

# 1

"What shall we do with a drunken sailor. What shall we do with a drunken sailor?  
What shall we do with a drunken sailor, early in the morning..."

"Who's callin' me a drunk sailor?"

"Put 'im in a box ... Why do they put 'im in a box?"

"Prob'ly 'cause 'e died."

"What'd 'e die of then?"

"Who gives a shit? 'e just died. It's a song."

"If 'e died, it musta been from sumthing. Don't stand t' reason otherwise."

"Look 'e jus' died. Now which way is the bloody train station from here?"

The crew of the environmental protest ship Environmental Challenger were enjoying a spot of shore leave in Amsterdam, after their ship had docked at Rotterdam for supplies. In an attempt to sample three months worth of organic delicacies from the coffee shops, this band of eco-warriors were circling somewhere close to cloud number nine in a holding pattern for Schipol Airport.

"Train station? It was here yesterd'y. All we did was walk along the canal and we were here. T' get back we just have t' follow the canal the other way."

"Which canal? This city's full of 'em."

"It 'ad a lickle bridge over it."

"They've all got bloody bridges over 'em."

The drunken group of sailors continued meandering their way around the red light district of Amsterdam, getting more and more lost by the minute. As they turned different directions to find a familiar reference point, the width of the roads gradually became smaller and the asphalt surface had turned into cobblestone alleyways.

"I know, we could ask that lady over there for directions."

"What lady? We're the only ones on this bleedin' street."

"The one in the window that hasn't got any clothes on."

"'ow much is that doggie in the window, woof woof," the choral sailor started up again. "The one with the waggelly tail... 'ang on a bloody minut'. Correct me if I'm wrong but ladies don't 'av tails do they?"

"Not that I've ever noticed," a worldly-wise sailor replied.

"Good, I thought I was going crazy."

"We're all bloody crazy or we wouldn't be sailing around the world pissing everybody off."

"We're saving the planet," another sailor offered. "Well, making a token effort anyway," he conceded.

"A little dog with clogs on..." the singing sailor continued with his song, "...going clip clipperty clop on the..."

"Shut up singing and anyway it's a mouse with clogs on."

"She doesn't look like a mouse," the choral sailor observed.

"She doesn't look much like a dog either. Do space cookies make you hallucinate?" he asked generally, "Because I can see a tail as well."

"Possibly but then why are we all hallucinating the same thing?"

"Autosuggestion," one sailor offered.

"I can't even think big words like that at a time like this, let alone say the bloody things. What was it again? Auto-sausages? What's automatic sausages got to do with the subject? Oh yeah, I see, sausages, tails, sausages, I get it now."

"No it's not sausages, it's somet'ing t' do with digestion."

"Suggestion, not digestion. You can't eat an hallucination."

"I'll give it a try," one sailor offered. "She looks edible t' me."

The proprietor of the establishment appeared in the doorway and enquired if any of the sailors wanted to purchase any of the merchandise.

"Only 500 guilders for the experience of your life," the Dutchman offered. "Good looking sailors like you are usually interested in something a little out of the ordinary."

"She's waving at us," a young sailor observed. "Hello, hello," he called while tapping on the window.

Maybe it was the organic substances that the sailor previously ingested or maybe even a subconscious signal to save a creature in distress but his knock was considerably harder than he anticipated. Before his eyes the plate glass window suddenly disintegrated into a thousand fragments and the window display was instantly open to the alleyway.

"My saviour!" the girl from the window display screamed while pouncing onto the sailor who'd broken the window. "Carry me to safety over the sea of broken glass," she continued.

"Oops," was all the sailor facing the proprietor could say as the Dutchman's mouth dropped open.

"Vandals! Thieves!" the proprietor started screaming as he produced a large wooden club from underneath his overcoat.

The sailors may have worked on an environmental protest ship but they were all veteran seamen of considerable bar brawl experience. The proprietor of the establishment hadn't even raised his club halfway when a heavy boot made contact with his groin. Even in their less than perfect state the sailors could fight like demons and the two bouncers who appeared through the doorway, in response to the proprietor's call, had met a similar fate.

"You thieving bastards," a very high pitched squeaky voice called out as the proprietor rolled on the cobbles holding his injured body parts, struggling to catch his breath.

"Let's get the hell out of here before the police arrive," one of the sailors suggested.

"Brilliant idea, but what are we going to do with Paul's new pet?" another asked. The girl from the window was still clinging tightly to the young sailor's neck.

