

The Plunderer

by Jason Spittel

Bill (Gunnery Captain of the Left Hand Gun, HMM Plunderer), while not exactly obese, nor could a disinterested observer call him him rotund, was nevertheless the sort of man who'd never be caught by a famine unprepared. And because of this more than regulation circumference, many, who didn't know him well, thought him to be a slow, in mind in body.

Everyone assumed he hadn't quite understood the order.

It wasn't a difficult one. It wasn't an order to fire upon, say, some life-forms who were armed with nothing more than A Bit Of Gunpowder, A Metal Ball, And A Reasonably Straight Tube. It wasn't the sort of order that would involve governmental inquiries later, summons, embarrassing first eye witnesses, that sort of thing. No.

What he had been order to do was to shoot a Colossus Tank, a rather large treaded contraption operated by 100 underpaid overambitious youth which could raze a city block in, depending on the city, and the block, a little under 10 seconds. Now in absolute terms, no, the order wasn't evil. The Colossus in question belonged to the Abergine State Corporation which for presumably wildly unjust reasons opposed to Her Majesty's interests on Planet 893029184902917 (Peace XXIV).

The Plunderer, at 0500, had happened upon the Colossus. It caught sight of the tank when tramping over a hill, and, stopping somewhat comically, dropped to its haunches.

All 287 people aboard had to check gauges, hit switches and go through a litany of checklists to make sure a Gravity Induced Lunge at Maximum Velocity hadn't destroyed anything too expensive or necessary. When Captain Fulholland ordered a GILMV he did it with

little warning and less consideration to the mech and her people.

Behind that hill, crouched low, the Plunderer had battered the tank with its main missile array, her left and right Xandorian Beam Cannons. In a hasty retreat, the tank took a not trivial tumble down one of the planet's lesser mapped craters.

At 0519, Bill was given the order. He had taken more than three minutes to execute. What he couldn't tell the Captain, or any of his crew, was something that was so spleen bustingly obvious it gave him physical pain when he realized none of them knew why he had taken so long.

While Bill delayed, the Colossus fired off all its escape pods, and as they streaked up into the stratosphere, each leaving a trail of bright green vapour, a counter command came down from the Captain.

"Belay that order Gunnery Captain, belay."

The Admiral, cruising far above the planet had caught the last bit of action on the Spectro Vision, and had congratulated Captain Fulholland on showing "Courage, gallantry, and above all gentlemanly mercy upon the 102 souls aboard the Colossus Tank Rachimov". Fulholland had got a medal out of it as well, which, if he was a normal captain and perhaps one who did not run his mech as near mutiny as possible, would have lead to Bill getting off the hook.

Of course, Captain Fulholland was not such a man. Captain "Damnable Bastard" Fulholland was not nearly such a man.

