

The Ghost Lost Ship
By Scott Coon

Ed was cool.

His body filled the space behind the round table. The wall buckled as he leaned back, smoking a menthol cigarette. Only Ed smoked menthols; that made him even more cool. He had salvaged them from an old space freighter. Of course, to him, they were just freighters. I mean, he's in space so why would he call them space freighters? Really? It's just a writer's device to let you know this is science fiction and he's in space.

But, I digress.

He got the menthols from a "space" freighter. He got his muscles there too. He had a forty-five inch chest, a thirty-two inch waist, and biceps that he hadn't gotten around to measuring yet. They came from moving heavy cargo off of derelict "space" freighters before he realized that if he turned the gravity off before he looted ... I mean... salvaged the cargo it would be *soooo* much easier. And so he did.

Next to him sat Bob. Or, rather, Bob's head since the table came up to Bob's chin. The guy's short. Really short. There was something definitely wrong with Bob beyond the disembodied head at the table thing. You could tell just by looking at him. He had a face that demanded he wear one of those beanie hats. You know the kind, the ones with the little propellers on them. Yeah, the rainbow colored kind. Just looking at him without it made people want to scream, "I just can't take it any more! Put the damn beanie on!" It was very useful in interrogations.

So, where were we? Oh yeah. Ed was slowly compromising the integrity of a wall in a sleazy bar while Bob just sat there freaking out the other patrons just by looking the way he does. Just then, a man in full Egyptian regalia walked in – white linen dress, gold neck thingies, sandals, the whole bit. “There’s going to be a barfight,” Ed said to Bob.

“Yeah?”

“One of Them just walked in.”

“Them?”

“You know ‘Them’.” He made the curling-finger bunny-ears quote thingy with his fingers. “They’re going to be fighting The Leather Spies.”

“Who?”

“Those guys over there by the bar. The ones in the trench coats and fedoras. They wear them to cover up the leather body suits. You can spot them because you can see the leather going up the back of their necks, and covering their faces, and who wears trench coats and fedoras anymore, really?”

“Oh.”

“They’re both chasing The Lost Ship. It’s filled with all kinds of lost nifty stuff. I read in Salvager’s Monthly that it was believed to be drifting through this area about now.”

“Is that why we’re here?” asked Bob.

“Don’t be stupid, it’s just an old science fiction story,” said Ed as he watched the Them march in unison to their table. “There’s no such thing.”

“What if it does exist?” asked Bob, his fingers nervously gripping the edge of the table. “Would that mean we’re in a story?”

Ed took a long, slow drag of menthol. “We are in a story. Look out there. Someone’s reading us right now.”

“Hello out there Mr. Reader Person,” said Bob, waving at you. “I thought The Ghost Lost Ship was coming. Ain’t that the thingy we’re going after?”

“You mean The Lost Ghost Ship?” asked Ed.

“No, it’s a ship that was lost that became a ghost ship,” explained Bob, “so it’s The Ghost Lost Ship.”

“That’s stupid.”

Then the fight broke out. I’m feeling lazy today so I’m not going to explain the whole thing about the pushing and the shoving and someone calling someone a pooppy head. You just fill all that in for yourself and be glad I have enough coffee in me to write this at all. Now, get back to reading the story.

As the Them and the Leather Spies (no relation to the leather mafia, whoever they are) threw each other around the bar, Bob hid under Ed’s chair, crying and shaking, maybe a little wetting himself, maybe. Ed just smoked and nursed a beer. Then one of the Them fell in his lap. She was beautiful and familiar, so he said her name. “Egg!”

“Ed!” replied Egg, since he had gotten her name right.

“I haven’t seen you in ...”

“A long time,” completed Egg.

“You’re as beautiful as ever. Why did I ever leave you?”

“To go salvage, jackass. You could have left me the key for the handcuffs. It took me three days to get out of those things!”

“I guess that’s why you weren’t home when I got back. I knew I had forgotten something that day,” said Ed scratching his chin. “How’d you end up with Them?”

“I joined for the uniform but I stayed for the game night. You haven’t lived until you’ve played Uno™ with Them.” She shivered at the very thought of it. “Bob’s here, isn’t he?”

“Yeah, how’d you know?”

“He’s sucking on my big toe.”

“My thumb was all pruny but I wasn’t done being scared yet,” called Bob from under Ed.

“After The Lost Ship?” asked Ed.

“Salvager’s Monthly?” asked Egg.

“Yup.”

“Yup.” Egg stood up and wiped her toe on the carpet. “I have to get back to the bar fight.”

“Good luck finding the lost ship,” said Ed. “You know it doesn’t exist, right?”

Egg shrugged, “everyone needs a hobby.”

And so she went back to the fight and Ed and Bob went back to their ship to get another beer for Ed. They just weren’t serving at the bar during the bar fight, local statute and all.

A day later, or so, Ed and Bob cruised the emptiness of space looking for stuff floating around. While Ed went to the hold to get another pack of menthols, Bob saw something in the blackness and steered toward it. As he approached, he saw its registry, “NNN”.

“It’s The Lost Ship,” he screamed.

Ed came running up from the hold, struggling with the cellophane on his new pack. “What the hell are you screaming about?”

“The Lost Ship! The Lost Ship! Look at the designation! NNN! Nifty Nick Nacks!”

“That’s, um ... yeah. Wouldn’t that be Nifty Knickknacks, which would be NK?”