"Paul, put her down. You don't know where she's been," the bosun commanded.

"It wasn't my idea," Paul defended himself. "She just pounced on me."

"Don't leave me behind," the girl pleaded. "They'll beat me again if they take me back in there."

Maybe it was the fact that they worked on a ship full of caring individuals which swayed their decision but despite the bosun's objections they agreed to take the rescued damsel in distress with them.

"Give her a bloody coat to cover up with," the bosun ordered. "And let's get going. We've wasted enough time here already."

With the assistance of the rescued girl they finally managed to negotiate their way out of the maze of alleyways which littered the red light district of Amsterdam. At the central railway station the half-hourly train to Rotterdam was just about to leave, so they jumped onto it and out of the city.

"Well that screws up Amsterdam for anymore shore leave," one sailor observed as the train chugged down the line towards Rotterdam. "And what did we get for our trouble? A bloody transvestite, that's what," the disappointed sailor observed.

In the heat of the melee the previous observation, of the supposed girl having a tail, had been completely forgotten, but as they relaxed on their journey back to the ship the facts were returning to them.

"I thought that was an hallucination," one sailor suggested.

"I've been in Amsterdam and Bangkok enough to recognise a she-male when I see one," the first sailor retorted.

"Is this true?" the bosun asked.

"I'm saving up for a sex change operation," the girl responded. "Please don't send me back to that place."

"How did you end up there in the first place?" another sailor asked

"The usual story. I came to Amsterdam for a good time and ran out of money. I started working in a bar and before you know it you get locked in a room and beaten if you try to leave, or if you don't please the customers."

"Why didn't you just break the glass before?" Paul questioned.

"I didn't realise it was just normal glass, and anyway, I'd have looked pretty silly running down the street naked wouldn't I?"

A few nods of agreement circled the carriage and a degree of sympathy had started to build in the gradually sobering group, with a notable exception of the highly religious bosun. In their time on the protest ship they thought they'd seen nearly every type of person possible. Lunatic evangelists who were on a mission from God to save the planet, diesel dykes on a mission to conquer any other dyke on the planet and anarchists who thought no government was better than the usual crap a population had to chose from. This was something different and the fear evident in the girl's eyes was enough to win over any man. It might also have been the fact that apart from one small part of her anatomy she looked absolutely stunning and now that that part of her was out of view the sailors couldn't help being attracted to this beautiful young girl.

"You sound as if you're English," the bosun commented, trying to change the subject of conversation.

"I am," she replied. "Born in London."

"What's your name?" he continued.

"Penelope Farthing, but you can call me Penny if you like."

"Well then Penny, how do you plan to get back to England?"

"I haven't really thought about it. Apart from this coat of yours I haven't got any clothes or any money. I guess I'm in a bit of a predicament."

"Can't she come with us?" one of the sailors suggested.

"We're about to go and piss off some government or other and you're suggesting we ask the captain if we can bring a passenger onboard," the bosun challenged. "He'll go potty."

"I was thinking about not actually asking him. Once we're at sea he wouldn't turn back to port, would he?" the sailor replied, "What do you think about sailing on an environmental protest ship?" he asked Penny.

"I'm all for saving the whales or stopping the sea being used as a rubbish tip," she replied.

These were the magic words, and despite the bosun's objections on religious grounds the crew voted to sneak Penny onto their ship. With reluctance the bosun conceded and soon they were alighting from the train as it pulled into Rotterdam station.

On the bridge of the converted deep-sea trawler Captain Erikson was in conference with his first mate, "Is everybody onboard yet?" the captain asked.

The Danish captain had come from a nautical family that could trace its roots back as far as the Vikings, but this latest member of the family tree had turned the family trawler into the Environmental Challenger as it had been aptly renamed. The captain had noticed over the years that the North Sea fish stocks were diminishing and reported this observation to the Danish government. The resulting quota system imposed an impossible restriction on his business, while large company ships had had their quotas increased. The fact that the Danish Fisheries Minister possessed a considerable stake in the factory fishing fleet was completely overlooked.

Karl Erikson had bitterly resented the destruction of his livelihood to facilitate a politician's profits and overnight he turned into a hardened anarchist. Sustained from charitable donations worldwide, his trawler now worked even harder than ever before to provide Karl with a sharp thorn to stick in any government's side.

"It looks like they're all back onboard," his first mate replied. "Most of them appear to have spent the weekend in a coffee shop though."

