



Adrift

Adrift amongst the stars, in the outer reaches of the galaxy, a small ship floated towards its final destination. The SS Brigand had set out from Earth a thousand years earlier. There was a single occupant. Doctor Gwen Bigby had volunteered for the mission as soon as she'd heard about it. There was nothing left for her on Earth by that point. The growing climate catastrophe had made sure of that.

On the face of it, the mission aims were simple. Travel to the distant planet of Andula and assess its suitability for supporting life. She could only hope that Earth was still inhabitable when she returned.

Somewhere in the back of the ship, a red light turned on. A motor grumbled into life. A low hum shook the floor. An automated valve opened and started to flood Bigby's chamber with warm oxygen. She coughed, spluttered and fell to the floor.

It took her a moment to gather her thoughts and remember where she was. Eventually, she picked herself up. She wandered over to the panoramic window that filled most of the front of the vessel. The curve of the foreign planet rose up in front of her. The ship spun and jolted into its landing position. Various mechanical beeps and groans told her that the autopilot was doing its job. A small alcove had been set into the wall with a conical valve jutting down from the top. For Dr Bigby, this was the most important device on the ship. Eagerly, she placed a well-worn mug under the cone and pushed a green button. A moment later, it was filled with strong, steaming coffee.

Secured to the floor in front of the dashboard was a comfortable leather chair. Dr Bigby settled into it and pulled the harness over her head. It snapped into the fastener with a click. Outside the window, the ground was rising up to meet them. She could make out individual trees now, and the small creatures flitting between them. From what she could see, most of the area seemed to be covered in a lush rainforest. She'd hoped that the computers would have been able to find somewhere flat to land, but it looked like it was going to be a rough touchdown.

Dr Bigby threw the coffee away and braced herself for impact. The ship skimmed the tops of the trees before dipping and crashing to a halt. A dozen airbags exploded and filled the cabin with a pillowy



whiteness. It took Gwen a few minutes to fight her way free. She grabbed her oxygen mask and stepped out of the hatch.

The forest was silent. The air was damp and warm - her clothes immediately felt sticky. Somewhere in the distance, a group of birds were chattering to each other.

However, Gwen's immediate problems were much closer. A sound alerted her to the fact that something was moving nearby. A vine was creeping towards her. It snaked along the floor more quickly than she could run. The thick stems were easily as thick as her arm and covered in sharp barbs. She turned back towards the ship but she was too slow. She felt the vine touch her boot and tangle around her feet, before cutting into her ankles and dragging her to the floor.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Write a definition for the word "adrift".
2. Find and copy a phrase that tells you there was only one person on the ship.
3. Why is it described as a "foreign planet"?
4. What does the word "lush" tell you about the rainforest?
5. Which phrase describes how Bigby made sure she was ready for the crash?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R

What did the conical valve deliver?

I

Why was Dr. Bigby so keen to take the mission?

S

What did Dr. Bigby do just before she threw away her coffee?

I

Why had she hoped the computers would find a flat place to land?

P

Write the next paragraph in the story.

Answers:

1. Floating around aimlessly
2. Single occupant
3. Because it is a planet from a different place to where Bigby is from
4. It is full of plants and life
5. (She) braced herself for impact

R: Coffee

I: The climate catastrophe meant there was nothing left for her on Earth

S: Strapped herself into the chair

I: It would be smoother and easier - less likely to crash and damage the ship