

## "THE LIFEBOAT MUTINY"

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Synopsis: Contractors buy a second hand ship to survey a planet not knowing that the ship is a intelligent lifeboat from a cruiser that was at war five hundred years before.

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DAVE (V.O.)

I have to trust my life to it. But Joe, the interstellar junkman just wants to show me around the lot... he can pat at an airlock door lovingly or kick at the ground gyros to show how sturdy they are. Joe exudes charm the way trees drop sap on you.

KNOCKING ON METAL

JOE

There, you see? Solid as a rock. Look at that plating! I'm tellin ya, this boat is a real buy.

DAVE

Well, she looks pretty old...

JOE

(this is not a bad thing)  
Sure, she is old...

ARNOLD

Aw, now don't give us that story about the little old lady who just used it to flip to church on Sundays...

JOE

Now, boys, I'm not trying to unload something on you... I don't stand to make a nickel on this. But tell me the truth, did you ever hear sweeter engines? And look at those servos!

DAVE

Pretty old...

JOE

And that hull. I'll bet its 500 years old and not a spot of corrosion on it. I'm telling you, you're lucky! It's a coincidence you two fellas coming in,

needing a lifeboat and sitting right here, waiting for you. Like you were made for each other is this baby

ARNOLD

Well, she certainly does seem rather nice? What do you think about it Dave?

DAVE

It does look pretty good. Its about what we need for the ocean survey work on Trident.. but you know Joe

JOE

Oh, they just don't build them this way anymore! Look at that propulsion unit - you couldn't dent it with a trip hammer. And note the capacity of the cooling system

DAVE

It looks good, but some of these old machines... you know I just want to make absolutely sure that its safe.

JOE

Safe! Ha ha. Safe... He asks me if its safe!

DAVE

Is it?

JOE

Oh, Well. Step inside.

A Door opens

JOE (CONT'D)

Go ahead, step inside.

(footsteps)

All right, push that button... right there on the instrument panel.

DAVE

This one?

A BUTTON IS PUSHED, A BUZZER

SHIP

I am lifeboat 324A

DAVE

Hey! The darn thing talks!

ARNOLD

Yeah! And in English too!

JOE

Its equipped with a universal translator!  
Its completely automatic.

I told you they just don't build them  
this way anymore. Go ahead, push the  
button again.

BUZZER

SHIP

I Am lifeboat 324A.. My primary purpose  
is to preserve those within me from peril  
and to maintain them in good health. At  
present I am only partially activated.

JOE

Could anything be safer? This is no  
senseless hunk of metal. This boat will  
look after you! This boat cares!

DAVE

I don't know... the idea of an emotional  
machine gets me. I can't even stand those  
robot maitre'd' s... They keep slobbering  
over you every time you go into a  
restaurant with their tubes just pouring  
kindness and consideration...

ARNOLD

Oh, you're a reactionary. We'll take it!

JOE

You won't be sorry. Boys, you just  
bought yourself a lifeboat.

MUSIC

DAVE (V.O.)

Joe delivered us assurances in a frank  
and open tone that helped make him a  
millionaire a several times over. It  
wasn't that he was dishonest, far from  
it. But all the flotsam he collected from  
anywhere the universe worked, but ancient  
machines, often had their own ideas on  
how a job should be done. They tend to  
get peevish when they get forced into  
another routine.

LOADING SOUNDS

ARNOLD

Well, there she goes. Lifeboat 324A. I  
got her down in the afterhold. I think  
she's in perfect condition. Y'know, its  
just what we need for those oceans on

Trident.

DAVE

I hope so... the last thing I bought from Joe was an electric razor, only it turned out it came from Denon 3, where they are slightly reptilian, and an electric razor is used to help them change their skin in the hot months. If you remember I was in the hospital three months, and after the skin grafts, I don't know my ear from my elbow.

MUSIC

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

This job we were on was to survey the planet Trident for a real estate speculator who bought it for subdivision. Trident was about the size of mars, but with a far better climate. There was no native indigenous population, no poisonous plants and no germ borne diseases. As a matter of fact, apart from one small island and one small polar ice cap, the whole planet was covered with water. There was no real shortage of land, you could wade across some of Trident's several seas. Our Firm was hired to survey and pan a little mountain raising because the sector council frowned on selling building lots under four feet of water. We landed on Trident and launched the lifeboat.

