

Bardo Zsa Zsa

Sample First Chapter

by

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And

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“It is the modern Kabbalists who know
there is always a remainder when a duplicate is made.”

-John Durham Peters, PhD

“Girls just wanna have fun.”

-Xenu, Grand High Lord of the Galaxy

PART 1

Chapter 1

Gilligan's Island

Light suffused the room from a source he could not determine. It was happening again as it had happened before, but this time Russ was awake. The greenish glow made his vintage *This Island Earth* poster look prophetic, and suddenly there was nothing funny about the wasp-headed monster pawing the lead actress while flying saucers zipped across a background of exploding planets. Small creatures were definitely in his room. He saw one when it stopped briefly at the foot of his bed. The small humanoid had wrinkly skin, a lightbulb-shaped head, and large dark eyes that seemed to let out no emotion. He knew he should be panicking but surprisingly he wasn't, assuming they had already done something to calm his brain. It amused him that Hollywood had gotten some of the details right, though the curious lizard-like creatures scampering around didn't seem to be anywhere near Spielberg's fantasy of interplanetary friendliness.

Russ' body and mouth were frozen by some unknown force that prevented him from calling out to his wife, sleeping peacefully next to him in her flowered cotton nightgown. Part of him was glad he wasn't able to awaken her. This wasn't a couple's thing. This nightmare was happening to him. Again. Alone, like the times before. He had an odd thought that if he survived this, maybe he should leave Kera, for her own protection. It was obvious now, if it hadn't been before, that these midnight encounters were not just a one- or two-time thing. She would be safer if he was not around. Thank God he didn't have kids to worry about.

As the creatures raised him a few inches off the bed with their invisible technology (something that hadn't happened before, at least as far he could remember), he took some satisfaction that all the hours he spent in support groups were justified. While other group members had sharper memories of their encounters, they were most often simply cavorting with beautiful, Swedish aliens with large foreheads wearing clothes made out of aluminum foil. Sometimes he felt the group frowned on those, like himself, who

encountered things more sinister, as if the beings were a manifestation of what each person deserved. *Maybe this is what I deserve.*

Dream logic kicked in as he levitated higher above his bed.

Screens... We have screens on all our windows. They won't be able to get me out of the room.

As if puny metal mesh from Home Depot that failed to keep out mosquitoes would have some secret power to protect him from this invasion. His body rose even higher and began to float slowly across the room where he saw that the screen was already gone. *That's that.* He hoped they would leave it somewhere where Kera would find it in the morning, maybe with some geometrical burn marks or something so she would finally have some proof he hadn't made up all his stories or run away in the night wearing just these striped boxer shorts she had bought at Target. He was glad he had his boxers on though. As he floated through the screenless window, his underwear became the only remnant of human civilization to accompany him on this floating journey to whatever spaceship he assumed lurked nearby.

Out in the cool autumn night, three big-headed creatures floated alongside him. He could feel their cold hands, one on his right arm, another on his left leg, and a third on his neck. They moved him as easily as you would guide a canoe through shallow water. As they flipped him face down for reasons unknown, he felt his penis poke out of his fly. Apparently it had avoided the paralysis. He flashed back to swimming with his brothers and how they had dared each other to take their suits off. He had always hesitated for fear that a prehistoric snapping turtle would see his dangly boy tool as a juicy little snack. Perhaps the creatures flipped him upside down out of kindness, so his member could wave goodbye.

Goodbye to Kera, goodbye to south Minneapolis, goodbye to Planet Earth.

Despite being a bit preoccupied with his precarious johnson-dangling situation, not to mention his probable death (or horrific sexual mutilation) on an unknown spacecraft, he couldn't help but notice what a mess his backyard was. The end of the growing season left bedraggled tomato plants and half-realized garden renovations. *Goodbye to you, my embarrassing attempt at a compost pile.* The stack of wood sat there mocking his intentions of it ever becoming their deck. He pictured Kera staring at the pile out the

patio door, it serving as another reminder of unfulfilled promises while she wondered if her husband had sleepwalked through the backyard and into the alley. Then she'd go back to the bedroom, find the window screen on the floor, full of strange geometric burn holes, and she would know that this time they got him for real.

His main sensation now was not fear, but rather a sort of regret, a regret that perhaps only floating high above his sleeping neighborhood might engender. He noticed all the decks in his neighborhood: finished decks, unfinished decks, decks he could have made for people but didn't, decks his competitors (the ones who hired illegals without compunction) had made far cheaper than his supposedly high-craft Minnesota branded work. It was a dumb idea to drop out of academia to make decks when he wasn't even a good carpenter. Where had he gotten the idea that skill came with the male gender's basic equipment?

