




# Homecoming

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Edited by Rich Handley

Based on characters and events from  
Rob Grant and Doug Naylor's television series *Red Dwarf*



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“Warning: Structural integrity at 42 percent,” the female voice calmly announced over the ship’s speaker. Arnold Rimmer sneered. In any other situation, the hologram might have found the computer’s soothing voice relaxing, almost comforting. In this particular instance, however, the explosions, fires, and ever-so-subtle telltale sounds of imminent cockpit depressurization rendered any chance of relaxation impossible. This was beyond his piloting skills; he flipped on the autonav system.


“Evasive Maneuver... er, Alpha-1!” he yelled desperately at the computer, knowing full well he had completely made that up. He regretted never having studied the flight manual.

“No such maneuver listed in tactical database,” the computer confirmed.

“Damn!” he replied. “How about... Maneuver... B?”

“No such maneuver listed—”

“D’ah! You stupid pile of shrapnel, lose those smegging ships!” His hologrammatic stomach lurched into his chest as *Wildfire* veered down and spun to the left, adjusting its trajectory to stay just out of reach of the enemies’ weapons. The temporary pause in laser fire allowed Rimmer the perfect opportunity to collect his thoughts and come up with a battle strategy. Instead, his mind went back roughly two years, to the moment aboard *Starbug* when he agreed to take over for “Ace” Rimmer—or, rather, the latest Ace Rimmer in an




obscenely long line of Aces—and shot out into the void in his dimension jumper. He recalled the many decisions since that day which had led him to his current predicament, and proceeded to systematically regret every one of them in order.

Twenty seconds later, a spark from the console snapped him out of it, and he shifted from regret to raw jealousy.

Emotions like these were not very Ace-like; Rimmer understood that, but he didn't very much care anymore. He remembered the stories—just before his death, Ace's hologrammatic memories had been transferred to Rimmer, along with his trademark gold Reflec jacket and white turtleneck. He knew of his predecessor's many adventures prior to their meeting: the centuple-breasted women of Calos 6, the Dom Pérignon Falls of Bezarius 11, the Erogenious Zone of Universe 68 (someone had dropped the ball naming *that* dimension), and, of course, Princess Bonjella of War World.

He remembered them all, but those memories were not his, and he resented them. That had all happened to the *other* guy, Rimmer fumed silently, and what did he get in *his* illustrious career as defender of the universes? Fecalia, a world submerged in raw sewage, where he had been tasked with saving the capital city from a massive fatberg; a near-death experience with cybernetic lemurs on Klithrala; a run-in with Prince Foe and his deadly hunting bees; and now, somehow beyond his comprehension, he had ended up here: Alternative G479/X. And he was far from alone.






*Three hours prior...*

**\*FOOOOOOOOOOM\***

The bright streaks and eardrum-bursting roar gave way to a vast star field and silence. “Dimension jump complete,” the ship’s computer proclaimed. “Arrived in Alternative Dimension G479/X.” Rimmer audibly grumbled. What was in store for him *this* time?

As if on cue, a flash of green suddenly whizzed past, nearly grazing his ship with its strut. “What the *blazes*?” he screamed at the blur as he brought his ship around to pursue the offending vessel. Rimmer recognized its distinct shape immediately. “Of course,” he said snidely as he plotted an intercept course for the insect-shaped shuttle. He had left the last few dimensions in a bit of a hurry, and was running low on fuel and spare parts for his ship. He really hoped the inhabitants of this dimension were a good deal more hospitable.

“*Wildfire* to *Starbug One*, come in,” Rimmer announced through the comlink in his best Ace voice. Nothing. The shuttle continued in a straight path. He tried again: “*Starbug One*, this is Ace Rimmer. Do you copy?” Silence. He scanned the ship and discovered that the autopilot had been engaged and the vessel was on low-power mode. “Right,” he said to himself. “We’ll do it the old-fashioned way.” He punched a few buttons and transmitted an override signal to *Starbug*’s landing bay door, then set his craft down on the shuttle’s landing pad.



Rimmer disembarked from his ship and looked around. “So far, so good,” he thought as he glanced around the bay. Inter-dimensional travel had conditioned him to search for subtle (and not-so-subtle) clues about a new dimension and its occupants. Larger, rounder doorways, for instance, could mean the human race was now extinct and replaced with giant turtle people. Piles of jewels and electronic circuits lying about could suggest that the crew were now cybernetic pirates. One never knew what one was getting into when entering a new universe.

Fortunately, there were no piles of suspicious-looking booty, and all doors seemed human-sized. By all accounts, it appeared identical to the *Starbug* he had left behind. Rimmer checked a computer panel at the far end of the bay and noticed one room, in particular, drawing much of the ship’s power. He quickly headed off to the suspended animation suite.

It took him longer than expected to reach his destination. The ship’s secondary functions were powered down, and all four doors between the landing bay and the SAS had to be opened manually. He pried open the last door and looked around. There, against the back wall, were three booths. He located the suite’s computer station and logged in to check the stats on the booths’ occupants; better to find out now who or what he was dealing with before reviving anyone. The monitor lit up his face as the computer responded:



SUSPENDED ANIMATION SUITE CONTROL

VER. 5.39

(C) COPYRIGHT 2357 MALPRACTICE MEDICAL  
& SCISPEC

SYSTEM STATUS: ACTIVE

ELAPSED TIME: 67 DAYS, 14 HOURS, 12 MINUTES

GENERAL INFO:

BOOTH 1 STATUS: IN USE

OCCUPANT(S) INFO:

LISTER, DEBORAH — AGE: 31

KOCHANSKI, CHRISTOPHER — AGE: 28

BOOTH 2 STATUS: IN USE

OCCUPANT(S) INFO:

LISTER, BEXLEY — AGE: 22

LISTER, JIM — AGE: 22


BOOTH 3 STATUS: IN USE

OCCUPANT(S) INFO:

KRYSTEN 2X4B-523P — AGE: MECHANICAL-N/A

BUNNY — AGE: 33


Rimmer sat back in his chair, perplexed but intrigued. He rarely had a chance to assess a situation before taking action; usually, he was being shot at within seconds of a jump. So he was determined to deduce as much as he could before reviving the crew.



Okay, he thought, touching the tips of his fingers together, it seemed fairly straightforward: he was obviously back in the reverse-sex universe, the one he knew as the Fifth Dimension. Deb, Jim and Bexley confirmed this. He checked the ages of the twins. Roughly four years had passed since Lister had given birth to the boys and returned them to their own dimension—enough time for the crew to have rescued Kryten (apparently known as Krysten in this universe); enough time for Arlene to have wandered off to become her own version of Ace Rimmer (hence, her absence); and enough time to... find Kochanski? Rimmer's brow furled, then jumped up. He checked the database: no, Kochanski was not a hologram. His brow fell again. Somewhere along the line, this crew had found a male version of Lister's old love interest. He wondered for a moment if *his* Lister had the same luck. He shook his head at the thought, then turned his attention to the last name on the roster.

Bunny. Who the devil was Bunny? Rimmer thought back to his last visit, and vaguely recalled meeting a creature named Dog who was supposedly Cat's opposite. So, then, who the hell was.... unless... of course! Rimmer smacked his head. This wasn't the same universe! An *alternate* alternate dimension, as it were, one in which Deb Lister had saved... a rabbit? Sure, why not. He'd certainly seen stranger dimensions.

Rimmer sat back with a smug smile, deeply proud of himself for having figured it all out. His pride quickly turned to panic, however, as one by one, the booths started to hiss. He




frantically scanned the control panels. Damn! Apparently, he had been so busy deducing that he had failed to notice the revival process had been activated, prompted by his arrival.

Rimmer watched as the doors on each of the pods slowly swung open, revealing its occupants. He froze in place as he watched the crew emerge from their holds. Deb pretty much looked identical to the one he'd met several years prior, minus an arm for some reason. The twins did as well, although it was more apparent with them that time had passed. Kochanski was a tall, slender man who seemed to move with deliberate calculation. Krysten appeared much like how Rimmer assumed a female mechanoid would, and for a split second he thought back to his encounter with the Pleasure Gelf, Camille, and wondered if this was how Kryten had initially perceived her.

