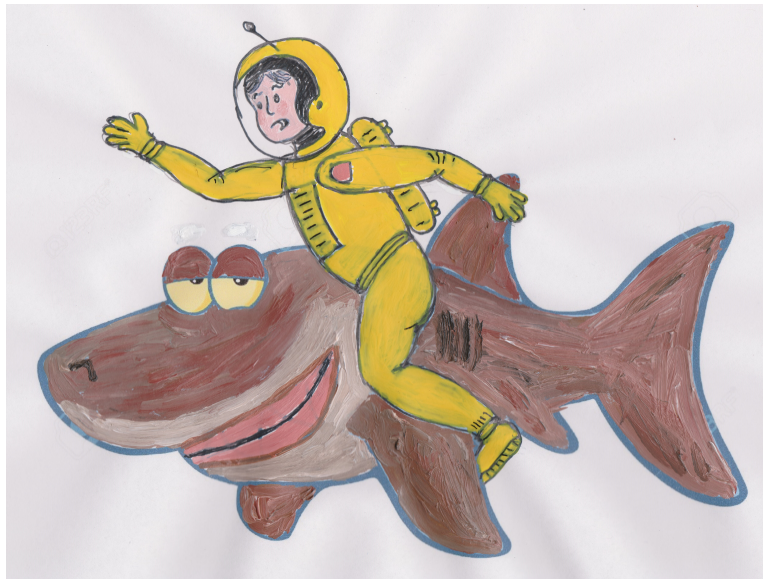


# Moon Charlie and the Dust Shark

By Robert Bee



Charlie had just turned 11 years old and was playing the last moments of the Grand Final in the Under 12s Inter-dome Lunar Netball competition. What was to happen next surpassed any surprises that her beloved netball could throw her way.

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“Gemma, pass to Skyler, to Skyler, quickly.” Charlie was frantic. The clock was ticking over, each second seemed to fly faster than the last. The whistle could blow at any moment.

Charlie, playing Goal Attack, was being marked like glue by the Nightingale’s Goal Defence but Skyler, as the Parrots’ Shooter, was in the clear. Sort of. The Goal Keeper was still floating back down from an earlier giant leap and on the wrong side of Skyler who was bouncing around in tiny slow hops.

“Incoming,” Gemma shouted as she launched a long high pass, over the head of the Nightingales Wing Defence and towards Skyler.

Skyler reached out for the ball, caught it cleanly in both gloves to the cheers of her teammates and launched herself upwards towards the net towering above her. She had just cocked her elbows and sent the ball soaring when there was a terrible sound in all their helmets.

The Full Time whistle. The game was over.

As they watched in disbelief, Skyler’s shot popped straight into the goal and fell through the net. One second too late.

The Newton Nightingales had won the Under 12s Grand Final 16-15. By just one goal. One goal and one second.

Bother!

Brenda was the first Nightingale to bounce over and shake Charlie’s hand. “Good game Charlie, bad luck.” She couldn’t help but notice Charlie’s look of disappointment, as much as she was trying to hide it. “Sorry you had to lose...” Brenda suddenly burst out laughing. “What am I saying? Of course I’m glad you lost. Oh, er...you know what I mean... don’t you?”

It was Charlie’s turn to laugh. “Of course I know. Don’t be such an idiot Brenda. Someone had to win, someone had to lose. Congratulations. But you know we’ll get you next year, don’t you?”

“Ah yes, next year. Under 13s. That will be fun. All those extra rules and gear. But dream on, Charlie. We’ll make it a double.”

“Extras rules?” Charlie said, puzzled, ignoring Brenda’s bragging. “What extra..?”

“Look, I’ve gotta go. Team hugs over there. I’ll see you at the pizza party later?” Brenda suddenly looked worried. “Your Mum is doing pizzas again, like last year, isn’t she?”

“Yeah, sure, but what..?” Charlie watched the back of her room-billetting friend bounce towards the victorious Nightingales squad who were starting to sing their team’s victory song “Nightingales Forever” to some unrecognizable tune as they all linked arms and bounced, badly out of time with each other, causing more laughter than song.

Charlie joined the rest of her team as they slowly bounced off the court towards their coach, Mrs Platt.

“Heads up, you Parrots,” Mrs Platt said. “My gosh, you all look like your favourite cat just died.”

“Huh? Cat? What cat?” came the confused reply from all the girls.

“Exactly, my point,” Mrs Platt said. “You don’t have any cats up here on the Moon so they didn’t die so why are you looking like that?”

There was a long pause, then finally Peta piped up. “But we lost the competition.”

“No, the Nightingales won the competition and well done them,” Mrs Platt said. “You’re the Runners-up, not losers. There’s a big difference.”

“Yeah. We did beat eight other teams,” Skyler said.

“And we’ll beat nine teams next year in the Under 13s,” Mandy added, to the cheers of her teammates.

“That’s the spirit,” Mrs Platt said, pleased her girls had gotten over their doldrums so quickly. “That’s certainly something to look forward to, especially with those exciting extra rules and gadgets for that age group.”

“Extra rules? What...”

“Did she say extra rules..?”

“Mrs Platt, what are you talking about... extra gadgets?”

“Pease tell us... what extra rules?”

“Girls, girls,” Mrs Platt laughed as she held up her space-gloved hands. “When you get to play in the Under 13s next year, there will be some special new things you can do that make the game even more exciting. Someone described it to me as being like Harry Potter’s quidditch in space without the broom sticks.”

There was more excitement from the group of girls, their loss to the Nightingales already forgotten. “Tell us, please,” they all begged.

“Plenty of time for that later,” Mrs Platt said. “Let’s head back to the dome and get cleaned up. With all that exercise you must smell something awful inside those suits. The image of a three day old dead possum comes to mind.”

“Oh, Mrs Platt, yuk!” Charlie said, disgusted at the thought, even though she had never smelled a dead possum, three days old or not. But she could imagine. Yuk!

Charlie and Gemma bounced their way across to their parents who were waiting for them, along with Jacob and Zac. They both wondered what extra rules Mrs Platt was talking about. Then Charlie remembered that Brenda had said the same thing. And gadgets.

“I’ve seen Under 13s playing,” Gemma told Charlie. “There isn’t anything different to our game.”

Charlie had a bright idea. “I know, maybe it’s something that will start next year. Something really new. What could it be?”

“Plenty of time for that later,” Gemma said, doing her best imitation of Mrs Platt’s grown up voice. She and Charlie burst out laughing as they reached their parents and switched to family link.

“What’s so funny,” Mrs Stone asked.

“Plenty of time for that later,” Charlie and Gemma said together, then burst out laughing again.

The four parents looked at each other and shrugged. They had expected their girls to be all upset about the game and here they were laughing their heads off. Thank goodness for that.

“Stupid girls,” Jacob mumbled. Now that he was six, a whole year older than at the time of the previous games, he wasn’t saying that so often. Especially when Skyler kept on being so nice to him. She wasn’t so stupid, he thought. But sisters... they’re different.

