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Opening extract from

Star Attack!

Written by

Lucy Courtenay

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For my godson James. If penguins can fly,
imagine what you can do. ~ L A C

For Indira ~ J D

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SPACE PENGUINS

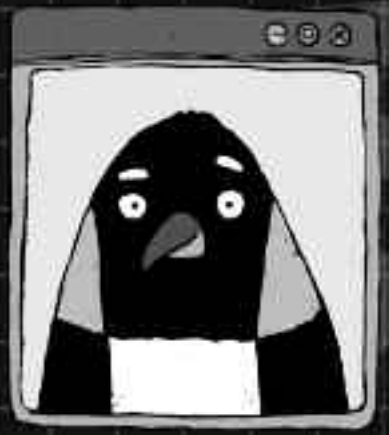
STAR ATTACK!

L A COURTENAY

ILLUSTRATED BY
JAMES DAVIES



MEET THE SPACE PENGUINS...



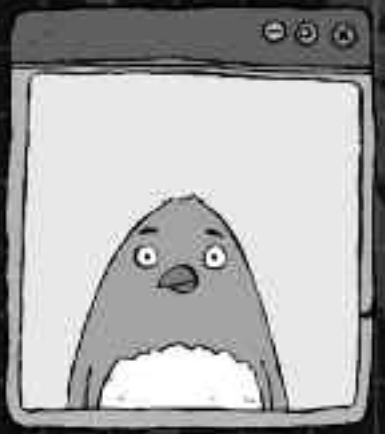
Captain:
Captain T. Krill
Emperor penguin
Height: 1.10m
Looks: yellow ear patches and noble bearing
Likes: swordfish minus the sword
Lab tests: showed leadership qualities in fish challenge
Guaranteed to: keep calm in a crisis



First Mate:
Beaky Wader
Emperor penguin
Height: 1.22m
Looks: yellow ear patches and evil laugh
Likes: prawn pizzas
Lab tests: cheated at every challenge
Guaranteed to: cause trouble

Pilot (with no sense of direction:
Rocky Waddle
Rockhopper penguin
Height: 45cm
Looks: long yellow eyebrows
Likes: mackerel ice cream
Lab tests: fastest slider in toboggan challenge
Guaranteed to: speed through an asteroid belt while reading charts upside-down





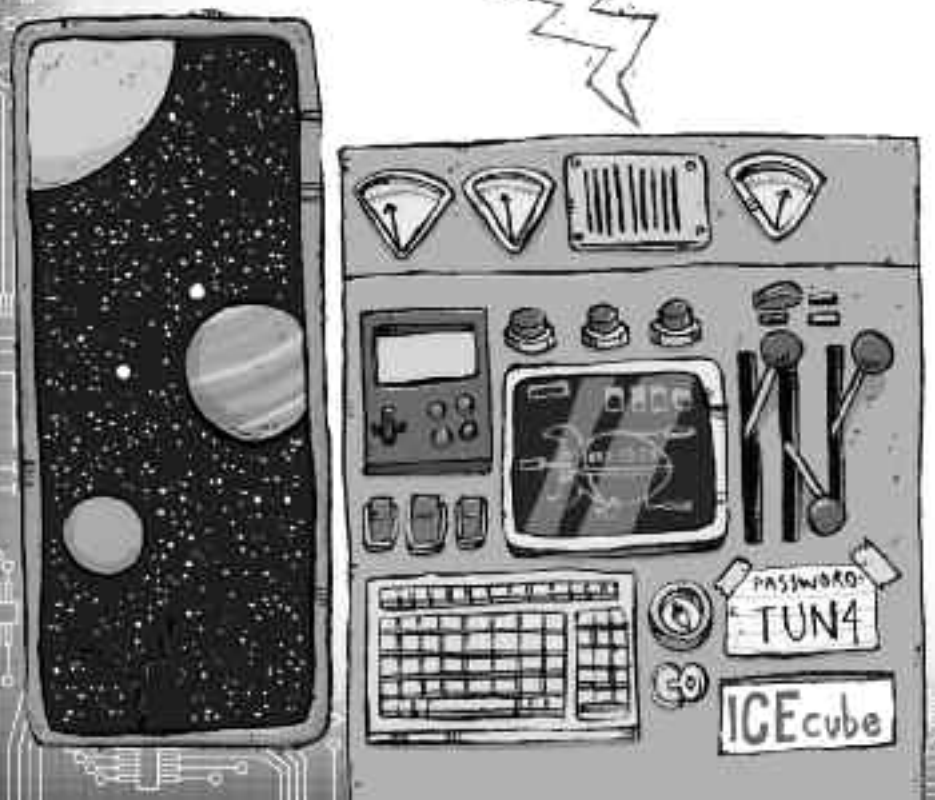
Security Officer and Head Chef:
Fuzz Allgrin
Little Blue penguin
Height: 33cm
Looks: small with fuzzy blue feathers
Likes: fishfingers in cream and truffle sauce
Lab tests: showed creativity and aggression in ice-carving challenge
Guaranteed to: defend ship, crew and kitchen with his life