Bunny was a different story. A short, petite female humanoid, she could almost pass for human, were it not for her enlarged incisors and taller-than-average ears. Dressed in the same blue jumpsuit as the others, she appeared incredibly focused and alert, so it was no surprise that she was the first to notice Rimmer. She shrieked and jumped back to hide behind the mechanoid, startling the others, who all quickly glanced in her direction, then toward Rimmer.

Rimmer diffused the situation quickly. "Hello there," he said, still channeling Ace. "I bet you're all wondering who I am and where the heck I came from. Well..."





“Ace Rimmer,” Deb said. “Well, *an* Ace Rimmer. A... male version.” She looked him up and down with slight disdain. “The Mylar outfit gave it away.”

“Ah, um... yes,” Rimmer stammered slightly.

“Excuse me, who’s Ace? And why is he dressed like an Alaskan break-dancer?” Kochanski asked as he checked the booth’s instruments. “He’s pulled us out of suspended animation too early.” He typed in some inquiry commands. “We’ve only been in for two months.”


“Ugh,” Deb said. “It’s kind of a long story.”

“Actually,” Rimmer interjected, “it’s a bit longer than you think.” He proceeded to explain, as best he could, how he was an alternate version of the Rimmer who had accompanied Dave Lister to this universe, who had returned to his own dimension with a pregnant Lister, and who had helped raise the twins for three days—during which they’d aged eighteen years—before returning them home.

“So you’re sort of related to Uncle Arnold, then?” Bexley asked.

“Well, in a manner of speaking...” Rimmer paused, “no, not really. But if it helps you to look at it that way, then sure, why not.”

“One moment,” Krysten said, perplexity creasing her artificial



face. “If I understand you correctly, what you’re saying is that you took over for Ace when he last visited your dimension. But that means it was Ace who...”


Deb’s eyes sprung wide open as she realized where Krysten was going. “Um, yeah, right, alternate universes and all that, very tricky stuff.... So what *are* you doing here, *ACE?*” She stressed the last word to indicate a change in topic was required.

Rimmer got the hint. “Right, of course. Well, I was hoping you fine lot would be able to help top off my ship and spare a few parts. I’m afraid the ol’ girl has seen more action than a handbot in an amputee ward, and is in desperate need of repairs.”

Bunny looked around to her other crewmembers. “Well, we’ve got a hold full of scavenged components,” she said with a slight lisp. “I’m sure you can find some stuff you’d need.”

Krysten added, “And we’ve got plenty of spare fuel, since we’re travelling in low-power mode. We weren’t due out of stasis for another two hundred years, and we were planning on refueling once we got back to the *Esperanta*, now that the squid is gone.”

“*Esperanta?*” Rimmer asked, then it clicked. “Oh, the *Esperanto*? Why are you going back there?”




“Um... well,” Chris said, somewhat sheepishly, “to fix this.” He pointed to Deb’s absent right arm.

“Yes, I noticed the missing appendage,” Rimmer said. “What happened?”

“Let’s just say I ran into a particularly nasty virus.” Deb answered. “Look, it’s not important, what *is* is that we get back on our way, so let’s load you up so we can get back on track, eh? But first we’ve got to get out of these slumber-suits.”

Rimmer didn’t quite understand what was going on, but he sensed it was a sore topic, so he dropped it. “Sounds fantastic. Lead the way.”





“So you’re not from this dimension either,” Rimmer said to Kochanski as they waited for the others to get dressed. They had been discussing the accident which had stranded Chris on *Starbug*.


“No. We did try to get me back home—several times, in fact,” he answered. “But eventually, we lost the opportunity. So here I am, stuck with Twiddle Dee and Twiddle Droid.” Kochanski smirked a half-hearted smile. “I mean, Deb’s great, but sometimes the lot of them can just drive a man nuts. Thankfully, I have the twins to occupy my time. I’ve been tutoring them; when I arrived, they had the education of chimpanzees... and not like the smart ones that can do sign language and stuff. I’m talking the poo-throwing kind.” Rimmer nodded to indicate he completely understood. Kochanski continued, “Honestly, I’m just happy for any excuse to keep that damned rabbit away from me.”

“Oh?” Rimmer asked. “Why, what’s wrong with Bunny?”

“Well, it’s just that, being a rabbit, she—”

“Oh Mister AAAAAACE?” A voice echoed from the adjoining room.

“Ah, well, maybe I’ll just let you find out for yourself.” Kochanski grinned as he patted Rimmer on the shoulder and hurried toward the cockpit. Rimmer watched with a confused expression as Kochanski scuttled down the hall, then turned around and bumped straight into Bunny, who



somehow managed to sneak up right behind him.

“AHH!” he yelped, decidedly un-Ace-like.

“Hi!” the rabbit girl chirped. “Wanna have sex?”

“Hi.... wait, *what?*”


“Sex. I need to make babies. Like, *right* now,” she said matter-of-factly. “I have this uncontrollable urge to impregnate. I’ve been told it’s genetic. Whatever, it doesn’t matter, but no one around here can or will help.” She scrunched up her nose. “Mr. Kochanski is always going on about ‘monogamy’ with Miss Lister or something or other, and the boys are barren due to their, um, ‘unique’ birth. But I bet a wonderful man like you could pump out a few dozen kids a year.”

“A few *dozen?*” Rimmer’s eyes widened sharply. All traces of Ace had left his voice by now. “Are you insane?”

“Forget it.” Deb said as she stepped out of her quarters. “Not unless you want a bunch of little LEDs running around. This one’s a hologram. You’d have better luck knocking up Arlene’s old plastic boyfriend, Raymond.”

Bunny stared at Rimmer skeptically, then asked, “Is this true?”

“Afraid so,” Rimmer responded. He pulled out his light bee remote and pushed a button, revealing the “H” on his fore-



head and restoring his original blue uniform, then switched to soft light and ran his arm through the bulkhead before switching it back to hard light. “You’re barking up the wrong tree. Or, you know, whatever sound rabbits make.”

“Dammit!” Bunny shouted, storming toward the cockpit.

Deb smirked back at Rimmer. “Dodged *that* furry little bullet, eh? Don’t get me wrong, Bunny’s a good person. It’s just that her, um, needs sometimes get a bit embarrassing around new people.”


“Better than what we had,” Rimmer remarked. “Bunny seems helpful, at least. Back home, we had a Cat. Most self-centered, narcissistic, vain creature you’d ever meet. He’d have sold us all out to simulants in a second for a yard of vicuña fabric.”

Deb let out a little laugh. “Well, I guess every universe has its ups and downs.”

“At least no one is trying to kill me in this one,” Rimmer replied.

Deb smiled again. “Day’s still young.” She glanced back into the living quarters. “But not for long. Where the hell are those damned kids? Jim! Bexley! What’s taking so long?”

“Sorry!” Jim yelled back. “Bexley can’t find his smegging jacket!”




“Language! And it’s probably in the laundry basket, where it always is!”

“Got it!” The boys emerged from their quarters as Bexley threw on his technician’s jacket with the words “*Red Dwarf*” emblazoned on the back. Rimmer’s eyes followed the twins as they passed him on the way to the supply deck. He had thought they’d resembled their father before, but seeing them in Deb’s old clothes, especially Bexley, brought back weird feelings of déjà vu. He shook it off and followed them to the storage room.

It took less than an hour to find the necessary parts, thanks to the obsessively thorough organizational system Arlene had originally put in place before leaving, one which Chris begrudgingly had to admit worked well and had adopted when he came aboard. Krysten loaded up a hover-cart and pushed it gently to the landing bay, where the twins proceeded to load the spare parts into the jumper. Fortunately for Rimmer, *Wildfire* had been fitted with a large storage hold during one of his previous missions, one that involved hauling antacids and toilet paper to the All-You-Can-Eat Mimosian Buffet planet.