Zac was puzzled. If he had lost the annual junior chess championship, after having won it the year before, he wouldn’t be laughing and making jokes like Charlie and Gemma. He’d be... what? Maybe not gloomy or grumpy, but at least unhappy. Upset. Who did these two think they were fooling? Of course they’re upset. They were just doing a good job of hiding it.

“Bad luck Charlie, Gemma. It was sooooo close,” Zac said, hoping to cheer them up.

“Oh well, them’s the brakes, as the shuttle driver said,” Charlie laughed, repeating one of her dad’s awful dad jokes.

Zac nodded. She must really be feeling bad, he thought, if she’s spouting terrible jokes like that. Poor Charlie. It was then that he decided he had to do something, something special, to cheer her and her team-mate friends up. His clever 11 year old nerd brain started ticking over with possible pranks to surprise them, make them really laugh, not pretend laugh. Tick tick tick his clocklike brain went, thinking, thinking. Then Ding! A bell in his head rang. He had it. The perfect prank. It will be delicious. It will be hilarious. And clever. Oh so clever. They didn’t make him the captain of the school’s robotic games team for nothing.

Zac quietly chuckled inside his helmet, forgetting his radio link was on. He smiled, wider and wider, thinking of his plan, then suddenly realized Charlie and Gemma were staring at him.

“C’mon Zac, the joke wasn’t that funny,” Charlie said.

Zac smiled even wider. “You have no idea, Charlie, no idea. Just you wait.”

“Wait for what?” Gemma said, just as puzzled as Charlie was. Zac was behaving strangely, even for him.

“You’ll see, you’ll see.” He noticed the players and spectators all heading towards the various shuttles. He could see that Moe and Curly were already full and turning their giant wheels towards the huge Plato Dome. “I’m off home, I have things to do. Who’s catching Larry with me?” And without waiting for a reply he turned and started bouncing in his best netball-lope towards the fifteen-seater waiting for passengers.

“You go ahead girls,” Charlie’s mum said. “I’m sure Mrs Platt will want to talk to you more. We’ll wait for the shuttles to come back.”

“Watch out Zac, here we come,” Charlie and Gemma cried, and leapt after their friend.

“Hey, wait for me,” Jacob yelled and he started after them.

Zac’s head start did him no good. Warmed up from their game and trained for long high leaps, Charlie and Gemma soon caught up, then overtook him.

“Hey, not fair,” he cried.

“Yes it is,” Charlie called back to him. “You need practice. You should come and train with us sometime.”

“Yeah, that will put some bounce in your bottom,” Gemma added, then burst out laughing at what she had just said.

“We sure left him behind,” Charlie laughed, emphasizing the last word.

“Very funny - not,” Zac said as he finally caught up, thinking that it will be his turn to laugh soon.

They piled aboard the waiting shuttle while Jacob bounced up. As usual, he grabbed the vacant seat next to the driver.

“Hello, Lunar Big Chief Spotter,” Hal Hogan, the driver said. “You riding in the shotgun seat again?”

“Yep,” Jacob said, puffing himself up importantly inside his space suit. “Me watch out for Moon Indians,” he said in his best comic book Indian voice. “They’re heap big trouble.”

“You do that, Chief,” Mr Hogan laughed. “Okay, all buckled in?” he asked his passengers. “Let’s go then.” He engaged the gears and started the shuttle lumbering towards the giant dome. “Better hold on,” he warned. “I may have to whip the horses into a gallop. Big Chief here tells me there may be Indians on the warpath.”

That caused everyone to start calling out “Indians, Indians,” hoping to make Mr Hogan ‘whip the horses’ to go extra fast, but Mr Hogan had other ideas as he drove the shuttle steadily at a safe pace over the rocky moon surface.

But Mr Hogan had a six year old boy of his own, Kenny, so he played along with Jacob’s game. “So, Chief, these Moon Indians, what do they eat out here? There are no buffalo. You can’t grow anything in the Moon’s vacuum.”

Without hesitation, Jacob answered. “They eat fish.”

“Fish?” everyone on the shuttle said, joining in the fun.

“What fish?” Mandy piped up. “You’d need lakes or rivers for fish.”

“Sorry, Jacob, my little hero,” Skyler said kindly, not wanting to embarrass him. “There’s no water on the Moon for lakes or rivers.”

“Der, I know that, I’m not stupid,” Jacob said, adding under his breath ‘like girls.’

“So, where are these fish, Chief?” Mr Hogan asked.

“In the dust craters, of course,” Jacob answered. “Golly gee, if there are sharks in the craters, there have to be fish.”

Mr Hogan was almost afraid to ask, but he did anyway. “Why do there have to be fish?”

“For the dust sharks to eat. Otherwise they’d starve and there’d be no sharks,” Jacob said, folding his arms with a satisfied smirk. “And everyone knows there are dust sharks in the craters.”

Mr Hogan didn’t know what to say to that, but Mandy said it for him. “What kind of fish could live on the Moon?”

“My friend Toby has a book about fish he got from his dad,” Jacob boasted. “It’s got every fish that ever was in it.”

“It must pong,” Mandy laughed.

“Good one Mandy,” Peta laughed even louder. “Phew!” she said, making a gesture of holding her nose, which was not easy with her helmet’s faceplate in the way.

Jacob ignored the girls. “It’s got fish like craterfish...”

“Isn’t that crayfish, Jacob?” Charlie asked her brother.

“... and there’s a moonfish and, and... a half-moonfish...”

“Which half, the head or the tail?” Mandy giggled. She didn’t want to mock Jacob because she really liked him. After all, a year ago he had saved the life of her friend, Skyler. But this fish stuff was just nonsense. Wasn’t it?

“... and there’s a mooneye fish,” Jacob continued. “Just look them up, smarties. And if they don’t live on the moon, why would they call them that?” he finished, his bottom lip starting to tremble a bit.

Suddenly a voice spoke up that surprised them all. “You know, I think he’s right. I think there are sharks in the dust craters, even the one we ski on.” It was Zac.

“What? Are you crazy?” Mandy called out.

“Zac, I thought you were the brainy one,” Donna said. “Boy, was I wrong.”

Jacob twisted in his front seat next to Mr Hogan and turned to spot Zac, two rows behind him. Zac gave him a big wink and a thumbs-up. Jacob beamed a huge smile and settled back into his seat, happy that someone believed him.

Mr Hogan listened to all the youngsters giving Zac heaps and laughed and laughed. Whoever said shuttle driving was boring hadn’t driven this group of eleven year olds. Oh yes, and one very imaginative six year old.

As the shuttle Larry entered the dome through its huge air lock, Zac was also very happy. His plan to cheer up Charlie and the others had just had a huge boost, thanks to Jacob and Toby’s book. Now all he had to do was put it into action.

Operation Moon Shark was go.

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The Pre-Presentation Pizza Party was well under way in the Anglers’ apartment which was speeding round and round in the giant accommodation drum, giving them Earthlike gravity.

