

Violence is a Perfectly Acceptable Alternative

Cutlass, the infinitely aged

ZOOL Death planet of the etc. etc.

ZOOL A planet of tropical swamps where the lost characters of a million plot lines eke out a miserable existence in a hopeless half reality!

They had only got down to 17 when they were interrupted by the disappearance of the roof of the library. The reason for its disappearance was quite obvious to everyone, except of course the Hamster and the Harkonnen who were still playing catapillars. Through the hole where the roof had been could be seen a rapidly descending squadron of spaceships. The leading one had just removed the roof with a *grazer*,¹⁹ which was now pointing ominously at the helpless trapped entities below.

“I wouldn’t move,” came booming from the ship, the voice amplified to a level that broke Molin-Cax’s glasses, scared Rasputin, and impressed Cutlass with a certain grudging professional respect.

The ships landed, and the doors to the library burst open to admit — yes, the Mad Alchemist, and a horde of his minions. Forgotten while the O.U.S.F.G. faced the threat of the Hax and their Starsheep Troopers, the Mad Alchemist had prepared his master stroke — contacting his minions in orbit far beyond the outer planet of Zool’s system, he had followed the heroes to Sane Tans, and choosing his moment well, had swept down on them when they were once more distracted.

“So, Galactic Agent, at last I have you in my power! This time you will not escape, and with you will perish the last hope for freedom in the Universe. With the arcane knowledge contained in the library I can become supreme!

“You speak too soon, Alchemist,” said Herpes. “The galactic agent is *my* prisoner — and soon the irresistible, if somewhat vague, forces of C.I.R.C.A. will sweep you and your puny minions away!” “Hah!” the Alchemist sneered “C.I.R.C.A.? You fool, Herpes! Do you not realise that C.I.R.C.A. is a sham, a mere cipher I created to conceal my purpose?”

“Oh.” said Herpes. “Come to think of it, I often wondered why a group of *historians* should be so interested in *dates!*”

“Enough of this,” snapped the Alchemist, going into the efficient evil genius mode. “Load the library onto my flagship. Herpes, you will come with me. Your rabble-rousing skills will be of use on Zool. The rest of you stay exactly where you are. My minions may be utterly incompetent but even they can hardly miss at this range.” So saying the Alchemist approached Rasputin, intending to take back Prinz Gestetner von Herpes’s soul which the faithful toucan still guarded. One withered, claw-like hand grasped the toucan around the throat. Another withered, claw-like hand prised Herpes’s black, diseased soul from the toucan’s withered hand-like claw. One orange beak snapped viciously on the Alchemist’s wrist.

“Aaaarghhh, *!?!%#@!” A stream of vile biological curses and suggestions poured from the Alchemist’s throat. Fully half the minions did *exactly* what he said being conditioned from birth to instant obedience to their master’s whims. (Most of his whims were much weirder than this.) The Stainless Steel Hamster suffered terrible indignities; the cactus gained an early and liberal education; Rave rather enjoyed himself.

¹⁹Gravity Laser — works by firing a coherent stream of gravitons at its target, which is then torn apart by tidal effects.

The galactic agent, in quite an uncharacteristic moment of competence, seized her opportunity. Grabbing Cutlass by what would be the scruff of the neck after 1,000,000 years of evolution and Thur by the scruff of the eyebrow, she dashed for the door.

“Quickly, into the nearest ship,” she said with remarkable originality. “With any luck it will be ages before he can get those morons to think of anything else.”

Realizing this, the Alchemist took other action. Disengaging himself from Rasputin (who flew off to join Thur) and a minion (who had only been obeying orders) he struggled towards Herpes.

“Come on, we can’t let her escape — she’ll warn the galaxy of my plans! We’ll follow her in my flagship — it’s the fastest in my fleet and guarded by my most trusted minions.”

The ill-assorted trio and the toucan had boarded a ship. The minion on guard had had no orders concerning toucans and tik-li-do, and was swiftly subdued.

“Can you fly this thing?” asked Thur dubiously.

“Of course,” said the Galactic Agent. “I’ve pinched so many ships off the Alchemist I ought to be an expert by now... let me see... that button there?” A light came on saying, ‘PLEASE DO NOT PRESS THIS BUTTON AGAIN!’ “No? How about this then?” The co-pilot’s chair immediately turned into a jacuzzi, which Thur found pleasant, but didn’t get them very far.

