

Wonder Danger

Numerous men of science refused to acknowledge the cold, hard facts I presented before their eyes. Yet, my account of the events I experienced is as verbatim as one can be.

We were sailing towards the strait, when something unusual appeared. What seemed to be a kind of volcano was on our designated path, and prevented us from continuing the route. I shuffled through all the relevant maps, but none included such a bizarre obstacle at our coordinates. The captain gave the order to contact the nearest ships. The Providence should have been in range for contact. But all our hails went unanswered. As I had the conn on the stalled heavy cruiser, I had to investigate. The captain ordered me to survey the ocean floor and report any further map discrepancy. I formed an away team with Jones and Smith.

We carefully dived, since this sort of work was not our usual assignment. Getting closer to the impromptu obstacle blocking our course, I thought I saw something faintly shining. I asked Jones and Smith to come to my position at once. But no response came. My radio was dead. Unable to contact my colleagues, I started worrying. The silence of the ocean was deafening.

Fortunately, I had carried with me a few tools that could come in handy for subaquatic exploration, including a grappling hook. But maneuvering such a contraction underwater is no easy feat. Nevertheless, I finally could see what was the item that seemed to reflect light earlier. With a more meticulous analysis, I determined that there was in fact a shipwreck. However, it was so twisted that I could not recognize class of the ship.

Something glowed, which was yet highly unlikely at such depths. I tried once again to contact the ensigns of my away team. The radio sputtered out nothing but static.

Among the rusty structure and the worm-eaten wooden floor lied what must have been many eons ago a tiny bookshelf. A half-rusted metal plaque was in fact the object that had caught my eye earlier on. What was inscribed on it was downright unreadable, save for the end of a word : '-line'

I scanned the books with attention. Most had highly interesting titles related to my field of expertise, including the *Bowditch*. But one of them was different, as the moldy leather cover only featured the title, and the author's name was nowhere to be seen. The title was only *Kaizen*. I had to quickly wrap up my exploration enterprise, for I was on the verge of running out of oxygen as the dial on my suit indicated. I took the book with me, and got back to the surface. I could see our ship in the distance. Weirdly enough, it was not at the same location

as earlier. Indeed, it seemed to be moving away from the volcanic island. But the crew would never have left us stranded here on a mission, without contacting us. Unless... there was a code black emergency. I looked around me, but couldn't find any immediate threat that could justify such an unusual course of action coming from the captain.

Alone, in the dark waters I tried to reach the island. Alas, the cliffs were too high, and I had lost my grappling hook underwater. The next best solution would be to find a cave with breathable air. I may have seen one during my first dive.

I searched for it, unsuccessfully. Back to the surface, I lit a flare to signal my position. But the ship was now so far off that it was only a ghost-like form in the mist.

Out of options, I carefully opened a random page of the odd book I had tugged around so as not to tear apart the ancient paper. It read as it follows: *'The diver stared in bewilderment at his ship leaving, stranded, in the middle of nowhere'*.

I was both irritated and puzzled. The sentence was so relevant to my own predicament that it could not be the result of coincidence. What kind of joke had my own crew played on me? I tried once more to contact them, to no avail. I was wondering whether it was Jones or Smith's idea to play such a despicable trick on me, when suddenly, I heard a noise that was between a whirring and a screech. I felt a sharp pain in my head, as if Thor's hammer was hitting me. As my vision started to fail, darkness came upon me.

I woke up in an unfamiliar, dull countryside landscape bathed by the sunset. No element allowed me to recognize the location, as I could distinguish nothing but huge fields stretching as far as the eye could see. A freezing breeze was blowing behind my neck. I set out to walk towards the fading tangerine light of the dying sun. Maybe I would run into some human presence. Surely, fields this large would require a horde of farmers. But no soul was in view.

A little farther off, I could make out the outline of a mountain. Approaching the elevation, it became clear this was not a natural occurrence, it was too symmetrical to be the outcome of an erosion process. It could only be man-made.

Two fiery glowing orbs unexpectedly appeared in the sky.

“What in the world, Troy! Can't you see you sent the wrong person? I can't possibly imagine how you managed to have a two-hundred-year offset!” the reddish orb on the left blurted in a mix of anger and surprise.

“I’m sorry sir. It won’t happen again” the blue orb on the left apologetically replied.

“You’re damn right. You’re fired! Effective immediately!”

“But it’s not my fault, a copy of the entry book was not supposed to be at this time and place...” the red orb replied, with its hue changing to a lighter shade, before disappearing as abruptly as it had come to existence.

In a state of shock, I wondered what purpose this otherworldly manifestation served. Had I just overheard a conversation between gods? Or were they somehow humans?

Pondering over this intricate question, I could not help but notice that the blue orb had stayed in the sky. What were its intentions, and how should one address a glowing orb?

I asked the orb to identify itself, stating I came in peace. It replied:

“Who left the P.A system on? I’m always the one who has to clean up other people’s mess! Really –“

Cut off mid-sentence, the blue orb had disappeared as well.

I woke up in what seemed to be a hospital ward. But as the whole environment was in motion, I could only assume that I was onboard a ship. A familiar face came towards me. It was the captain. He looked thoroughly unamused, and asked for an explanation. Jones had found me unconscious, lying on the ocean floor. After bringing me to sick bay, the medical officer reported I was rambling indecipherably about spheres or some other insanity.

I could not tell them what I had seen, as I did not want to be relieved from duty. I told them I had fainted, and did not remember anything.

Later on, I asked eminent archivist if they knew anything about the odd book I held for a few moments. But my search for this book has not yielded any result. What terrible secrets can it possibly hold in its depths?