BOATY McBOATFACE BOOK 1

THE BIG LAUNCH

As night fell, the great Scottish shipyard stood silent. The giant cranes were still and apart from the gentle hum of the generators supplying electricity to the powerful floodlights the whole place was quiet.

There were three ships in the dock that night, all due to be launched the next day in a very special ceremony. By a very special person. Two of ships were gigantic. A new battleship the HMS Warspite, and a brand spanking super yacht, the SS I’ve Got Loads Of Money – And You Don’t. But between them lay a smaller ship. A much smaller ship.

And then the silence was broken – by a giggle.

“Have you heard?” boomed the giant warship to the super yacht.

“Heard what?” replied the luxury yacht.

“The wee one is going to get a name”

“The SS Tiny Tot?” replied the yacht

“Ha Ha Ha!” bellowed the warship, “No even worse than that!”

Knowing he was being talked about, the smaller of the three ships opened his eyes and ears.

“They've had a vote.” continued the warship “The result is overwhelming. They – the stupid public- are going to call it...wait for it.... Boaty McBoatface!”

At which point the two larger ships burst out laughing.

Then the cranes joined in, swaying about, giggling uncontrollably, one of HMS Warspite’s guns just about fired itself by mistake and a all of the enormous infinity pools on the SS I’ve Got Loads Of Money – And You Don’t nearly emptied themselves into the sea.

Oh poor wee boat! Hanging his head, he shut his eyes tightly, went a very deep red and wanted nothing more than to crawl into a hole. Or at least slip under the waves, never to return. What an utter embarrassment. What a stupid, stupid name. Of all the names! He would be a laughing stock. He wasn’t even at sea yet and the whole world was laughing at him.

Heart-broken, he listened to the laughter as the whole shipyard seemed to fall into hysterics...

Just then though, deep within the small boats modestly-sized bridge, a series of lights started flashing. Hard drives whizzed, screens crackled and a whole wall of delicate instruments came to life. Then came a Voice. It seemed to be be coming from a large red television camera eye hanging from the roof of the bridge. An eye with a large Smiley in the middle of it and covered in what looked like curly red hair.

“All systems initiated. Feedback loops running. Health Check First Run. Pass!” the Eye announced.

“What in the name of all the oceans is going on?” the wee boat wondered to himself.

“Helipad. Check! Robotics. Check! Sonar and Ultrasonics. Check!” the Eye continued.

“What a day,” thought the wee boat to himself. “First I am publically humiliated and now I am hearing voices. Am I going mad?”

“No need to worry!” replied the Voice “All systems up and running. Pre-launch check complete. SAL reporting for duty.”

“SAL?” asked the wee boat.

“Yes, System wide Artificial intelligence Local area network...but you can call me SAL”

The wee boat was lost for words.

“I can see you’re lost for words wee one. Let me explain. I am your on-board computer.

I can tell already we are going to have some fantastic adventures!”

“Adventures? I don’t think I’ve been on an adventure before. I been tied to this dock for four years sandwiched between these pair of morons. They’re just so RUDE!”

“Ha Ha! Well let me just bring you up to speed on the adventures that you and I are going to have. Your mission – if you choose to accept it – is to travel to where no boat has traveled before. To explore strange new underwater worlds and meet strange new underwater creatures. Seventy per cent of this planet is covered by water. The rest by land. Man has explored most of the land – even bits of outer space – but the rest – the oceans – well, that is where you and I come in!”

“Really? That sounds great! A far as my mission goes... I accept!”

“Wonderful. You know there has never been a boat quite like you. You are not the biggest or the fastest or the strongest.... but you are the smartest and also maybe one of the bravest. But maybe more importantly, your mission is one of good – you are not here to destroy or two show off – you are here to discover and to learn! You should be very proud!”

“But I am not proud. I am a laughing stock. Have you heard what all the other boats are saying about me? They are killing me. Do you know what I am going to be called?”

“Oh I wouldn’t worry about that. Everything will be made very clear in the morning. Now get some sleep and I'll make sure all the systems are running smoothly. Tomorrow is a big day. Tomorrow is your Big Launch!!”

The Wee Boat tried to sleep but kept waking up. He was nervous and kept thinking about the day ahead. Would everyone laugh at him? Who was the very special person who would be at the launch?

But there was something else. He had never been to sea before. What was it going to be like? He felt scared.

"Stop thinking!" he said to himself "Try and sleep!"

