

## Ralph, Randy and the Yellows

He snuck past his parent's room, down the stairs and out into the cornfield. He was careful when he approached the triangular shaped object, but as he inched closer and noticed no explicit dangers, he touched it. The black shimmering material felt cold like metal yet had a smoothness and tackiness he associated with plastic. After he ran his hand across the foreign vehicle, two large doors separated, revealing a sterile, brightly lit interior. Ralph inhaled a deep breath, then he stepped inside.

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Ralph was an only child and lived with his parents on a six-hundred-acre farm. He was home schooled and had few friends. Ralph, by almost all definitions was a loner. Because he had large amounts of time by himself and adequate medial work to attend to, his mind often wandered. He envisioned himself as a cowboy in the old west or an astronaut on a secret space mission. Sometimes his daydreams got more specific, and he would imagine himself as Bruce Willis in "Die Hard" or Daniel Craig in "Casino Royale." After a while, Ralph's daydreams began to take on a more active form as stole mannerisms and lines of dialogue from his favorite action heroes. One day he stole his mother's cigarettes and began smoking. He had put the cigarette to his lips, lit it, inhaled the foreign taste of burning tobacco and said to nobody at all, "Welcome to the party pal." In his best Bruce Willis voice.

When Ralph woke to see bright lights and a strange craft preparing to land in the cornfield, he didn't question it. He had seen the scenario play out in countless movies; it was his time to act. He had been waiting for this moment, preparing for it.

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On the inside of the craft, Ralph studied the buttons arranged in rows along the ceiling. To him, it didn't seem much different from an airplane. As he was staring at one large lever, a short, yellow being appeared before him. It was hard to distinguish the being's head from the being's shoulders and harder still to identify any facial features. Ralph stared at what must have been the being's eyes.

A voice of several odd tones stated, "I am N581." Ralph recognized Justin Bieber's and Oprah's voices in the short utterance and realized the being was using an amalgamation process derived of Earth's audio recordings to speak.

"Yeah well, I'm Ralph." Ralph looked at the short yellow mass, his eyes filled with intrigue rather than hostility or fear. To Ralph's left, a chair rose from the floor of the craft and secured in place with a metallic 'click.' With a short right arm, the yellow pilot motioned for Ralph to sit.

The being took a seat across from him. Ralph smiled, noticing how N5's yellow legs dangled above the floor. He thought the alien looked very clumsy and in reaction, let out a single grunt of shallow, quiet laughter then he dug in his pocket for a Marlboro.

"Well, N5, let's go." Ralph said, bringing the cigarette to his lips. He flicked the lighter and took the first drag. "I wanna see your planet."

N5 reached up with a left arm which was noticeably longer than the right and pulled the ominous red lever. The light beams on the underside of the craft grew in circumference as it slowly ascended. Ralph hadn't remembered seeing windows on the flying machine, yet he could see the isolated broken stalks standing in his father's fields, the cows concentrated into one corner of the pasture and the decaying red barn. Ralph didn't know when or even if he would be back. With the thought, he took a sharp, sustained drag to calm his nerves. N5 thrust the lever back in the other direction and the spaceship stopped ascending. Ralph heard Waylon Jennings' voice from a song he knew well, "Are you sure—?"

Ralph took one more look down at his house where his parents were hopefully still sleeping and oblivious to his dangerous adventure. "Yes. Let's go."

N5 hit a series of archaic, mathematical looking symbols and in an instant the stars became long, brilliant streaks. Ralph pondered the lack of discomfort inside the spacecraft, they were going incredibly fast but were not experiencing any substantial G-forces. Ralph concluded that there was a separate gravitational field at work inside the craft, or maybe even a warp drive enabling the craft to bend space and time.

Ralph leaned against the small backrest and wondered about N5's planet. Was it hospitable for him? Was it years away? Was it like Earth? Ralph always had questions, and questions made him tired. He stubbed out his smoke on the armrest and closed his eyes.

