

Adopt a God

The Margavellium left Earth's orbit almost thirteen years ago, drifting farther away with each passing moment. The aptly named ship pays tribute to the late great Jimmy Buffett, the 52nd President of the United States. The design of the ship took inspiration from the barges he would perform on during State of the Union addresses. With the pina colada white hull of the ship reflecting the light off of the passing stars, anyone that could see the ship on its journey through space would think it was nothing more than a bright ghost of an old-fashioned tug boat. The proud captain of the finest vessel of its kind sits alone in his cabin after waking from another stint in the cryogenic chamber.

"Humanity's last hope, leaving Earth. Now that's ironic." He ended his log and stared into the vast void of space. What was once the sole reason he accepted this mission was now the reason he wished he never had stepped aboard. His eyes had decided they had their fill, and he decided it was only right his glass did the same. As the dark liquor flowed from the nearly empty bottle, his eyes were drawn to the only source of color in the room. A lonely picture frame rested on the edge of the cold steel desk, the vibrant colors of palm and pine trees outside his family estate on the Tennessee coast was now his only connection to the life he once had.

"God, I want to go home." He tipped his glass into the air and the last of its bitter contents disappeared. Rising up from the chair he decided it was time to wake the others. The door of his cabin rose vertically as he made his way into the common area.

"Mornin' Roy!"

"There's no morning in space Kara."

Kara Ambers served as his second in command and was both the only joy he had left on the ship and his biggest burden. It never failed to amaze him how her cheerful attitude can simultaneously give him energy and drain him of it. He imagined this must be what being a father felt like.

“You beat my record yet?”

Her smile faded from her expression as she turned the speed up on the treadmill and her strides grew longer. “You put the bottle down yet?”

A weak laugh escaped his lips, “I’ll do that when you beat my record.” Seemingly satisfactory enough to both, the conversation shifted to the remaining crew members.

“Cyrus and Walker in their usual spot?”

“If they aren’t sleeping, they’re playing those damn video games.”

Roy faked a gasp, “Miss Ambers! That’s not very cheerful of you.”

“I know they ate the last of the real food, now all I have is that powdered crap. Smack them around for me when you wake ‘em.”

He headed towards the corridor that led to their cabin. For once he was jealous of them. At least they were wise enough to do the only thing worth while on this ship. Roy couldn’t help but laugh at this thought, it had to be the only time anyone had called either of them wise.

The labored steps taken to reach their cabin echoed throughout the ship, only drowned out by the increasing rhythm of Kara’s on the treadmill. Roy thought about knocking but

decided against it, if they are sleeping, nothing known to man could wake them with only a sound. He took a last breath of air and walked inside.

The first thing that hit Roy was the scent of left-over food. He suspected if Kara had smelled this, she wouldn't complain about the powdered stuff anymore. At the center of the room a screen that rivaled the command centers sat along the wall, but instead of using it to track their course and every function on the ship, theirs was spent processing the latest game of FIFA or Madden. At the moment the screen was blank, a rare sight in the twin's room. Along the left wall were their DIY bunk bed style of cryogenic chamber pods. A faint blue light emanated from them both, illuminating the far side of the room where the posters of their favorite teams somehow hung both proudly and haphazardly.

Roy bravely entered deeper into the stale aired room and approached the pods. He didn't have to make it all the way there to tell that both lay empty. If the twins weren't in the common room and not in here, where the hell –

A deafening siren stopped his thoughts before they could form. "All personnel report to their designated disaster areas. T-minus five minutes until impact" could be heard between the ringing in his ears. He stumbled out of the room and made his way back to the common room, much to his surprise, Kara had already abandoned her post at the treadmill. He kept his stride and made his way to the entryway of the bridge.

"Captain, this makes no sense." "Where the fuck are we?" the twins shouted, completing the other's thoughts.

Well, I found the twins. "Update me, Kara."

“All systems show we are still on course to the Trinity galaxy, but the ship left travel speed and is now being pulled into that planet. I’m trying to reboot the system to- “

“No time Kara, strap in. Cyrus and Walker, you need to give all the juice we’ve got to the rear thrusters. I’ve got to try and save the ship.”

A bright light blinded the crew as the Margavellium was engulfed with an intense orange flame. The ship made its descent into the atmosphere and began to rattle as it made its approach to the ground.