Perhaps the aliens were showing him that everything about his life had been leading up to this moment, this revelation of purposelessness. His true calling was not to be a skilled craftsman nor a blue collar day laborer, but the nearly naked Earth ambassador to the creatures from the stars.

He wanted to think that the Discovery Channel, the History Channel, and *National Geographic* had prepared him for this moment. Like Richard Dreyfus in *Close Encounters*, he wanted to say, *yes, yes, I am ready*, but instead drifted off to sleep counting decks.

Russ awoke naked on a metal table, his body illuminated from lamps on flimsy metal tripods. They looked like the lights a small time pornographer would use in his basement. They had cords and the metal was rusty. Lights on a real spaceship wouldn't need cords, and spaceships don't have rust. At least one would assume they wouldn't. Spaceships were supposed to be spotlessly clean; you should be able to eat off their floors. The crappy lights triggered the possibility that he was involved in some kind of elaborate reality TV hoax. The creatures in his room could have been hired dwarves. Or are you supposed to call them little people now? He couldn't remember.

Floating him out the window would have been tough to pull off for a prank show, though he suspected drugs of some kind were used. Can TV studios drug you? Maybe he

would sue when this was all over. Then again, who could have tipped a rogue network off on his alien contact story? Outside his support group, only Kera knew aliens were stalking him, though it's true he had never been fully abducted before. At least, not that he remembered.

Kera hated TV; he couldn't see her being involved in selling his story. And he couldn't imagine any of the wounded narcissists in his support group had the project management skills to sell him out either. Unless, of course, the group had been infiltrated. Faye Dunaway in *Network* wouldn't have hesitated to set something like this up, and that was over twenty years ago. Surely worse things happened now.

One of the *E.T.*-type creatures appeared and moved close enough to Russ' face that he could see his own reflection in the glossy spheres of its eyes. A band of color ran through the iris like a lizard's eyes. The snapping turtle that wanted to bite his dick off had evolved into a cruel intergalactic civilization. The creature's face had two slits roughly in a nose position and one of them seemed to be leaking a viscous trickle. Lizards with allergies. Would Faye Dunaway have thought of that?

The alien tapped the side of its forehead then touched its spongy finger to Russ' temple. Was it indicating a psychic communication was attempting to come through? Russ closed his eyes and tried to send a series of mental questions. *What's going on? Why did you take me? What are you going to do with me?*

The greenish-grey creature put a finger up to its lipless mouth, in Earth culture interpreted as a shushing motion. "You speak. Use words." Its syntax had the staccato rhythm of Tarzan struggling to introduce himself to Jane.

Russ said, "Who?" followed quickly by, "Why?" He had more to say, but his throat felt constricted and dry. Perhaps he should ask for a drink of water.

"Xenu," the little thing said, nodding.

Russ coughed and cleared his throat. "Is that your name? Xenu? Me Russ, you Xenu?"

The name rang a bell for some reason. Where had he heard it before? Did that add or subtract to the possibility of this all being a hoax?

He couldn't think what to ask from his hundreds of questions, so he started with, "Where are my boxer shorts?" He felt some loyalty to that humble article of clothing, as

they had been through the whole levitation-dangling-penis experience together. But before he could get an answer, his body began to shake as if he was cold, though the temperature felt about 70 degrees. The creature looked concerned and put its six-fingered hand on his solar plexus as if to calm him.

“Xenu, what’s happening here?” Russ asked the creature.

A look of what seemed to be horror came over the little creature’s face. “Oh, no, me not Xenu. Xenu most high, most important. Me not important. Me only Grol.”

“Grol,” Russell said. The creature’s thin mouth moved upwards slightly at the ends. A reptilian smile?

“Me Grol.”

“Okay, fine. So—who is this Xenu?”

A taller creature that looked more intelligent wasp than quirky lizard pushed Grol aside. He couldn’t see how this new creature could easily be a human in a costume. It carried a stick with a nasty-looking claw at the end.

In a guttural harsh voice it said, “You are the Professor? Russell Johnson?” It was an identifiable question, though the words sounded more like “Ruzel Zhon-zen.” But it was close enough that Russ nodded in agreement. The professor part didn’t make much sense, since he had barely wrangled a BA in Anthropology out of the University of Minnesota.

It was true that he had been called Professor before, but only as a joke by his friends when they were drinking. He took it as a sign of affection, though it referenced his habit of bringing up odd facts. *Did you know that camels store water in their humps?* That sort of thing. *No, Professor, enlighten us.* Or if these were indeed aliens (a jump he was still unwilling to make), maybe they called all Earthlings “professor” for some reason.

