

*Extracts from the transcript of the Court-Martial of Algernon Quakeberry, Commander of the Venturian Invasionary Force to Terra.*

*Presiding Officer Burger-Mix:*

Will the Clerk of the Court please read the charges.

*Lance-Corporal Thug:*

The charges laid against Commander Algernon Quakeberry are as follows: firstly that he did fail to annexe the planet Terra, also known as Planet Earth, to the Venturian Confederation; secondly that he surrendered a Venturian stun-weapon to the enemy forces without a fight; thirdly that in the execution of his duty as a representative of the Glorious Venturian Confederation he failed to fight to the death, but returned to Venturis in ignominy; fourthly that he knowingly permitted an extra-planetary ravaging beast to be introduced to the home planet.

*Presiding Officer Burger-Mix:*

Mr Quakeberry, how do you plead to these charges?

*Commander Algernon Quakeberry:*

{Reply inaudible}

*Presiding Officer Burger-Mix:*

Speak up, Mr Quakeberry, the Court wishes to hear your reply!

*Commander Algernon Quakeberry:*

Not guilty, sir.

*Uproar in the Court-House. Shouts of "Dishonour!" and "Truss him up by the third ear!"*

*Commander Algernon Quakeberry:*

Silence in the Court! Silence!! This is not a circus! Let the records show that the Prisoner Quakeberry has pleaded Not Guilty.

*Prosecuting Officer Darangakhoukillian-Z:*

Now, Commander Quakeberry, if I could beg your indulgence to read from your mission report, so that everyone may hear what happened. If I may ?

*Commander Algernon Quakeberry:*

Go ahead. I have nothing to hide.

*Prosecuting Officer Darangakhoukillian-Z:*

I will read verbatim from your report, then, sir.

"As Terra's paltry sun came up over the horizon, we landed in the middle of a city. There was no one in sight as we landed. As we stepped from our shuttle, a creature hopped from a bush. Private Klou stunned it with a sharp burst of fire and we dragged it to the shuttle for closer inspection. Analysis showed that its genetic structure matched up with a creature called a White Rabbit, of which there were some details in our database. As its habits and forms of communication were unknown, we kept it in stasis for later analysis."

If I could call the Court's attention to this act, Mr Presiding Officer, sir: that Mr Quakeberry did not immediately and as per standing orders destroy and utterly annihilate this creature. As is now known, that creature escaped from detention on the Invasionary Force's return to Venturis and has terrified several of our loyal citizens. Even now, its whereabouts are unknown.

*Uproar in the Court-House. Shouts of “Shame!” and “The Treacle Pudding machine is too good for him!”*

*Prosecuting Officer Darangakhoukillian-Z:*

Silence, my friends; let me read some more from Commander Quakeberry’s report:

“A small detachment approached one of the nearer buildings. At what appeared to be a door, a creature in dressing-gown and carpet-slippers appeared suddenly. Before we could shoot it down, it waved at us and shouted. As Commander of the Force, I stepped forward: “Take me to your leader!” I commanded, as per the First Imperative (Subsection 3, Paragraph 2[a]). The creature appeared to have some difficulty hearing us, so I repeated my command.”

Mr Quakeberry, I think it would please the Court if you would tell us what happened next in your own words?

*Commander Algernon Quakeberry (coughing):*

If it pleases the Court, then certainly. The creature appeared to beckon to us and invited us into the building.

“Come in, deary,” it said. My Science Officer reported that this must be an elderly female member of the predominant Terran species. The dressing-gown and lack of teeth seemed to indicate that it was one known as a Granny, a cult of High Priestesses in this primitive society.

We followed the Granny into her inner sanctum, which was littered with newspapers and dead flowers in jars.

I gave the Granny an ultimatum, as per the Second Imperative: “If you do not surrender this planet to the Venturian Confederation, you will die!”

Her reply confused me.

“I know you’re from the Post Office to fix my telephone. You’ve got one of those new vans outside. I don’t know why they painted them that colour: red was perfectly acceptable. Anyway I called the Exchange last night to tell them my telephone wasn’t working - the silly girl didn’t seem to understand. Now, see what you can do - every time I pick it up, the person at the other end seems to be whispering.”