“Thrusters now!”

The thrusters roared to life and the ship kicked back in protest of the unknown planet’s gravity. “It’s not gonna be enough. Get ready for a rough landing.”

“Have we ever had a smooth landing?” chimed Walker.

Cyrus broke from his prayer and shouted, “The only thing smooth about you is your brain Walker.”

“And the only thing smooth about the captain is his whiskey. What’s your point?” he retorted.

The four crew members fell silent as they listened to the computer give updates on their unavoidable touchdown. “Two minutes. One minute. 30 seconds.” Roy pulled back on the ship’s controls until he could no more. The flames obscuring the bridge’s window receded and the crew got the first look at the strange planet’s surface quickly approaching.

As the Margavellium broke through the atmosphere of the planet it soon emerged from behind the layer of dark clouds that stretched as far as the eye could see. The sky had the same blue tint to it as back on Earth which made Roy weaken his grip on the controls only slightly.

“At least I can see where I’m flying now.” Said Roy.

“Great! Now tell me you see a place to land!” shouted Cyrus who had yet to open his eyes.

Roy scanned the rest of what he could see and liked his chances. There wasn’t a piece of land in sight.

“Kara, deploy the water landing gear on my mark.”

“At this speed? We’ll surely d- “

“On my mark” Roy proclaimed louder than the still rattling ship. “One, Two, NOW!”

A loud hiss could be heard and moments later the Margavellium made contact with the brown water beneath. Instead of the usual mini tidal wave produced from a high-speed water landing, or in this case a high-speed water crash, the Margavellium made no such wave. In fact, it barely made a ripple. The ship skipped off of the surface as if it were a stone on a lake back home. The inflatable tube meant to keep them afloat now propelled them forward in the galaxy’s first ever game of space ship hopscotch.

Their momentum seemed to be slowing down after what seemed like an eternity. A few hops and an unflattering scream from Walker later, the Margavellium had finally come to a rest atop the planet’s surface.

“Everyone alright?” as Roy eased back into his seat.

Kara unclasped her restraints, “I’m fine, but I think we might have a murderer on board. Did anyone else hear that cat being killed when we landed?”

Walker shifted in his seat. Cyrus slapped him on the back, “It’s a good thing no laws exist here, you’d have a hard time fighting an animal abuse charge after that performance brother.”

And as the crew shared a laugh, the reality of their situation began to set in.

Walker pried himself from his chair and ran to the window, “Well Cap., I hope you know how to launch from a swamp.”

“Kara, we’re going to need a complete diagnosis on the ship and all the systems. Walker and Cyrus, suits on. We’re taking a look outside.”

The confident tone in Roy’s voice hadn’t been heard in years, but as soon as it returned from whatever years long sabbatical it took, the crew remembered why he is the captain. He rose from his chair and went to put his suit on.

Walker and Cyrus were making their way to the ship’s exit when Kara cut them off, her exploratory suit already on. The twins looked at each other, this wasn’t the first time Kara has put herself on the team.

“Play ya for it” they chimed.

“Not a chance. All my training wasn’t for pushing buttons” she said, “One of you run the diagnosis, I’m going to see the planet we just landed on.”

“It’s alright bud, I’ll get the game system back up first” and with that, Cyrus walked back towards the bridge.

Kara and Walker met up with Roy at the bayside door. “Glad you’re joining us Kara, just hope Cyrus doesn’t make the ship worse.”

This time Walker was the confident one; “This ship is just a giant video game. Cyrus will have it good to go and a new high-score before ya know it.”

Roy slid his helmet over his curly black hair, “Radios on. Stay close together.” The doors rose from the ground and the three of them all took their first steps outside.

Cyrus returned to the bridge and began the full systems diagnosis, getting the updates from the monotoned voice of the ship’s computer. “Thruster’s status: fully operational. Hydraulics status: fully operational. Life Support Systems: fully operational.” This continued one by one until the entirety of the ship had been covered.

“Everything’s fine?” he questioned. “It appears so Mr. Emerson. Would you like me to reboot your gaming console at this time?”

“Hold onto that thought. Where the hell are we?”

“Unknown.”

Cyrus turned from the command center, “Well, I tried. Reboot the console. Might as well have some fun while I wait for the others to return.”

