

## Chapter 2

### Creature from the Blue Lagoon

Troy Tempest braced himself as he sat waiting, unable to move. A metal band had been secured around his forehead, and from it wires were connected to a grey box, which sat on the table in front of him. A finger was poised over a large red button. The finger stabbed downwards. "Ouch!" cried Troy as an electric shock surged through his body.

"Reflexes A-Okay Captain," Doctor Venus told him as she walked over and unfastened the electrodes. "You are in excellent condition for the tests. We just have one thing to put right."

"We do?" Troy asked, as he pulled on his uniform jacket. "What's that Doctor?"

"Your diet. I'm afraid you'll be on a strictly regulated food intake for the next month or so."

"But... I'm not over weight... Am I?"

"Oh no Captain, you are in fine shape." Venus reached into a cabinet and showed Troy a bottle of tablets. "You'll be taking these food pills."

"Before or after meals?" Troy asked as he took the bottle and peered at the pills inside suspiciously.

"I'm afraid these ARE your meals Captain; all our astronauts take these when out in space."

"Gee, that kinda hurts more than the electric shock."

Venus smiled. "Oh you'll get used to it. I'm afraid it's very necessary. You see I have to carefully balance the oxygen pill drugs with the ones you

normally take to withstand the very high undersea pressures. The less solid food you consume, the greater your chances of avoiding adverse reactions...”

“Like getting sea sick?”

“Yes... That could be fatal at high pressures.”

“Okay Doctor, I guess you know best.”

“Yes Captain, I do.” Venus smiled again. “You may leave now. Please send in Lieutenant Sheridan.”

Troy exited the examination room with some haste. Titan he could cope with; but medical check-ups really bothered him.

“How’d it go Skipper?” Phones asked as Troy met him in the waiting room.

“Oh, fine, just fine.” Troy sighed.

“I see you got some pills.”

“Pills? No Phones, these are our meals for the next four weeks.”

Phones went pale, “No kidding?”

“No kidding Phones — I think I’d have coped better with the green hair!”

Troy grinned, “Your turn now. If you’re lucky maybe she’ll decide you aren’t fit enough for the project.”

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In the control room at Space City, Lieutenant Ninety was anxiously trying to make contact with three unidentified craft which had suddenly appeared in Earth orbit. The base was on full alert, klaxons blaring. “Commander! One of the ships is breaking orbit.”

Commander Zero hadn't taken his eyes off the astroscope, "I can see that Ninety! I have got eyes you know! I want all tracking stations to follow it down. We can't risk losing it in the lower atmosphere."

"It's descending too fast Sir," Ninety said excitedly. "The pilot must be crazy! He'll burn up at that speed."

Zero studied the space scanners as the object plummeted Earthwards, "It's heading for the Pacific Ocean Lieutenant. I want to know the exact point of impact."

"Plotted sir. Estimated point of impact... North west Pacific, twelve hundred miles east of China. Position two two one zero black. Impact... one minute."

The unidentified object did not burn up in the atmosphere. It finally slammed into the Pacific Ocean, sending a gigantic cloud of steam and water shooting high up into the sky.

Within an hour, the World Navy had arrived on the scene. Ships and aircraft combed the impact area looking for debris.

Back at Space City, Colonel Steve Zodiac had joined Commander Zero in the Control Tower. "Still no trace of the other two unauthorised craft in Earth orbit Commander?"

"No Steve, not so much as a blip. Ninety has been checking with the tracking stations but they seem to have vanished. Looks like it could have been a false alarm."

"But something splashed down in the Pacific..."

"Yeah... that much is certain."

"Could it have been a large meteor? That would explain why Ninety didn't manage to make radio contact with it."

“That’s the World Navy’s line Steve. They think it’s either a meteor, or a piece of antique space junk that’s fallen out of orbit.” Commander Zero frowned, “Lieutenant Ninety can be a tootie at times, but he is convinced that thing was a spaceship, and frankly, so am I...”

Steve shrugged, “Looking at the data Commander, there’s no hard evidence either way.”