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By the time Ralph grew into a gangly, awkward teenager he was very much into comedy. He still loved adventure of course but began to marvel at the art of a good joke. He started to see himself as Jim Carrey as opposed to Bruce Willis. Being as curious and obsessive as he was, it didn't take Ralph long to acquire the talent and begin interspersing jokes into regular conversation with his parents. Ralph's favorite mode of comedic study was watching a show called, "This Week with Randy Diggin's." The show recapped current pop culture events with wit, satire, and plenty of puns. Asleep on the spaceship, Ralph recalled a joke told by his favorite comedian.

"Kim Kardashian is in the news again did you hear?" The audience waited for the punch line. "Apparently she's dating someone new." Randy paused, "Yep, it's true, there's no ifs, ands or butts about it." Randy stood back from the mic and smiled reveling in the audience's applause then he added, "Well, there might be one big butt about it."

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When Ralph woke, N5 was sitting at the controls, motionless and staring out the main windshield; the stars streaking by in long lines of light. Deciding to add a bit of comedic wit himself, Ralph asked N5, "Do you know E.T.?"

N5 quivered in an odd sort of way which caused Ralph to awkwardly smile and quickly change the subject. "N5, why do you go to Earth, anyway?"

"Fun, fun, fun..." N5 said using the popular Beach Boys song.

"You go there for fun?"

“Yeah, oh yes, yes, baby.” Ralph was taken aback by the sudden pornographic audio used in the conversation.

“Jesus N5, okay but isn’t your planet fun?”

N5 sat motionless but answered, “No.” The alien reached up and pushed the red lever forward, which caused the spaceship to slow almost to a stop. Outside the front windshield, Ralph could see a purple planet with long mountain ranges and a large ocean. As they neared closer, Ralph could see green and orange flashes within the mountains and red laser beams undulating in the sky and up into space. He expected to see a utopia of floating cities and crazy craft. What he saw was a world at war.

The spacecraft descended further, closer to the surface of the purple planet. Ralph watched as the mountains grew larger, more rugged. N5 steered the saucer through the peaks and valleys until stopping above a small, low-lying area nestled amongst the jagged peaks. N5 punched three buttons on the panel and the craft prepared for landing.

The doors of the craft opened, letting in a strong smell of sulfur. Ralph could see the craft was parked just inches above the surface of the planet, hovering. The air was cold, like late fall. There was no warmth from a sun, only blackness.

As he took his first steps on the rugged planet, Ralph felt himself getting lighter and lighter, and realized he was floating away. N5 bounded up and grabbed Ralph by his feet and pulled him back down. Ralph couldn’t help but laugh during their slow descent. N5 had looked like he belonged in a strange version of Mario; the alien had jumped so deliberately yet so slowly.

N5 motioned for Ralph to hang on to his shoulders. The being would keep them both grounded. N5's skin was warm and leathery, but also rigid. Ralph struggled to maintain his grasp because N5's body was so hard. Ralph wondered if N5 had an exoskeleton.

Only the occasional lasers and explosions provided light, but N5 seemed to know the way. The explosions sounded far off, which disappointed Ralph. He could see himself commanding an army of yellow beings, leading them up a mountainside to gain back the freedoms they had lost at the hands of an oppressor. He would persevere against all odds just like Mel Gibson in "We Were Soldiers." N5 seemed to be good, at least cordial but there was the chance that N5 belonged to the oppressive faction. There was no way he could know for sure if N5's side were the good guys or the bad guys without delving into alien politics.

N5 stopped at a sheer mountain face and Ralph was again blinded by a white light as two doors parted. Ralph's eyes slowly adjusted and when he could see clearly, he saw three more yellow beings, two of which were tiny. One of the little beings waddled toward Ralph. It stopped before him and stared. Ralph looked around at the inside of their mountain dwelling. There was no excess, just uncomfortable looking chairs and a long table in the center of the room.

"Homo-sa-pien?" the little yellow creature asked in a science documentary voice.

"Yes, you are right." stated Ralph as he bent down to the being's level thankful for the added gravity in the dwelling, "your parent brought me." Ralph looked over to N5 after lending his assumption. N5 walked closer to Ralph and the little one.

"Help! I need somebody—war, children, it's just a shot away." Ralph could hear N5's emotion in the use of the Beatles and Rolling Stones sound bite. N5 needed his help. The alien had two little ones and a partner that would soon be swept up in the turmoil the rest of the planet was experiencing. Ralph felt overwhelmed, which was a feeling he didn't experience often. He

was usually just an observer, an audience member but now he was thrust into action as the main character in a serious situation that had potential dire consequences. He didn't know how to help and why of all people had N5 chosen him?