Cyrus left the bridge with excitement radiating from his face. Not only is the ship completely fine, but he can take credit for it being so. And to top it all, he doesn’t have to risk his life on an ‘Unknown’ planet.

He headed through the common area and saw the damage the rough landing had caused. The cabinets and fridge doors were left dangling by their hinges. The powdered food packets laid tattered and spread across the floor. Their contents covering each and every inch of the room, Cyrus thought this must have been what a Rick James party looked like. He maneuvered through the carnage and past the treadmill, which appeared to be the one thing in the room to escape unharmed, leaving boot prints in his wake as he made his way to his cabin. He made it to the other side of the room and began to kick his shoes together, attempting to dust off the dinner he'll never have.

As he got the last of it off of his government issued boots, he heard the familiar clanking of analog sticks. "Walker?" he shouted out "How'd you beat me back?" to no response. He hustled the rest of the way to the cabin, eager to pick up the other sticks and show his brother he was the better player.

The doors to his room slid open with a satisfying swoosh. He was met with the usual loading screen but an unfamiliar figure standing in his way. Cyrus stumbled backwards at the sight of the stranger standing in his room. His brain failed to let his mouth form words. Years of academy training wasted just to fumble for the light switch.

"Here, let me get that."

The lights cut on with Cyrus's hand still searching the wall. He was now mere feet away from a man dressed in regal robes of emerald-green and gold. Pitch black stones were braided into his long black hair that fell to his chest.

"You're Loki!" Cyrus cried as his eyes now shined with excitement and fear. A smirk stained the god's face, which grew as he spoke. "No need to be scared Mr. Emerson. This

is the planet Pantheos! I'm part of the welcoming committee. My 'associates' are speaking to the rest of your crew as we speak. I suggest we wait for your friends before we discuss any further. Do you want to be player one or two?"

Playing against the literal god of mischief sounded a lot better before Cyrus actually picked up the sticks. In the first game Loki managed to change his goalie to Jerry Rice and stopped every goal. In the second, Cyrus suffered a 10-goal defeat thanks to the powerful kicks of Bruce Lee. Before the third game could get started, the rest of the crew walked through the doors of his cabin.

"Cyrus, we need to talk."

"Finally, a worthy competitor! Walker, your brother is almost as bad at FIFA as Thor is and trust me that is hard to do. Granted he hasn't smashed the controller yet." Loki turned towards the door anticipating his next victim. "Bast?"

"Loki!" A small dark figure shot into the air and leaped over the crew still occupying the doorway. Landing on all fours, the woman rose to her feet and blew the dark braided hair out of her eyes. Her sun-kissed skin was covered by a leopard print jumpsuit that nearly matched the gold that hung in her hair.

She walked the few steps between her and Loki before her hands disappeared in a blur. By the time they were visible again a new scar had been added to the plethora occupying Loki's face. As the blood dripped from his cheek, the now familiar smile erupted across his face once again. "You magnificent cat you! Still got that spunk I see."

"What are you doing here Loki?"

Puffing his chest out, “Winning at FIFA.” He waved off Cyrus before he could defend himself, “I see you found new mice to play with.”

“The others won’t be happy you’re here, they’re not as loving as I am.”

“I’ll take my chances; they are in my debt after all”

Loki adjusted his royal robes, never breaking eye contact with his much shorter feline friend. He finished with a pop of his collar, pushed his way through the crew in the doorway and reached the hall. Turning back towards the silent crowd, “Well, if you want to talk, you better follow me.”

The crew left the twin’s cabin in single file line with Roy following Loki. Somehow Loki navigated the ship as if it were his own. Taking confident turns and pausing periodically to warn Roy about the consequences of stepping on his robe.

Frustrated, Roy finally spoke up. “I don’t need a tour of my own ship. In fact, I don’t want you on my ship, I remember the stories about you.”

Loki kept his stride as he continued to navigate the corridors of the Margavellium.

“Those are children stories captain, not to mention over a thousand years ago.”

“You know the saying, Leopards and their spots and what not.”

“That’s very offensive” chimed Bast, “But I do agree with you Roy. Loki cannot be trusted.”

Doing his best to look offended, Loki finally turned around to face the group but did not stop his stride. “If you really felt that way Fancy Feast, you would have gotten rid of me by now. Just like the humans did all that time ago.”

Shuffling her feet, Kara spoke under her breath, “Sounds like our ancestors knew what they were doing.”