Charlie, Gemma, Skyler and Mandy from the Parrots, along with Jenny and Freda from the Kepler Kites and Brenda from the victorious Newton Nightingales (and she wasn’t letting the others forget it) were having a ball, gobbling down the pizzas as fast as Charlie’s mum could bring them in from the kitchen.

Jacob popped in with his friend Toby from time to time, just to grab a slice or two of pizza, then escaped back to the kitchen to work on a Lego model. At the moment they were building a Shark - as big a model as their supply of pieces would let them. Toby had brought his own box of Lego so they had a lot to work with.

Jacob was extra happy as Zac had dropped by, saw the shark taking shape and offered to help them. He also helped eat their share of pizza, which needed more trips to the dining room to grab extra.

Brenda was excited as she retold, for the umpteenth time it seemed to Charlie, how she had held her breath when Skyler took that shot that was just beaten by the full time whistle.

“What about the Talents?” Charlie blurted out, just to shut Brenda’s bragging up for a while.

“What about the Talents?” Freda asked, puzzled.

“Remember last year how their fancy uniforms had us all certain they were so good they would wipe us off the court?”: Charlie said.

“Yeah,” Gemma said. “But it was us...”

“...and all the other teams,” Mandy added.

“...who wiped them off the court,” Gemma finished. “They couldn’t play for peanuts.”

“And who came third in the comp this year?” Charlie said. “Even beating the Aces in the play off.”

The girls stopped chomping the popcorn pizza for a second and thought back.

“Der! It was the Talents,” Charlie said. “So, what about that?”

Everyone took another bite of pizza and with full mouths agreed the Talents were much improved from last year. Charlie remembered her chat with their goalkeeper Megan after their game back then. Megan had said they were going to study videos of all the games and learn from them. Boy, they sure learned quickly.

“If they keep getting better like that,” Charlie said, “they might win next year.”

“Not a chance,” Brenda jumped in. “It’ll be the Nightingales again.” Brenda had to duck when a swarm of olives and pineapple pieces were thrown at her, just as Mrs Angler walked in holding a tray of water bottles.

“Girls, what a mess. No... don’t even think about eating them. The three second rule doesn’t apply to pineapple or olives,” Mrs Angler said. “Just chips. Now, pick them all up and... Brenda, I said don’t eat them... and put them in this bowl. Really, Brenda.”

“Sorry, Mrs. A,” Brenda said, putting a handful of olives and pineapple pieces in the bowl, but secretly popping another olive in her mouth when she saw Charlie’s mum wasn’t watching her.

After Mrs Angler had gone back to the kitchen, Gemma picked up a surviving slice of Hawiain pizza and held it above her head, pointed end up. She moved it around in small circles, staring at it.

“What on Luna are you doing?” Freda said.

“I wonder what they’d taste like,” Gemma said, ignoring Freda’s question.

“What what would taste like?” Jenny said.

“A moon shark,” Gemma said, pointing at the pierce of pizza.

“Poor thing,” Brenda said, popping another picked up olive from the bowl into her mouth. “Losing the comp has made her mad. Gemma, that’s a slice of pizza.”

“No, it’s a shark’s dorsal fin. Zac said they swim in the dust crater where we ski.” Gemma burst out laughing when Brenda choked on the olive and Freda had to slap her back a few times until she was better. “Really, Brenda,” Gemma imitated Mrs Angler.

“Charlie, what is Gemma babbling about? Dust sharks?” Freda asked.

Charlie explained to her friends who hadn’t been on shuttle Larry all that Jacob had said about moon Indians, moon fish and moon sharks. Then she told them how Zac had shocked everyone on board by agreeing with Jacob, at least about moon sharks.

“Boy, and I thought Zac was clever,” Brenda said.

“That’s what I said,” Mandy protested.

“Did I hear my name?” a voice said from the doorway.

All the girls turned to see Zac standing there grinning, while Jacob and Toby stood beside him, holding something behind their backs.

“Show them what you’ve got there Jacob, Toby,” Zac said.

The two younger boys did a little twist and turn and held out their surprise. The seven girls all gasped as one, then Mandy added a squeal.

It looked really scary. The model was about eighty centimeters long, with a big double tail at one end and a big mouth, full of horrible teeth at the other. Just like Gemma's slice of pizza, there was a tall pointed dorsal fin on its back and a long pectoral fin on each side. But worst of all were the eyes. Big angry eyes that seemed to follow you all around the room.

"Ta-ra!" Zac made a dramatic gesture at the model he had helped the boys make. "Behold... Pistis Lunaris."

"What?" said Charlie, wondering if Zac had just said something rude.

"Der!" Zac shook his head. "It's Latin for Moon shark, Charlie."

Suddenly Jacob took the model from Toby and ran into the room with it. "Moon shark, moon shark," he yelled as he made it attack each of the girls, chasing them around the room. It seemed so real, the girls forgot it was only a Lego model and screamed as they tried to escape from its teeth.

Zac and Toby laughed and laughed from the doorway as they watched the girls tripping over themselves trying to get away, screaming louder every time Jacob managed to touch the shark's nose against them. Freda hid behind the sofa and Jenny tried to squeeze in with her. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough room for two and Jenny's bottom was sticking out as Jacob ran past.

"Gobble gobble," Jacob laughed as he pressed the shark's toothy jaws against Jenny's behind. He was rewarded with a loud shriek from Jenny, then he turned to chase Charlie who was trying to get past Zac and Toby who were blocking the doorway.

Jacob was just about to give the shark a chunk of Charlie when Brenda and Gemma ganged up and tackled him from behind, dragging him to the floor in a giggling pile.

Sadly for the shark, Jacob was so surprised by the tackle that he dropped the shark. Zac gasped, reached out to catch it but missed by thaaaat much. The shark hit the carpeted floor and broke into pieces. The tail went one way, the dorsel fin that way, each pectoral fin went another way and the head landed at Toby's feet.

There was sudden silence in the room as the girls saw what happened. They all looked at Jacob, expecting the worse.

Jacob stood up slowly and looked at the broken sections of shark. Charlie could see his bottom lip starting to quiver, his eyes water, his shoulders start to heave, but before the volcano could erupt, Zac stepped up like a big brother, patted him on the shoulder and said: "That was great fun Jacob. Did you see the girls run from your shark? Boy, did you show them."

Jacob looked up at Zac. "Yeah, they were really scared, but..." He picked up the shark's head "... look at my shark. It's..."

"Toby," Zac said quickly, cutting Jacob off. "Help pick up the pieces. I have an idea to make the shark even better. And bigger. And more real."

"More real?" Jacob said, his tears forgotten. "Wow. C'mon Toby, let's go, grab some pieces and back to the Bat-kitchen."

Soon Jacob and Toby had all the pieces in their arms and hurried back to the kitchen. Charlie and her friends picked themselves up, gulped a bottle of water each which, by some miracle, hadn't been knocked over in the shark attack, and settled down to party again. They all agreed that had been fun... sort of, though Jenny had the crazy urge to feel her backside to make sure it still all there.