“How about this lever labelled LAUNCH?” suggested Cutlass.

“Look, since when are you an expert on spaceships, anyway?” asked the Galactic Agent in annoyance as she pulled the lever. The ship rose with a shudder and started following an idiosyncratic trajectory as the Galactic Agent tried to find out which levers did what.

At an altitude of about 100 spacial (*Copout!*) she seemed to have got the hang of things. The ship steadied up a bit, and her companions were able to pick themselves off the ceiling.

“Cutlass, be a good ape, and have a look in my backpack, will you?” (Galactic agents’ backpacks are legendary.) “There’s something in there that I think may come in handy.”

Out came a stream of peanut butter sandwiches, half-finished drawings, old socks, and kitchen sinks. At last Cutlass reappeared with a small ramshackle device that showed obvious signs of having been put together in a hurry.

“Yes, that’s it — I pinched it off Tomred the Terrible²⁰ the last time we met — it’s the stasis field from his stardrive. Would you point it at the planet and give it a quick squirt?”

“How can I do that from inside a spaceship?” asked Cutlass, understandably puzzled by the problems involved.

“Look, this is *Conquerors of Zool*, what do you expect? Logical hard science? Just get on with it.”

The ludicrous twists of subplot space provided the answer and Cutlass took careful aim at the unsuspecting planet below. The apeman shot with his usual lack of competence, but even he could not miss a whole planet. A silvery ball covered the squalid surface of Sane-Tans, hiding the horrific architecture for which it was notorious all over the civilised galaxy. Inside the sphere, the O.U.S.F.G. and the minions alike were frozen in the unnatural postures they were caught in, trapped as time froze for...

“What was the setting on that thing?” asked Thur curiously.

“Dunno,” said Cutlass, “I’ll have a look... Three times ten to the googolplex universal cycles.”

“Good,” said the Galactic Agent. “That ought to hold them a bit. And like a good Galactic agent I haven’t actually killed anyone.”

“No,” said Thur with heavy sarcasm, “I suppose locking up half your friends and a perfectly innocent planet for eternity several times over is an acceptable level of civilian casualties, is it?”

²⁰See *Time Warriors of Zool*.

“Exactly,” beamed the agent. “Sacrifices have to be made in the cause of truth, justice, wishy-washiness and cupcakes.”

“What all this really means, I suppose,” said the apeman, “is that there’s nothing left for me to blow up.” And, in a disgruntled manner, he went off to play with the weapons console.

The Galactic Agent was happily writing a new chapter to her memoirs entitled *How I Saved the Universe from the Forces of Darkness for the Thirty-Fifth Time*, when Thur suggested that maybe, just maybe, there was something she ought to think about.

“I think you ought to look at this on the rear screen, Jane,” she said in a worried tone.

“What can possibly be there? We zapped all the baddies, and everyone else for that matter, and there’s no-one else at all... in... this... sector... except the Mad Alchemist’s flagship!” she finished in a panic. “He must have taken off before we froze the planet. Give him another zap with the stasis ray.”

Thur turned to pick up the weapon. Her eyes widened with alarm as she saw it to be covered with a silvery layer remarkably similar to that covering Sane-Tans. “Plignoids,” cursed the agent. “We’ve had that for the next few googolplex eternities. Now I see why he had so many spares. We’ll just have to do it the hard way. Stand by to come about! Cutlass, get ready on the weapons console!”

A grease-stained, ape-like hand appeared through a hole in the top of the weapons console. A grease-stained, ape-like hand waved a No. 13 Chinese laundry screwdriver. “Can you give me ten minutes?” he said. “There didn’t seem to be much else to do, so I thought I’d recalibrate the gravitic flux collimator. I’m trying to up the pulsation rate of the aardvark beam as well.”

“Cutlass,” screamed Thur, the agent and the toucan in unison. But all was not lost. Galactic agents are trained to deal with any emergency — even companions who insist on stripping weapons to their component parts at every opportunity. She did exactly what the book suggested for such a crisis: she started screaming loudly for help. Thur and the toucan did too. Cutlass, having returned to reality, joined in.

Meanwhile, the Mad Alchemist and Prinz von Herpes were approaching. Their horribly beweaponed ship was crewed with loyal minions, some of whom could think of more than one thing a day. They carried all the arcane knowledge they had plundered from the library of the O.U.S.F.G. Ahead of them, helpless, lay the one ship that stood between them and total domination of the galaxy!