

WHERE NO BUG HAS GONE BEFORE

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

SECURITY	Standard red-shirt bacteria, except it survives.
ADMIRAL	The admiral sent to lead the ratship on its epic journey
CAPTAIN	Captain Quirk, typically in charge of the Rodentprise
NAVIGATOR	Mr. Flulu is responsible for steering the Rodentprise
GONDII	A research engineering from SMELBAD
ENGINEER	Mr. Spotty is in charge of engineering for the Rodentprise
SCIENCE OFFICER	Mr. Speck is the science officer of the Rodentprise
TECHNICIAN	Some distant bug that doesn't get paid nearly enough
YEOMAN	Not at all like Yeoman Rand, but kinda sorta exactly like her if she were bacterial.

SETTING

Aboard the Ratship Rodentprise. Modern day.

Nothing is stranger than the real world.

Reference: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/podcast/episode/toxoplasma-infected-rats-love-their-11-08-17/>

SCENE

(Lights up on the bridge of the Ratship Rodentprise. Various bacteria are manning (bacteriaing?) the stations, and the Captain is in its chair. Suddenly there's an announcement whistle, and the doors slide open. Admiral and Gondii enter, the latter carrying a case (of protozoan parasites, you were curious.)

SECURITY

Admiral on the bridge!

(All the bacteria stand and salute.)

ADMIRAL

As you were, bugs. On the order of Rear Admiral Streptococcus, as of fourteen hundred hours I am assuming command of the Ratship Rodentprise.

CAPTAIN

Sir!?

ADMIRAL

Stand down, captain. Now, what I'm about to share with all of you has been classified top secret by the highest levels of our taxonomic genus. I'm not going to sugarcoat this for you, bugs. Ratfleet Command has been tracking our population densities, and the situation is grim. If we don't spawn some new growth, our entire species could be extinct within the week.

(There's a tremendous outpouring chorus of "oh my god", "this is terrible", and "what are we gonna do" from the crew.)

SECURITY

Ahh-TENN-SHUN!

(The crew snaps to alert. The Admiral nods to Security in thanks.)

ADMIRAL

Fortunately, we have identified a fertile location in this quadrant where we can implant a node of embryos.

(There's a general sigh of relief.)

Feline Alpha One.

(There's a shocked silence.)

NAVIGATOR

Sir?

ADMIRAL

That's right. Feline Alpha One.

CAPTAIN

Admiral, may I have a word?

(Pulls the Admiral aside.)

Sir, this is a *Ratship*. Our navigation system won't—

(The Admiral speaks loudly to the whole bridge crew.)

ADMIRAL

I understand your concern. Traditional propulsion techniques have been unable to penetrate the Hypothalamus Inhibition Aversion Zone. But Commander Gondii here, head of the Special Mitochondrial Engineering Laboratories for Bacterial Advanced Design – what you all probably just know as SMELBAD – has developed a new technology that we believe will solve this problem once and for all. Doctor Gondii, if you will.

GONDII

Our engineers have been working on a prototype for the past eleven hours—

ENGINEER

Prototype? I'll nay hae yoo screwin' up mae ratship wi some damn prototype!

GONDII

I assure you, Lieutenant, that we've run dozens of simulations, and we're confident—

ENGINEER

Simulations!? I ain't riskin' mae damn ratship—

CAPTAIN

Stand down, Spotty.

(Engineer grumbles, but steps back.)

Go on, doctor.

GONDII

As I was saying, we're confident that the toxoplasma drive will permit us to finally breach the HIA Zone. As you can see...

(Gondii opens the case, and the crew gathers to look inside. There are mutters of "whoa", "so shiny", and "that one looks like my aunt Edna".)

You can see that these are no ordinary, run-of-the-mill protozoa. As we speak, my technicians are installing a set of these into your ratship's primary guidance computer. Once they signal they're done, we'll set our plan in motion.

CAPTAIN

And what, exactly, is this plan of yours?

ADMIRAL

Captain, this may be difficult for you to hear, and it's why leadership has put me in command of the Rodentprise for the duration of our mission. After we've completed installation of the new toxoplasma drive, we're going to be taking her not just *to* Feline Alpha One... but right inside.

NAVIGATOR

That's impossible! She'll never make it. We'll lose control before she ever gets that close!

ADMIRAL

Don't worry, Mister Flulu. She'll make it. She's as sturdy a rat as they come.

CAPTAIN

Admiral, when you say *inside*...

ADMIRAL

That's right, Captain Quirk. Literally inside.

SCIENCE OFFICER

No ratship has ever—

ADMIRAL

Once we're there we'll establish a standard orbit as a holding pattern. And then, we wait.