“Yeah, I’m Russell Johnson. Who are you?”

Grol stood behind the insectoid creature, gesturing. His voice faintly said, “Zwat,” as his long green-grey finger pointed to the taller creature. It was *a Zwat* or was it *named Zwat*? It might describe his function, like you’d say cop or soldier. Or torturer. Or executioner. The creature definitely gave off a vibe of being unafraid to use force to back up its authority.

Russ’ surge of anger at Zwat (or *the Zwat*) seemed to reduce the shaking he had been experiencing. He decided to try a different tactic. “Why am I here?” he said loudly and

slowly like a dumb tourist talking to a European. “Who are you? Why have you taken me?” As he was running out of questions, he tried, “Let me speak to... ” Who? Your supervisor? Leader? Yes, go with the classics. “... your leader... yes, let me speak to your leader!”

“Me ask questions,” Zwat said louder. “We have the other actors. Alan Hale is the Skipper. Tina Louise is Ginger. Nearly all of them.”

What the hell was he talking about? Skipper, Ginger? The Professor? He recognized the names from the ancient TV show *Gilligan’s Island*. He knew of the show, of course, and the fact that his name—Russell Johnson—was the same name as the actor who played Professor Roy Hinckley, something that had also been part of his friends’ joke.

“Hey Professor, let’s see that nuclear reactor you made out of coconuts!”

“Hey Professor, you score with Ginger yet?”

But why on Earth were these “aliens” interested in an old television show? And it made even less sense that they were interested in the *actors* on that show, although really none of it made sense. This had to be drugs.

“*Gilligan’s Island...*” Russ said. The Zwat creature seemed to react, possibly positively. He was on to something, but how in the hell did this fit in with bad reality TV? Though there was an obscure irony about kidnapping a man with the same name as a cast member from a 1960s TV show. Whatever their intention, this would end in lawsuits. Blood would flow in the courtroom.

He tried tossing out the leader’s name again. “Xenu? Is Xenu here? Let me speak to Xenu. Take me to your leader!”

Zwat’s expressions were more difficult to read than Grol’s. It seemed to have a completely different kind of mouth apparatus, with teeth coming from all sides of a hole at the end of an elongated snout. Great effects, if that’s what they were.

Zwat’s snout came close to Russ’ face and he smelled licorice and motor oil. It reached a four-fingered hand toward Russ’ genitals. Russ bucked with as much energy as he could muster, given the limited control he had over his body. He felt the cold fingers of Zwat close on his scrotum and give his balls a yank. He winced in pain. This was no medical exam. The thing seemed to be making an interspecies point along the lines of, *Don’t fuck with me, human trash.*

Groin still stinging, Russ felt a bug creeping up his leg and the Zwat sucked it up with a long slimy tongue that left a wet spot on his skin. Cockroaches in space? More evidence that this couldn't be a real spaceship. The aliens had to be in a terrestrial warehouse conducting their experiments. Maybe they were making a movie. *Gilligan's Island*, the alien porno remake.

In the dim glow coming from three incandescent bulbs, he began to make out a third type of being. It was closer to Grol in appearance, but taller and with a larger head, possibly an adult. Grol's head was already too large for his body, so the creature in the shadows took on a comic similarity to a bobble-head. The Zwat stepped backwards, nearly tripping on Grol. They were making room for this new creature to move forward.

As it approached, Russ could see this third presence was wearing a Hawaiian shirt. The shirt was decorated with palm trees and various Italian sports cars in bright primary colors. It had to be a boy's size. This Hawaiian was definitely a creature related to Grol, though its facial features seemed to be animated with a more delicate muscular system, allowing for more expressions. Plus, its skin was closer to a blue tint while Grol's was green. *What the fuck is happening?*

An educated-sounding voice with a hint of a British accent said, "Hello, human, I am Xenu." And then, after a small pause, "Did you actually say... 'Take me to your leader?'" Xenu broke into a laugh, something very close to a human laugh.

Russ started to talk, but Xenu silenced him with a gesture of a finger to its lips.

"Ssh ssh ssh ssh... All your queries will be answered in time. We allow our... interns—I think that's what you would call them—to conduct experiments on your planet. And now, this particular project—why you are here, that is—well, it involves finding the real characters from your television shows and trying out some... alternate scripts our interns have come up with."

"So this is a movie studio? Something to do with *Gilligan's Island*?"

"No, no, Professor, this is our ship, of course. But the project's not exactly working out. Maybe you can help them with it. Since you're the only one..." He didn't finish his sentence.