Ship's Engineer:
Splash Gordon
King penguin
Height: 95cm
Looks: orange ears and chest markings
Likes: squid
Lab tests: solved ice-cube challenge in under four seconds
Guaranteed to: fix anything



LOADING...

LOADING...



LOADING...

Welcome aboard the spaceship *Tunafish.* This is your Intergalactic Computer Engine speaking. You can call me ICEcube for short.

I'm here to guide the *Tunafish* through the universe, scan the galaxy for meteor storms and spot any black holes. My penguin crew would have flapped their last flap years ago if it wasn't for me.

Penguin crew? Yup! Penguins are perfect for space missions. They're good at swimming (being in space is a lot like swimming), cheap to train, and untroubled by temperatures of near zero.

But why are these penguins in space? You'll have to ask NASA about that. Their finest scientists started a top-secret mission to send penguins further and faster than any creature had gone before. They designed the Spaceship *Tunafish* for all their needs. But the spaceship disappeared. Everyone thought that the mission had simply been a failure. Little did they know that the *Tunafish* and its penguin crew had just been sucked through a wormhole into Deep Space.

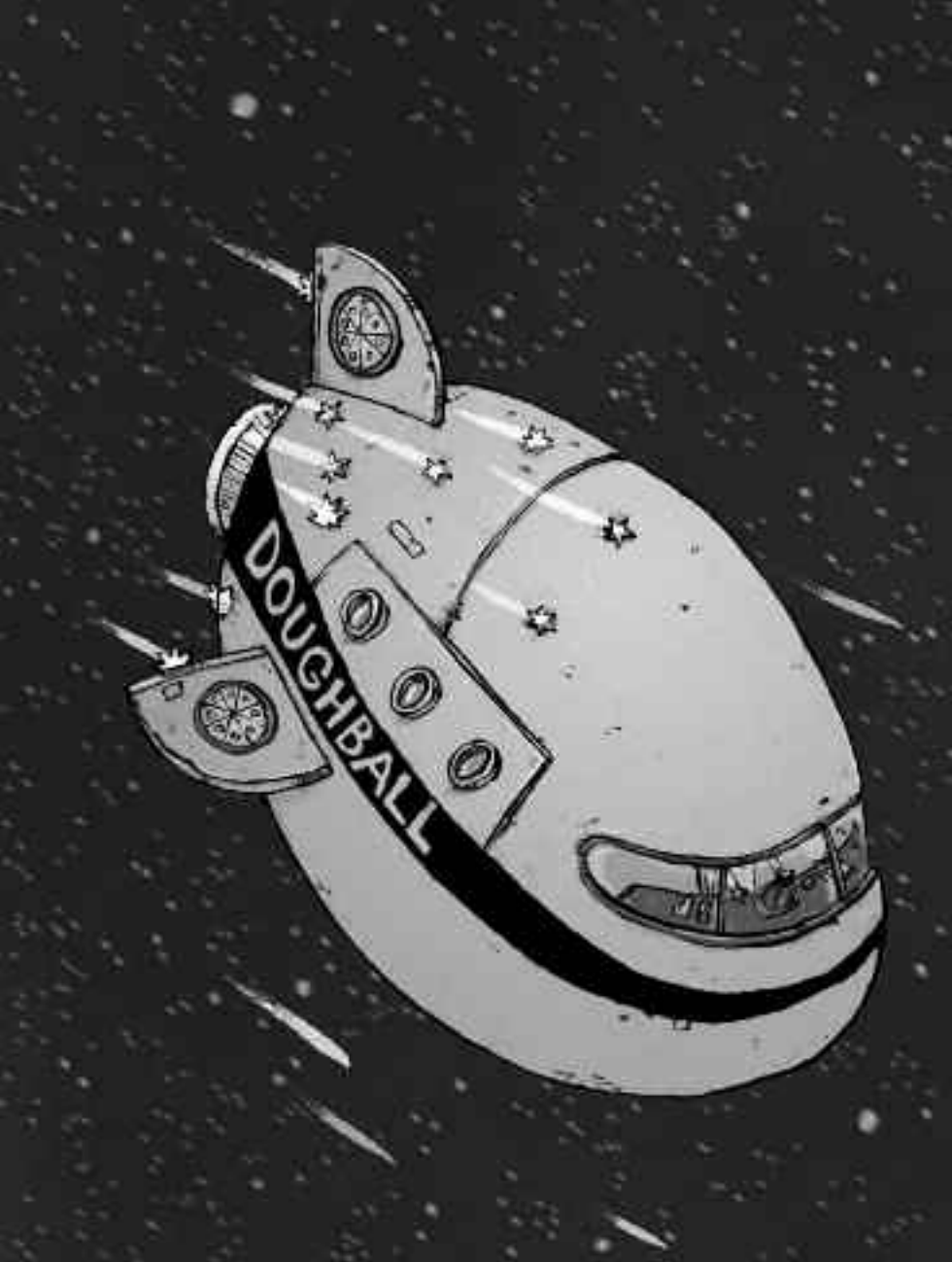
My database suggests that the best word for this is: whoops!