Rimmer, meanwhile, sat in his cockpit, arguing with the ship’s computer as usual. “Look, it’s a simple question,” he asked, getting more annoyed by the minute. “Can *Wildfire* be retrofitted with shields? Yes or no?”



The computer answered coldly: “The Space Corps DJX-1 Prototype, designated *Wildfire One*, is an experimental spacecraft and was not designed to accommodate third-party shielding of any kind.”

“Yes, you’ve said that, time and again. But it was also not designed to be constantly used for target practice, and I, for one, would very much like to survive our next fracas. So stop telling me what it was and wasn’t *designed* to do and tell me what it *can* do.”


The computer paused as though to think about it, then answered: “Any redirection of power from the primary jump-drive would result in reduced operational performance and possible catastrophic failure, and is thus ill-advised.”

“Ill-advised?” Rimmer snorted back at the computer. “Now listen here, you trumped-up little—” The sound of distant explosions cut him off as the hangar bay shook slightly. Alarm lights and claxons simultaneously activated, and Kochanski’s slightly panicked voice echoed through the ship’s intercom. “Um, ladies, we have a minor problem.... We’re under attack!”

“What?” Rimmer clicked on his radio and patched in to *Starbug’s* comm system. “How is that a *minor* problem?”

“Did I say ‘minor’? I meant ‘massive’. Yes. Yes, we have a *massive* problem.”





Rimmer grimaced as more explosions shook the ship. “Who? Who is attacking us?”

“Dunno yet,” Bunny’s voice broke in. “I’m a little busy keeping us in one piece to ask for an ID. KRYSTEN?”

“Right here, ma’am.” Krysten shuffled in to the cockpit and quickly sat at her station. She frantically punched at her keyboard to scan the immediate area and was puzzled by the results. “A long-range battle craft. I’ve never seen a configuration like this, very unorthodox. It almost looks like... oh, my.”


“What?” Rimmer’s voice crackled over the cockpit’s intercom. Krysten spun to face Kochanski. “Sir,” the mechanoid began, trying to hide the stress in her vocal modulator, “what are our current coordinates?”

Chris punched up the information on the navicom. “4-9-5-3-7-2,” he responded. “Why?”

*Starbug* shuttered as another blast took out one of the rear engines, forcing it to power down. A shadow crept across the slowing shuttle as the massive enemy craft eclipsed it.

“Activating Glum Mode,” Krysten said. “We’ve been here before.”


“Will someone tell me what the blazes is going on?” Rimmer barked over the intercom. “Who’s firing at us?” His query



was completely ignored by the crew, however, who were busy staring out the cockpit window at the enormous, H-shaped vessel looming above them.

*“Attention, degenerates,”* a stark female voice belched from the ship-to-ship radio. *“This is Supreme Grand Admiral Arlene 4853294861, commanding the Rimmerworld command ship Ignavus. Prepare to die.”*





“Rimmerworld? You took us back to *Rimmerworld*? Why on Io would you do *that*?” Rimmer shrieked over the intercom. The idea of a planet full of his own clones was traumatizing enough; he couldn’t even fathom the horrors of a world inhabited solely by Arlenes.


“What the hell is a Rimmerworld?” Kochanski shouted. “Or is that something I really don’t want to know?”

Krysten addressed Kochanski: “Sir, please. I’ll be happy to explain it all to you if we happen to survive the encounter, but at the moment, I suggest you let me do the talking.” She then clicked the button on the radio. “*Starbug to Ignavus*, we are on a peaceful mission to locate our mothership, the mining vessel *Red Dwarf*. We pose no danger to you. We simply request safe passage.”

“*Starbug crew, you are in violation of 23 statutes of the Rimmerite Grand Code of Normalcy. Per clause 73c under article 421, section b, subsection 7 of the abiding rules of engagement, your violations will now be listed in order of severity, after which your death sentence will be carried out. Violation one...*”

“Oh, just kill us all now and spare us,” Bunny said under her breath, hoping the radio wasn’t on two-way mode.

Deb stumbled into the cockpit. “Geez, can’t a gal go to the loo without the whole ship going to hell?” she asked. “What’s going on?”



“*Violation two....*” Arlene continued droning on in the background, ignored by everyone.


“Well,” Rimmer’s voice interrupted, “it appears we’ve somehow found our way back to your version of Rimmerworld, and now there’s a death-ship full of Arlenes who want to blow us out of the sky over various trumped-up charges.”

Deb shuddered at the memory of her last visit to Rimmerworld. “*Why* did we come back here?”

“*We* didn’t do anything, exactly,” Krysten pointed out, sounding annoyed. “The autopilot was programmed to take us on a straight path back to the *Esperanta*. Logically, we would have passed through all the same points as before, including the area containing the wormhole leading to Rimmerworld. It never occurred to me that, given the time-dilation effect of the wormhole, enough time would have passed for the residents to develop space-faring technology and set out on a murderous rampage of universal cleansing.”

The android turned to talk directly into the speaker, addressing Rimmer: “Besides, we *were* in low-power mode, they shouldn’t have picked us up on their scanners. They probably detected us through the wormhole after we were released from suspended animation and powered the ship back up.”

“So this is *my* fault?” Rimmer asked incredulously. “Right, I’m taking off.”




“*Violation five....*” Arlene’s voice continued to be ignored by everyone.

“Rimmer... Ace....” Deb interrupted. “Are you really that cowardly as to leave us in the lurch like this?”

“Ordinarily.... yes,” Rimmer admitted. “But I may be able to draw them away. The *Bug*’s not going anywhere, they know that. Strategically, their only option is to pursue me. That’ll buy you enough time to effect repairs and get away.” He switched over to *Wildfire*’s exterior speakers. “Jim, Bexley, clear the landing bay. I’m taking off.” He waited a few moments, then closed up the hold and lowered the cockpit dome. “Landing bay doors open. Stroke me a chipper, ladies, I’ll be back.... oh, forget it.” Rimmer pressed the launch button, and *Wildfire* rocketed out of the hangar and bolted away from *Starbug*.

As predicted, the massive warship immediately broke off to pursue the escaping craft. For a while, Rimmer’s plan seemed to have worked, as the lumbering H-shaped vessel struggled to keep up with the much faster and nimbler dimension jumper. Just as he was about to write off the encounter, however, his scanner pinged, a sound he had quickly learned to hate. He glanced down at his radar to find three more dots in pursuit, and they were gaining quickly.


“You’ve *got* to be joking,” he said to himself, then pushed his thrusters to maximum in an attempt to lose the newly launched fighters. His attempt was futile, however, as the



attacking craft, which were also H-shaped, quickly overtook him and launched a volley of laser fire, causing his ship to violently shudder and scream. The computer casually announced, “Warning: Structural integrity at 72 percent.”

Rimmer slowed the ship down, then sharply flipped it around and hit the thrusters again, allowing him to gain a bit of distance. Although the fighters were faster than *Wildfire*, he noticed that they also appeared to be much less agile, meaning he could conceivably play cat-and-mouse all day with these harpies. A sudden mix of anxiety and anger washed over him as he thought back to his youth, when his three older brothers would chase him around in a game of Tig (or, as it often ended up, “Catch and Pummel”). If he weren’t in mortal danger, he’d almost find it humorous how similar his current situation was to those days: he, a scrawny but agile youth up against three faster, but less dexterous, opponents. He recalled how they would chase him around for hours, taking pot-shots and slowly tiring him out, until finally...

Rimmer closed his eyes. He knew how this game ended. Another round of blaster fire struck the side of his ship, prompting the computer to give an update: “Warning: Structural integrity at 59 percent.” He gritted his teeth and performed the same maneuver as before, slowing the ship and spinning it around to thrust away, but this time, one of the enemy ships had stayed behind and caught up to him much faster. Rimmer realized he couldn’t keep this up all day. “Well,” he said to himself, “at least I’ve saved—”



“Oi,” came a voice over the intercom. “You wanna cool it up there? I’m being bounced around like a rubber ball in a pinball machine down here!”