“Then riddle me this miss Ambers, why are you so far from the wonderful world your ancestors created?”

Walker’s face lit up as if he was back in high school and just got asked the one question he studied for. “We’re looking for a new planet to move to!”

Loki’s attention shifted to Walker who was looking proud of his own wisdom and let out a boastful laugh. “Just like humans to look for a new thing to destroy rather than fixing what they already have.”

“It can’t be fixed” Roy admitted, “God himself can’t save the planet at this point.”

“Of course he can’t, that’s why I brought you here!”

Loki turned back around but finally stopped his involuntary tour. They had walked back to the same bay door where the crew had taken their first steps on Pantheos from. Loki spread his arms wide and in perfect unison the doors rose from the ground once again.

“Brother!”

Three silhouettes stood in the entry way and slowly made their way onto the ship. As the other two stopped, one very large man continued towards the group. A bright red beard grew to his waist, large enough to roost an entire henhouse. Walking up to Loki, he locked eyes before wrapping his arms around him. “Good to see you brother.”

While the two gods were still locked in an embrace, the other two took this as an opportunity for introductions. The first had long white hair with a matching beard that

was tucked into a kelp green kilt. “Greeting’s voyagers! How wonderful it is that you’ve made dock on our planet.”

Kara once again asserting herself in the line of fire, “Let me guess, Neptune?”

“No! I hate that guy.” The swampy bog rose above the ship on all sides as his eyes roared with intensity. “I am Poseidon! God of the seas and proud partner with BP.”

Walker, peeking over the shoulder of Kara, “Aren’t you the same guy?”

Before the Greek god could sink the ship, the third god stepped forward to comfort him.

“There is no need for this. You forget the humans are unable to hold their tongues.”

“You’re right wise Horus. Whoever said owls were the wise ones must have been a fool.”

The falcon headed god turned his different colored eyes through the crew and to his old companion. “Bast! Have you not addressed our new comrades?”

The cat goddess bowed in submission, “Forgive me my lord, for we have not had the time thanks to the trickster.”

“No worries my warrior. The crew is safe.” Horus released the old sea god and addressed the crew directly. “The fate of your world is quite literally in your hands.”

Breaking free of Thor’s embrace, Loki joined the other deities as they made their final introductions. “You’ll have to forgive my bird-brained associate. He doesn’t mean to put that pressure on such a resourceful group.”

Stepping free of the crowd Roy asserted himself among the others. “It’s been very nice to meet all of you. But it is time for us to leave this planet and return home.”

Taking his own position in front of the other gods Horus spoke in a calm voice, bowing his head in disappointment, “I thought after all these years man kind might have learned by now.”

“We’ve learned plenty!” Cyrus said defensively.

Horus pushed the feathers back on his head, “Your inventions are impressive yes. But not a single one of you have improved their faith.”

“Faith doesn’t get you half way across the universe.”

A smug expression on the face of Loki once again dominated the room, “I suppose you forgot how you got here.’

Now confident against the god of mischief Cyrus asserted himself, “It was a crash. Nothing we didn’t train for in the academy.”

“An Academy man!” Thor proclaimed as Horus nodded in agreement. “I like your style.”

Leaning against the bone white wall Loki pretended to light a cigarette. “Roy, have you figured it out yet?”

As the words came out of his mouth the dots began to connect. Roy looked at the assortment of bed time stories standing in front of him, “You don’t mean...”

“Well of course I do!” Loki conjured himself a director’s chair to sit in. “Shall we start from the beginning? Your god forced us out of jobs. Nobody believed in us after Christianity took control of the world. If nobody believes in us, then we can’t impact the world we inhabit.”

Bast made her way to Loki's side. "That's why I abandoned my infinite liter box of the Sahara for this murky wasteland."

Horus, not one to have the spotlight stolen from him, made his way to the center of the group. "Those blasted humans believed a man coming back to life over a man with a head of a bird, and the powers of a dam. Somewhere down the road a man by the name of Stanley Steamer is praised for his carpet cleaning abilities. Complete blasphemy."

"Actually my carpet has never been cleane--"

"Shut up Walker" proclaimed Kara. "We need to save humanity and you're telling us we don't need to find a new planet?"

"Finally!" Loki exclaimed. "I see someone has been eating their corn flakes."