“How do you need me to help N5?”

With audio from an old sci-fi movie, N5 responded, “Tell Earth, we come in peace.”

“You want me... me!! To tell the people of Earth that you yellow things come in peace?”

Ralph, while brave and thrill seeking, knew he was a just kid. What did he know about foreign relations, let alone interplanetary relations?

Ralph figured he could hide N5 and his family at the farm for a while but breaking the news to the entire nation and then inevitably the world that aliens do in fact exist was a bit much. Asking any government if his alien friends could stay on Earth for a while would be impossible, no-one would allow it. The concerns were valid too. What diseases would be let in? What malicious motives might N5 have once trust is gleaned from Earthlings? Ralph considered the risk and wanted to help, but it would have to be kept quiet. He proposed his offer.

“I can hide you and your family at the farm. The barn is mostly empty, we could put your space—”

N5 interrupted. “All beings.”

“What?”

From some political speech N5 said, “All of us!”

“What do you mean!”

N5 reached his long arm over and grabbed Ralph. He dragged him across the room to the far wall. The wall slid open, revealing a large room that must have taken up the entire footprint

of the mountain. Inside the room were thousands of yellow beings, large ones and small ones, hundreds of families.

Ralph hung his head. The problem had gotten one hundred times worse. What could he do now? Surely N5 could find a better planet to bring thousands of refugees, why Earth?

“Couldn’t you live on Mars?”

“She’s so cold.” N5 said once again using Mick Jagger’s voice.

“Venus?”

“Hot stuff.”

Ralph didn’t want to disappoint N5, but there was no way he could hide thousands of little yellow creatures on his father’s farm. Earth was becoming too populated as it was, and people would be hostile to the beings no matter how nice they were. They were different and anything different was suspicious. Ralph needed to find an alternative solution. He could hide them in the Amazon or maybe on the plains of Africa, but that could create conflict down the road. He wished he would have told N5 to leave and never come back when he discovered his craft in the cornfield. Unfortunately, like so many times before, his curious nature overpowered his precautious instincts.

“Alright.” Ralph said as he continued to stall and come up with a solution. He needed to know more about the alien conflict. “What’s the war about N5?”

“... Mr. Roboto.” N5 said, using the words of the band Styx.

“Like Robots?” Ralph asked.

“Oh yeah!” shrieked a female voice from another porno. N5 had no filter.



Ralph was empathetic to N5's situation since robots were a potential problem on Earth with the recent advancements in artificial intelligence, but that hardly helped in solving the challenging predicament. "Do you have any idea how to stop them?"

"No." N5 paused for a long while as if to gather more English words into his vocabulary in which he used to speak. "We created them. We use them for things we dislike doing. Cannot re-program or turn off. They learned."

It was the longest sentence Ralph had heard N5 speak; it was cut together with rapid jumps in diction, volume, and voicing. "Are you robots N5?"

"No. We are the Yellows."

Ralph wasn't sure what a *Yellow* was, but he sensed they were biological like himself. An idea occurred to Ralph. "Are the robots capable of experiencing emotion?"

N5 gathered more words. "Don't think so. They use math and probability to decide."

"Do you experience emotions N5?"

"We eliminated anger, sadness, and jealousy eons ago. Two hundred bindles ago humor evaporated and now happiness is under attack because of the Greens."

Ralph didn't bother to ask what a *bindle* was. "The Greens? Are they the robots?"

"Yes. Like us, but green. Computers for brains."

"N5, when did you first create these bots?"

"Three hundred bindles ago."

"And you probably modeled them to be like you, correct?"

"Yes."

"So, they are programmed not to get angry, sad or jealous."

“They are analytical. May have developed emotions. We are taking space, using resources.”

“This response could be purely them running the numbers and realizing they have to kill you off so they can sustain themselves?”

“Yes.”

“I have an idea N5, but I need to go back to Earth.” Ralph walked toward the door of the mountain dwelling. He looked back to make sure N5 was following; he was but slowly, as if unsure of Ralph’s request. Ralph himself was unsure.