STEPS

ARNOLD

OK, I got the sandwiches and the water. Ready to cast off?

DAVE

Aye, aye sir. All mooring lines are on board.

ARNOLD

All right, let's crank this swan boat up and get going.

DAVE

Well, push that button.

ARNOLD

Heh. Aye aye.

SHIP

I am lifeboat 324A.. My primary purpose

is to preserve those within me from peril and to maintain them in good health. At present, I am only partially activated. For full activity, press button 2.

DAVE

Well, there it is right next to the first one

HUMMING and WHIRRING

ARNOLD

Well, something's going on back there. Sounds like motors warming up.

BUZZER ALARM

ARNOLD (CONT'D)

Hey, that sounds like a short circuit somewhere. You know there's no wheel on this thing?

DAVE

Oh, wait a minute, there's gotta be some sort of tiller or control....

ARNOLD

Well, you look! That's all there are, two buttons...

DAVE

Well, maybe she controls telepathically. I'll try it. Hey, uh, 324A, go ahead slowly.

CHAIN GRINDING AND MOTION

DAVE (CONT'D)

Ah, there she goes. That's it. Starboard a little

CHAINS

ARNOLD

Now wait a minute, I still don't like the sound of it. I bet there's a short somewhere I'm gonna go down and take a look at it with a circuit tester.

DAVE

Don't louse anything up. I like a boat that works this way. Gives me a sense of power. Hey, 324A, full speed ahead!

MUSIC

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Arnold disappeared into the bilge with a circuit tester and I handled the survey. Actually, our machines did all the work, tracing the major faults along the ocean bottom, locating the most promising volcanoes, and when the survey was complete, the next phase was turned over to the subcontractor. He would wire the volcanoes, seed the faults and touch the whole thing off. After that, there'd be enough dry land on trident for anybody. About mid-afternoon I figured we could knock off for a while, we ate our sandwiches, took a drink of water from the canteen and then had ourselves a swim in Trident's clear green water.

#### SWIMMING SOUNDS

DAVE (CONT'D)

Hey, give me a hand up. That was very refreshing!

ARNOLD

Oh yeah... I'll have to get this grease off with sandpaper, but I think I found the trouble. You see the leads from the primary activator have been removed and the power cable's been cut.

DAVE

Why would anyone do that?

ARNOLD

It could be part of the decommissioning... but I got it hooked up now. Go ahead hit the second button.

DAVE

OK, here she goes.

BUZZER, Whirring., high pitched squeal.

SHIP

I am lifeboat 324A, I am now fully activated and am able to protect my occupants from danger. Have faith in me. My action response tapes, both psychological and physical. have been prepared by the best scientific minds in all Drone.

ARNOLD

Ah, That's more like it, huh? Gives you a feeling of uh confidence doesn't it?

DAVE

I suppose so. But where's Drone?

ARNOLD

Dunno.

SHIP

Gentlemen: try to think of me not as unfeeling mechanism, but as your friend and comrade in arms. I understand how you feel. You have seen your ship go down.

DAVE

Huh?

SHIP

Cruelly riddled by the unshakable H'gin.

DAVE

What ship? What's he talking about?

SHIP

You have crawled aboard me, dazed, gasping from the poisonous fumes of water. Half dead...

ARNOLD

Oh no? Wait a minute You mean that swim we took? Oh no, we were just surveying...

SHIP

Half dead, shocked, wounded. Morale low. You were a little frightened perhaps, as well you might be, separated from the Drone fleet and adrift on an alien planet. A little fear is nothing to be ashamed of gentlemen, for this is war, and war is a cruel business, and we have no alternative but to drive the H'gin across space.

DAVE

There must be a reasonable explanation for this

ARNOLD

Probably an old television script got mixed up in its response banks.

DAVE

We better give it a complete overhaul. We can't listen to that stuff all day.

ARNOLD

Well, we're about a quarter mile from the

island... ah, I'll tell ya what, I'll go down and clean the goo out of the contacts when we get there.

WHINE DOWN

DAVE

Hey! What's going on?

ARNOLD

We're stopping!

DAVE

Hey! Hey, Lifeboat!

SHIP

Quiet. Calm. Trust in me. I am scanning the island.

ARNOLD

What's he talking about? Scanning the island?

