



In our last episode, the landing pod had touched down on the planet Ong near the wreckage of the ship Vesta. Leaving the pod, the crew found strange footprints in the snow around the pod. Someone had been watching them through the starboard windows.

Matt Piersol

Shatfield, the squad leader, took out a small camera and photographed one of the tracks, setting some goggles next to it for a scale comparison.

Just then, Farzad, the radio monitor, came out of the pod. He had gotten word that the Argus had to break orbit in order to deliver some farm machinery to a neighboring planet called Punt. A storm system threatened the grain harvest there, upon which many depended for food.

The harvest had to be brought in before the storms arrived. That meant the landing party would be on its own for three days.

Farzad and Grossman waited behind to mind the pod and the radio. The rest stretched for a while, then began following the tracks, which led them over a slight rise. The squad's objective was to find any survivors of the Vesta or their descendants — the Vesta had sent out a few radio signals after it had crashed 50 years before.

Soon the wreckage was sighted, and our hero Jack Frost was mesmerized by it. The wreckage was strangely beautiful. It was half buried in snow. Its exposed wings seemed crystalline. Countless icicles of different sizes

grew from them. As the sun crept higher, the wreckage sparkled like a cathedral carved of glass.

Half the squad headed for the wreckage carrying ropes and cutting torches. The rest, led by Shatfield, continued following the footprints.

The landscape was flat and white as a piece of paper. Jack soon grew bored and eavesdropped on a conversation Shatfield and Wong were having.

"Whoever left those tracks might be one of their children. Or one of the natives. They ought to know something anyway. They're leading us right to where the infra-reds spotted fire's burning."

"Why do we have to go on foot? The pod would be quicker."

"Well, the pods only hold enough fuel to get here and back. We could use the jet packs, but they're not dependable in weather this cold. Besides, the exercise is good for you."

"To tell you the truth, I'm not too eager to meet up with any of the natives. Since they're on protected species status, how are we supposed to defend ourselves?"

"The noisemakers have always scared them off before."

"Yeah, well, I read a report on the locals here before we left. A tribe called the Galoots. They're a pretty rude bunch."

"I read it too," Shatfield said. "Hunters mostly. It said they're reputed to castrate and fatten their captives like cattle for cannibalistic feasts. Unless they keep you to chew hides."

"Chew hides?"

"Yeah. They keep slaves sometimes, make them chew hides to soften them. That is, till your teeth fall out. I'm not too worried though. I've been to about a dozen hick planets like this. Even if the worst happens, there

isn't a situation you can't bribe your way out of with a penlight or a butane lighter."

About then the wind stirred and began to blow in fitful gusts. Soon the sky was the color of cement as it filled with clouds. Snow began to swirl around them.

Since a blizzard was a possibility, Shatfield got out the glow-in-the-dark dental floss stuff and tied a strand between them all. They had to walk single-file now. They left a trail like a huge caterpillar.

Wong suddenly barked out this observation:

"Hey, did you notice this? Whoever made these tracks has been walking backwards." Sure enough, the footprints had switched 180 degrees since the onset of the pursuit.

"Why do you suppose they've been walking backwards so long?" Drinkwater asked. "To try to fool whoever might follow them?"

Jack blurted out: "Maybe cause of the wind. They wanted to have the wind at their backs."

They were all puzzled.

For whatever reason, the window-peepers had walked up to two miles backwards. The group took a rest while Shatfield checked his digital compass. Then the crew trudged on, following the vanishing tracks.

Suddenly Wong let out a yelp. He had seen something. "Hey, look at that." He handed his binoculars to Shatfield and pointed at a low hill about 150 yards ahead.

Shatfield looked ahead. His jaw flapped open. "I don't believe it," he said. He rubbed his eyes, knitted his brows then looked again. He waved the column forward. Jack wondered what it was they were running toward.

Shorts

An art exhibit featuring the works of Oscar Pullum from Boys Town, Greg Brown from Morris Junior High, and Ron Sykes from Northwest High School, the area by the cafeteria on the third floor of the hospital.

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Cards & Letters

Local woman calls exercise a disease

First things first. I am neither fat nor skinny. If I were, I wouldn't be writing this letter. I'd be hopping up and down with a lady named Joni who lives in my TV set. I am what used to be known as a normal American female, eight pounds overweight and psychologically "hippy." I enjoy my Snickers bars.

As a normal American female, it is my duty to make the American public aware of a devastating disease which is sweeping our nation. Some people call it "aerobicize," others know it as "jazzercise" and still others swear it's called "believeercise." I prefer calling it "selfercise."

It is the epitome of American self-centeredness. The inflicted are immediately recognizable, donning purple leotards, red legwarmers and Sony

Walkmans. They are lulled into civic halls and exercise factories, where they proceed to jump up and down, legs and arms flying, for 45 minutes a day, three days a week. In the background Michael Jackson is blaring away. In the foreground, Marci, the instructor, is also blaring away... "C'mon folks! Kick, two, higher! You gotta love it!"

And more importantly, everyone is smiling. Smiling while they are sweating and huffing and puffing and moving at unnatural rates of speed, in unnatural contortions. The smile is the key, for it is the disease in its purest form.

Selfercise is the American consciousness knocked out cold. It causes peo-

ple to stop eating candy and onion rings. It makes people's cheeks sink in. Their ribs stick out. The veins in their arms and hands stick out really far. Yuck! And recent scientific studies have even linked selfercise to another American phenomena — buying Cabbage Patch dolls. Same type of folks, I guess.

You know it's a disease when the diseased respond in such contradictory ways — trying desperately to be thin while fighting like heck to get their little pumpkin cakes one of those fat little Cabbage Patch dolls.

Jane Raglin
Lincoln

With your help, we're out to change that.

WERE FIGHTING FOR YOUR LIFE

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