This New Zealander of part Maori descent augmented the international flavour of the Environmental Challenger's crew. His pet hate was anything to do with nuclear warfare and especially the French, who in his mind had no regard for the Pacific Ocean. When the mess conversation turned to matters of deforestation though, he suddenly became quiet, as if he felt responsible for his ancestor's burning of the forests of his native country.

"In that case, I think we can get underway. There's a French nuclear power station about to dump some of its waste on somebody else's doorstep as usual."

"Why is it that the French always dump their garbage in somebody else's garden? If they're not blowing up the Pacific, they're dumping waste in the Atlantic. Don't they know what damage they're doing?" Kia Taranaki asked.

During his maritime career the well-built Maori had served with the Royal New Zealand Navy and he was in Auckland harbour when another protest ship had been sabotaged by the French secret service. This action had enhanced his loathing of the French and it hadn't been long after leaving the navy that he'd joined the Environmental Challenger as its first mate.

"It's not a matter of don't know with the French, it's more like don't care. Being neighbourly has never been their strong point and I don't expect they'll ever change," Karl replied.

"If they don't, then it won't be our lack of trying," Kia added.

It wasn't just a mutual love of the sea, combined with hatred of politics, which bonded these hardened veterans. Over the years they'd become close friends and when in a difficult situation, neither had to talk to the other anymore. Their knowledge of each other's style was ingrained into their minds and their reactions appeared to be more telepathic than verbal nowadays.

Below the decks the rest of this band of warriors were busy stowing their backpacks after returning from their tour of the red light district of Amsterdam. Very few countries still accepted the Environmental Challenger into their territorial waters for resupply and refuelling. The fuel tanks had accordingly been increased in size during the recent refits, to provide a considerable extension in the ship's range when the diesel motors had to be used. To reduce the fuel usage large sails had been rigged on three masts along the ship's length and solar panels provided the electricity to power the radio, radar and navigational equipment. For all intents and purposes the ship was relatively self-sufficient and could completely circumnavigate the globe on one tank of fuel.

It was only in confrontational situations that the sails were stowed and the increased speed and manoeuvrability of the diesel engines employed to outwit the opposition. Over the years the original slow engines of a working trawler had been upgraded to give the large ship a top speed of twenty knots, which was far in excess of the whalers and freighters that they usually came into conflict with.

"What are we going to do with Penny?" one of the sailors asked. "We can't sneak her into the female cabin without telling the other girls about her and if one of them informs the captain before we sail, she'll be off the ship."

"I've got an idea," another replied. "If we let Randy in on the fact that she's here, then she can sleep on the stretcher in his helicopter until we're too far down the coast to turn back."

Randy Sowers was in fact the American helicopter pilot whose tour of duty in Vietnam had shaken his beliefs in human nature so much that he consequently joined the environmental movement. His pride and joy was the helicopter perched on the aft deck that was used to provide reconnaissance for the disruptive activities of the small inflatable craft which harassed anyone considered a threat to the environment.

Randy had taken one look at the stunning blonde who now stood before him, dressed in a pair of jeans and a T-shirt borrowed from one of the crew. Her curvy figure and ample bosom, the result of ingesting large quantities of hormones, appealed to this middle aged American and he instantly agreed to the surreptitious use of his helicopter's stretcher bay, for use by the stowaway. The other men in the crew had thought it prudent not to mention her extra appendage and Randy, none the wiser started making his play for the attentions of Penny.

"I think we're ready to sail," Kia announced.

"Let's cast off and make for the Channel Islands then. We'll use Alderney as a staging base. I think they're still open to our docking there."

In the engine room the large diesel engines sprang into life, as the throaty sound of the powerful motors manoeuvred the ship away from the Rotterdam dockside. Chugging slowly out of the Maas estuary past Hoek van Holland and Europort, the Environmental Challenger entered the North Sea and unfurled her massive sails before cutting the diesel engines and silently sailing southward.

In the stretcher bay of the helicopter, Penny settled down to make herself comfortable. She'd always heard of stowaways sleeping in the lifeboats under the tarpaulin, but this adaptation seemed considerably more comfortable than the thought of hard wooded boards. The fact that the option of the lifeboats wasn't available hadn't crossed her mind. Like most modern ships the Environmental Challenger only had inflatable life rafts, the kind that was stowed in a small cylinder on the edge of the deck. Only the helicopter provided the seclusion that a stowaway need to remain undetected and on the whole only Randy went anywhere near it during a voyage.