisted Holden. "My mum says it's bad luck to change your mind."

"You'd think whoever had designed this place would have thought about installing a lift." observed Alex.

"Good point Alex." responded Vincent. "Remind me to put that in as a suggestion to the management before we go home."

*

Eventually they reached the ground floor - only to find the three metre space leading from the bottom step blocked off by an all too solid stone wall.

"Bummer!" exclaimed Vincent as he crossed over to the wall. "Looks like we goofed."

"Now what shall we do?" asked Alex.

"All the way back up I suppose. What else is there?" answered Holden

"OK." said Vincent, turning to face his comrades. "But I think we all need a break first."

While the others slumped to the floor where they stood, Vincent leaned against the wall behind him. To

his surprise he felt it move slightly under his weight.

"Hey guys!" he called. "Come over here and help me push this thing."

*

What they'd thought was a solid wall was in fact one face of a six foot hollow cube made to look like it was made of stone. They slid it as far as it would go, revealing a side passage in the process.

Vincent entered first, followed by the others. The passage's walls seemed to have been hewn from solid rock.

At first sight it didn't seem there'd be enough light to see where they were going. Suddenly, however, a lamp mounted on the wall illuminated itself on their approach. The lamp extinguished as they got further on, but not before another had lit itself.

"At least the designer got this right." quipped Vincent. "Remind me to compliment him on that in my letter."

*

Eventually the rock passage widened out into a large chamber on the far side of which a door could be seen. Shafts of orange light illuminated the airborne dust particles high above their heads. Their footsteps echoed as they crossed the chamber.

They reached the door where once again there were the now familiar green and blue illuminated buttons. Vincent smiled and pressed green again. His smile didn't last long.

The ground they were standing on was in fact a huge trap door. With a screech and a lot of clanking the two halves of the trapdoor swung open and the startled four suddenly found themselves chaotically slithering down a long, smooth slope. They finally came dizzily to a stop when the slope spewed them tangentially into a bowl shaped portion.

The good news, however, was that they were out of that wretched building at last. The sky was a sumptuous blend of blue directly overhead becoming more orange the nearer the horizon.

"Wow!" gasped Vincent hesitantly smiling. "It truly was someone with a WICKED sense of humour who designed this place!"

*

Holden, with Vincent's help, was first to climb over the brow of the bowl. The two brothers, one above, the other below, then helped Jill and Alex get out. Finally Vincent took a running jump at the brim where Holden and Jill each grabbed one of his hands.

Looking back in the direction they had come from (at what they had thought to be a building), all that could be seen was a sheer cliff that must have been at least a thousand feet in height.

The orange glow towards the horizon was darkening and some sort of twilight seemed to be encroaching. Only the top of the cliff was still in sunlight. Several areas near the top appeared to have a mottled texture. On closer scrutiny these turned out to be colonies of birds of some kind. Occasionally an individual bird could be seen taking a brief flight in the hope of finding itself a better position for the night.

"Maybe we should look for somewhere we can get some sleep?" suggested Vincent.

"And for something to eat and drink." added Alex, who was finding it harder and harder to keep from thinking of the double cheeseburger, the large fries and the medium Coke she had anticipated enjoying after her manicure.

"I wonder what that is over there?" interrupted Jill pointing towards a faintly incandescent spot at the other side of the bowl.

When they arrived at the object, 'it' turned out to be not one object but four.

What luck! They had discovered four survival packs, each of which contained food, drink and a sleeping bag.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Alex as she tore the wrapper from an energy bar. "I'm beginning to suspect someone knew we'd be coming here."

"Just what I was thinking." Jill concurred.

Jill and Alex were too busy tucking into their second energy bar each to notice the momentary glance that occurred between Vincent and Holden.

"Yeh," said Vincent. "you girls might have a point."
[br]

3 - A little hope.

It was still not at all clear where they had been transported. Were they still on Earth or were they on some far distant planet (maybe one in another galaxy)? Perhaps they were still on Earth, but had been taken many aeons forward or backward in time? To another epoch even?

In each of the survival packs they'd found was a gadget which turned out to be a heat generator. They were obviously meant to be hung one inside each tent. Before turning in the four of them spent some time gazing up at the stars looking for any constellations they could recognise. Nothing looked familiar.

Jill, who had once been quite keen on astronomy, realised that this meant they were probably at least a few light years from earth. Her heart sank. But she consoled herself by thinking that, if one wormhole had got them here, another wormhole might be able to get them back.

"Well, no sense getting ourselves too downhearted." said Alex, seeing the glum faces of the others. "Look on the bright side. This is probably the most exciting thing that's ever likely to happen to us in our entire lives."

"Your right." Jill agreed, a half smile replacing her dejected frown. "There might even be other humans, or at least something with human intelligence, on this planet."

"And whatever happens, this is already proving to be an amazing adventure." added Holden excitedly. "There's bound to be more to come."