Zac caught Charlie's eye. He made a lunging, biting action like a shark, then winked and smiled, before turning to join the boys in the kitchen.

I wonder what that was about, she thought. Oh well, boys and their toys. "Who's for more pizza?" she asked.

"Is the Moon round?" Skyler laughed.

"Yes please," the others chorused and, as if by magic, Charlie's mum came through the door carrying a plate piled with pieces of popcorn pizza.

"Sorry, girls, there would be more pieces here but I was attacked by a horrible shark in the kitchen and it got away with three pieces," Mrs Angler said.

"What?" Charlie said, pretending to be outraged. "Jacob, Tony, Zac," she called out. "Just you wait."

Down the hall in the kitchen, while munching on his delicious slice of popcorn pizza, Zac heard Charlie. Over a generous mouthful, he smiled to himself. "Oh no, Charlie, just you wait. This was only the beginning."

The Games Junior Netball Presentation Ceremony had just ended. The Newton Nightingales had received the Under 12s Cup and Brenda the U12s Best Player Award. Charlie would never hear the end of that for a long while.

But there was a huge plus. Charlie had been thrilled to see Jessica Strong again. Jessica, who was there to do the presentations, was now captain of the Australian Diamonds but she still remembered Charlie and Jacob from last year's games. She was also better at walking in the low gravity on the Moon. She had finally managed to get away from the adult games and dome officials and was mixing with the young players and their families during the drinks and nibbles in the huge dome plaza.

"How Big Chief Lunar Spotter," Jessica said to Jacob when she came across Charlie with her brother. She held her right arm up in the traditional Indian greeting. "Saved anymore fair squaws lately?"

Jacob was so surprised he almost choked on his soft drink. Jessica gently slapped his back a few times until he regained his breath. Jessica then turned to Charlie. "Hi Charlie, bad luck in the grand final. It was a near thing with that last shot by Skyler."

Charlie was glad she hadn't just taken a mouthful of drink too or she would have choked. "You heard about that?" she asked, amazed that the captain of the Diamonds would be interested in an under 12s game. Then she took a sip of her drink.

"No, I saw it. I was there," Jessica said.

Charlie choked on her drink and received the same slapping treatment from the Diamonds captain.

"Is it something about living on the Moon that makes everyone choke on their drinks around here?" Jessica laughed. "Is it the low gravity?"

"You were watching?" Charlie asked. "Wow, wait till I tell the others." She looked around for Gemma and Skyler.

"Before you do, Charlie, can I ask you something?" Jessica Strong lowered her voice. "Something really important?"

Charlie wondered what she, an 11 year old, could possibly tell the captain of the Diamonds. "Uh, sure," she said. "What is it?"

"I'm going to do some dust skiing before I return to Earth," Jessica said. "I hear it's a lot of fun."

Ah, Charlie thought. She wants some advice on how to ski in low gravity. "Right, yes it is. Heaps of fun. So, what do you want to know?"

Jessica looked around the plaza where they were standing with the others. She bent her tall frame down and lowered her voice even more. "Is it true about there being sharks in the crater?" she whispered, a worried look on her face. "It wouldn't do for me to be eaten by one just before the coming test series with the Silver Ferns."

Charlie was speechless. Of all the things she could be talking to the captain of the Australian netball team about, her dreams come true, but this? She suddenly realized her mouth was wide open so she shut it with a loud plop. "Wha... wha... where... who... I'm sorry... what?"

"Dust sharks. I've heard they're swimming in the Dusty Lake where you ski," Jessica said. "Is it true?"

Charlie looked around at Jacob who was busy demolishing another blueberry muffin. "Have you been talking to him?" she asked, pointing to her brother.

"No... well yes, but not about sharks," Jessica said.

"Then who told you..?"

"Oh, no-one told me. I just overheard it when I was getting a drink over there," Jessica pointed to the drinks table.

Charlie looked in that direction and saw a group of her friends happily chatting. There was Gemma, Skyler, Mandy, Brenda, Freda, Jenny and... Zac. At that moment Zac looked across and saw her. He waved, made a dorsal fin gesture with his hand, then turned back to the chatting group.

"Zac," Charlie said, not happy with her friend and louder than she meant to.

"What?" Jessica asked.

"Yes, him," Charlie said.

"Who?"

"Who you just said, Watt, my friend Zac Watt."

"I'm new up here remember, Charlie. Zac who?"

Charlie suddenly realized Jessica's confusion. "Oh, that's his name. Not Who, but Watt. W – A – T – T."

Jessica burst out laughing at the mix-up, causing a number of people nearby to look around and smile, while Jacob shook his head and said "I don't get it. What's so funny? Stupid girls."

"I'm glad we sorted that out, Charlie. But you didn't answer my question."

"Which question?" Charlie said, desperately hoping Jessica had forgotten.

"Dust sharks in the crater?"

"Oh, that question." Charlie sighed. "No, there aren't any," she said and pointed at Jacob. "He just made them up."

"You mean Big Chief Lunar Spotter Jacob?" Jessica laughed. "Telling fibs?"

Jacob turned when he heard his name. "What did I do now?" he complained.

"You and your stupid dust sharks," Charlie said.

"They're not stupid, they're real. Ask Zac," Jacob said, his voice rising.

"Ask me what?"

Charlie and Jessica Strong looked around. Zac and Charlie's group of friends had wondered over, curious about the conversation they could see Charlie having with the famous guest.

"Charlie's telling this lady that dust sharks aren't real," Jacob said. "They are real, aren't they? You tell her Zac."

Everyone looked at Zac. Jacob with a trusting smile. After all, his big friend Zac wouldn't lie to him. Charlie and all her friends with skeptical 'pull the other leg' smiles, and Jessica Strong with a patient smile, curious about what Zac would say.

Zac gulped as he looked up at Jessica Strong, and he had to look a long way up. She was very tall. He couldn't tell whoppers to this celebrity like he could his friends. What could he say? Then he decided. Tell the truth. Sort of.

"Jacob, remember that Lego shark we made last night. Was that real?" Zac asked.

Jacob thought about that, frowning. "It was only a model shark," he finally said. "Not a real shark. That would be silly. Real sharks aren't made of Lego."

"But it was real," Zac said, emphasizing the 'was'. "It was a real model." Then he pointed at the girls standing around him. "And you all thought it was a real shark," he smirked, folding his arms.

"We did not too," Charlie said, echoed by the others.

"You did so too," Zac laughed. "If not, why did you all run away from it?" He pointed at Jenny. "How's your bum, Jenny?"

Before she could stop herself, Jenny put a hand to her bottom as if to check it was still there, then pulled it back again. "Oooh, I'll get you, Zac," she fumed.

"Don't get me," Zac said. "It was the shark that bit your bottom."

Jessica Strong was clearly enjoying this exchange. "So, what are you saying, exactly, Zac?"

"All I am saying is I believe the dust shark in the crater is as real as that Lego model was real," Zac said.

