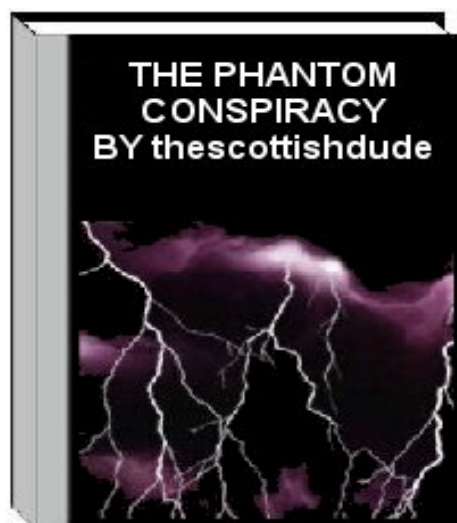


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THE GUIDE

Writing a short story can be a daunting task for a writer, the subject of the story is the first thing he thinks about. One of the most popular choices by way of theme is science fiction. Now that the writer has thought of the theme he has to think of the subject, what will it be about? It being a sci-fi piece the thought of spaceships immediately enters his mind, could aliens be involved as well as humans? Lets stick to what we know, humans. With all this thought of, the writer begins to type the start...

The year is 3000AD, and in the Plutous nebula a United Kingdom Starblazer100 rattles through the atmosphere of nothingness. A crew of four men is aboard the black, triangle-shaped spacecraft. Captain Kirt – the leader of the crew – dressed in his dark green jumpsuit with his blonde hair shaved into his head, his beady, blue eyes searching the vastness of space for their target, stands on the bridge.

Pausing the writing to think of the rest of the characters, the crew that should accompany Kirt on his adventure, the writer begins to dabble in stereotypes...

The Captain is joined in the light-grey control room by his 24 year-old navigator, Jason Macgregor, a fierce Scotsman with a passion for both the bagpipes, that could be heard droning away, much to the anger of the other crew members, long into the night, breaching the quietness of space, and whiskey. He had a short brown beard that went well with his short, brown hair.

Thinking that stereotypes would not alone suffice for the story the writer adds in a character that epitomises intelligence and stability...

Lieutenant Peter Falklands is the Captain's right-hand man and 2nd in command of the ragged crew. Peter had gone to University, achieving a degree in psychology, before going to space-flight crew where he graduated top of his class. He had been serving as long as Kirt in the space federation now, a total of 9 years, both of them were the same age – 34. Never prone to making a rash decision Peter was usually the savour of the crew in times of crisis. A valuable member of the crew.

The writer being male and a fan of martial arts movies decides to add a character with kung-fu abilities in order to make the story more appealing to himself...

Bruce Lu, born and raised in Japan until he departed at the age of sixteen for Great Britain where he attended Cahill University and graduated with an honours degree in Computing. Bruce Lu was always interested in martial arts and started studying them "addictively" before he ventured to the British Isles. He is the third oldest of the crew, 28 years old, and responsible for computer and machine maintenance.

Now the story must begin, brainstorming a multitude of possible plots and scenarios the storyteller decides on one and off we go...

The Starblazer100 is a small, nippy spacecraft built for exploration purposes. Its features include Smart Computer Human Interface (SCHH) that is able to talk to the users and advise them on course details and mission statements. The ship is equipped with limited weapon systems designed to ward off pirates – twin Vulcan magnet

cannons, this is a large double-barrelled machinegun placed on the ship's roof that fires bullets using magnets to propel them so there is no recoil, and locker missiles. These types of missiles rely on a laser locking system that the pilot must control to guide the missiles to their target, these missiles are jettisoned from the craft before igniting to cut down on the resultant forces pushing against the craft. The Starblazer100 is only capable of light speed level 1,2 and 3 – there are 7 levels of light speed, level 7 being the closest to actual light speed possible.

In the silent control room Captain Kirt turns to Peter Falklands and inquires. 'What are the mission objectives?'

'Forgotten again?' Peter shot back.

'When you're Captain you can forget as well, and besides I never listened to you the last three times when you told me.' Kirt joked using his poker face, which wasn't very good as he was smiling.

'Okay. Our main objective is to take reconnaissance photos of planet 44562.678 and identify what it is composed of and whether it is suitable for small-scale colonisation.'

'What do they mean by small-scale this time?' The navigator, Jason, asked. 'The last time the government said "small-scale colonisation" they built a city with a forty mile radius.'

Peter rolled his eyes back in his head. Was he the only one listening in the briefing room when this was all explained? 'They intend to build a surveillance outpost capable of launching satellites to all of the 6 other planets in this solar system.'

With the entire introduction out of the way the thing that needs focusing on now is the action...

Not joining in the conversation for once, in fact the only time ever, Bruce Lu glances at the radar screen next to Jason, who isn't paying it any attention. On the screen a small red blob is moving steadily towards them. The mechanical voice of the SCHI bursts out of the speakers, shattering the conversation. 'Alert! There is a Mark 5 Lexispladder on an intercept course. Chance of the Lexispladder being a pirate craft 89.3%.'

'Oh, great!' Kirt exclaimed. 'That's all we need, damn pirates.'