The spaceship ascended. Ralph looked out the windows again. He saw N5’s two little ones staring up at them leaving, surely wondering if when they get back it will be too late. Explosions were still erupting, their orange glow in the sky still far off. There was hope. Ralph plucked a cigarette from his pack. As he prepared to light up, he said, “Humor, that’s how we beat them.”

N5 stared ahead at the streaking stars.

“You said the robots were created three hundred whatever’s ago and if humor died out two hundred whatever’s ago, then that means part of their computer brain has been lying dormant, they may not have overridden it but simply forgot it is there.” Ralph took a drag. “If we overload that circuit, overwhelm them with humor, it could kill them.”

“Don’t count on it.” N5 said, using some gruff voice from a 1970s crime flick.

Ralph took a long pull on his cigarette. “There’s a chance, N5.”

The spaceship intercepted Earth’s orbit just above Beverly Hills, California. Randy Diggin’s sprawling mansion spread out across an acre of land directly below them.

“God, I hope he’s home.” Ralph said, noticing it was night again, or possibly still the same night. The craft descended further, hovering just above the roof of the house. He didn’t know how it happened, but Randy’s roof evaporated, revealing him asleep in bed next to a gorgeous brunette woman. N5 reached up with his long arm to a lever on the control panel and pulled it down. A door opened on the floor of the ship and a bright blue beam appeared below. It cast down and encapsulated Randy, but not his bedmate.

“Are you sure?” N5 asked again using the Waylon Jennings song.

“Yes.”

With the flick of a switch, Randy hovered above his bed and slowly ascended toward the craft, still fast asleep. As he entered the craft, the door closed. N5 hit another button; the roof reappeared unscathed. Randy Diggins laid on the floor of the craft in his plaid pajamas, still sleeping.

N5 piloted himself, Ralph and Randy up into orbit and headed back to the purple planet. Ralph tapped out another cigarette. “I hope he’s got good material, we’re gonna need him at his best.”

N5 clamored down from his pedestal seat, knelt, and hovered his short arm above Randy’s head. Randy’s eyes opened. They darted around, taking in their new environment.

“What the hell!?”

Ralph extended his hand. “I’m Ralph.”

Randy shook Ralph’s hand. He looked at N5. “What about E.T. here?”

“That’s N5, he needs our help.”

“Jesus Christ, is this some PR shit? Did Melissa put you up to this? This better not be one of those 'Make a Wish' things, costume looks pretty good though.”

“This is no joke, Randy.” Ralph offered a cigarette. Randy took the smoke stick with a shaky hand and placed it between his quivering lips. Ralph sparked his lighter and lit it for him. “The short of it is, there are a bunch of robots threatening to take over N5’s planet, we need you to be funny to defeat them.”

“Like funny how?” Randy asked in a mobster accent, quoting the movie *Goodfellas*.

“Like hilarious funny, we need you to melt their faces Randy, literally.”

The gravity of the situation finally hit Randy as the unlikely trio streaked across the darkness of space. Randy was always working on new material, but he didn’t think he would be thrust into a space gig where being funny was literally a matter of life or death. Ralph saw Randy contemplating the mission and gave a nonchalant shrug as he continued to puff on what remained of his cigarette.

“Is there a particular topic to hit on with these guys?” Randy asked, taking a drag.

“Not sure, N5 here,” Ralph motioned to the yellow pilot, “can understand us pretty well, so I would assume the bots can as well.”

Ralph told Randy how humor died out amongst the Yellows and that he was counting on the notion that the bots' humor sensors were lying dormant, and the key was to overload the circuit.

“Sounds like a gamble to me. Why didn’t you get like the whole cast of SNL or something, why put this all on me?”

“Hey man, N5 picked me and I’m picking you.” Randy stubbed out his cigarette and settled back in his chair. Ralph sensed a tinge of annoyance.

Randy sat thinking. Just moments ago, he was asleep next to the warm, ravishing body of Veronica Velazquez, a fashion model and up-and-coming actress. He wished he would be there

when she woke. The situation he was in left much to be desired. Randy always had shit luck.

“Hey N5, what is the shittiest planet in the universe?” N5 remained silent. Randy offered the punch line, “Uranus.”