He closed his eyes again and drifted off. Then he heard a sound and looked around but all he could see was mist. Then another noise and through the mist what look like giant icebergs. It was also very cold. Then he saw an old boat slowly making its way towards him. It had huge dents in it's hull, seaweed and barnacles hanging from three battered old sails and on its prow he could make out its name: "Onward"

The Wee Boat looked all around for any sign that he was still in the dockyard. But he could see none. It looked like he was at sea. But how could that be? Was he dreaming?

Slowly, slowly the old boat sailed nearer and is it did it began to sing, it's song carried through the still, cold air on flakes of snow.

"Come all ye young fellows that follows the sea

Now please pay attention and listen to me"

The wee boat shivered and then much to his relief he heard the soft reassuring voice of SAL.

"A quick search reveals the boat "Onward" to be the first icebreaker built in Norway in 1892, but according to records she was lost at sea in 1923." said SAL

“Is he a ghost ship?’ asked the wee boat.

“I have no record of such a thing” replied SAL

"So what is an ice breaker?" asked the wee boat.

"A specially-strengthened ship that was able to sail through the Arctic and Antarctic without being crushed by the ice.”

“So I wonder what he wants?” said said the wee boat to SAL. But before SAL could answer the old boat started to sing again.

“I am here to help.

Many miles have I travelled and much have I seen.’

Don't be afraid, trust in yourself and enjoy the journey that you are about to go on.

Listen to the sea and the wonders she holds.

Follow her currents and trust in her tides

But above all, follow the Golden Rule.”

“What is the Golden Rule?” asked the wee boat.

“To answer the call and heartfelt plea

Of any creature that finds itself in peril on the sea.”

And with that the old boat sailed off, the mist cleared and the icebergs melted away.

The wee boat woke with a start. He immediately started looking around to see where he was. But there were no icebergs or old boats to be seen. He was back in the dock. Something had changed though. He was quite taken aback to see a large crowd sitting in a specially erected enclosure at the front of which was a man standing in front of a microphone. Next to him was the very special guest.

Then the man started to speak.

“Good morning ladies and gentlemen and welcome to a very special event. My name is

Professor Nigel Nuttbolt and I am a …”

“Top NERD’ whispered SAL

“NERD?” replied the wee boat.

“NERD is short for National Environment Research Department.” replied SAL “They’re based in Edinburgh and they designed us, had us built and are in charge of what we are going to do.”

“So who are they?”

“Scientists mostly. Scientists are great, they help us find out about the world around us"

Professor Nuttbolt then continued his speech.

"Today we are here to launch our new vessel whose mission is to help us find new ways to manage our environment responsibly as we pursue new ways of living, doing business and growing our economies."

"What language is that?" whispered the wee boat to SAL.

"Sounds like gibberish to me" replied SAL "quite boring too. What kind of mission is that? Think I prefer the old boats Golden Rule."

The Professor tried to continue his speech but was rudely interrupted by the two big ships.

"Oh hurry up" screeched the luxury yacht, "get Boaty out the way so we can get on with the real important business of launching me and HMS Warspite"

"Hear! Hear!" boomed Warspite.

The very special person did not look very amused by the two big ships behavior.

Professor Nuttbolt didn't look to happy either but he carried on.

“Now before we continue with today's launch it is time to introduce a very special person indeed.”

“Boaty McBoatface!” shouted HMS Warspite

“Or is it Jokey McJokeboat!” shrieked the super yacht, both howling uncontrollably at their own cruel jokes.

Professor Nuttbolt waited patiently until the rudeness had gone away and then calmly finished his speech.

“Sorry about that interruption Ladies and Gentlemen, but now as I promised I am going to hand you over to a very special person indeed….Ladies and gentlemen…the Queen of Scotland…Queenie McQueenface!”

At which point HMS Warspite nearly choked on his own anchor chain and the SS I’ve Got Loads Of Money – And You Don’t started going through her passenger cabins in order to find 10 million dollars and some expensive jewelry to offer as a groveling apology.

Looking at these antics the Queen of Scotland began her speech.

“As you all know my real name is Morag Jessie McKay and I did not ever really want to be a queen. After all I come from a long line of dinner ladies. But after I was voted in as your new Queen, there was also a vote to give me a proper title. Queen Morag the First would have done, but the people decided to name me Queeny McQueenface. At first to be honest I was a little embarrassed by it ..But then I became immensely proud of this name I had been given as it was the People’s choice and it made me the People’s Queen. And so it is with this young boat that we are here to name.”