Jessica stroked her chin in thought. "I see..." she said, nodding slowly.

Charlie stomped her foot in frustration. "Well I don't. Oooh Zac, you can be so... so... oooh. Is it real or isn't it?"

Zac gave Charlie and her friends his biggest smile. "Only one way to find out," he said. "Now I'm hungry again. All this talk about sharks has given me an appetite. A real appetite. See you all later." Zac gave a little wave to Jessica Strong, then moved away towards one of the refreshment tables, his eyes on a freshly arrived plate of sausage rolls.

"Just a second, Zac," Jessica called out. "Bye girls, been nice talking to you. I look forward to next year's comp. Especially how the Talents go. Oh, and Skyler, try to be a little faster with those shots. It can make a big difference to the game." Jessica started to walk after Zac.

"Don't tell her that," Brenda spluttered, knowing that Skyler being one second faster would have cost the Nightingales the trophy and her the Best Player award.

Charlie and the girls watched Jessica catch up with Zac and walk on with him. Straining their ears, they could just catch a snippet of their conversation over the background noise.



“... so would... be safe... skiing?” Jessica had said.

“Yes... shark... real... but ... trust...” Zac had said. He then seemed to explain something to her, jiggling his hands about as if he was on some video game controller, but the girls couldn’t catch any of it.

What did all that mean, Charlie thought, frustrated.

Whatever it was that Zac had said, it made Jessica burst out laughing. She clapped her hands, looked over her shoulder at Charlie and the others, smiled and gave a wave, then turned back and gave Zac a friendly pat on his shoulder, making all the girls as jealous as can be. “Zac, for a science nerd, you would be a great netball player. Have you ever thought of playing?” she said, quite clearly this time.

But Zac’s reply was lost in the crowd’s hubbub as they walked further away. The girls all formed a huddle, casting glances over their shoulders at Zac happily nibbling away at a sausage roll. Jessica Strong had joined a group of adults in conversation.

“Did you hear that?” Charlie spluttered. “Zac play netball?”

“She can’t be serious,” Gemma added.

“No way,” Brenda smirked.

“Boys don’t play netball,” Skyler said.

“Not now,” said Mandy, “but you never know what the future will...”

“Nup, trust me, it will never happen,” Charlie said. “And that’s for real.”

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It was two weeks after the Netball Presentation. Jessica Strong had enjoyed her skiing trip on Dusty Lake, showing quite a talent for it. She had then admitted to her minders that she water skied regularly back on Earth so had an advantage. The important thing was Jessica had survived without being attacked by one of Jacob’s dreaded moon sharks. This came as no surprise to the moon locals as they had never seen one in all the years they had been skiing and wondered what Jessica was talking about.

Life for Charlie and her friends had finally gotten back to normal. Brenda, Jenny and Freda had returned to their domes, promising to keep in touch. Brenda vowed the Newton Nightingales would win again next year in the U13s while Freda and Jenny said ‘in your dreams,’ it will be the Kepler Kites.

Jacob got his room back.

Charlie, Gemma and the others were back at school, doing gym, in-dome netball and having a great time playing together. The loss of the competition, or rather being runners-up, was a distant memory, long forgotten.

But not for Zac. He was determined to carry out his super-prank, certain that, no matter how well she hid it, Charlie was still upset and needed the laugh that the prank would bring.

“Have you seen Zac?” Charlie asked Mr Watson that afternoon. Mr Watson was the dome’s resident astronomer and a good friend of Zac’s. “I haven’t seen him after school for ages.”

Freddie Watson laughed. “You and me both,” he said. “He’s usually pestering me for the latest news about passing asteroids, but he’s been very quiet since the games finished. You might try the spare school science laboratory. He sometimes borrows it for his robotics projects.”

Charlie thanked Mr Watson and headed to the Administration Drum, hopped into its Gogo room, enjoyed the change from one sixth to full gravity, then went to the school science lab section. There were three science laboratories. Charlie poked her head into the first and saw the high school science teacher Mr Sumner-Miller busy sorting out instruments which she had no clue what they were for. But there was no Zac.

The second laboratory was all set up with glass flasks, bottles, tubes and Bunsen burners, ready for some smelly chemistry experiments. But no Zac.

Charlie continued down the corridor and came to laboratory number three. The door was closed. She went to open it but found it was locked. “Hmph,” she said, raising her hand to knock, but then she saw the sign

It was written in large, bold, bright red letters.

“BUSY! DO NOT DISTURB!”

Then in slightly smaller, but not much smaller, letters, it said:

“THIS SPECIALLY MEANS YOU CHARLIE”.

Charlie stared at the sign, her mouth hanging open. “What on the Moon?” she grumbled. Annoyed, she rapped loudly on the door. “I know you’re in there Zac, open this door.” She paused, then added sweetly. “Please?”

“Go away Charlie,” Zac said from inside, his voice almost drowned out by the sound of an electric drill whizzing away. “Please,” he added.

“Zac Watt,” Charlie said with her best ‘school teacher’ voice, “I am not going anywhere until you tell me what you are doing in there. This instant.”

The sound of the drill stopped. Something heavy banged on the work table. A moment later, there was the sound of a latch being unlocked and the door creaked open, but by less than a centimeter. Zac stood against the gap so that Charlie, who was craning her neck to peep into the laboratory, couldn’t see past him.

“Hullo Charlie,” Zac said. “How’s tricks?”

Charlie placed her fists on her hips and glared at Zac. “Where have you been all these days after school?”

“Well, I...”

“And what are you doing in there with all that drilling and stuff?”

“Well, I...”

“And what does this sign mean? Why especially me?”

“Well, I...”

“You have some explaining to do mister,” Charlie said, pointing one finger at Zac’s nose.

“I’m trying, if you’ll just give me a chance,” Zac laughed.

Charlie folded her arms. “Well, I’m waiting.”

Zac shrugged. “I’m working on a project.”

“What project?” Charlie said. “A school project?”

“Well, no, it’s a special project,” Zac said, sneaking a look over his shoulder at whatever it was on the work bench.

“Oh Zac, tell me,” Charlie insisted. “Please, please, please.”

“Sorry, I can’t.”

“Pretty pretty please?” Charlie tried batting her eyelids at Zac.

“Sorry, that won’t work, no.”

“Ooooh, you’re so... so... why not?” Charlie stomped her foot.

“It’s a secret,” Zac said. “Only two people know, and you’re not one of them.”

“Who are the two people who know?” Charlie said.

“Well, me... obviously, and someone else.”

“Who?”

“That’s a secret too,” Zac said. “Sorry, I’d love to talk but I have work to do. Got to go. Bye.” Zac started to shut the door.

“Wait,” Charlie cried out. “When will we see you again? Outside of school, I mean.”

“Are you going dust skiing tomorrow?” Zac asked.

“Yes, me and my family, and the other kids,” Charlie said. “The usual.”

“Good, I’ll see you there. Bye.” Zac shut the door and latched it. A moment later, Charlie could hear banging, then the electric drill, then more banging.