N5 twitched violently. Ralph jumped up from his seat and steadied N5 so he wouldn't fall off his chair. The two humans exchanged worried looks as the alien convulsed like someone experiencing a seizure.

“N5? N5! Can you hear me?” Ralph pleaded, knowing N5's death would leave him to die careening across space in a foreign craft. Slowly N5's twitches diminished in intensity and frequency, and then, like nothing happened, the alien sat straight up and opened his small eyes.

“Ha, ha, ha, ha.” The sound of his laugh was strange, guttural with an ominous *h* sound and a high pitched, nasal *a* sound. Even amidst the spooky laugh, Randy, and Ralph both smiled. Humor had worked on the dormant humor receptors of N5's biological brain. What would it do to a computer?

N5 pulled the red lever, and the purple planet came into view. The craft made its way down for landing.

“Jesus! This is where you things live?” asked Randy.

Explosions were erupting all over the surface of the planet in brilliant oranges and greens. N5 steered the craft through the mountains before landing it again at his dwelling nestled between the high peaks. Randy and Ralph held on to N5 as he walked into the mountain fortress. They needed to come up with a plan.

“Okay N5, where is the largest congregation of these bots?” asked Ralph.

N5 walked over and touched the far wall. A map appeared. The map showed a 3-D image of the planet. “Here.” N5 said, pointing to a large peninsula.

“Well, looks like we’re goin’ to Florida.” Randy said, causing N5 to start trembling again. He fell to the floor and let out another unnerving, “Ha, ha, ha, ha.”

“Would you stop it?” Ralph asked as he stared at Randy.

“Can’t help it.”

Ralph turned back to the map. “What’s our best approach? Just fly in there and start telling jokes?”

“Sounds okay to me.” Randy said.

“Okay then. We start there.”

Not wasting any time, the trio turned back the way they came. Just before they reached the exit, a sudden force dented in the metal of the doors, the accompanying thunderous 'boom' reverberated off the walls of the mountain fortress. In the ear-ringing aftershock, N5 took small cautious strides toward the door. When he reached it, he placed his hand on the metal. The door virtually disappeared to reveal hundreds of the robot Greens quickly advancing. N5 removed his hand and turned to Randy. Using the words of a 1990s AC/DC song, he asked, “Are you ready?”

Randy’s stomach churned with a familiar nauseous feeling he experienced every time he went on stage. This time, however, bombing meant death. As he mentally re-hashed the few jokes he had prepared, N5 reached for his hand and shook it, giving him a long look with concerned eyes. N5 turned to leave, to seal himself inside the large room with the rest of the Yellows. Ralph stood, confident and purposeful, ready to open the doors and meet the threat.

Ralph hit the button he had seen N5 use. The doors parted, and the humans stepped out into the cold sulfuric air. In the low gravity, Ralph and Randy groped around their surroundings before affixing their grips to a rock wall in front of the mountain dwelling.

The first wave of Greens approached in a large formation. To Ralph and Randy, it was reminiscent of historic Earth warfare before guerrilla tactics prevailed. Ralph lit a cigarette. The flame from his lighter flared larger due to the increased hydrogen in the air. He took a long, hard drag and passed it to Randy, who did the same. The Greens stopped before them; they stood silently, processing the presence of the humans.

Not wasting any time, Randy let himself drift forward and told the first joke, “Did you hear about the,” his voice quivered upon noticing the gun-like weapons each Green was carrying, “Yell-ow an-d Green couple?” The Greens stopped but didn’t answer the question.

“They *blue* it!” Randy said with forced charisma. The army before him stood motionless.

Randy turned to Ralph. “It didn’t work.”

“Just hold on, relax. Dying is only natural.”

“Wha- dying is only natural! I would prefer not to die at the hands of this booger army!”

“Just freakin’ relax, alright. No good is going to come out of being fearful, it causes hesitation and hesitation causes your worst fears to come true.”

“Is that from a movie?”

“Yes.”

Randy readjusted his posture and tried to embrace the wise words of young Ralph. The Greens took another step forward. “Whoa, whoa, you got someplace to be?” Randy asked rhetorically before offering another joke.