“You know I can’t spell.”

“But,” said Ed, holding his head, “the ship.”

“Ships can’t spell,” snorted Bob. “Let’s get it!”

“Yeah, whatever.”

“At least we know it’s not The Ghost Lost Ship.”

“Uh huh. Why’s that?”

“Cause it’s not all grey and translucent and wavy and stuff.”

“Bob,” said Ed, “shut up.”

They did all that technical docking stuff. You know what I mean. And then they were in the lost ship. Maybe it was The Lost Ship, we don’t know yet. Just hang in there and we’ll sort all this stuff out together.

Anywho...

As with most derelict ships, only the life support and gravity were still working. As with most cockpits on most derelict ships, there was a skeleton at the helm. Creepy, huh? Ed and Bob made their way to the hold where the good stuff was. It was full of boxes of various sizes. Bob picked up a small one, read the label, and opened it. It held an old, copper cup – filthy thing. Looked like it had spent a couple thousand years in a cave, kind of like the cups in that bar where the fight thing happened. You remember, it was in the first half of this story. Go check. I'll wait.

Done?

Good.

Bob called to Ed, "We'll have to open these boxes."

"Why?" replied Ed still looking around for the gravity control so he wouldn't forget to turn it off before moving the heavy boxes. I say "still" because he started looking for it while you were off checking the first half of the story just now.

"They're labeled wrong," explained Bob. "This one has just a cup in it and it's marked 'The Holy Grail'. It's not a grail, just a cup, and not a hole in it."

"Hmmm." Ed picked up a small box for himself. It was marked The One Ring. He opened the box and said, "Yup, one ring," and tossed it back over his shoulder.

Bob was scanning the labels on some other boxes. "The Golden Fleece, Cupie Dolls, Declaration of Independence ... Hey, wait a minute. Ed!"

"What?"

"Check this out. The label on this one has been torched off. Isn't that the thing on your girlfriend's uniform? Not Egg – the new one."

Ed took a look at the mostly torched off marking. “That’s a swastika. And, she’s not my girlfriend. She’s a prostitute. Have some respect; the woman’s a professional. But, yeah, that’s what’s on her uniform.”

Bob sniffed the burnt crate. “Why would someone torch this?”

“They didn’t; it was torched from the inside. This is the Arc of the Covenant. I saw it in a movie once. This is what the Them was looking for. I guess this is The Lost Ship, after all. I owe you a dollar.”

“Told you so,” said the smiling Bob. Looking over the loot, something caught Bob’s eye, figuratively. He rushed to the back. “Please, oh, please be marked right!” He threw open the lid and a golden shower of light caressed his tiny cheeks. “Twinkies™!!! Wonderful, glorious Twinkies™!!!”

Ed stood over him and said mockingly so as to mock him, “Yeah, Twinkies™. Get off your knees, you look like a doof.”

But then Ed saw the label on the box next to it. He rushed over to it even though he was only two steps away. “Please, oh, please be marked right!” He threw open the lid and a golden shower of light caressed his not so tiny cheeks. “A complete Jenna Jamison video collection!” He fell to his knees.

Before Bob could mock him in a mocking way for having mocked him before, someone kicked in the starboard door to the cargo hold. No, not the one into space. I mean, come on, try to keep up with the story here, we’re in outer space. It would have let all the air out or all the vacuum in, whichever. Then someone else kicked in the port door – and don’t make me go through all that again.

It was the Leather Spies and Them coming in through opposite doors. Once again the pooppy head thing happened and they started fighting. Stuff just going everywhere and so forth and etcetera while Bob and Ed hid behind the Twinkies™ and a crate of naughty tapes.

“This salvage is ours!” called out one of the Them. Not Egg, one of the other ones. You don’t need to know who; he’s just a minor character. Go with it. “We’re taking the Arc of the Covenant and that’s all there is to it!”

“No, this salvage is ours!” replied an equally unimportant character from the Leather Spies dudes. “We’re taking the Maltese Falcon and that’s all there is to it!”

Did you catch that? They’re both after different things so they’re really fighting for no reason. It’s silly if you think about it.

They had lasers this time. And the lasers were just tearing things up. Ed and Bob soon became board because all these people were bad shots. They just kept firing at each other and hitting everything else in the room. Worse of all, Ed was down to his last menthol. They had to get back to the ship. That’s when Ed noticed a switch on the wall behind them labeled Gravity

On

Off, with that switch I mentioned before between the “On” and “Off”. I know it doesn’t belong there at the back of the hold with no other switches around it but I’m writing this story at work and it’s almost lunch time so I want to get this done. You’re with me on that, right? Good. Let’s continue.

So, Ed hit the switch. The gravity went off. The poopy heads went floating around the room. So did all the boxes. In the floating confusion, Ed and Bob escaped with the Twinkies™ and the naughty tapes. I know you were expecting to see more of Egg in this part of story but there you go.

As they pulled away, the poopy heads battled for control of the things that only they wanted but were too rash to figure out. Safely away from the poopy heads, Ed offered Bob the dollar.

“Hold up,” said Bob. “Let’s go double or nothing on The Ghost Lost Ship.”

Ed snorted a laughing kind of snort. “Yeah, let’s do that.”

As they left the area, another ship, also marked NNN, drifted by. Only this one was all grey and translucent and wavy and stuff.

Ooooo, creepy!