Charlie stood outside the shut door, stewing. What on the Moon is Zac building? And who’s the other person in on the secret? And why isn’t it her? Boy, for a cute nerd, he could be annoying. She sighed a big sigh, turned and headed back to the Gogo room to go home for dinner. Tomorrow was going to be a great day for dust skiing. As she was always telling Gemma, the weather was going to be perfect. Whatever Zac was up to, it wasn’t going to affect her.

Boy, was she wrong!

The weather at Dusty Lake was perfect. No air, so no wind. No water, so no clouds or rain. Just the big beautiful Earth hanging overhead and stars. Lots of stars.

Charlie, with her mum, dad and Jacob, had arrived at the small crater in the shuttle Moe. Gemma and her parents came with them, plus Skyler and her mum and dad. Zac's dad was on Moe too but there was no sign of Zac.

"Mr Watt," Charlie said as they jumped down from Moe, "where's Zac? He said I would see him here today."

"Oh, he came on ahead earlier on Curly, with Hal Hogan. Told me he had something special to do," Mr Watt said. "If I didn't know better, I'd say that boy's up to something, but I've no idea what." He patted Charlie on her space-suited shoulder. "Let me know if you find out, hey Charlie?" As he turned and walked away, Charlie could hear him chuckling. "One thing's for sure, life is never dull with Zac for a son."

Well, Charlie thought to herself. Zac's dad is not the other person who knows Zac's secret. Interesting. So, who could it be?

As she and Gemma hopped into the small buggy that was going to take them around to the opposite side of the lake to start their first ski run, Charlie looked all around the crater. There were already two people scooting across the lake's surface, throwing up a huge wake of moon dust behind them as the cable winch pulled them in. One adult was being pulled by a jet ski off to their side, doing kinky twists and turns and jumps. That looked like heaps of fun, Charlie thought but knew she couldn't try that until she turned fifteen. Something else to look forward to.

All around the lake, there were families either watching the skiers or playing out-dome games. Like throwing frisbees.

It was amazing how far you could throw a frisbee on the Moon. As there was no air to slow it down or give it lift, it was just like throwing a ball. With the low gravity, a frisbee or a ball, as Charlie knew from her netball games, could go a long, long way.

Gemma and Charlie had travelled almost to the opposite side of the lake from the big winch, to where they would start their ski ride, but as much as she looked, Charlie couldn't see Zac. He had been working on his secret 'special project' and he was coming out here today. Were the two connected? Is that why he came out to the lake early? So many questions, Charlie thought, but no answers. And no Zac.

Just before they reached their ski launching point, Mr Stone, who was driving, stopped the buggy suddenly, almost causing Charlie and Gemma to fall off. "Well, will you look at that," Gemma's dad said, then burst out laughing.

Charlie followed the direction of Mr Stone's pointing arm. There was a small group of space-suited people, adults and children, standing at the shore of the lake. They formed a rough semi-circle around something, pointing and taking photos. She couldn't quite see what it was they were looking at. "What is it?" Charlie asked.

Mr Stone had to stop laughing to answer her. "Why don't you and Gemma go across and look?" Then he burst out laughing again.

Gemma and Charlie exchanged puzzled glances, then stepped off the buggy and hopped towards the crowd at the lake shore. As they did, they switched their radios to the public link so they could hear what the other people were saying. Most of what they heard didn't make a lot of sense, especially since most of it was drowned out by laughter.

"Where did he come from...?"

"Is he real? No, he can't be, surely not..."

"Has he caught anything yet?"

"What's he using for bait?"

"What on the Moon are they talking about?" Charlie asked Gemma as they gently worked their way through the crowd.

"Beats me," Gemma said just before she finally made it to the front. Then "Oh my... golly gosh," as she saw what was there. "Oh, Charlie, you won't believe this. Look."

Charlie reached Gemma and looked. And looked again. Then she laughed out loud, slapped Gemma on the shoulder and said "Zac, he really did it this time." Switching quickly to her family link, she said "Daddy, quickly, bring Jacob with you. He's going to love this."

There, sitting on a large moon rock by the edge of the dusty lake, was an Indian. It was about the same size as Charlie, had red skin and was wearing an Indian vest, knee length fur trousers and moccasins on its feet. There was a cloth band around its forehead and three large white feathers sticking up at the back. To top it all off, the Indian had white war paint on its face, a face which stared intently out into the lake as it waited for something, a moonfish

perhaps, to take the bait at the end of the line which ran from the fishing pole held firmly in the Indian's hands. Every few seconds, the Indian raised the rod a bit to check for a bite, then lowered it again with an exaggerated shrug of its shoulders. Then waited patiently again.

It looked so lifelike. A real Moon Indian.

So that's what Zac had been up to. His special project to make the Moon Indians Jacob had talked about real. And if the Indian is 'real', then so too are the moonfish, and then so are the moon sharks. Suddenly Charlie realized that this is what he had secretly told Jessica Strong.

Very clever, Zac, Charlie thought. Very clever.

Charlie walked back through the amused crowd towards the buggy but then saw Zac, sitting on another large rock, a remote controller in his hands.

"Hi Charlie, do you like it?" Zac said.

"I love it," Charlie said. "And here comes Dad with Jacob. He's going to be over the moon about it."

"Boom boom!" Zac laughed.

"But how did you do it? And why? Just for Jacob?"

"The how was easy. I used my robotics skills, an old mannequin dummy my Mum had and some old clothes and some paint. A snack," Zac said.

"But how did you get it out here without being seen?"

"Ah, that's where the second person into my secret came in. I needed someone to drive me and big chief out here early..."

"Mr Hogan," Charlie said. "Of course."

"And for Jacob? Yes, the little squirt needed a lift after all that ribbing he got. But Charlie," Zac said, "I did it mostly for you."

"For me? Why...?"

"I wanted to cheer you up after you lost the netball comp," Zac said.

"Oooh, Zac," Charlie stamped her foot, raising a small cloud of moon dust. "How many times do I have to tell you I don't need cheering up. I'm fine. I'm over it."

Hmmm, Zac thought. Sure you are. Not. "Okay, if you say so. I'd better go and check the fisherman," Zac said. "You go and enjoy your skiing." He got off the rock and turned towards the fishing Indian who still had an amused crowd gathered around it. "Oh, and Charlie..."

"Yes, Zac?"

"Watch out for dust sharks." Zac gave a wave and walked away.

Oh boy, that's one thing I don't have to worry about, Charlie mumbled to herself as she hopped back towards the lunar buggy with Mr Stone and Gemma. Zac has used up all his tricks.

Boy, was she wrong. Again.

\*

"Wheee!" Charlie squealed with delight as she and Gemma sped across the surface of Dusty Lake on their ski boards, being pulled at high speed by the large winch on the far side of the crater. She had already had two great trips across the lake, each one fast and exciting as she learned to lean from side to side to weave the board about in little curves, not just a monotonous straight line. This made fantastic patterns in the dusty wake on the surface of the lake behind her, just like it would on a real water lake on Earth.