“What do you call an alien robot without a hard drive?” Another long bout of silence ensued. Randy offered the punch line, “an easy commuter.” One robot began twitching and convulsing violently. The effect was contagious as it spread across the front line of Greens.

“Don’t stop!” Ralph yelled, “hit ‘em again!”

“So, is there a *honey* moon in this galaxy, or is that none of my beeswax?” The shaking got worse, and the Greens fell. Randy offered another space joke.

“Do you guys have any Mars Bars? Or do I have to go to the Milky Way for those?”

The front line of robots fell and with the last bits of shaking, they laughed with their electronic voices, “ha, ha, ha, ha.” Their heads exploded in a dazzling display of blue flashes.

The next line of Greens advanced, taking no different precautions than the ones before them to quell the onslaught of humor. Randy took the moment of transition to gather himself and ready more one-liners.

“What’s an alien’s favorite button on a keyboard?” Randy knew they wouldn’t respond, but the pause was crucial. The clauses of the joke had to be distinctly separate. “The *space* bar!” The Greens raised their guns. Before they could fire Randy asked, “Have you ever been to *Planet Fitness*?” Randy and Ralph dove for cover behind their small rock outcropping as another group of Greens fell.

“You’re doing good.” Ralph said.

“Yeah, but I’m running out of shit.”

“Nah, you’re good.” Ralph said, tapping out another cigarette as the second wave of Greens began twitching. As Ralph sparked up his smoke, he neglected the extra hydrogen in the air. The flame from his lighter flared high and bright, igniting his hair. Ralph lost his grip and started floating away. His arms flailed as he batted at the flames. Randy tackled Ralph as best he could and laid over his head, snuffing out the fire. The bots seemed to find the ordeal funny as blue flashes illuminated across the front line.

“Nice, man.” Randy said with a laugh after he was certain no real damage was done to Ralph. The two dragged themselves back to their cover along the bigger part of the rock wall.



Seemingly undeterred, Ralph lit his cigarette, this time with an abundance of caution, something usually foreign to him. The two passed the smoke back and forth as the next wave of Greens approached. It was going to be a long night.

The Greens stopped before the rock outcropping, readied their weapons and began firing. Ralph and Randy hid behind their cover. The red laser streaks hit the rocks, breaking off only small chunks.

Randy yelled, "Are there any daughters in this universe?" He followed up with, "Because all I see are *suns!*" Knowing he needed another joke, he continued, "What do you call a spacecraft full of child-bearing females?" Randy was giving shorter pauses, "The *Mother-ship!*"

Ralph sat with his back against the rocks, rolling his eyes. Randy looked at him, "You try one." Ralph swallowed the lump in his throat and surveyed his surroundings, then he rose above the rocks; this was his moment.

"When a robot has a problem to solve what do they do?" Ralph waited; Randy peeked out from behind the rocks to witness the effectiveness of the joke. "They go back to data-basics." The robots fell to the surface of the planet, sputtering their last digital signals.

"Nice job, man." Randy said, smiling.

The two humans stayed hidden for several hours, Randy and Ralph fired upon the Greens with their onslaught of jokes which were nothing too hilarious by human standards. If there was an inclination of humor or a pun, the joke was effective. After half of the Greens had been rendered into scrap metal, a large ship came over and beamed them up. The two humans knew they were lucky and had to move.

Ralph and Randy re-entered N5's mountain fortress. "We did it N5!" Randy exclaimed as he searched for the little yellow being. The door to the far room opened and N5 waddled in.

“Yes, oh god yes, more!” N5 said. Ralph thought he recognized the porn star’s voice but said nothing. The three beings shared an awkward hug on account of N5’s small stature.

“We need to move N5, they’ll be back with bigger guns.” N5 turned to the thousands of beings that waited in the room behind him. He waddled over and opened the doors. A parade of Yellow’s followed him.

“Should we stay or should we go now?” asked N5.

Ralph smiled and led his rebel force outside, where he noticed the subtle warmth of a distant sun peeking above the horizon. It had seemed like two Earth days of cold night, but now things were changing. Brightness and the hope for a warm future was spreading rapidly across the purple planet. There was much that needed to be done, but Ralph knew he could do it with N5 and Randy by his side. They would defeat the Greens one joke at a time.