“That’s another thing Steve. There should be more data. Sure, that object came down fast, but we should have been able to get better telemetry”. Zero shook his head, “It looks like it all points to instrument failure...”

“Or,” Steve suggested, “some kind of sabotage.”

“Yeah. Maybe.” Zero sighed. “In my experience, meteors don’t sit around in orbit before deciding to drop in. And they don’t make good saboteurs either... There’s something down there in the ocean Steve, and it means trouble. Big trouble.”

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For days Troy and Phones had been subjected to numerous medical tests. Their new diet only served to reinforce their growing feeling that volunteering for the project had not been one of their better ideas.

By the end of the week the two friends were in need of a break. 7pm found them in the Blue Lagoon bar. The place was beginning to fill up with off duty aquanauts and other WASP personnel.

Troy and Phones sat at their favourite table near the bar - it had been a long day of tests and more tests.

“Well what did you think of today, Phones?”

“Don’t ask, Skipper — just don’t ask.”

And don't keep reminding me I volunteered for these tests, okay!" snapped Troy.

"I think I hate that pressure tank the most," Phones sighed. "It's so boring sitting around in there with nothing to do."

"I guess you've tried whistling 'Dixie' like you do when you get bored on patrol?"

"Yeah... I tried that. Doctor Venus told me to keep quiet..."

"Good for her."

"At least," Phones said dryly, shaking his little bottle of concentrated food tablets, "we can still have a drink to wash these delicious pills down."

"Nothing stronger than coffee Phones; remember what Doctor Venus said."

"I wonder what's on the menu tomorrow," Phones muttered, "Blue pills? Pink pills? Orange pills?"

"Just look on the bright side," Troy suggested. "If the Commander invites us over for a game of poker, you might keep a clear head, and beat him for a change. Then you can pay me back some of that money you owe me."

"I'll get our coffee Troy..."

The new barman had heard every word of this conversation, but quickly turned away to let someone else serve Phones. Even with his head shaved, and his green skin hidden beneath flesh coloured make-up, X2-Zero had to be careful he was not recognised by the Stingray crew. He decided to clean the tables...

A few minutes later, Phones returned to the table with two coffees. "Cheers Troy... Say where'd my pills go?"

"Uh... Oh I guess they got cleared away when the barman cleared the table..."

As Troy spoke X2-Zero placed the bottle of pills back on the table, “Sorry gentlemen, my mistake.”

“Thanks. No harm done,” Phones smiled, putting the pills back in his pocket.

Troy watched as X2-Zero disappeared back behind the bar, “You know Phones, there’s something familiar about that barman...”

“Really?” Phones grinned, “Do you think he might be the Creature from the Blue Lagoon?”

Troy frowned, “There is something kinda fishy about him...”

“Well Troy, by the time we finish this project, I guess there’ll be something kinda fishy about us too!”

They both laughed and forgot about the incident.

X2-Zero was also laughing quietly to himself, as he counted five pills he had extracted from the bottle, “Good, all is going according to plan.”

He considered what he should do next. He had to get the pills to Titanica before he was discovered; but what if Titan’s scientists could not unlock their secrets? Well, he knew someone who could be forced to help them...

X2-Zero left the bar as soon as he could, complaining of a headache. These Terraineans were such fools! He had driven into a top security base with false ID papers and now all he had to do was ask a security guard to direct him to the medical centre. With any luck Doctor Venus would be working late again and there would be minimum staff on duty at this hour. This would be so easy...

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“Not seeing Troy tonight Atlanta?” Commander Shore asked as his daughter came into the lounge of their Marineville apartment.

“No father, not tonight,” she sighed, “Troy said he and Phones had to go out for a quiet drink. All those medical tests are getting him down I guess.”

“Yeah, that Doctor Venus is very keen.”

Atlanta laughed, “Troy doesn’t have a good word to say about her. I’ll make us a coffee.” As she headed for the kitchen a thought struck her, “Father, I wonder if we should invite Doctor Venus over tonight — she must be very lonely here all by herself.”