At which the wee boat, gulped nervously and went all shy..

“There’s no need to be embarrassed,” responded the Queen.

"The name you are about to be given is the People’s choice and this makes you the People’s boat. There can be no higher honour. It is a beautiful name and it is a beautiful thing you are about to do. On behalf of the people of Scotland I wish you every success on this important mission"

She then smiled a beautiful smile and amongst the crowd a huge cheer went up, a spectacular firework display lit up the day and a special flypast of roaring jets wrote the name ‘Boaty McBoatFace’ in brilliant white smoke trails against the clear blue sky.

The wee boat didn't know what to say. All his fears and worries were swept away and his heart swelled with pride.

The the Queen turned her attention to the two larger boats, who were now expecting their own special launch. But that is not what happened. Lowering her voice and looking directly at the crowd, the Queen began to speak..

“To be perfectly honest with you all, I have been very disappointed with the attitude of the other two…er…'boats’ in this shipyard.

In my opinion – as your Queen – there are far too many wars going on in this world and to me it does not really make much sense to send yet another warship out to sea. If we are interested in building peace we should be building less warships, not more…”

The crowd cheered loudly drowning out the loud protests of HMS Warspite.

“Bearing that in mind” continued Queenie, “I hereby confine HMS Warspite to dock until you the people work out what to do with him”

“Replace his shells with seeds, fill his magazine with meals and have him fire fresh water over drouthie deserts!” shouted two young girls from the crowd.

“Ha Ha Ha!,” replied Queenie “ That’s not a bad idea! I’ll look into it!”

“What about the other one! – the SS Whatever Her Name Is…” shouted a man from the crowd.

“You mean the SS Jobby McJobbyface?” replied another. The crowd roared with laughter.

“One doesn’t know yet’ replied Queenie with a broad smile “Any ideas?”

“Make her take us on our school holidays! For nothin!” suggested a young boy

“ Quite fancy a wee winter cruise in the Carribean!”

The crowd laughed and cheered while the two big boats growled and spat with anger and pain.

Now it was Boaty’s turn.

Hoisting a flag with a large yellow Smiley on it he made his first speech.

“Your Royal Highness, Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you for all your kind wishes and support. No one is looking forward more to the adventures we are about to embark upon than SAL and I. We will try to find out as much as we can about the new and strange underwater worlds that lie submerged around this beautiful Blue Planet. Please wish us luck and be assured that this wee boat bears the name Boaty McBoatface with nothing but pride. Thank you and goodbye! We will be in touch soon!”

With that Boaty McBoatface and SAL sailed down the Clyde and the whole shipyard from all the people to the cranes in the dock to the jets in the sky broke into song.

"Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday Boaty McBoatface, Happy birthday to you!"

Boaty had never been so happy and as the newly named boat headed confidently out to sea he could think of no place he would rather be. It had all been worth it.

Then SAL spoke.

"Just received our first directions from NERD, Boaty. They have asked us to head North by North West to the Arctic Sea."

"Full Steam ahead!" replied Boaty.

Through the waves they travelled, the sky clear and blue above them.

Then SAL spoke again.

"Boaty, just had a distress call from a pilot whale in the Faroe Islands"

"No problem SAL," replied Boaty "We'll just drop by on the way and see what the problem is."

"But Boaty, the Faroe Islands are 500 miles off our course."

And so Boaty had to come to his first decision. Should he follow NERD's instructions or head off course to help a whale that was in trouble?”

What to do? He thought and thought and couldn’t make up his mind. Then he remembered the words of the old icebreaker and the Golden Rule.

“To answer the call and heartfelt plea

Of any creature that finds itself in peril on the sea.”

"SAL" he said. "I have come to a decision. We shall follow the Golden Rule. We must help this whale if we can. Please set a course for the Faroe Islands.

" Yes Boaty" Then there was a bit of a silence and SAL spoke again.

"Boaty..I've been thinking...maybe I shouldn’t call you Boaty”

“You don’t like the name Boaty McBoatface?” asked Boaty a little nervously.

“I LOVE the name Boaty McBoatface and it’s fantastic that everybody else is going to call you that. But I think I should call you something else.”

“So what would you like to call me SAL?”

There was a brief silence and then SAL replied.

“I would like to call you Captain...My Captain!”

With that the pair headed off to the Faroe Islands and Boaty McBoatface felt sure that this was just the first step on a journey that could be the best that any boat could ever have.

COMING SOON: BOOK 2 – SAVING THE WHALES