“What the hell?” Rimmer barked. “Who’s in the cargo hold?”


“It’s me, Bexley,” came the response. “I was trapped by some of the heavier equipment during the attack and couldn’t get out of the hold. Your fancy flying freed me, but I’m getting a bit banged up in here, so if you could do me a solid and stop flying like a maniac, it would be greatly appreciated!”

Rimmer couldn’t believe his ears. “Oh, well, I’m *verrrrry* sorry. I’ve just been up here trying to save my—and, through extension now, your—hide. So hang on, or buckle in, or... something, because we’re about to—”

Another volley struck the ship, causing the console to flame and the hull to creak. “—come under fire again,” Rimmer grumbled.

“Warning,” the computer again announced. “Structural integrity at 42 percent.”






Rimmer snapped himself out of his funk and attempted to focus. His ship couldn't take much more of this—he had to come up with a plan. Wasn't it Confucius who'd said, "In order to beat your enemy, you must think like your enemy?" And since he was his own worst enemy, who better to come up with a strategy against these simulacra? His mind raced, trying to come up with some kind of tactic or exploit.

He knew he couldn't outfly the pilots, so he turned his attention to the ships themselves. How would *he* have built these fighters? Besides apparently overdoing it with the "H" symbolism, what features would they have? They'd need to be designed around basic cowardice and self-preservation. Safety features would have to be fully automated to account for operator error, which meant...

"Hmmm," he thought. "It's worth a try." He shut off the autonav system and grabbed the control stick, then made a bee-line for the nearest vessel. Unaware of Rimmer's plan, the pilot veered toward him as well, firing lasers at the rapidly approaching vessel. "Now would be a perfect time for those shields we discussed earlier!" Rimmer yelled at the computer as explosions rocked the ship. He still managed to stay on track, however, ignoring the collision alarms and the computer's warning to alter course.

The two ships streaked toward each other at blinding speed until seconds before impact, when the enemy ship, detecting an imminent collision, automatically ejected the pilot. Rimmer pushed the flight stick forward as hard as he could,






forcing *Wildfire* to skim just under the recently vacated vessel, in an attempt to avoid the jettisoned lifepod. He watched the pod as it fired its thrusters and headed back toward the *Ignavus*, which was still too far away to be a threat.

“One down,” he thought as he set his sights on the second ship, which proved just as easy to incapacitate. The third pilot, savvy to his plan, was more difficult, but hubris eventually got the better of her and she was also jettisoned from her fighter and whisked back to the command ship.

Rimmer exhaled deeply as he switched on the braking thrusters. His light bee’s perceptual sensors were still sending overload signals to its CPU, creating the sensation of a heart beating out of his chest. He stared out at the three abandoned fighters—a trio of H’s randomly drifting about, each one slowly spinning around its center of mass. Eventually, after what seemed like hours, he snapped out of it and hit the intercom. “Bexley, are you alright?” he called. After a moment, the speaker clicked. “I’ll live,” Bexley responded, “but it’s a bloody mess down here.”

Rimmer hoped he hadn’t meant that literally. “Don’t worry,” he answered, “we’ll get you back to *Starbug* as soon as we can.” He sounded more confident than he was. His ship was practically in pieces, and the *Ignavus* was still out there, pursuing them. The best course of action, he figured, was to set down somewhere and lay low for a while, until they were reasonably sure the danger had passed. Rimmer scanned the area and located a remote S-3 moon just on the edge of his




sensors. He set the autopilot toward it and closed his eyes, looking forward to the long, restful flight.

Once again, he was disappointed. “Alert,” the computer warned. “Inter-dimensional distress signal received. Emergency dimension jump imminent.”

“*What?*” Rimmer almost jumped out of his seat. “Nooooo, no, no, no, we can’t possibly jump now!” Besides never being able to return Bexley to this dimension, he doubted the ship could even survive a jump in its current condition. He frantically gazed around the dashboard, then punched “inter-dimensional distress signal” into the datacomp. The computer responded with a single entry: “SEE: CROSS-DIMENSIONAL EMERGENCY TRANSCIEVER.” Rimmer rolled his eyes and selected it.

The answer was not encouraging. Apparently, somewhere along the line, one of Ace’s predecessors had installed this transceiver device in *Wildfire* and had specifically tuned it to *Red Dwarf*’s emergency beacon frequency. When activated, it could pick up a distress call from the mining ship from any dimension and/or time, automatically plot its location and initiate a jump. Somehow, it would seem, it had been accidentally triggered during the battle.

His eyes darted across the console for the activation switch and located it—or, rather, what was left of it. The circuit had become fused, leaving no way to cancel the jump. The computer continued: “Temporal-spatial positioning system



locked. Destination: Alternative Dimension A129/C. Dimension jump in ten...”

The jump drive started humming loudly. “Um, Bexley,” Rimmer said through the intercom, trying to sound calm. “Remember that promise I made to you a few seconds ago? Well, belay that, because there’s been... a development.”

“Five...”

The noise from the jump drive made it almost impossible to hear Bexley’s response. “What kind of ‘development,’ eh? And what’s that countdown for?”

“Three...”

The roar was deafening as the ship started to quake. “For the smegging development!” Rimmer yelled at the top of his lungs. “Brace yourself!”

“One... jump drive engaged.”

“Hold on...” Rimmer thought at the last minute. “A129/C? Wasn’t that...”

**\*FWIP\***





**\*FOOOOOOOOOOM\***

The bright flash and monstrous noise subsided as *Wildfire* blinked into existence, tumbling over itself upon entry. “Dimension jump complete — arrived in Alternative Dimension A129/C,” the ship’s computer announced as Rimmer struggled to regain control. Eventually, he stabilized the ship and brought it to a stop, after which he closed his eyes and let out a huge, pent-up sigh. He re-opened his eyes. Wait... A129/C? That was his dimension, his... home.


He was home.

The hologram had already decided that the life of Ace Rimmer was not for him. Try as he might, he derived absolutely no pleasure in selflessly helping others. How fortunate, then, that he was now able to retire in the relative safety of his own dimension. A smile slowly formed across his face.

The universe, sensing his sudden contentment, responded in kind.

“War-war-war-war-warning,” the computer announced. “Structural integ-teg-tegrity at 12 percent. C-c-c-c-c-atastrophic failure imminen-ne-ne-ne-nent.”

“Shit!” Rimmer hissed as he scanned the area for any signs of *Red Dwarf*. He didn’t have time to check on Bexley; he had to land fast or neither of them would survive. The scanner scope blipped a confirmation, and Rimmer banked




around to face a ship he did not recognize. Was this supposed to be *Red Dwarf*? The lettering on the hull confirmed its designation, but this pencil-shaped monstrosity didn't look anything like the mining vessel that had been his home for years, both before and after he died.

It also didn't seem to be in any better shape than *Wildfire*. In some areas, air jets streamed from cracks in the hull; in others, entire sections appeared to have been dissolved away. The fact that the engines were still running seemed to be a small miracle in itself. Rimmer was apprehensive, but he didn't have a choice; he had to land. At best, he hoped to find a shuttle and escape before *Red Dwarf* exploded, after which they could locate an S-3 planet to live on. At worst, they would die in a massive fireball instead of asphyxiating in a tiny dimension jumper. Or, rather, Bexley would asphyxiate; he would just have to wait until his light bee's power cell ran out.

Rimmer scanned the ship and located a relatively unscathed landing bay, then transmitted the bay door's activation code and headed toward the mining vessel. Sparks flew around the cockpit as *Wildfire* became increasingly difficult to control, its engines sputtering wildly.

This was not going to be a smooth landing. They were coming in hard and fast, as Rimmer continued to wrestle the flight stick. Just as they flew past the door's threshold, one of the jumper's lateral stabilizers blew, sending the ship sharply toward the ceiling. Rimmer forced the ship down and over-




compensated, causing it to graze a service crane and smash through several storage containers before smacking into the landing pad and coming to a very abrupt halt, flinging debris and metal shards against the bay's rear wall.

