

Futures

Emergency housekeeping rules for the *SS Heart of the Sun*

A reminder for all personnel. By Aimee Picchi

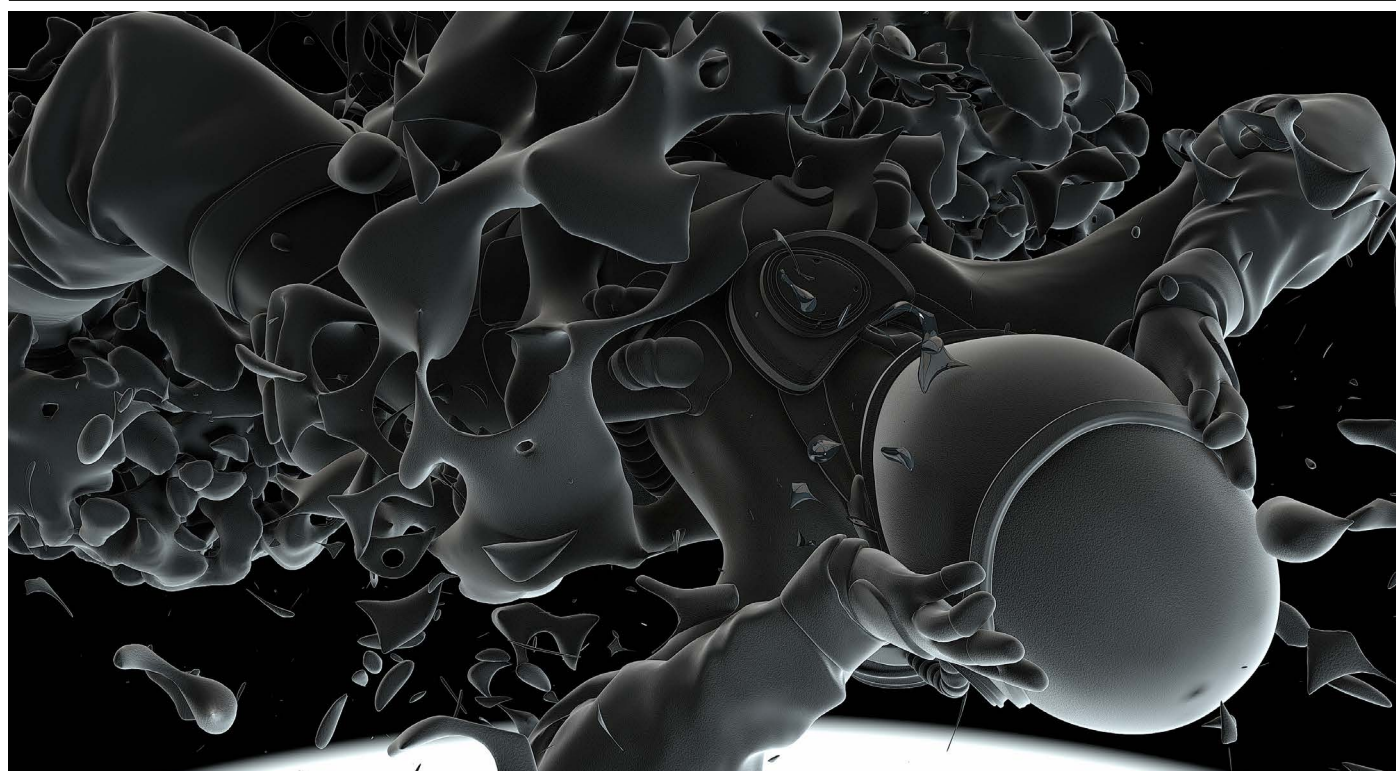


ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

From: Captain Frieda LaMontagne

To: All crew members (except Ensign Renard Able and his acolytes)

Subject: Emergency housekeeping rules for the ongoing tentacloid mould situation

It is no coincidence that the *SS Heart of the Sun* is considered the Spacefleet's top trash collector. As I like to remind you all, a tidy ship means a tidy Solar System. And because of our hard work, *Heart of the Sun* has been the winner of the Spacefleet's Tidy Ship award for seven years running. More importantly, our dedication to cleanliness has helped us avoid the type of mishaps suffered by the *SS Dreadnought* (RIP).

Sadly, our standards have slipped. It breaks my heart that our clean and efficient ship has transformed into a vessel of tentacloid evil.

You have probably heard the rumours about Ensign Renard Able. I want to make it clear that

every rumour you've heard is true – except for the one about the body-cleaning robots. They are quite safe to use, even in your sensitive regions.

Although I find it disheartening that I need to update the basics of ship housekeeping with rules that should be obvious, this is where we find ourselves.