DAVE

Ssh. Better humor him.

ARNOLD

Lifeboat, that island's OK, we, we, we checked it personally.

SHIP

Perhaps you did, but in modern lighting quick warfare, Drone senses cannot be trusted.

They are too limited, too prone to interpret what they wish. Electronic senses, on the other hand, are emotionless. Eternally vigilant and infallible within their limits.

ARNOLD

But there wasn't anything there!

SHIP

I perceive a foreign space ship on the island

DAVE

Oh, that's our ship.

SHIP

It has no Drone markings.

ARNOLD

Well, it hasn't any enemy markings either. I painted it myself.

SHIP

In war, we must assume that what is not ours is the enemies.

DAVE

Oh...

SHIP

I understand your desire to set foot on land again, but I take into account factors that a Drone, motivated by his emotions, would overlook. Consider the apparent emptiness of the strategic bit of land. The unmarked space ship -- put temptingly out for bait. The fact that our fleet is no longer in this vicinity...

DAVE

All right, all right, that's enough. I am tired of arguing with you. Go directly to that island! That's an order.

SHIP

I am sorry. I cannot follow that order. You are unbalanced from your harrowing escape from death.

ARNOLD

All right, all right, enough of this nonsense. I'm just gonna take that cutoff switch --

BUZZING and YELLING

ARNOLD (CONT'D)

Ow! Ow! Ow!

SHIP

Come to your senses, gentlemen. Only the decommissioning officer is empowered to turn me off. For your own safety, I must warn you, not to touch any of my controls. You are mentally unbalanced. Later, when our position is safer, I will administer to you, but now, my full energies must be devoted to detection... and escape from the enemy.

BELL RINGS, MORE WHIRRING

DAVE

Where we going?

SHIP

To rejoin the drone fleet! As soon as I can find it.

MUSIC

DAVE (V.O.)

We sailed over the empty seas of Trident for the rest of the afternoon and far into the night. At about midnight we sat in the cabin sharing our last sandwich. The lifeboat was still rushing madly over the waves, its every electronic sense alert, searching for a fleet that had existed 500 years ago upon an entirely different planet.

WHIRRING

ARNOLD

Oh, why didn't I pack more sandwiches? You ever hear of these Drones?

DAVE

Yeah, vaguely. They were non-human, lizard evolved creatures. They lived on the sixth planet of some little system near, uh, Cappella. Their race died out over a century ago.

ARNOLD

M-hm. And the H'gin? What about them?

DAVE

Also lizards, same story. Wasn't a very important war, Y'know... all the combatants are gone except this lifeboat apparently ...

ARNOLD

..and us! We've been drafted as Drone soldiers. Think we could reason with this tub?

DAVE

Ahhh, no... I don't see how. As far as this boat is concerned the war is still on. It can only interpret data in terms of that premise.

ARNOLD

Its probably listening in on us now.

DAVE

No, no. I don't think so.

ARNOLD

Oh?

DAVE

See, it's not really a mind reader. Its perception sensors are geared only to thoughts aimed specifically at it.

ARNOLD

Yessiree, they sure don't build this way anymore... boy, if I could get my hands on Joe...

DAVE

Well, you know.. it's actually a very interesting situation. The machine is acting very logically upon no longer existent conditions. Therefore, you could say, that the machine is the, uh, well, victim of a systemized delusion.

ARNOLD

You mean the lifeboat is just plain insane?

DAVE

No, I believe paranoia is the correct designation. Ah, but, it'll end pretty soon.

ARNOLD

Why?

DAVE

Its obvious! The boat's prime objective is to keep us alive. Our sandwiches are gone and our only other food is on the island. I figure we'll have to take a chance and go back.

SHIP

Gentleman, at present, I am unable to locate the Drone fleet. Therefore, I am turning back to scan the island again. Fortunately, there are no enemies in the immediate area, so I can devote myself to your care.

DAVE

Oh, you see, its about time you got around to us! We're hungry.

ARNOLD

Feed us!

SHIP

Of course immediately.

CAN OPENING SOUNDS.

SHIP (CONT'D)

There you are. On the tray.

ARNOLD

What's that?

DAVE

It looks like clay?

SNIFFING SOUNDS

DAVE (CONT'D)

Oh... it smells like machine oil! Hey, what's it supposed to be?