Every warning light on Rimmer's console now lit up, but it didn't matter. *Wildfire* was totaled. He hit the switch to open the cargo hold, then crawled out of the smoking cockpit and circled around the ship, afraid of what he might find. He was relieved, though more than a little surprised, to find Bexley dazed but intact.

"Bloody hell..." Bexley remarked as he saw Rimmer peering into the hold. "You call yourself a pilot? A catatonic bonobo could've landed softer!" He exited the ship and eyed the massive landing bay. "Where the smeg are we?"

"You're welcome, first of all, for saving your scrawny neck. As to where we are, this is *supposed* to be *Red Dwarf*—my *Red Dwarf*—but I don't recognize it." He scrunched his nose as he scanned around. "No matter, we've got to find a shuttle quickly. This ship is falling apart faster than a Morris Marina at the Banger World Series!"

"Right," Bexley responded, fidgeting. He felt a peculiar tingling sensation, starting from his arms, running through his body and down his legs. He dismissed it as a side-effect of being tossed around the cargo hold and continued, "I don't see any shuttles in this bay, but the control tower's computers should have an inventory of any that are left on



the ship, assuming there *are* any. But shouldn't we search for the crew?"

"Look, last I knew, this ship had been stolen by entities unknown," Rimmer told him. "There's no telling who's on board at this point in time. The only thing worse than violently exploding in a city-sized mining ship is being captured, tortured and eviscerated by crazed simulants before violently exploding in a city-sized mining ship. No, our first and only order of business is to get off this thing before it goes all supernova." He pointed to the lift that led to the control booth. "That way."

"All right," Bexley said as he headed toward the lift. Rimmer followed, the omni-directional rumbling of twisting metal quickening his pace.


Once in the control booth, the two poured over various monitors, seeking any method of escape. To their dismay, every operational shuttle had been recently launched, confusing Rimmer even more. He decided to give up trying to understand what had transpired and continued to search for other means of transport. Suddenly, the monitor changed to show the inventory of Landing Bay D, and Rimmer's eyes lit up. "There!" he proclaimed as he smashed his finger down on the monitor. He turned to get back on the lift as Bexley moved in to read the monitor. Under Landing Bay D's inventory listing, a single entry was highlighted: *Escape Pod — SS Hermes*.



“Thank you!” Bexley yelled at the ceiling, and ran off after Rimmer. As the two descended in the lift, a mysterious message appeared on the abandoned monitor: “YOU’RE WELCOME.”








“Arnold Judas Rimmer. Your life is over. Come with me.”

Nano-Rimmer glanced up from the deck plating at the dark shadowy figure standing over him, as the remnants of *Red Dwarf* violently shook around them. He grabbed the extended skeletal hand as it lifted him to his feet, and stood face-to-undead-face with the Grim Reaper. He was slightly taken aback; Death, he thought to himself, was a lot shorter than he had imagined.

The creature continued, “We will travel to the River Styx, where you will place a coin in the—”

Rimmer wasn't in the mood. “Not today, matey!” he pronounced and, working off a hunch, kneeed the Angel of Death squarely in what he hoped was still its groin. The robed figure dropped its scythe and buckled over in pain, allowing Rimmer to finish, “Remember, only the good die young!” before bolting down the corridor as fast as his wobbly legs would take him. He was fairly certain it was all just a hallucination brought on by oxygen deprivation, but why chance it? As he sprinted away, he thought he could hear the manifestation mumble something, but he was far too concerned with where to go next to make it out.

He doubted there was any point in running, but sticking around the most decrepit section of the ship didn't seem like a viable option. He ran for what seemed like miles until he found a less-damaged area, then stopped to catch his breath and collect his thoughts. The air was thin, but he needed to focus; there *had* to be a way off the ship.



Suddenly, he heard a voice behind him. “Oi, how we doin’, mate?”

“Holly?” Rimmer spun around to see the face of the ship’s former AI on a wall-mounted monitor. “How did you get here? I thought you were still in the Tank’s prison server.”


“Well,” the computer answered, “it was a masterful and daring escape, really, full of danger and complexity, one that taxed the very fiber of my resolve and the limits of my intellect.”

“The other AI abandoned ship and left the firewall open, didn’t he?” Rimmer responded with a not-so-subtle tone of sarcasm.

“Well, when you put it like that, it doesn’t sound as compelling,” Holly countered, the excitement drained from his voice. “Anyway, you might want to know that I’ve been assessing your current situation, and I think I have a plan to get you off the ship safely. But before you go and name babies after me, you should know that there’s a very good, nay, certain, chance of failure.”

The ship shuddered as fires broke out down the hall. “Yes, yes, anything, what do I need to do?” Rimmer snapped back. His patience was running as thin as the air had become.

“You’ll need to hurry,” Holly answered. “The microbes have gotten into the primary AI core. It’s only a matter of



time before I'm rendered useless." Rimmer started to say something, then thought better of it. Holly continued, "Go to Landing Bay D. I'll meet you and the others there."

Rimmer turned to head off, then stopped and looked back at the monitor. "Wait, what others?" he yelled, but it was too late, Holly had disappeared. He scrunched up his face in frustration and ran off to Landing Bay D.

The path was filled with fires and debris, but Rimmer eventually reached the bay. He entered the enormous hangar and surveyed the area. There, off in the distance, he spotted it: a small pod. He started to run toward it, but stopped short once he noticed the gaping hole in its side. "What is that senile, half-dissolved computer thinking?" he muttered out loud, hoping Holly was listening.


As if in response, the door behind him slid open, revealing two silhouetted figures. They ran into the bay but skidded to a stop when they noticed him. The two Rimmers walked toward each other, both exclaiming, "What the hell?" They then simultaneously turned to the large monitor on the wall and barked, "Holly, what the smeg is going on?"

Holly flicked onto the monitor. "Oh, I'm sorry. Of course, we have all the time in the world, what with the entire ship being dissolved and collapsing all around us. So why not stop for introductions... Arnold Rimmer who was revived by nanobots I created to bring back the crew after Kryten's own nanobots reconstructed *Red Dwarf*, meet Arnold Rimmer,



a hard-light hologram of your former self who ran away to become the next savior of the omniverse, and Bexley, one of two boys born to Dave Lister after he slept with a female version of himself in another dimension and became pregnant. Holo-Rimmer and Bexley, meet nano-Rimmer. Now that *that's* out of the way, shall we proceed with the plan to save our lives?"





“No... no... abso-smegging-lutely not,” holo-Rimmer said defiantly. “You’re not going to turn me into some kind of puncture-repair kit!”

“It’s quite simple,” Holly replied. “You’re a hard-light hologram, virtually indestructible, and immune to the vacuum of space.”

“But—” holo-Rimmer tried to interject.


Holly continued, “Your humanoid form, initially defined by the Arnold Rimmer template stored in the Hologram Projection Suite, is generated by a pattern manipulator, and locked in place by an inhibitor program designed to prevent holograms from taking other forms.”

“Yes, but—”

“Once I access your light bee’s core operating code and disable the inhibitor, you’ll be able to change your form to just about anything within the range of your photon emitters. Hypothetically, you should be able to morph into a flexible membrane to patch the escape pod from the inside.”

“But—”

“I’ve re-programmed the pod to find the nearest planet with a livable atmosphere. Those of you who need food and oxygen will have enough for a month. Once you find a safe environment, I’ll re-activate the Rimmer program and the



inhibitor, and you'll be back to your sniveling, irritating self in no time."


"But..." holo-Rimmer protested, ignoring the insult, "it's just so... so... *demeaning!* And what do I do if something happens to you and I can't revert back? What happens if I'm stuck an amorphous light-blob?"

"Well, you could spend the rest of your days lifting comics off the funny pages," Holly retorted, tired of the discussion.