"Alright Charlie, that's enough for today," her dad said when she reached the shore. "Time to head home."

"Oh, Daddy, please, just one more go," Charlie pleaded. "Please."

Mr Angler looked at Charlie's mum. Mrs Angler shrugged. "Why not," she said. "But definitely the last run."

"Oh, thank you, thank you," Charlie said, giving her mum and dad an awkward space suited hug, then bounced as fast as she could to the lunar buggy before they could change their minds.

Mr Hogan had taken over the ski shuttling duty from Gemma's dad. He gave a shake of his head in his helmet as Charlie jumped on board. "You are so wicked, Miss Angler, twisting your parents around your little finger like that." But he smiled as he said it.

"I'm wicked?" Charlie laughed. "What about you and Zac, pulling that robot Indian trick."

"That wasn't wicked. It was good fun," Mr Hogan protested. "Everyone enjoyed it."

"Yes, but he kept it a secret. From me. Ha!" Charlie huffed.

Mr Hogan laughed again. He had a nice laugh. "Get over it Charlie." Then he looked around. "You by yourself? Where's your shadow, Gemma?"

"Oh, she's had enough skiing and went home. It's just me this time."

"Hmm, is that safe, out there by yourself? What about the dust sharks?"

"Rrrrrrr! Don't you start, Mr Hogan, please," Charlie said. "Zac's bad enough."

"Sorreeee! Let's go then. All... that's you... aboard."

When they reached the far side of the lake, Mr Hogan helped Charlie lock on her ski-board and double checked her safety line was securely attached. Then he radioed the winch operator to get ready. After Charlie had the cable handle firmly in her grip, he patted her helmet to say 'have a good one,' then gave the winch operator the 'Go' signal. But, just as the cable slack was taken up and Charlie started to be pulled across the dust, Mr Hogan said those dreaded words: "Don't fall in, now."

Of course, she did. Halfway across, having the time of her life, Charlie got a bit overconfident and she leaned a little too far in one swerve. She overcorrected and went too far the other way. Each wobble got bigger and bigger – fishtailing they call it – until Charlie went spilling sideways, letting go of the cable and splashing, rather dustily into the lake. "Yowies" she cried out to anyone listening, then went down deep under the dust.

Here I go again, Charlie thought, then let out a sigh of relief as she checked and found her safety line was still connected. At least they will find me easily this time.

She was also happy to find she was right way up and not upside down. Any moment now she would feel the tug on her safety line as it gently pulled her to the surface to be collected by the rescue jet ski.

But just then, she felt something completely different. Something unexpected.

Something bumped into her leg.

Then it was gone.

"What was that?" Charlie said, forgetting that in the dust, no-one could hear her radio.

Then it happened again, this time higher up her leg.

Charlie fought the urge to scream. That would be silly. There's nothing to be frightened of in moon dust.

This time, whatever it was, nudged her hip, then her tummy, then slid up higher and higher until it bumped the bottom of her helmet. Charlie, holding her breath and hoping that this might all just be a dream, slowly worked her arms up through the thick dust to touch the object. Maybe it was a piece of broken something which had sunk in the dust and was now floating up past her. A lost ski board, perhaps. She took a deep breath of relief. Of course, that's what it was. How silly she'd been to worry.

At that point, her hands found the object and she pulled it towards her helmet for a better look.

This time she did scream.

She was looking into two large black eyes, one on either side of a huge blunt grey nose, under which was a wide mouth of... nothing. No teeth. Just gums.

A moon shark? No, impossible.

Charlie let go in surprise and the... thing... backed away from sight.

"Yowsie yowsie yowsie..." Charlie said over and over. Where did it go? And what was it? It couldn't be... could it? One of Jacob's stupid sharks? Was Zac right after all? No no no no...

"Yikes," she said as suddenly the... what..? ...shark? ...came up under her and nosed in between her legs. It nudged gently, pushing her legs further apart until she was sitting on its back. Then it gently rose up, pushing her through the dust until her helmet broke above the lake's surface.

“Hey,” she called out to whoever could hear her. “I’m over here. Help”

By then, she was almost fully out of the dust except for her legs which, when she looked down to see, were straddling the body of the... shark. She could just see that each leg was tucked behind a low pectoral fin and, when he carefully felt behind her, there was this stubby dorsal fin on its back.

“Oh my, oh my,” she said, now more confused than afraid. What on the moon is going on here?

“Be there in a tic Charlie.” It was Mr Hogan on a jet ski, coming towards her in no great hurry. After all, she didn’t look in any kind of danger.

“Hurry, hurry, please, it’s got me,” Charlie called out.

“What’s got you?” Mr Hogan said as he came up to Charlie. By then, the shark had sunk out of sight and Charlie was floating in the dust as she normally would have, head and shoulders above the surface.

As Mr Hogan pulled her gently onto the jet-ski, Charlie said “did you see it. Did you?”

“Did I see what Charlie?”

“The shark. The dust shark. You had to see it... it was right there.” Charlie pointed to where she had been floating in the dust.

Mr Hogan shook his head. “Now don’t you go making fun of me, Charlie Angler,” he said in a slightly peeved voice. “You were the one who got cranky on me about mentioning sharks. ‘Don’t you start’ I seem to remember you saying. ‘Zac’s bad enough’ you said too. Now here you are talking about a shark.” He started the jet-ski towards the shore where Charlie’s parents were waiting. What Charlie didn’t see when Mr Hogan turned away was the wicked grin on his face.

“I’m sorry, really I am. It’s just it was so real.” Charlie sighed. If it wasn’t a shark, then what was it?

As they reached the shore and Charlie stepped off the jet-ski, Mr Hogan stopped her. “I know you saw something. Now Zac is pretty smart for an eleven year old. Too smart sometimes. Maybe if you talked to him, he might know what it was. Take care now, bye.” With that, he gunned the jet-ski and headed back across the lake.

“Thank you,” Charlie called after him, then bounced towards her mum and dad. Jacob raced up to her in long low hops.

“Did you see it, did you see it?” he said, as excited as she had ever seen her little brother. “I told them, I told them.”

“Yes, I did see it and, yes you did tell them,” she said, relieved that someone else had seen the shark. “It was really...”

“I’m going to call him Chief Fishes by the Lake.”

“What?” Charlie said, thinking that was a strange name for a shark.

“It’s the way Indians are named, like Chief Field Full of Buffalo, or Chief Hunter of the Deer,” Jacob explained, being an expert on red Indians.

“Oh,” Charlie said, a bit deflated. He was talking about Zac’s Indian robot. “So you didn’t see..?”

“See what?” her mum asked.

“Um, er... oh, my big stack off the ski board. I bet it made quite a splash,  
Charlie said.

“I’ll say,” her dad laughed. “The dust is still settling down on the lake. Are you okay? You look a bit... funny.”