SHIP

That is Giesel. It's the staple diet of the drone people. I can prepare it in 16 different ways.

DAVE

Oh... Try it.

ARNOLD

All right... ooh! It tastes like clay covered in machine oil! We can't eat that!

SHIP

Of course you can! An adult drone consumes 5 point 3 pounds of Giesel a day and cries for more!

ARNOLD

Look here. We are not drones, we are humans, an entirely different species! The war you think you're fighting ended 500 years ago. We can't eat Giesel, our food is on the island!

SHIP

Ah yes. Your delusion is a common one among fighting men. It is an escape fantasy... a retreat from an intolerable situation. Gentlemen, I beg you, face reality.

ARNOLD

You face reality, or I will have you dismantled bolt by bolt!

SHIP

Threats do not disturb me. I know what you've been through. And possible you suffered some brain damage from your exposure to poisonous water.

ARNOLD

Poisonous?!?

DAVE

To Drones.

SHIP

If absolutely necessary, I am also equipped to perform physical brain therapy. It is a drastic measure, but there can be no coddling in time of war.

THWACK, THWACK. KNIVES COME OUT.

SHIP (CONT'D)

You see, you need not worry all my scalpels are razor sharp and ready for immediate action.

DAVE

Oh, scalpels, huh? Well, we're feeling better already! That's a fine looking batch of Giesel isn't it Arnold?

ARNOLD

Oh, uh, uh delicious...

SHIP

Nothing is too good for our boys in uniform. Do try a little.

DAVE

Oh, that's wonderful it (chokes) delicious.

SHIP

Good, I am moving towards the island, and I promise you, in a little while, , you will be more comfortable.

ARNOLD

Why?

SHIP

The temperature here is unbearably hot. It is amazing you haven't gone into a coma. Any other drone would have, Soon, I will have it down to Drone norm of 20 degrees below zero. And now, I will play our national anthem.

ELECTRIONCA SOUNDS AND GRUNTS.

MUSIC

DAVE

Arnold?

ARNOLD  
(pissed) )  
What?

DAVE  
I'm cold.

ARNOLD  
Well, you should be very comfortable.  
Drones live at 20 below zero. We're  
Drones and no backtalk!

DAVE  
Those cooling tubes are all frosted up.

ARNOLD  
Yeah, I just wrote my name in the frost  
on the porthole. Hey, wait a minute I  
have an idea.... follow my lead.

DAVE  
Why not? Lead on, fellow Drone.

ARNOLD  
Ah, give me the canteen.

SHIP  
What... are you doing?

ARNOLD  
Uh, just going to get a little exercise.  
Heh heh. Gotta stay fit you know.

SHIP  
That is true.

ARNOLD  
Uh, Here ya are boy, catch!

DAVE  
Look out, that canteen's heavy

ARNOLD  
Aw, just throw it right back, boy, just  
heave it right in. C'mon! Lemme see your  
curve.

SHIP  
Be careful with that receptacle! It is  
filled with a deadly poison. Water.

ARNOLD  
Oh, we'll be careful, ooh, here we go!

CRASH!

DAVE

Bad shot, old man.

ARNOLD

Oh, how careless of me, I seemed to have broken the cooling tubes. Cooling fluid all over the floor.

SHIP

I should have taken precaution against internal accidents. It will not happen again. But, the situation is very serious. I cannot repair the cooling tube myself, I'm unable to properly cool the boat.

ARNOLD

Say... that's tough. Now, if you'll just drop us on the island

SHIP

That is impossible. My first duty is to preserve your lives. And you couldn't live long of the climate of this planet. But I am going to take necessary precautions to ensure your safety.

DAVE

What are you going to do?

SHIP

There is no time to waste. I will scan the island once more. If our Drone forces are not present, we will go to the one place on the planet that can sustain Drone life...

DAVE

What place?

SHIP

The southern polar ice cap. The climate there is almost ideal. 30 degrees below zero.

BUZZING and WHIRRING

SHIP (CONT'D)

And, of course... I must guard against any further internal accidents,

CLANG

SHIP (CONT'D)

So, I will lock you gentlemen in the cabin.

MUSIC STINGER

ARNOLD

Think!

DAVE

I am thinking! Nothing is coming out.