"'God' as you like to call him" stated Horus "is far overworked. Over population affected the planet and over the years limited his influence."

"You think he can answer all the prayers for the planet when he has to bless each and every athlete in America? Get over yourselves."

"Exactly" said Loki. "And if you're looking for a show of faith, I answered your prayer to bring you all here."

The crew looked at each other in complete confusion.

"Come on Roy! You don't forget praying to go home do you?" Loki dusted off his robe and glared at the captain, "I heard your prayer from millions of light years away, and thought I'd lend a hand. I didn't even require my usual sacrifice!"

Roy escaped from his paralysis of the situation “You expect us to put the fate of our world in the hands of some washed up gods?”

“There’s only one washed up god actually” as Loki gestured towards Poseidon who gave an approving nod.

“We just want a second chance” Thor pleaded.

“Have some pride Thor” Horus took control of the conversation yet again, “What he means to say is that we can bear the weight of ‘God’s’ burden for the time being. All we ask is that you spread our story.”

“How the hell will campfire stories save our planet?”

“We siphon power off of belief” claimed Bast, “If mankind can believe in us again, we can grant the prayers that your god can no longer hear.”

Poseidon, having been reenergized by the conversation offered his support. “Wouldn’t you like to visit the lost lands of Florida? That’s a weekend job for me.”

Roy turned around to look at his crew. For the first time in his life he was met with Kara’s face completely blank of emotion and unable to speak. Not a good sign. But what truly scared him were the faces of Cyrus and Walker. The twins embodied the purest expressions of fear and excitement. It was hard to tell if Cyrus was afraid of the deal they were considering or the possibility that he would have to play more games against Loki. The excitement on Walker’s face radiated from his wide smile. It was no surprise he would be excited after being promised the opportunity to visit his ancestor’s home of Florida.

Loki sat forward in his chair and gave his best Caddyshack impression, “Well? We’re waiting.”

With one last look at his crew, Roy took a deep breath and turned to face their godly guests. “Here’s the deal. This ship is only able to support eight life forms. One of you won’t be able to make the trip back.”

Turning back to his crew, “I suggest we each choose one god. And remember you will have to be responsible for them. Once you make your pick meet me on the bridge, it’s time we head home. Horus, I hope you like drinks, because I need one.”

The falcon-headed god gave his best attempt at a smile and followed Roy down the corridor.

The remaining gods now huddled together.

As soon as the reality of the situation hit him, Walker shouted for Poseidon to be his choice. “We are going to have so much fun in Tampa!” The grizzled god joined him at his side and watched the others make their choices.

Kara got her courage back and promptly chose next. “Bast.” The cat goddess pranced her way across the room with a grin that rivaled Loki’s. She turned to face the remaining gods.

The two stood side by side, Thor dwarfing his adopted brother. Cyrus stared ahead, the same look of fear staining his face. “No hard feelings brother, but it’s obvious who he shall pick. Besides, you won’t be much help unless there is a monster to slay.”

Cyrus opened his mouth, but the silence continued. Loki taking the opportunity to fill the void, “It’s okay buddy but let him down easy. I’ll let you be player one this time.”

Several more seconds pass before Cyrus is able to speak again. With his head hanging low only one word managed to escape his lips, “Thor.”

The look of joy on Loki’s face was immediately replaced by one of primal rage. The same grin he wore while playing video games still dominated his face as his skin grew darker and his eyes began to intensely glow. As soon as it appeared the god had reached his boiling point, a cloud of smoke consumed him.

Thor raised his hammer and swung it rapidly, the smoke disappeared as quickly as it appeared. When the last of the smoke cleared the ship Loki was no where to be seen.

Thor shrugged, “He does that sometimes. The smell should go away shortly.” Scratching his beard, “You guys got any food?”

The crew and their godly counterparts began walking to the bridge where Roy and Horus are waiting to take off. Walking past the twins’ cabin Cyrus was certain he heard the faint sound of analog sticks, but decided to keep this to himself.

The bridge doors slid open revealing Roy already comfortable in his captain’s chair with a drink clasped tightly in his hand, Horus right by his side. The others followed his lead and assumed their stations, their gods in tow.

“Let’s go save our home. Kara if you’d do the honors.”

She looked around the room at the odd assortment of misfits meant to save the world.

With a satisfying nod, “Prepare for launch. 3...2...1...”