SCIENCE OFFICER

If I may, Admiral, for what are we waiting?

ADMIRAL

We wait... until the cat takes a piss.

SCIENCE OFFICER

Sir?

GONDII

(Unable to contain its excitement...)

You see, once the ratship's sensor detect the urea and creatinine blend, augmented with potassium and chloride impurities, simulations show that the ratship will...

(Gondii gets all embarrassed, and starts to blush.)

CAPTAIN

Will what?

GONDII

Well, umm, will get... umm... interested.

SCIENCE OFFICER

Interested?

GONDII

You know, she'll get... amorous.

ADMIRAL

(Stepping in impatiently)

She'll be horny like a virgin Catholic rabbit.

(There are shocked gasps and more murmurs. The Admiral waves everyone to silence.)

And while she's... idling, Feline Alpha One will pull her right in.

CAPTAIN

And how will we escape? This sounds like a suicide mission.

ADMIRAL

Nothing of the kind, Captain. Escape is a piece of cake. Or more accurately, a piece of shit.

SCIENCE OFFICER

Fascinating. Are you saying...

ADMIRAL

That's right, Mr. Speck. We'll just ride it out in a nice, cozy little turd.

NAVIGATOR

And then?

ADMIRAL

And *then* we'll hitch a ride on the next ratship that comes around to refuel. Couldn't be simpler.

(There's a buzz, followed by...)

TECHNICIAN (OFF)

Admiral, the toxoplasma drive is installed, and diagnostics all show positive.

ADMIRAL

Mr. Flulu, plot a course for Feline Alpha One.

*(Navigator looks nervously at the Captain, who nods.
Navigator lays in a course.)*

NAVIGATOR

Course plotted, Admiral.

ADMIRAL

Take us in. One half impulse.

*(All the crew shift a little as the rat gets underway.
After a few moments...)*

NAVIGATOR

Approaching Feline Alpha One.

CAPTAIN

On retina.

NAVIGATOR

Aye, Captain.

ENGINEER

Well, willya look at tha...

ADMIRAL

Slow to one quarter impulse, assume standard orbit.

NAVIGATOR

Aye, sir. Legs at one quarter, standard orbit.

SCIENCE OFFICER

Captain, it appears to be... squatting...

(There's a beep beep beep, and a light flashes on the science station console.)

Sensors are detecting urea and creosote in high concentra—

(The ratship starts to shake, and the Navigator starts fighting with the controls.)

NAVIGATOR

Captain! She's starting to pull inwards, I can't maintain orbit!

ADMIRAL

(Perfectly calm)

Let her go, Mr. Flulu.

(The whole crew watches the retina-screen with interest.)

SCIENCE OFFICER

We've been detected, Captain. Feline Alpha One is coming about, adopting an attack posture.

CAPTAIN

Raise shields! Red alert!

SECURITY

It's targeting us... it has target lock!

CAPTAIN

Evasive maneuvers tango delta four!

ADMIRAL

Belay that order! Lower sh—

(The whole ratship is rocked.)

SECURITY

We've been hit, sir!

SCIENCE OFFICER

Damage reports coming in... Moderate damage to external sensors...

ENGINEER

It's got oor tail, sir! We're trapped! Reroutin' power through the adrenal intermix chamber. That should give us—

SECURITY

Captain! Feline Alpha One is extending claws... Brace for impact!!

(The bridge shakes.)

SCIENCE OFFICE

Heavy structural damage to decks fourteen through eighty thousand and six.

NAVIGATION

Maneuvering thrusters offline!

SECURITY

It's attacking again!

(The bridge shakes massively, knocking some of the crew over, and then everything's silent.)

CAPTAIN

Status report!

SCIENCE OFFICER

We've lost main engines, auxiliary power inoperative. Switching to emergency life support.

GONDII

Look at that. Those teeth are so huge! I never imagined.

ADMIRAL

This is it. We're going in.

SCIENCE OFFICER

If memory serves, we'll be the first bugged ratship to actually enter any Feline system in recorded history.

(The crew stares at the retina screen with oohs and ahhs, and the occasional "this is incredible".)

CAPTAIN

We're going see the inside of a Feline system. Mr. Speck, try to get external sensors back online.

ADMIRAL

Congratulation, bugs. You should feel very proud to have served on this historic voyage of the Ratship Rodentprise, the first ratship even to *enter* a Feline system.

NAVIGATOR

Maybe they'll rechristen us the Ratship *Enter*-prise.

(Everyone smiles appreciatively at the joke. Yoman either enters, or just approaches the Captain.)

YEOMEN

Captain, I'm scared!

CAPTAIN

Don't worry, yeoman. *(Puts his arm around her.)* We'll make it through this.

(Lights out.)