Shore shook his head, “That’s a nice thought Atlanta, but it seems she’s made some friends already; she told me she was meeting someone at the Blue Lagoon tonight. When I asked who, she said it was a secret.”

“The Blue Lagoon? That’s where Troy was going — you don’t suppose...?”

“No Atlanta, I don’t. Now where’s that coffee?”

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Back at the Blue Lagoon, Troy and Phones were on their second coffee. Phones sipped his appreciatively, “Hmm this coffee is sooo good.”

“Knock it off Phones,” Troy scowled, “I’ll sure be glad when that Doctor goes back into space, or wherever it is she goes when she’s not being cruel to aquanauts.”

“But Troy - we did voluntee...”

“Phones!” Troy really didn’t want to be reminded. He was just about to tell Phones to can it when a deep voice interrupted him.

“Hey Troy, Phones - good to see the both of you!”

Troy looked up at the large man standing by their table, “Hello Stygo! Good to see you again!”

Phones smiled. “Yeah. Say, what are you doing here without the rest of the band?”

“And,” Stygo looked pointedly at the two coffees, “what are you guys doing here without a drink? Anyways I am with the band. We thought we’d surprise you HQ types.” Stygo smiled broadly, “and we have a special ‘star’ tonight!”

“You do?” Troy asked, all thoughts of Doctor Venus gone from his mind.

“Yeah! A real good saxophonist!” Stygo headed off towards the stage, “You gotta hear this; she’ll knock you out!”

The lights on the stage went up and there were the Wasps — the World Aquanaut Security Patrol’s very own jazz trio. A guy with dark glasses sat at a piano, to his right was a drummer. Stygo picked up his upright bass and took his position. The three men waved to the cheering audience. The pianist spoke into his microphone. “Good to be back with you folks.” He paused, and turned to wave a hand in the direction of a pretty blonde girl carrying a saxophone who stepped onto the stage and walked over to stand beside him. “Meet our new Evening Star!”

Troy nearly choked on his coffee as the audience applauded the stunning looking beauty in the glittering green evening dress.

“Phones... Isn’t that...?”

“Sure looks like it Troy... that’s Doctor Venus!”

“She looks kinda different out of that lab coat of hers.”

“You can say that again Troy.”

As the applause faded the pianist spoke again. “Okay, here goes with a new little number. We call it, Zero G... a tribute to our World Space Patrol friends, and especially Venus!”

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Meanwhile, X2-Zero had succeeded in getting into the hospital block and had donned a white medical coat. “These fools will never suspect me...” he chuckled to himself as he headed towards the rooms where Doctor Venus did her tests.

“Can I help you Doctor?” A security guard had suddenly stepped in front of him.

“Er... No... That’s all right officer... I er, just have to speak with Doctor Venus.”

“I’m afraid she’s left for the night,” the guard informed him.

“Oh... I see... Then I’ll just check over the equipment.”

“Of course Doctor.” The guard opened the door for him and to X2-Zero’s dismay, followed him into the laboratory.

“I just need to check a few things — nothing must go wrong tomorrow.”

“Of course.” The guard sounded interested. “My brother told me all about this stuff. There’s only one other machine like this on Earth....”

“Good.” X2-Zero said. “I mean, I’m glad you understand.”

“Say... Hold it... You’re not a Doctor - you’re the barman from the night club!”

The guard said no more; he fell to the floor unconscious when X2-Zero gave a karate chop to the back of his neck.

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Back at the Blue Lagoon, the band was receiving another well-deserved round of applause from an enthusiastic audience.

“She sure can play Troy!” Phones shouted above the din.

“Yeah... Guess she’s not all bad.” Troy agreed, “Say, they’re taking a break. Let’s see if she’ll join us.”

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“I needed a good walk Marina, thanks for coming along.”

Atlanta and Marina had decided to take a little evening stroll together.

Marina nodded. Both girls were a little preoccupied.

“Why,” Atlanta asked, “do you suppose Troy decided to volunteer to help Doctor Venus? He’s spending far too much time over at the hospital these days.”