"I really don't think that we have any other choice here," Bexley commented, pain contorting his face. He was beginning to sweat profusely. The landing bay rumbled louder as the sound of failing support beams grew closer. Nano-Rimmer chimed in, "Agreed. We have to go *now.*"

As the two of them hurried toward the pod, holo-Rimmer shouted, "Of course you agree, it's not *your* skin being stretched into a plastic putty to be applied like so much spackle!" He stared back at Holly, who raised his digital eyebrows at him. "Oh, smeg it all!" the hologram yelled, and raced after them.

The three climbed into the escape pod and waited for further instructions. Finally, Holly's likeness appeared on one of the pod's monitors. "Ah, there we go. Everyone on board, are we? OK, accessing light bee program and deactivating inhibitor... now!"




Holo-Rimmer put up his index finger in one last gesture of protest, but before he could utter any words, his body shimmered and dropped to the floor in a shapeless blob. The others jumped back in horror. “G’ah!” nano-Rimmer yelped. “You could have warned us that was going to happen!”

“Did I mention that time was of the essence?” Holly responded, then addressed the pearlescent globule: “All right, up you go. Make sure it’s an air-tight seal. I’ll pressurize the pod once you’re in place.”

The undulating blob attempted to make a crude two-finger salute in Holly’s direction, then moved up the pod’s wall and climbed over the gaping hole, dozens of tentacle-like appendages feeling over the jagged edge of the breach. As soon as Holly was satisfied that the hole was sufficiently plugged, he pressurized the pod and launched, guiding the tiny vessel around the fallen I-beams and massive chunks of debris, until it cleared the *Dwarf’s* outer bay doors. The AI altered the pod’s trajectory and fired its booster, hurtling the craft away from the crumbling remains of the mining ship and into the black void of space.





“You’re out of your mind,” nano-Rimmer snapped at the face on the monitor. “Out. Of. Your. Mind.”

“It’s a cold, hard, scientific fact,” Holly responded. “There’s just no arguing it.”

“You’re crazy,” nano-Rimmer insisted, then looked to Bexley for affirmation. “He’s crazy.”

Bexley pressed his hands against his temples, trying to alleviate the tension headache that had been building up. They’d been cooped up in the pod for only twelve hours, but with Holly and Rimmer arguing various pointless facts the entire time, it felt like years.

Of course, in Bexley’s case, it was quite literally true. The rapid-aging process which had afflicted him and his brother when they were born had returned and, at a pace of one year for every four hours, had already aged him to 25 years old. He prayed they found a habitable planet within a few days; the thought of spending the rest of his short life stuck in a cramped pod listening to these two bicker was almost enough to drive him mad.

“Look,” Holly rebutted, “I have an IQ of six thousand. Even taking into account three million years-plus of wear and tear, being ripped apart by nanobots, *and* having half my circuits dissolved by an acidic microbe, that still makes me at least a hundred times smarter than you. And I’m telling you, *Gone with the Wind VII* is, objectively speaking, the best of the series.”





“Says you,” nano-Rimmer responded.

“Says me and Roger Ebert’s hologram. His review stated, and I quote—” A rumbling sound cut Holly off, shaking the pod.

“What the smeg is that?” nano-Rimmer asked cautiously, surveying the pod.

“With any luck,” Bexley replied, still rubbing his temples, “it’s a meteor storm, come to smash us to oblivion.”


“That’s odd,” Holly said, his brow furled quizzically. “According to these readings, we’re back where we started.”

“What?” Bexley lifted his head up from his hands. “That can’t be. Please tell me that can’t be. What happened?”

Holly answered in his usual calm demeanor. “Apparently, we reversed course somewhere along the trip. I suppose I was so preoccupied with the friendly banter I hadn’t noticed.” He paused as he checked over the navigational records, then added, “It appears the pod had discovered a closer suitable environment. Wait a tic... blimey, it’s *Red Dwarf!*”

Rimmer stood up to check the external monitor. “That’s impossible,” he said flippantly. “*Red Dwarf* should be a bubbling spoonful of slime by now.”

“It’s the *Dwarf*, all right,” Holly persisted, “but certainly not the ship we left. Take a butcher’s.” He displayed the



spaceship they were now approaching. Sure enough, it was the mining vessel, but somehow it had re-reverted back to its original squat form, with the exception of the engines, which were still upgraded.

“How?” nano-Rimmer asked. “How is that even possible?”


Bexley finally stood up. “Who cares how? If it’s safe, let’s just land!”

Holly responded, “Oh, it’s safe—good as new, in fact. As for how, I won’t know that until I get back into the mainframe. Initiating landing procedure now.”

The AI remotely activated the landing bay doors on the crimson mining ship and guided the pod through, then fired its retro engines to gently touch down on the landing pad. The pod’s circular door slid open, allowing its bipedal occupants to exit, followed by the holo-blob, which slid off the side of the pod and onto the floor.

“I’m transferring over to the mainframe,” Holly finally said. “Shouldn’t take too long. I wouldn’t go wandering off too far until we know what’s going on. Be back in a moment.” The holo-blob tried to get the AI’s attention by waving a crudely formed appendage, but to no avail.

Nano-Rimmer and Bexley scanned the landing bay, which, to their astonishment, was remarkably clean. It seemed a fair bit different as well, though they couldn’t decide whether or



not it was due to the lack of fires and piles of rubble.

“Astonishing,” Holly’s voice now boomed from the PA system as his head appeared on the wall-mounted display. “Absolutely astonishing.”

“So what happened?” Bexley asked. Behind him, the holo-blob furiously waved its various bits some more, seeking attention.


“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” Holly responded.

“Holly, mate,” Bexley said, disparagingly. “I’m aging at the rate of three months an hour. I’d prefer to hear the explanation before dementia sets in.”

“Oh, right. Well, it seems that when you and holo-Rimmer arrived in this dimension, you brought along a few stow-aways — several million, in fact.” He waited for a response, and got none. He continued, “I’m assuming that when you left your dimension, you were in the process of searching for your mechanoid’s nanobots?”

“Aye.”

“Well, apparently they found their way onto your clothes and into this dimension. They deserted you shortly after you crashed in the landing bay, and have been feverishly working to repair *Red Dwarf* ever since. The engines were relatively undamaged, so they left them intact, but the rest




of the ship was unsalvageable, so they had to act quickly and reconstructed it using the last design they had. The result, it would seem, is this amalgamated ship.”

“Remarkable,” nano-Rimmer replied. “So the ship is completely repaired and safe?”

“Well, repaired, yes. However, I’m detecting odd fluctuations of power in certain areas of the ship. Some of the computer networking is still using bio-organics; it seems our little friends took some shortcuts, and it’s wreaking havoc on several systems. I’d steer clear of the drive room until I can get things sorted.” He finally noticed the flailing blob of light waving hysterically behind nano-Rimmer. “Oh, sorry, Arnold, I forgot about you. I’ll upload the Rimmer template and pattern stabilizer now. Should take about twenty minutes to complete the reformation, then I’ll reactivate the inhibitor. Sit tight.”

The light-blob froze in place, its pearlescent color replaced by a black-and-white static pattern. Suddenly, it disappeared in a bright burst of light and reappeared as a pixelated humanoid shape. It stood motionless as its features slowly increased in resolution.

“Now,” Holly continued, “let’s see what’s causing this power surge.” He closed his eyes as his artificial mind wandered through the ship’s systems, searching for weak points. His consciousness ebbed and flowed around the life-support systems, energy production, waste management, navigation...



Holly opened his eyes, their usual sparkle now tinged with the sadness of realization. “Oh...” he said softly. He paused for a long moment as he considered the options, then blinked and looked down at the two men staring at him in anticipation.

“Sorry,” he finally said. “OK, it appears the navicomp is having a bit of trouble interfacing with the new engines. Unless we correct the problem soon, a power surge will build up, eventually discharging directly into the main engine array, taking out half the ship. Bexley, I’ll need you to quickly go to the drive room and connect the navicomp to the drive computer—we may be able to shunt the power away from the engines.”


Bexley nodded and raced off toward the Xpress lift. Nanno-Rimmer glanced back at Holly in confusion. “What about me? Shouldn’t I go help him?”