"Don't probe me and maybe I can help."

“Probe you? Oh, you creatures are always talking about our probe experiments. Those really made quite the impression, I guess, eh?” He laughed again.

What was the technique you were supposed to use on kidnappers? He had seen a documentary once demonstrating the effectiveness of various approaches. Be friendly and helpful. Emphasize your humanity. In this case, emphasize interspecies cooperation and maybe they would let him go.

“How can I help?”

“Light,” Xenu spoke and the walls activated a glow. The room no longer looked like a warehouse and it did have slightly curving walls, though it still didn’t look like any kind of spaceship ever imagined by humans who were paid to imagine such things. It had an unkempt quality. The walls were stained with brown smudges, like you might see in a meth house. Could it be shit? An unfinished paint job the “interns” had bungled? The brighter light revealed several other tables with naked humans lying prone. The odds of Ashton Kutcher jumping out and telling him this was just a big joke seemed to be rapidly decreasing.

The nearest other human was a young African-American boy, possibly twelve. On the gurney next to him was a heavy-set woman, Caucasian, a red head. Her face was made up with dark red lipstick, which Russ associated with the dinner theater or burlesque of some kind. She was a bit too fat to be a stripper, but she had that tired, sinful aura about her. An old white man with a Santa Claus beard and hairy belly was next, followed by an Asian male in excellent shape, possibly thirty. Beyond that, Russ couldn’t make out details.

“Help me out here, Russell Johnson. Or... should I say... the Professor. Correct?”

“Yes, I’m the Professor,” Russ instinctively agreed. It seemed the wrong moment to challenge their extraterrestrial reasoning.

“Great, great,” Xenu said. “Let me introduce the others.”

Xenu walked in front of the comatose African-American boy and gestured like one might do for a normal introduction. “Bob Denver, First Mate.” The boy didn’t move, maybe asleep or in some sort of trance. The creature in the Hawaiian shirt then moved to the overweight entertainer and said, “Tina Louise, the Ginger.” She also seemed to be in the trance. Was the trance next for him?

Xenu pointed to the next two naked bodies. “Alan Hale, Captain. Jim Backus, the Millionaire.” Alan Hale had a thin line of foamy spittle trickling from his mouth.

It occurred to Russ that, for whatever reason, these creatures didn’t understand that on Earth, many people shared the same name, the famous with the un-famous. Seemingly, these poor abductees’ only crime was to share a name with an actor on *Gilligan’s Island*, just as he himself did. Their stark nakedness and precarious state of health negated any possibility of this being anything but a horror.

“You see the problem we’re having,” Xenu said, “they look nothing like they are supposed to.”

“But, I don’t understand.” Russ started, “The show... the actors... share their names with others... and...”

Xenu ignored him. “We try to let our interns operate with a degree of freedom, so they can explore their... creative selves. Make their own mistakes, if you will. Just like you do on Earth in your colleges and trade schools. We learned this from you.”

“But... what is it?”

“The project? As always, we are studying your gender divisions. Men and women. They fascinate us. We devise experiments.”

“But... a television show... ? From the past... ?” Russ couldn’t speak normally. It was like talking to a demon. What can you say to make them stop?

“Yes, of course. We are searching for the moment.”

“The moment?”

“When it shifted. They shifted. The genders.”

“*Gilligan’s Island*?”

“Don’t be such a snob, Professor. This experiment could tell us everything we want to know. If they did it right. If the experiment turned out. But no. Problems, problems, problems!”

“Problems?”

“We have been through several batches of these... Gilliganians. Not only do they always look wrong, they are difficult to keep alive. If they stayed around a little longer... maybe we could figure out what we’re doing wrong. Perhaps it has something to do with spelling?”

“They’re... dead?” Russ interrupted Xenu, which from the look on his face, he didn’t appreciate.

“Well, of course they’re dead. Don’t they look dead?”

“You kidnapped these people... and killed them?”

Xenu rolled his eyes, or some motion that communicated similar exasperation. “This is a lab. This is science. This is art. Shit happens.”

Russ felt his blood pressure climbing and he struggled once again to gain control of his body. He had a sense that the last moments of his life were at hand, spent in a dirty room talking to a monster about *Gilligan’s Island*.

“Well, fuck.” Xenu said, as he turned and walked away. “You’re as useless as the rest.” He gestured to Zwat, “Dump this batch. Restart the project... again!”

The creature’s long toothy snout seemed to form a smile. As his vision went black, Russ knew this was the end. He didn’t even have time to flash his whole life before his eyes.