Marina shook her head and shrugged.

“Oh look Marina, we seem to have walked all the way over to the Blue Lagoon — maybe we should just pop in and give Troy and Phones a wave?”

Marina nodded her agreement and the two girls quickened their pace. A sudden loud, low rumble halted the girls in their tracks.

“Hey, was that thunder?” Atlanta asked, glancing up at the sky.

Marina shook her head and pointed back the way they had walked.

Sirens began screaming loudly.

“Fire trucks!” shouted Atlanta as the vehicles hurtled past them, their flashing lights blazing against the dark night sky. She stared after them.

“Marina... It’s the hospital — look it’s on fire!”

Over on the other side of Marineville they could see smoke and flames billowing from the hospital building.

Marina tugged at Atlanta’s arm. Troy and Doctor Venus were rushing out of the Blue Lagoon and into the car park. Venus was hurriedly pulling a coat around her bare shoulders.

“Troy!” Atlanta called, but Troy didn’t hear above all the noise and he and Venus quickly sped off in his car.

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A few hours later Troy and Phones were in the Control Tower reporting to Commander Shore.

“Well I guess there’s no serious damage...” Shore was saying, “... no casualties — thank goodness.”

“No serious damage Commander?” exclaimed Venus as she emerged from the elevator. “My equipment — it’s all totally destroyed!”

Venus looked exhausted, her blonde hair grubby with soot and ash. She self-consciously brushed at her coat as she joined the three men. “It may take months to get replacement equipment...”

“Yeah.” Shore added, “I was just getting to that Doctor. The lab for the breathing experiments — that’s out of commission.”

“I’ll say it is,” said Venus. “Don’t you have security here in Marineville?”

“You mean you think it was deliberate?” Troy asked in surprise.

Shore sighed, “Yeah Troy, it was sabotage all right.” He moved his hover chair over to a desk and picked up a slim folder. “It’s all in the security report. One of the guards found someone posing as a doctor... he recognised him as a new barman at the Blue Lagoon night club.”

“I knew it!” Troy exclaimed, “er sir.”

“You did?” Shore demanded.

“Well, no sir, not exactly, but I thought he looked odd.”

“He looked odd?” Commander Shore sounded weary, “Anyway, the impostor slugged the guard. He had time to plant coralamic bombs on the lab equipment before another guard tried to apprehend him.”

“Tried sir?” Troy asked. “He got away?”

“Yeah Troy, The guard only just had time to get the unconscious guy out before the bombs detonated. Unfortunately the saboteur got clean away in all the confusion.” Shore tossed the report back on to the desk. “The rest you know.”

Troy frowned. “Commander, you say that guy used coralamics? That sounds like Titan’s work.”

“More than likely Troy.” Commander Shore agreed.

“I said that barman looked fishy!” Troy muttered.

“That’s right Commander,” Phones added supportively, “Troy thought that he might be the Creature from the Blue Lagoon....”

“Highly amusing!” Shore snorted, “I’ll be sure to mention that to the World President, when I inform him that his pet project has just been wrecked.”

“Please don’t worry Commander Shore,” Doctor Venus reassured him, “I’ll requisition new equipment from Space City. It’s just a matter of a few months — only a short delay — not the end of the whole project.”

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A little while later Troy and Phones were heading back to their apartments.

“Troy!” Atlanta called after them. They waited for her to catch up.

“Hello Honey,” Troy greeted her, “...Guess it’s been a hectic evening.”

“Yes.” Atlanta agreed. “Looks like your date with Venus got spoiled...”

“Date?” Troy mumbled, “Venus?”

“Say Troy, Atlanta...” Phones said quickly, “I’ll see you both tomorrow...I’m real bushed. Good night.”

Without waiting for a reply Phones hurried on his way.

“I’m not stupid Troy,” Atlanta continued. “Just having a quiet drink with Phones, you said. Well Marina and I saw you — with Doctor Venus at the Blue Lagoon night club!”

“But Atlanta... Honey... I can explain...”