She pushed a crude communications device at me. I passed it to Lieutenant Look-4<sup>th</sup> for analysis and pointed my weapon at the Terran. But she was too quick for me, grabbed it and stuffed it into her handbag.

“Don’t point that thing at me, young man! Now sit down and explain to me what’s wrong with the telephone.”

I replied that I had not come to barter for peace but to take over the planet or shatter it utterly to atoms. I explained that we had arrived from the other side of the galaxy and was about to inform her of the benefits Terra would gain from submitting to the Venturian Confederation, when she interrupted.

“Ah, so you would be from that Comet that’s going past. I’ve read about it in the newspapers, you know. My son tried to show me where it was in the sky, and I think I saw it. But my eyesight’s not as good as it used to be. Do you know I’m 86 years old now? Oh, I must tell you about my feet. I phoned the Chiropodist yesterday. The man’s a complete lunatic and thinks I am too. He pretended he couldn’t understand what I was saying and then he insisted on whispering. I just told him: ‘Mr Garlic’, I said, ‘Do not whisper like a fool. My feet are hurting and I want an appointment right away.’ Well, he could only give me an appointment next week, so I put the phone down on him.

And I just went down there after lunch and waited outside his surgery-door until he took me. No bother to him, of course. But tell me again why you're here?"

So -

*Prosecuting Officer Darangakhoukillian-Z (interrupting):*

So you admit, Commander Quakeberry, that you did not immediately eliminate this creature, this ... Granny?

*Commander Algernon Quakeberry:*

If you had been there, sir, you would understand. Yes, I admit it. But her words were so confusing and I did not have a chance to say anything, because as soon as she had finished talking about one aspect of daily life on Terra, she started on another.

*Prosecuting Officer Darangakhoukillian-Z:*

Thank you, Mr Quakeberry. If it pleases the Court, I would like to read some more from the official report from the Invasiory Force?

*Presiding Officer Burger-Mix:*

Go ahead, sir!

*Prosecuting Officer Darangakhoukillian-Z:*

Commander Quakeberry's report states the following:

"The Terran priestess talked at length about the iniquities of the Banking System on Earth, about certain technical problems which afflict small devices located in the ears of elderly Terrans, about the incompetence of the book-lending services, about fundamental changes occurring in the packaging of foodstuffs. In the space of two Terran hours she had laid bare to us the inner workings of a mis-managed and utterly corrupt society, one which I considered ripe for the picking and which confirmed the Central Committee's decision to subjugate Terra to the Glorious Government of Venturia."

So states your report, sir! But what is the reality? The reality is that, after two hours of this, you still did not annihilate this creature, nor did you demand the unconditional surrender of the planet. Is that not the case, Mr Quakeberry?

*Commander Algernon Quakeberry:*

{Reply inaudible}

*Prosecuting Officer Darangakhoukillian-Z:*

Please speak up, sir, the Court cannot hear you!:

*Commander Algernon Quakeberry:*

It is true, sir... {Further uproar in the Court. Cries of "Outrage!" and "Send him to the Olive Pits!" The Presiding Officer calls for silence} It is true that I did not take decisive action at that point. But it was my opinion as Commanding Officer, that, by agreeing to her wishes, there would be a successful conclusion to the Invasion, with minimal casualties.

*Prosecuting Officer Darangakhoukillian-Z:*

How interesting, sir! Well, please enlighten the Court, Commander - we are most interested in learning how a planet may be captured without casualties!

{Laughter}

*Commander Algernon Quakeberry:*

After some time, I stood up and formally asked for the complete and unconditional surrender of the planet, and stated that I would be obliged to liquidate her if she refused. The Granny looked at me strangely, patting her handbag in which she had concealed my weapon; then she asked me how to spell *liquefy*. I tried in vain to tell her that I had said *liquidate* and not *liquefy*,

but she persisted. In the end I ordered Lieutenant Look-4<sup>th</sup> to spell the word she wanted. Unfortunately, Terran spelling is better than Venturian spelling and the Lieutenant got the word wrong. So the High Priestess sat us all down with pieces of paper and pencils and subjected us to a ritual which she called a Spelling Bee. She fired words at us and we had to spell them correctly: rococo, inoculate, desiccate, minuscule, impostor and many other difficult words.