Holly waited until the lift doors closed, then addressed the question. “No, Arnold. I need you to stay here, where it’s safe.”

“Safe? What do you mean safe? Holly, what the devil are you talking about?”

Holly paused again. The computer did not believe in Silicon Heaven or Hell, but if they did exist, he was certain he had just secured himself a spot in the latter. “I need you to stay away from the drive room,” he finally responded, “because there’s about to be a terrible accident.”





Holo-Rimmer blinked his eyes several times and found nano-Rimmer sitting morosely on a crate of spare injectors. Across from him was a monitor displaying Holly's equally grim expression.

“What happened?” holo-Rimmer said to whoever was listening. He scanned around the bay. “Where's Bexley?”


“Go ahead, HAL 9000,” nano-Rimmer said to the floating head on the monitor. “Tell him.”

Holly addressed holo-Rimmer: “There was an accident in the drive room. Bexley was attempting to draw power from the engine array using the navicomp, and the feedback caused it to explode, destroying the drive room and three other sections. Bexley, I'm sorry to report, did not make it.”

“What?” holo-Rimmer said, “He's gone?” He lowered his head in shame. “And I brought him here.”

“You left out one teeny-tiny little detail,” nano-Rimmer chimed in, his voice dripping with disdain. “That little bit about you knowing it was going to happen and sending him anyway.”

Holo-Rimmer couldn't believe it. “You what?” He barked at Holly. “You mean you knowingly sent that boy to his death?” He then shot nano-Rimmer a ferocious glare. “And you didn't stop him?”




“That crazy bastard of a computer locked all the lifts and deactivated the comms,” nano-Rimmer defended himself, pointing to the monitor. “I tried talking some sense into him, but it was too late.”

Holo-Rimmer was about to speak, but Holly cut him off. “Arnold, there was nothing else I could have done. I may be a state-of-the-art tenth-generation hologrammic artificial intelligence, but I’m still just that—an artificial intelligence—bound by Asimov’s Laws. In the event of a conflict, I must rely on pure logic, using the given facts. And in this case, the facts were as follows. One: the navigational computer was not interfacing with the ship’s engines properly and had built up a massive power accumulation. Two: if the navicomp was not attached to the drive computer in time, a power surge would have fed straight into the engines and obliterated the ship, killing everyone. Three: with no way to return to his own dimension, Bexley would have died of old age within a month, even with the best of medical care, whereas nano-Rimmer has the potential, as unlikely as it may be, to live a full life. Thus, the choice was clear.”

Holo-Rimmer walked up to where nano-Rimmer sat and slowly took a seat on an adjacent crate, looking stunned.

“Besides,” Holly added, “you know as well as I do that we couldn’t have stopped it even if we wanted to.” He paused, saw holo-Rimmer’s confusion, and added, “I believe your exact words were, ‘It will be happened, it shall be going to be happening, it will be was an event that could will have been taken place in the future.’”



Nano-Rimmer turned sharply to ask holo-Rimmer what the hell the computer was talking about, but the hologram's expression silenced him.

“My God...” holo-Rimmer exclaimed, his eyes widening. “The future echo.”

“Exactly,” Holly responded. “So as much as I'd like to accept your nomination for ‘Psychopathic AI of the Year,’ I'm afraid there was no way to prevent the inevitable.”

“Right... of course. So now what?”


Nano-Rimmer piped in, “Well I think we should get the nanobots to repair the drive room. Otherwise, we're dead in the water.”

“The nanobots are no longer aboard *Red Dwarf*. We'll have to use the auxiliary drive room on Level 138 from now on,” Holly said. “However, there may be a silver lining in all this. Before leaving, the nanobots informed me of an unusual device in the captain's suite. They repaired it the best they could, but without knowing its purpose, they were unable to complete it. I believe it's the portal generator to the mirror universe. Given time, we may be able to get it operational and retrieve the others.”

“Finally, a bit of good news,” holo-Rimmer murmured. “So, when do we start?”








For thirteen days, the three toiled over the mirror machine, testing and tweaking and retesting, until they were fairly confident it was stable enough to connect to the mirror universe without embedding someone in a wall. Holly calculated that they probably could have done it within a week had there only been one Rimmer, but the incessant arguing and bickering between the two more than doubled the repair time. Whoever it was who had said two minds were better than one, Holly decided, obviously had never met Arnold Rimmer.

In fact, the only time they agreed on anything was at the end, when it was decided that, because of his previous experience, nano-Rimmer would go through the portal to search for their crewmates. Holly powered up the device. “Stand back,” he said. “If my calculations are correct, the creation of the portal will produce a small vacuum. Anyone standing directly in front of the mirror, on either end, might get sucked into the abyss between dimensions.”

Nano-Rimmer shuffled to the side as the device shot a blue beam into the full-length mirror. “If I’m not back in one hour...” he began to say, then realized he had no follow-up plan. He sheepishly turned and vanished into the mirror.

Emerging on the other side, Rimmer encountered complete darkness. He stumbled for a moment, then ordered the lights on. It was clear that no one had lived in these quarters for weeks. He hadn’t noticed it at the time, but during his last visit, the captain—the *real* Captain Rimmer—was nowhere to be found, which allowed nano-Rimmer to unintentionally



take his place. If the captain were still MIA, possibly having been sucked into the aforementioned vacuum, that would make the search for his crewmates that much easier. It also sparked an idea for the future, but that would have to wait until he finished the task at hand. He rummaged through the drawers and found the captain's pips, placed them on his collar and turned to leave the room, smacking right into the entrance door.


"Smegging hell!" he exclaimed, rubbing his nose. He waved his hand in front of the door's sensor, getting no response. It seemed the quarters had been locked from the outside. Fortunately for him, he still remembered the captain's passcode from his short stint as Hollister's attendant. He punched in the code and stepped into the hallway.

He made it about three steps.

"Halt!" a voice from behind him yelled. "This is a crime scene. What were you doing in the captain's quarters?" The voice was awfully familiar to Rimmer. "Turn around slowly."

Rimmer rotated and stared up at the gangly, blonde Dane. "Petersen?" he asked quizzically, then sighed at the realization. "Yes, of *course* you're a security guard."

Utter panic gripped Petersen's features as he snapped to attention. "Sir!" he said in an official tone. "My apologies! It's just that, since your, uh, disappearance, this area has been off-limits, per Space Corps Regulation 523—"



Rimmer took immediate advantage of the situation. “Don’t quote the regulations at me, son! Can’t a man, er, take a walk around his own ship without the entire place going hysterical?”


“For two weeks, sir?”

“Yes, well, um, I needed to clear my head.” He stiffened up. “Tell me, anything unusual happen in my absence?”

Petersen paused, as though unsure how to answer. “Well, sir, the trial against the stowaways accused of your... um, well, *absence*, is finishing up today, if that qualifies as unusual.”

Rimmer smiled. “Indeed it does. Thank you, Petersen. Please inform the crew that I am back, then bring me to the prisoners.”





“Do you have anything else to say in your defense?” Commander Selby addressed the four defendants. Dave Lister, Kryten, Cat and Kristine Kochanski all exchanged sullen glances. The Board did not believe their story about the microbe and the mirror universe, the captain was missing, and an investigation had turned up no sign of the portal, leading them to the absurd conclusion that the four were a hostile threat, possibly shape-shifting GELFs, aimed at replacing the crew, and that they had killed the captain, who was to be replaced next. The other members of the Board of Inquiry, including First Officer Lister and Commander Chen, looked on as they awaited a response.

Finally, Lister stood up. “Yeah, I’ve got something to say.” His comrades hid their heads in their hands. “What kind of moronic, idiotic piss-hats believe that ‘malevolent bodysnatching lifeforms’ is a more credible explanation than a mirror universe?” He motioned toward Selby and Chen, “You lot, I’d expect this kind of half-baked cockamamie logic from,” he said, then pointed to his higher-ranking doppelgänger. “But I at least thought *you’d* listen to us. You’re supposed to be the reasonable one.”