So now these penguins are travelling in search of a nice planet to call home. In the course of their quest, they've become intergalactic heroes. They've saved the cat race of Miaow from certain death on the planet Woofbark. They've even destroyed a large pair of frozen pants that was endangering space traffic on the tiny planet of Bum. This is mostly down to me, of course. Impressed?

There were five penguins to begin with, but the first mate, Beaky Wader, disappeared from the *Tunafish* three years ago after a nasty argument about who was going to be Captain. The words, "You haven't seen the last of me," echoed around the spaceship for days. Good riddance, I say. Beaky Wader was Trouble with a capital Fish.

And now – well, now they're still looking for the perfect penguin planet. We'll probably be rescuing things as we go along, so I know you're as excited as I am to be here. Fasten your seatbelt and have a sardine. I would say that you are in safe hands but penguins only have flippers.

Five. Four. Three. Two. One…



CHAPTER ONE

BOBBY CHEESE HAS A BAD DAY

"HELP!" bawled Bobby Cheese, commander of intergalactic pizza-delivery spaceship, the *Doughball*, as he zoomed towards certain death.

A crazy-looking spacecraft had appeared out of nowhere, driving him off-course in a blaze of gunfire.

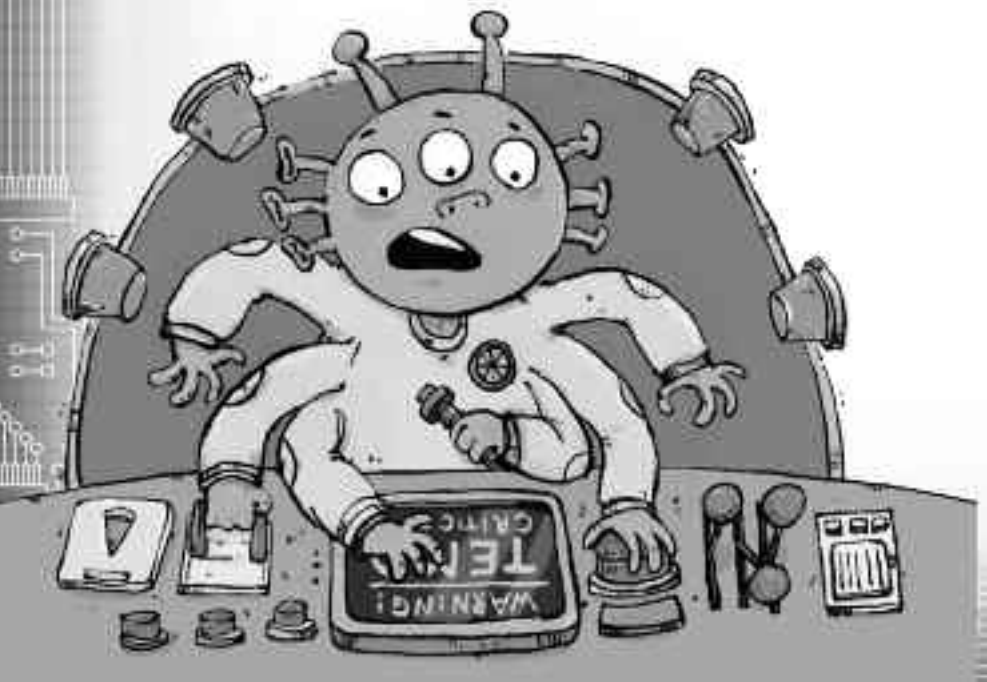
"Awaiting instruction," said the *Doughball*'s computer.