"That's the spirit, guys." applauded Vincent. "Think of this as a privilege we've been granted. No more nine a.m. to three p.m. schooling five days a week. No more SATs tests. No more hassle from our parents to tidy our rooms or get out more often. No more ..."

"OK ... we get the picture!" interrupted Alex wishing she hadn't started this. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to try to get what sleep I can before the morning. And that isn't going to be easy without Hector, my teddy bear!"

4 - Things that don't go bump in the night.

Had Jill not been fast asleep in her tent, the amateur astronomer in her would probably have gazed in awe at the spectacle that was the rising of the magnificent halo which encircled the strange world to which they had been brought.

Slowly and silently the halo rose from the horizon. For a few minutes one part of its rim became silhouetted as it crossed the face of the yellow full moon, which now hung low over the planet's horizon. The halo passed the moon and continued to ascend relentlessly towards the zenith.

Other eyes, however, didn't sleep. Their attention wasn't directed towards either the halo or the moon. Their interest was in the little group of tents nestled in the moonlight.

Valk released his wings' suction grip one by one from the roof of the cave allowing himself to drop to its floor. In doing so he landed deftly beside Gyp.

"Do you see them?" asked Valk.

"Yes." answered Gyp.

"Do you think they are the ones?"

"Possibly. We need to take a closer look. I was thinking of flying down there while they are asleep."

"Shouldn't we send a few drones first?"

"There is no time. I am prepared to take the risk. Are you with me? I shall go alone if necessary."

"Very well." Valk conceded, adding. "God grant us the strength necessary to be able return here."

Gyp was no believer. He left Valk's words unanswered.

The two bat like Hedra shuffled their weakened and ungainly bodies into the gaping mouth of the cave.

Summoning as much strength as they could, Gyp was the first to launch himself into the moonlit darkness. Valk followed, praying that this would turn out to be the long awaited help he'd heard would one day arrive.

*

Inside their separate tents Vincent and Holden simultaneously became aware of the approaching Hedras' ultrasonic pulses.

They both emerged from the tents into the moonlight at the same time. A guarded smile passed between

the brothers.

Vincent pressed a button on what looked like his wrist watch to activate its short range beacon.

"Over there!" he whispered to Holden, pointing to a spot a short distance away from the tents. "We have positive confirmation."

*

"Welcome to Galactia Sixteen." said Gyp, offering his bony hand in friendship to first Vincent then Holden. "I am Gyp, this is comrade Valk."

Valk was obviously having some difficulty recovering from his flight.

"Is he alright?" asked Holden. "Maybe you should have one of these." he added offering Valk an energy bar.

"You're ... very kind." panted the breathless Valk. "It's ... not food I need. Rather ... a healthy pair of lungs."

Holden put the food back in his pocket. He was wondering if Valk's problem was self inflicted, but didn't like to ask.

"Comrade Valk was gassed in the early days of the invasion." Gyp explained, adding (with thinly veiled anger). "It was wholesale slaughter. Those of us who survived did so by taking to caves high in the hills.

Valk had recovered somewhat. He continued Gyp's explanation.

"Since they completed the halo ... they think they can leave what remains of us to die of ... er ... *natural causes*."

Gyp took over the explaining once again.

"However, *we* have been developing *our own* equivalent of their 'halo' - but what we are making is not in outer space. It is underground."

"Indeed." interrupted Valk. "You have already experienced part of what we are developing."

Vincent and Holden looked puzzled.

"You remember the windowless building into which you were emerged when you came out of the the wormhole?"

(Vincent and Holden were hardly likely to forget such a 'Tombr Raider-esque' experience.)

"Well," continued Gyp. "that building represents our only hope of rescuing what's left of this planet from the clutches of ... ***the Covenant!***"

Vincent and Holden looked at each other. They gulped simultaneously.

5 - You think you know someone, then ...

Jill and Alex had been awakened by the conversation. They had crept from their tents over to where the sound of voices was coming from.

Something fishy was obviously going on between their boyfriends and the two weird characters. The girls stood side by side a short distance away in the moonlight. They had puzzled looks on their faces and they were leaning slightly towards each other. Alex spoke first.

"What on Earth's going on here?"

"Yeh! Explain!" echoed Jill with more than a hint of anger in her voice.

Vincent and Holden had known they were going to have to put the girls in the picture sooner or later. Even so, Holden momentarily looked for approval to Vincent before speaking.

"Er ... firstly, Alex, this isn't Earth," he started, hesitantly. "It's Galactia 16."

Jill's and Alex's expressions remained surprisingly nonchalant. Holden continued.

"... and we'd like you to meet Gyp and Valk."

He gestured towards the two hedra who bowed respectfully towards the girls.

"They're hedra and they live in caves high up on the cliffs."

Holden pointed to the distant cliff (which was presently silhouetted against the star, moon and halo lit sky) as he spoke.

Jill and Alex might well have been exceedingly annoyed at the discovery that their boyfriends had undoubtedly colluded in abducting them to this alien world.

However, an aura of mystery emanating from Gyp and Valk was instead making them curious to learn more about this strange place, its history and its inhabitants.