Charlie didn’t know what to think. She was sure she had been rescued by a shark. And it was a rescue, not an attack, she now realized. She was sure Mr Hogan knew about it but pretended not to and hinted Zac knew something about it too, but what? But no-one else saw what had happened. Oh bother, bother, bother. “No, I’m fine Daddy,” she fibbed. “Can we go home now?”

\*

The next day, Zac’s fishing Indian robot was the talk of the school and even the whole dome. Zac was Celebrity of the Day and a lot of that celebrity was reflected on Jacob who had been the source of Zac’s inspiration. If Moon Indians weren’t real, Chief Fishes by the Lake was the next best thing to it.

After school, Charlie followed Zac as he slipped away to his science lab. Just as Zac was unlocking the lab’s door, Charlie caught up with him.

“Zac Watt, I want to talk to you.”

Zac almost jumped out of his skin. “Oh, hi Charlie.”

Charlie laughed. “Oh Zac, you look like you’d just seen a moon shark.”

“A what?” Zac said, a bit confused, or was he pretending to be?

“A pistis lunaris,” Charlie said. “That’s what you called it, remember?”

“Yes, so what?”

Charlie smiled at Zac sweetly. “I know, Zac. I know your secret.”

“My secret?”

“Your secret project.” Charlie stamped a foot. “Ooooh, don’t treat me like an idiot, Zac. Mr Hogan told me.”

“Ah, that secret. Not the fishing Indian?”

Charlie stomped her foot again. “Nooooooo! The other secret.”

“Ah, the pistis thingemy. I made that up, by the way,” Zac said, smiled proudly, then saw that Charlie wasn’t smiling with him. “So... Mr Hogan told you?”

“He said you would know all about the moon shark and I should ask you. So, what do you know about it?”

Zac sighed, his shoulders slumped. His smile had completely gone. “Only that it was a failure, a flop. As adults would say, an unmitigated disaster.”

“What?” Charlie said, totally surprised.

“Unmitigated disaster. It means...”

“Ooooh, I know what it means,” Charlie said. “But what do you mean? It can’t have been. I saw...”

“It worked great in the laboratory. It even worked the first time Mr Hogan helped me put it into the lake,” Zac said, some pride back in his voice. “You should have seen it. The compressed air cylinder I put inside the shark’s body worked a treat, pushing it around under the dust. I used my remote controller to steer it with its fins and I got it to dive under and come up again, and go round in circles and... and...”

“What happened?” Charlie asked, amazed at how clever her friend was, forgetting how cranky she was with him.

“After Mr Hogan had left me with alone the shark while he went to do another shuttle run, something went wrong. Maybe dust got into a tube, or a control circuit blew.” He shook his head, staring at the floor. “I don’t know, but it just died. I had to pull it in with the safety line. I left it in the shallow dust by the shore – I didn’t want other people to see it. To see my failure”

“Well, Zac Watt, you’re not a failure. I think you are very clever,” Charlie said.

Zac looked up. “Do you really?”

Charlie nodded. “And I don’t need any more cheering up. Okay?”

“Okay,” Zac agreed,

“So, can I see the shark, please?”

Zac shrugged. “I don’t see why not. After everyone else had gone home, Mr Hogan helped me bring it back. It’s in here.” He unlocked the lab door and opened it.

“Wait,” Charlie said, grabbing Zac’s arm. “Are you saying Mr Hogan doesn’t know your shark... died? He thinks it was a big success?”

“No, I couldn’t tell him. I know I should have but...”

“Wowsies,” Charlie said. “That explains why he thought... but, then, that must mean... ooooh, I don’t know what it means. I’m confused.”

“Charlie, what on the moon are you talking about?.”

“Ooooh, I don’t know. Can I see the shark?”

“It’s over here.” Zac led her to the big work bench, covered with all sorts of bits and pieces of metal, wires and tools. But in the middle lay Zac’s pride and joy. His secret project. His Pistis Lunaris.

Charlie stared at it. “Oh boy,” she said. She walked all around the shark, looking at its face and fins close up, touching its skin. Zac was surprised when Charlie grabbed a chair and climbed up onto the bench and stood astride the shark, looking down on it, even squatting as if to sit on the shark’s back. All the time she was muttering “oh boy, oh boy...”

Charlie stepped down off the bench and stared at the robot again, her legs feeling a little shaky. “Oh boy,” she said, again.

“Oh boy?” Is that all?” Zac said.

Charlie looked at Zac. “That’s very... sharky. Very clever. Thanks for showing it to me. And don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone else. It’s our little secret.” She looked at the shark again. “Oh boy.”

“Charlie, what is it?” Zac said, puzzled with Charlie’s mood.

“Ummmm, nothing. Thanks again Zac, gotta go.” Charlie headed towards the door. “Bye.”

As Charlie left the lab and turned down the corridor, leaving a very confused Zac behind, she stopped short. And thought and thought. She had two very clear images in her head. One was the shark that rescued her. The other was the shark on Zac’s work bench. She put the two images together and she gave a little giggle.

Her rescuing shark looked absolutely nothing like Zac’s.

And it was twice as big.

\*

That night a very tired Zac prepared for bed. It had been a big day being hailed a celebrity at school, then having that very strange time with Charlie in the laboratory. Though his shark robot had ended up a dud, he was happy that he finally had been able to cheer Charlie up. He could concentrate on his next project now.

Zac turned off his room light, went to his bed and pulled the sheet down. He jumped onto his bed, ready for the soft embrace of the mattress and pillow. Instead, he landed on something hard and prickly. He reached over and turned his bedside lamp on, then turned to whatever it was he had landed on.

“Yikes,” he yelped, as he stared into the gaping toothy mouth and crazed eyes of a shark. A shark made of Lego. He launched himself back... and fell out of bed.

“Charlie,” he yelled. “Charlie Angler! I’ll get you.”

\*

Charlie didn’t hear Zac’s threat. She was snuggled up in bed, thinking happy thoughts about a secret. Her secret. Something only she, on all the Moon, knew. While everyone else thought it was a figment of Jacob’s imagination. She knew otherwise.

She knew it was real.

“Don’t worry Sharky,” she said sleepily. “Your secret is safe with me.”

Then she rolled over and dreamed of playing U13s netball, with the new rules and gadgets, whatever they may be. And she sank goal, after goal, after goal...

\*

While the Dome slept, out at Dusty Lake the crescent Earth shone overhead and the stars twinkled happily.

In the centre of the lake, in the pale Earthlight, the perfectly smooth dust surface seemed to shimmer, then ripple. Slowly, a triangular tip broke through the surface, travelling slowly through the dust, leaving a growing wake behind. It grew and grew until the entire dorsal fin was in the Earthlight, moving sedately in a large circle. Soon a broad brown back broke the surface and behind it a large tail wagged happily. A brown pointy head slowly rose free of the dust and two large wondering eyes stared up at the Earth. The creature nodded its head slowly, then sunk slowly back into the dust.

The last of the dorsal fin’s tip sank below the surface and, within seconds, Dusty Lake was smooth, peaceful, still and calm. Again.

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