*{Muttering breaks out in the Court. The Presiding Officer scribbles words on his notepad and calls for a dictionary. Proceedings are suspended for several minutes. Runners are sent from the Court. The prisoner is asked to submit a full list of all the words to be spelled. An adjournment of five hours is called.}*

*Presiding Officer Burger-Mix:*

Order in my Court, please! Order! Order! In the light of this important new evidence, the Court must now decide whether to proceed with the charges against Commander Quakeberry.

*Prosecuting Officer Darangakhoukillian-Z:*

May it please the Court, sir, I cannot see how Commander Quakeberry's asinine actions in the face of a weak enemy of the Venturian people can possibly be excused. Surely there is a consensus among all conscientious citizens that we cannot accommodate such sacrilegious behaviour -"

*{Cheers are heard from the public gallery: "Good on you, Dee-Zed, five words right already!" The Presiding Officer threatens to clear the Court. Noises abate.}*

*Presiding Officer Burger-Mix:*

Would the prisoner please inform the Court how many of the words given by this High Granny were spelled correctly by the Glorious Invasiary Force of Venturia?

*Commander Algernon Quakeberry:*

There were 23 words, sir, and I am pleased to report that my elite fighting unit got only eight of them wrong.

*{Whistles of admiration throughout the Court. Cries of "Let him off, guv'nor!" and "Send Dee-Zed to the Encyclopaedia Farms!"}*

*Commander Algernon Quakeberry:*

The Granny took in our papers and marked them. Then she told us about how Earth technology was full of anarchy, resulting in tins and bottles which could not be opened by Earth's ruling citizens, and about the incompetence of dental surgeons on Earth. Seeing a chance here for a peaceful handover to Venturia, I therefore adopted a conciliatory position, as per Paragraph 16, Sub-Section 14.2 of Standing Orders, sir, and offered the guiding rule of Venturis in cultural, technical and commercial matters, as we have done, sir, in the case of the Planet Karaway in the Pretzel System. But she cunningly diverted the discussion back to the matter of her chiropodist and so we lost our tactical advantage.

*After an adjournment of seventeen minutes and five seconds, the Presiding Officer Burger-Mix sums up:*

Will the prisoner please stand? This is a very serious case, sir, one of the most serious to pass before me. In my 4,603 years of judging, I have seldom come across one which, to all appearances, merited the death-penalty or, more

serious indeed, perpetual exile to a Home Economics class in a secondary school on Bura-Muran. The Invasiory Force was sent to Terra with specific orders to bring that planet under the guidance of the Venturian Confederation, or to perish in the attempt. The Invasiory Force returned with a truly dangerous beast on board and with a list of words almost impossible to spell. I must confess that I only got eleven of the words right -

*{Cries of "Oh no, your Worship!" and gasps of horror are heard.}*

*Presiding Officer Burger-Mix:*

Oh yes, it is true. The one that really got me was 'Broccoli' - I could never get it right. Never mind. Under such circumstances, it would appear to me that Commander Quakeberry acted both correctly and courageously in not destroying all life on that planet, but in reporting back his intelligence to the High Command! I therefore find that there are no charges to answer in that respect. *{Cheers from all sides. Prosecutor Darangakhoukillian-Z slams down his papers and stalks out of the Court-Room.}* But in the matter of the White Rabbit, I must mete out punishment where it is due. For the ill-considered act of bringing to Venturis this alien creature and for the consequences which arose for innocent citizens as a result of its escape, I sentence Commander Quakeberry to seven years hard-labour cleaning out the Proverbial Hamster Cages! And, Mr Quakeberry, let me wish you the very best of luck!