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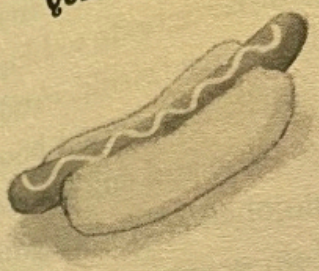
QUEST ORANGE



In World of Warcraft, the quests are all colour-coded. Grey quests involve defeating people with fewer skills than yourself. They're very easy, but you don't gain much experience. Then there are yellow – a bit harder; orange – a lot harder; and red – Certain Death. I decided the best thing was to treat this whole thing as a quest.

Dr Drax definitely gave us the impression that she was sending us on a grey quest. Maybe a bit yellow round the edges. But definitely not orange. And certainly not Certain Death.

For a start, we had loads of back-up. She took us to DraxControl so that we could see for ourselves. It's a massive glass office, with huge plants and a little water feature and dozens of people strolling round in white shirts, talking into headsets, reading

their BlackBerries. They certainly looked like they knew what they were doing. 'These are the clever people who will be steering your rocket,' Dr Drax said, 'so you won't have to do a thing. The Infinite Possibility really is just a ride. And DraxControl is like the man in the fairground booth. All you've got to do is be sensible and enjoy the view for a few hours. Oh, and do one simple little thing for me.'

And it did seem a very simple little thing. We had to press some colour-coded buttons in the right order at the right time. That was it.

Because the Infinite Possibility is really a launch vehicle – that's why it's so big. It was carrying something into space. A payload. A completely cosmic payload.

'I'll explain it all to you,' said Dr Drax. 'It's a kind of space minibus. I designed it myself. It's called the Dandelion because it doesn't have engines – just these big silvery sails that catch the solar wind, just like normal sails catch the normal wind, and blow it across space. A spaceship propelled by sunbeams – as quiet and traceless as a dandelion seed. Hence the name.'

She showed us a model. It looked like a high-sided vehicle with lots of windows. Like an ice-cream van.

Only with no wheels. And no ice-cream man.

Once it was separated from the Infinite Possibility, the people at DraxControl were going to steer the ice-cream van across space, round the back of the Moon, and back to Earth by remote control. Then it was going to do a lap of the Earth and head back around the Moon. And it was going to keep doing that – one lap of the Earth, one lap of the Moon – in a kind of figure of eight, forever. It had comfortable seats that turned into beds. Dr Drax's plan was that as soon as Infinity Park was opened, people would pay to get into a small rocket, dock with the Dandelion during its Earth orbit and stay on for one lap of the Moon before going back down to Earth.

A sightseeing trip around the Moon in an inter-planetary ice-cream van.

The Dandelion was a kind of massive box just under the living quarters of the Infinite Possibility. All we had to do was shoot up into space, float around for a bit, and then, when Dr Drax said so, press the buttons in the right order – red, orange, green – and that would blow the Dandelion off into its own orbit.

Then DraxControl would bring us back home in the command module.

The buttons are designed to set off a series of small explosive charges – red to separate the Dandelion from the rocket, orange to blow the covers off the Dandelion and green to make its sails pop out.

'We could detonate the charges from the ground,' said Dr Drax, 'but we thought it best to keep it simple.'

What could go wrong?

Well, nothing did go wrong, exactly.

Not with the buttons.

Not with the charges.

Not with the Dandelion.

The thing that went wrong was us.