ARNOLD

We gotta get off when he reaches the island, it'll be our last chance.

DAVE

Now, look, we know his internal scanning isn't very good... when we reach the island, maybe we could cut his power cable.

ARNOLD

Oh, you couldn't get within 5 feet of it. He's got an electric charge on all the controls.

SHIP

I am now scanning the island.

ARNOLD

Uh, place looks fine today.

DAVE

Sure does! I'll bet our forces are dug in underground.

SHIP

They are not. I scan to a depth of 100 feet.

DAVE

Well, uh, under the circumstances, I think we should examine it a little more carefully.

SHIP

It is deserted. I cannot let you endanger your lives by going ashore. Drone needs her soldiers. Especially sturdy heat resistant types like you.

ARNOLD

We like this climate!

SHIP

Spoken like a patriot. I know you musty be suffering, but now I am going to the South Pole to give you veterans the rest you deserve.

DAVE

Wait a minute, you don't understand.  
We're operating under special orders. We  
weren't supposed to disclose them to any  
vessel below the rank of Super  
Dreadnought. We're a suicide squad

ARNOLD

Yes! Yes! That's right Especially trained  
for hot climate war.

DAVE

Our orders are to land and secure that  
island for the Drone forces.

SHIP

I didn't know that.

DAVE

You weren't supposed to! After all,  
you're only a lifeboat!

ARNOLD

Land us at once!

SHIP

I couldn't guess you know... All right.  
We'll head for the island.

BUZZER. WHIRRING

DAVE

Arnold, its going to work!

ARNOLD

Why not? As long as we tell him the  
truth...

DAVE

The beach is only 50 yards away.

CLANGING, SLOWING

SHIP

No. No.

DAVE

No what?

SHIP

I cannot do it.

ARNOLD

Whattymeant? This is war. Orders!

SHIP

I know, but I cannot obey. A different  
type of vessel should have been chosen

for this mission. But not, a lifeboat.

DAVE

You must think of our country! Think of the barbaric H'gin!

SHIP

It is electronically impossible for me to carry out your orders. My prime directive is to protect my occupants from harm. That order is stamped on my every tape, giving priority above all others. I cannot go to your certain death.

BUZZING

DAVE

You'll be court martialled for this! I will have you busted down to a dingy!

SHIP

I regret to say I must operate within my limitations. I must take you to the safety of the South Pole.

ARNOLD

Listen you crazy tin can, let me at those controls.

SHOCKS and YELLING

ARNOLD (CONT'D)

Ow! Ow! Ow!

SHIP

Please do not attempt any more destruction. I know how you feel.

DAVE

Wait a minute, Arnold, old friend. Since we cannot accomplish our mission, we cannot ever again face our comrades. Death before dishonor. Hand me the canteen.

SHIP

No! Don't! That's water! It is a deadly poison. Don't! Don't!

DRINKS and SIGHS

DAVE

Too late. Arnold, its your turn

ARNOLD

We who are about to die, salute you.

ARNOLD drinks

DAVE

We die for glorious Drone!

FALLS

ARNOLD

That goes for me too!

SHIP

Speak to me! Speak to me!

DAVE

Stay still, will you?

SHIP

there is no known antidote. If only I could contact the hospital ship. Speak to me. Are you still alive. Answer me. Here!

FOOD SOUNDS

SHIP (CONT'D)

Here. Perhaps if you eat some Giesel.

(pause.)

Dead. Dead. Dead. I will now read the burial service. Great Spirit of the Universe, take into your custody the souls of these, your servants. Although they died by their own hand, still it was in the service of their country. Fighting for home and hearth. Judge them not harshly for their impetuous deed, rather blame the spirit of war that inflames and destroys the spirit of all Drones.

DRAGGING SOUNDS

SHIP (CONT'D)

And now, by the authority vested in me, by the Drone Fleet and with all reverence, I commend their bodies to the deep. Accept them, O Ocean, for many brave hearts are at slumber in the deep.

ARNOLD

Why is the lifeboat sticking around?

DAVE

Just be happy the Drones didn't believe in cremation.

WATER SPLASHING.

SHIP

Sleep quietly brave spirits. I will now  
play the Drone National Anthem.

DAVE

Well.. there she goes.

ARNOLD

Where?

DAVE

To the south pole.. to wait for the drone  
fleet!