Remember, following these rules will keep us safe and healthy. If we do so, none of us should be concerned that *Heart of the Sun* harbours a darkness that threatens to consume us all.

Rule 1: Clearly label your food by writing your name on the container, and *only your name*.

Rule 2: Do not eat any nutrition pack that you have not labelled yourself. That means that when Ensign Able opened the fridge and found a nutrition pack with the words "Ensign Able,

eat this. You'll love it" he *should not* have tasted it. Any fool would should have suspected Tentacloid Empire interference, designed to introduce tentacloid mould into our fleet.

Rule 3: If you, like Ensign Able, are too damn stupid to remember rules 1 and 2, and you eat a pack filled with tentacloid mould, run to the sick bay immediately.

Rule 4: If you do not make it to sick bay, please vomit into the waste duct, which will suck the bile and tentacloid mould into the cold vacuum of space. Do not be like Ensign Able, who vomited across the floor, tables, chairs and kitchen towels. And on the spatulas.

Rule 5: If you have vomited across the kitchen, DO NOT RUN THE VACUUM ROBOT.

Rule 6: If you find Ensign Able or any other

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crew member running the vacuum robot over vomited tentacloid mould, which is now smeared across every inch of the floor, and they tell you it's only brownie batter and ask you to taste it to see if it needs more vanilla, don't be an idiot and believe them.

Rule 7: Do not listen to Ensign Able's arguments. Please remember that tentacloid mould was engineered by the Tentacline Empire to rewrite the human nervous system to make us agree to their illegal dark-matter harvesting. No matter what Ensign Able tells you, dark-matter harvesting is still banned under the Earth-Tentacline Accord.

Rule 8: If Ensign Able insists he has 'information' about the real 'facts' of dark-matter harvesting, do not attempt to argue with him. You cannot argue with tentacloid mould-brain. He will only become more certain in his views.

Rule 9: Protocols require that all dark-matter tatters we confiscate from the Tentacline Empire's stealth ships be stored in tamper-proof boxes. If Ensign Able and his group

of followers ask you for the codes to open the boxes, claiming the boxes are part of a deep-ship conspiracy to undermine your personal freedoms, do not engage. Use spray foam to build a barrier between the mould-brains and the rest of the ship.

Rule 10: If you fail to contain the mould-infected crew members, they will attempt to overrun the ship and steer it into one of the Tentacline Empire's home ports. No matter what they say, the Tentaclines are not our 'friends' or 'strong allies'. At all times, you must wear ear-mutes to block out the sound of their mould-inspired praise for the Tentaclines.

Rule 11: If you have failed to follow rules 1 to 10, your captain will initiate Operation Clean Flush.

Rule 12: After the trash-haul robots have been repurposed to forcefully inject a mould antidote that will result in the most painful 48 hours of one's life, affected crew members will be locked in their cabins until they exhibit a tolerance for facts, such as that dark-matter

harvesting is illegal because it will lead to the collapse of the Universe.

Rule 13: Despite our best efforts, we still have not been able to locate Ensign Able and several of his acolytes. They may be hiding in the vents. Therefore, if you pass a ventilation duct and hear a haunting melody praising the deliciousness of dark matter, with distant voices joining in from other distant places in the bowels of the ship, *do not listen*. Find your ear-mutes and engage them immediately, then report your location to your Captain – and if the voices invite you into the ventilation system for a poetry slam with other 'open minded' types, back away slowly from the airduct.

Clean space, ship and mind,
Captain LaMontagne

Aimee Picchi is a Nebula finalist, a member of Codex and a graduate of Viable Paradise. Her fiction has appeared in *Podcastle*, *Fireside*, *Flash Fiction Online* and *Daily Science Fiction*, among other publications. Follow her on Twitter @aimeepicchi.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Aimee Picchi reveals the inspiration behind *Emergency housekeeping rules for the SS Heart of the Sun*.

This story came about at a particular moment in history — after the 2016 US presidential election, I had travelled to Washington DC with family and friends for the Women's March in January 2017. It was an incredibly powerful event. Funny, moving and inspiring — but with an underlying anxiety that the darkness was only going to deepen.

That weekend of the Women's March, I took part in a flash writing contest in which you could pick a title from a huge assortment that had been provided by other writers. This one caught my eye because it suggested the idea of trying vainly to keep order when things around you are going very, very wrong.

The problem of 'fake news' has only grown since then, of course. And for a while, I hoped that the plague of misleading information would disappear after the 2020 election (ha). But the pandemic has only provided a more fertile ground for conspiracy theories and misinformation. For some people, the lure of tentacloid mould-brain may be simply more appealing than facts.