'What's our course of action?' Peter asked of the Captain.

'We've got a lock-on, sir.' Jason added with a worried look.

Taking a moment to ponder the situation Captain Kirt made his decision. 'Keep the lock-on but do not fire. Let's see if it just passes by us.'

'Affirmative.' Jason confirmed he had heard the order.

The control room was now filled with an atmosphere of quiet panic and tension you needed a chainsaw to cut. They all began to breathe quicker the closer the Lexispladder dot on the radar got closer to the centre of the screen, closer to them. Sweat started forming like a fine mist in the room, all their eyes became veined and red, as if they had been playing in a five-hour video games marathon. Still ever closer the

Lexispladder came, every blip of the radar that sounded meant it was that bit closer.

When the other craft was barely a kilometre away the Captain asked a question of his crew. ‘Have we still got them on a lock-on?’

Bruce Lu spoke for the others. ‘Yes, sir.’

‘Okay, then. Send a message to the Lexispladder requesting a visual communication.’

Not a word was said, they just went about the task. It took only a few seconds and the monitor in front of Kirt was lit up with the face of the, possible pirate, ship commander. The ship commander’s face looked battered and dirty, full of grease and motor oil. He had his hair shaved completely off, what colour it was no one could have guessed. His dull, and slightly stoned, glazed over grey eyes looked inhospitable. Captain Kirt spoke the first words. ‘I am the Captain of the Starblazer100 that you seem to be on a collision course with, I ask you to divert your course to avoid collision.’

‘Not collision.’ The Commander stated.

‘What?’ Kirt asked, bewildered by the reply.

Watching the crew of the Starblazer100 with hunter’s eyes the Commander elaborated on his previous statement. ‘Not collision, boarding.’ He let off a glimmer of a smile. The computer terminals in the Starblazer control room rang loudly and red lights flashed.

With a face drenched in gloom Jason reported. ‘Sir, they have a lock-on on us.’

Focusing on the monitor Kirt gave advice to the pirate commander; it was a pirate ship, no doubt about that. ‘Look, we have a lock-on on your ship. If you do not divert your course we will be forced to fire on you.’

Although the time between the Captain’s speech and the pirates commander’s reply was only seconds to the crew it seemed like hours. ‘We also have a lock-on on your ship, we have a better-equipped ship for a fight than you do. We could take a direct hit from one of your missiles, we’re faster than you and I doubt you could take a direct hit from us.’ The commander was gleeful, nearly laughing at the feeble Starblazer100 in comparison to his ship.

‘You may be able to take a direct hit from us but you can’t take more than one. Just to let you know, we’ll be firing missiles three at a time.’ The captain responded. Jason noted this and reconfigured the ship to fire three missiles at a time.

Now that the tension has been built up it’s time for the action, and just to let you know this short story has a built in scare defuse device. The scare defuse device lets you know what will happen in advance so that you need not get worried about the outcome. Both ships will survive the encounter but one of the Starblazer crew will die...

The moment between the two ship leaders got even more heated as the radar confirmed that the Lexispladder had fired a missile at

the Starblazer. Peter informed the captain of the development in hushed dread. ‘Kirt, we have a missile launched.’

‘ Fire a three round locker missile burst, take evasive measures.’

Turning around Peter shouted. ‘ You heard the man!’ The three missiles were fired and evasive action taken, which consisted of the ship completing a 90 degree turn and shooting off at top speed. The missiles were still gaining on them. Chaff was launched and luckily the missiles went after the chaff capsules and blew them up, letting the Starblazer escape. However, the enemy ship had also used similar tactics and had avoided all three missiles fired at it.

Back at the control screen the two leaders went back to their face off. ‘ Oh, I see there is a little bit of fight in you.’ The Pirate Commander announced.

‘ Yes, there is. I suggest you leave my ship alone; we will not miss a second time.’

Now the writer adds in a little event that was completely unexpected by the reader, to add a shaky and unpredictable atmosphere to the story...

Amid all the excitement Peter Falklands, the second in command, got extremely wound up. He began to hiss, glow brightly and then exploded.

Told you someone would die.

This came quite unexpectedly to the crew; instantaneous human combustion had never before been witnessed by any of them. They had heard about it on the x-files, now on it’s 986 series.

Standing in front of the monitor the Captain tried to look commanding, despite the fact he had little bits of Peter splatter all over his back. He didn’t manage to pull it off. The pirate commander laughed heartedly and fired off two more missiles. ‘ Sir, there’s two more missile locked-on to us and deployed!’ Bruce Lu shouted.

By the way, the built in scare control device malfunctioned earlier on. When it said that both ships would be fine, it meant that they both would become stardust, sorry for any inconvenience this has caused you. To make a customer complaint please send an e-mail to scare_complaints@c4.com...

‘ Fire off a three round locker missile burst! Shake them off of us!’

After punching the command into the computer for evasive action Jason reported. ‘ Sir our engine has broken down, we’ve lost movement.’ The Lexispladder had been experiencing similar problems and just as Jason finished his sentence both ships exploded as the missiles impacted on them. They were now officially stardust.

The writer finishes off his story and then yawns, bleary eyed he grabs a can of coke, switches off his computer and goes to bed.

THE END