First Officer Lister stared at the four sternly as Commander Chen responded, pausing after each word, “*Where*. Is. Captain. Rimmer?”

“I don’t know, ya’ bloody smegpot!” Lister yelled.

Kryten tugged on Lister’s jacket, “Um, sir, I don’t really think this is helping our case...”



“What case? Look at them, Krytes. We were guilty the moment we were picked up.”

“If that’s all, then,” Selby interrupted, “we shall continue. It is my duty to inform you that, in accordance with the rules and regulations set forth by the Jupiter Mining Corporation, we, the Board of Inquiry, find the defendants—”

“Stop!” A voice boomed as the doors in the rear of the room slid open, revealing nano-Rimmer, dressed in his bedecked white dress uniform. He had always wanted to make a dramatic entrance to a courtroom full of people; the gasps of shocked crewmembers were just icing on the cake.

“Captain!” Selby shouted, as everyone in the room except for the four defendants stood at attention.


“About smeggin’ time,” Lister muttered under his breath.

“Sir!” First Officer Lister said in a slight French accent. “Where have you been? We thought you were dead!”

“Obviously,” Rimmer said smugly, “since you were about to imprison my four friends here for my murder.”

“Wait... you *know* these imposters? Who are they? Where are they from?”

Panic sliced through Rimmer’s body. He had absolutely no clue where to go from here. He continued to smirk, but his



eyes widened as he frantically tried to come up with a story. Somehow, he managed not to pass out.

“Who are they? They are... well...” He surveyed the room and noticed the layout of the aisles made a rough “H” shape. “Holograms! Yes, holograms, a new project by the Space Corps. Self-sustaining, next-generation hard-light holograms. Very top-secret. Not even Holly knew about them.”

“Holograms,” Selby repeated.

“Yes,” Rimmer reaffirmed. “They were sent here by the Corps to be tested among the crew. I was in closed-door meetings discussing the testing parameters with the JMC. Hence, my absence.” He gestured toward Kryten, adding, “They were to be observed by the mechanoid. The bit about a ‘mirror universe’ was their cover story should anything go wrong.”

There was total silence as a wall of confused expressions stared back at Rimmer. Finally, Chen spoke up. “So... you’re saying that the Space Corps... created advanced holograms of certain members of our crew?”

“Yes.”

“Including a slobby version of the First Officer, a dimwitted version of the professor... and an intelligent version of his secretary?”

“Yes.”



“And they were being tested by... a sanitation droid?”

“Indeed.”

“And you spent the last two weeks sequestered in a meeting room discussing this operation with JMC officials?”


“Correct.”

There was a long pause as the Board members exchanged glances and murmured. Eventually, Selby responded, “Right. Well, that’s about as good an explanation as any I’ve heard in this room so far.” He smiled at Rimmer. “Welcome back, Captain. I release the, er, holograms, into your care.”

The four defendants all let out a huge simultaneous sigh of relief, as did Rimmer. “Thank you, Commander,” he said, then turned to the rest of the room, ordering, “Carry on.” He motioned to his friends to quickly follow him, and they stood up and filed out of the room.

Once in the hallway, the four rushed up to Rimmer as they proceeded toward the captain’s quarters. “Nice plan, buddy!” Cat cheered as they hurried down the corridor.

“Yeah, man, took you long enough. Where the hell have you been?” Lister asked, then stopped dead in his tracks. “Hang on... did you change into your dress uniform before coming to rescue us?”



Everyone stopped short and stared at Rimmer. “I had to make a big impression!” he defended, then added, “Whatever, it worked.”

“Yeah, how exactly?” Kochanski asked. “Surely, they’ve realized there hasn’t been a JMC *or* a Space Corps in millions of years.”

“I admit that was a gamble, yes. But I figured the captain would have kept most of the facts about their resurrection and situation from the crew, even his first officer. Therefore, as far as they knew, they were simply out in deep space, still operating for the company. Thankfully, I was right.” Rimmer started walking again, picking up the pace. “Come on, we’ve got to go *now*.”


As the others followed, Kryten asked, “To where? Did the antidote work? Is *Red Dwarf* repaired?”

Rimmer rolled his eyes. “I haven’t got time to explain. Suffice it to say that everything’s back to normal.” After a slight pause, he added, “...relatively speaking.”

They turned the corner and entered the captain’s quarters. “Here we go,” Rimmer said, gesturing to the mirror. “On the other side is a Rimmer hologram. I believe you’re all well acquainted with him. He’ll be able to explain what’s been happening.”

Lister cocked his head. “Wait, you’re not coming back with us?”





“I’m afraid not. There’s nothing for me back there. At least here, I’m somebody — I can live my dream, command a ship, be an officer!”

“But sir,” Kryten interjected, “you don’t belong here.”

Rimmer interrupted, “I don’t *belong* anywhere. I died. There’s already a hologram of me; I’m superfluous in our dimension. What could I possibly accomplish there, except finishing up my categorical index of the ship’s suppositories?” He pointed out the door, “At least here, they need a captain. Here, I can finally feel at home.”


Lister knew it was pointless to argue. “But are you ready?”

“If not now, then never,” Rimmer said defiantly. Then, more humbly, he added, “I guess we’ll see.”

“Alright, smeghead,” Lister gave in. “Just promise me you won’t go fixing any more driveplates.”

“Deal,” nano-Rimmer said with a smile, shaking Lister’s hand. The others shared short farewells, then one by one, the crew disappeared into the mirror.





“...and *that’s* how I saved *Red Dwarf*,” holo-Rimmer said, concluding his detailed half-hour explanation of the events of the past few weeks.

“You what?” Lister snickered. “It was all a complete accident, you goit! Everything you just described came down to dumb, blind luck.”

“Nonsense!” Rimmer countered smugly. “It was all elaborately planned out and meticulously executed.”


“And did your ‘elaborate plan’ include the death of my son?”

“Well he wasn’t *your* son, was he? I mean, he was *a* son of *a* Lister, but not yours.”

“And that’s supposed to make it better?”

“Yes, it is,” Rimmer said confidently. “That means your boys are still out there, frolicking among the stars.” He softened his tone a bit. “You knew this would happen someday. Just be glad it wasn’t *our* Bexley.”

“Rimmer, please,” Lister interrupted, rubbing his forehead. On some level, he knew Rimmer was right. How many Bexleys were out there in the various universes? It was certain more than a few had met untimely deaths; at least this one had meaning. And in a way, he actually felt a sense of relief. All these years, he’d wondered whether he’d be able to prevent the accident Rimmer had foreseen in the future



echo, or, like with the Cat and his broken tooth, if he'd end up causing it because of his attempt. Now he was free of that possibility. He decided to ease up on Rimmer and let it go. "So, you going back to the thrilling, heart-pounding life of Ace Rimmer?"

Rimmer's face warped in disgust. "Not on your smegging life."

"But sir," Kryten said, "as happy as we apparently all are that you're alive and well, what about the long, proud lineage of Ace Rimmers?"


"As far as I'm concerned, the Ace lineage can suck it."

Kryten recoiled in mild shock. "I'm sorry?"

Rimmer flared his nostrils. "The way I see it, there are an infinite number of universes, right? If even half of them produced an Ace Rimmer, half of infinity is still infinity, so... technically, there is a never-ending supply of wretched, pompous, do-goody metrosexuals out there. The omniverse isn't going to miss one."

Kryten paused to process Rimmer's explanation. Finally, he conceded, "Well, I can't fault your logic on that one."

Lister shook his head. "Leave it to you to find a loophole in destiny."



“Besides,” Rimmer added, “it’s not like I have a choice anyway. The jumper’s gone, the nanobots are gone... let’s face it, you’re stuck with me!” He grinned broadly.

“So now what?” Cat bellowed. “We all just go back to Soap-sud Slalom and Durex Volleyball?”

“Well, I was reading through the ship’s logs, and there was a file downloaded from *Starbug*’s AR system which intrigued me. Tell me... what’s this ‘Rimmer Experience’?”



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