"I AM instructing you!" yelled Bobby Cheese. "HELP me!"

He thumped all the buttons on the *Doughball*'s juddering control panel in a panic. Bobby Cheese was a six-armed alien from the planet Bo-Ki, but even so, two thousand buttons took a long time to thump.

"Awaiting instruction," said the computer again. "Chill out, Cheese," it added.

"Don't tell me to chill out!" Bobby Cheese wailed. "We're hopelessly out of control!"



SPACE PENGUINS

Stars shot past the *Doughball*'s windows at weird angles. Bobby Cheese moaned. He didn't know if he was upside down or the right way up.

"Awaiting instruction," said the computer for the third time.

"You're useless!" cried Bobby Cheese. "We've got nearly a thousand pizzas flying around in the back. They'll be *ruined*. We'll be picking mozzarella out of the fuselage for weeks unless we get this craft back under control!"

"We'll be picking you out of the fuselage as well," the computer said helpfully.

"Quit the small talk and get me out here. Have you any idea who's attacking us?" Bobby Cheese yelled.

The computer was quiet for a second. "The attack is by Squid-G fighters," it said at last.

"Squidgy what?"

"Squid-G fighters. Spacecrafts with considerable fire power and a strong smell of fish."

"But why are they attacking me?" shrieked Bobby Cheese.

"For fun?" suggested the computer.

The *Doughball* spun faster. Its nose dipped further. The stars outside grew wonkier. Bobby Cheese glanced at a tattered poster stuck on the wall. The poster showed four penguins posing beside a fish-shaped spacecraft.



"Only the heroic astronauts of the *Tunafish* can help me now," he gasped. "We have to contact them!"

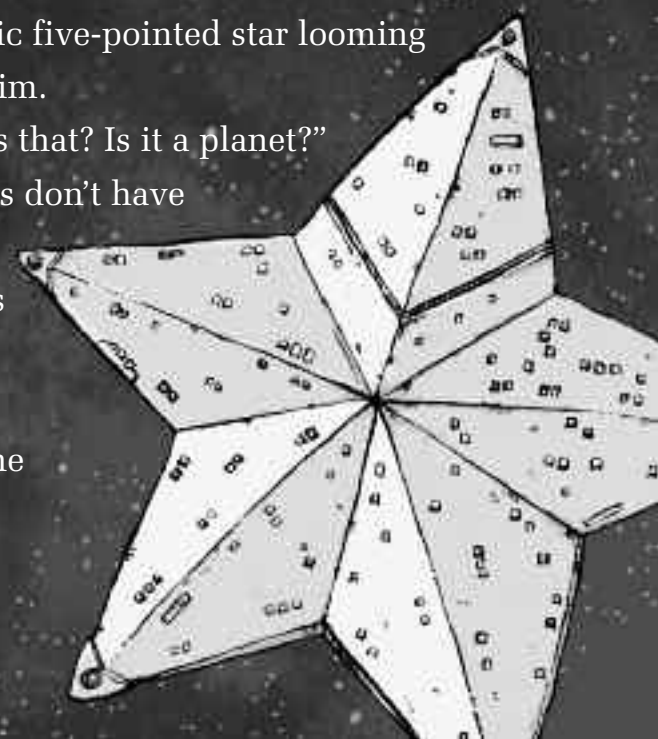
"But they're just penguins," said the computer. "Are you sure you want to put your life into the flippers of four flightless birds?"

"They're not *just* penguins!' cried Bobby Cheese. "They're space-fighting heroes! If I haven't died by the time they get here, remind me to get their autographs!"

The wonky stars suddenly disappeared from view altogether as the spinning *Doughball* plunged into a bank of mist. Bobby Cheese typed a shaky distress call to the spaceship *Tunafish* and pressed SEND. Squinting desperately through the windscreen, his eyes widened at the sight of a gigantic five-pointed star looming ahead of him.

"What's that? Is it a planet?"

"Planets don't have pointy bits. That's a space station," reported the computer.



The air filled with a humming sound. Bobby Cheese groaned and pressed his hands to as many of his ears as he could reach. It was over. The *Doughball* was stuffed.

Where was the *Tunafish* in his hour of greatest need?

CHAPTER TWO

SMELLY SOCKS

The problem with Deep Space is that it is extremely Deep. And Spacious. And at that particular moment, the spaceship *Tunafish* was a hundred million light years away.

The Space Penguins had just sorted out an army of invading purple blobs on the planet Tentakle. After chilling in the freezing fog room (the penguin version of a steam room), they were now back at work and on their way to – well, anywhere that looked nice, really.