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Opening extract from

Harvey Drew and the Bling Bots

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CHAPTER ONE

Awash with litter

The *Toxic Spew* is the grottiest, grubbiest spaceship in Galaxy 43b. Frankly, everybody in the entire Known Universe, and Beyond knows that it's a disgustingly filthy, tatty old pile of junk.

If you sat in the shabby black captain's chair in the middle of the command bridge you'd be gobsmacked by the state of the place. It's awash with litter – empty pizza boxes, crushed drinks cartons and sweet wrappers. And you'd be pretty careful where you put your hands because the control desks are covered with horrible sticky black grime.

The deck is so slimy with dregs of spilt drinks and slops of tomato sauce that the crew's space boots stick to it and make a slurpy, sucky noise as they walk along.

The stench of rotting rubbish is so gross I'm not even going to describe it because it'd make your eyes water so much you wouldn't be able to read.

You would think the captain would do something about it, wouldn't you?

But then you're from Earth, aren't you? And I don't want to be rude, but hey, what do you know?

Which explains why, as this story starts (on Novaday the 92nd of Luna), the crew are sitting round the command bridge having a galaxy-class whinge.

Squabbling on the command bridge

'It's all so tedious,' groaned Senior Engineering Officer Gizmo clutching at his short



multicoloured hair. ‘Emptying countless tubs of toilet waste from pangalactic starships or scooping up tons of rocket trash or toxic gloop from the HyperspaceWays.’

‘And it’s so pointless,’ moaned Pilot Officer Maxie sitting with her elbows on the flight desk, her purple face cupped in her hands. ‘I mean as soon as we suck up . . .’

‘*Vacuum* up!’ corrected Scrummage. As Chief Rubbish Officer he was very touchy about the ship’s garbage kit. Not so touchy that he didn’t mind putting his filthy space boots up on the garbage control desk.

Maxie shot him a withering look with her bright turquoise eyes and carried on. ‘As soon as we *suck up* one pool of revolting toxic gloop then an even more disgusting one drifts in from somewhere else.’

Scrummage leant back in his seat, his scruffy multicoloured ponytail hanging limply from his balding head. He raised one white eyebrow and said . . .

(Hang on. You did notice that the crew have purple faces and multicoloured hair, white eyebrows and turquoise eyes, didn't you? And you've probably even worked out they're not from Earth.

But I bet you didn't know they're from the planet Zeryx Minor, did you, Smartypants?

It's not your fault of course. You don't study 'The A–Z of Intergalactic Life Forms' in Earth schools, do you? And I bet you can't even download it from the Outernet.

You must feel horribly left out in your remote corner of the universe.)

'Look, it might not be the most glamorous job', said Scrummage. 'But . . .'

'Glamorous? It's ghastly!' Gizmo butted in, sneering down his rather hooked nose.

'As Chief Rubbish Officer, may I point out that space junk is a serious danger to interplanetary traffic. We do a vital job.'

'No, we do a rubbish job . . . and *you* are a Rubbish Officer.'

Maxie laughed.

Fight, fight, fight!

'Gentlemen!' said Harvey in a warning tone. Scrummage and Gizmo were heading for a spat and he wanted to nip it in the bud.

'It's daring and dangerous!' exclaimed Scrummage.

It's disgusting and dirty,' sniffed Gizmo. 'It's also, revolting and repulsive, gruesome and gross. Like you.'

Scrummage swung his legs angrily off the control desk and hitched up his filthy green and yellow overalls over his vast belly. 'Right! That's it!' he snorted, storming over to Gizmo.

'Fight, fight, fight!' chanted Maxie.

CHAPTER TWO

No brawling on the bridge!

Harvey leapt out of his seat and jumped in between Scrummage and Gizmo before they started slugging it out with their bare fists.

It might be helpful if I mention that although Harvey doesn't have much experience as a spaceship captain (almost none in fact) he was captain of the Highford All Stars football team back home on Earth for two seasons running.

Obviously, his teammates weren't anything like as stroppy as the crew of the *Toxic Spew*. And he hadn't actually had to face many literally deadly dangerous and fatally lethal situations

on the pitch (like poisonous killer maggots, a multiple spacecraft pile-up and exploding garbage). But he's a quick learner.

And, of course, the crew think the Highford All Stars is a spaceship. And he hasn't *quite* got round to telling them it's actually a football team.

> ***(Look, I don't want to give you the wrong idea about Harvey. He's not deliberately lying. It's just that tactically there hasn't been a good moment to . . . er . . . fess up.)***

'No brawling on the bridge,' ordered Harvey, pushing Scrummage and Gizmo apart. 'And, Maxie, what kind of behaviour is that, encouraging a fight?'

'Spoilsport,' said Maxie.

'He started it!' said Scrummage, prodding his finger at Gizmo.

'No you did!'

'Pack it in!' ordered Harvey.

'"Pack it in!"? What kind of order is that?

From a spaceship commander?' laughed Maxie.

Harvey sighed. She never missed a chance to get a dig in. Maxie wasn't much older than him, or much bigger. She had to roll the sleeves and legs of her uniform up to stop them flapping around. But she was a brilliant pilot. And she didn't like being bossed around by anyone. Let alone an eleven-year-old boy from a planet they'd never even heard of and couldn't even find on a 3D digital star map.

Fortunately for Harvey, the crew were suddenly distracted.

Rocket Fuel Special

SCHWOOOSH!

The doors to the bridge opened and Medical Officer Yargal slurped onto the bridge, her three yellow eyes waggling on their stalks. She oozed across the deck, like a large green slug, her huge single slimy foot trailing sticky grey slime in

its wake. A pile of pizza boxes and drinks cartons slithered around alarmingly in her six slippery blue tentacles. Strings of gunk dribbled down onto the boxes making them soggy.

(The one snag of having a Yargillian as Medical Officer and Ship's Cook is that the constant dribbling and oozing can put you off your lunch. Yargillians are one of the most revolting life forms in the entire Known Universe, and Beyond – but it isn't polite to mention it, obviously.)

Snuffles, the ship's dog, lolloped behind her, looking like a cross between a hungry Grey Wolf and an even hungrier Great White Shark – vast, shaggy, slobbery and utterly terrifying.

'Lunch!' cried Yargal.

Everyone grabbed the boxes greedily. Snuffles settled himself at Harvey's feet, dribbling hopefully. Strings of saliva slobbered off his massive teeth and dripped onto the grimy deck.

DRIBBLE, DRIBBLE! DROOL, DROOL!

