

The Adventures
of Billy Bob,
Jimmy John, and
Cletus: Fly by
the Moon

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Part 1

“This is it, Cletus. We gon’ make it this time.”

“I sure hope so, Billy Bob,” Cletus said. “Ninth time’ s the charm as some folks say.”

“These radical liberals and deep state elites won’t stop coming for our freedom. Our liberty. We’ ll show ‘em. We’ ll show the criminal government how to do it right,” Billy Bob said, snapping the right strap of his greasy, sweat-soaked overalls. He was shrouded beneath a whirling cloud of horseflies swirling overhead. They swooped down and zipped up through the air like they rode atop some kind of invisible roller coaster.

“They is dark,” Cletus said. “They is evil.”

“Sure are.”

“Some even say they is a dark force of medieval communists.”

“Many say it. They lurk and they prowl in the night,” Billy Bob said. He squatted and tiptoed around Cletus. Body convulsing, legs shaking in a occult dance, wiggling his fingers like he was casting a wicked spell. “Some say when they come into contact with the Sun’s shining light, they melt like that witch from the Wizard of Oz.”

“Sounds like a strange force of weirdos,” Cletus said, shaking out his tattered, stained white teeshirt to get a bit of air to flow through the holes near his armpits.

“Yup,” Billy Bob said.

“But they sure ain’t no force to be reckoned with,” Cletus said. “Ain’t no match for American Patriots prepared to stand and fight for the freedoms of every citizen in the United States of America.”

“Nope,” Billy Bob said. “Patriots unite, communists divide. You think those anarchists could build a craft like this?”

“Nope! It was easy, too,” Cletus said.

“We’ve had plenty of practice over the past three and a half years,” Billy Bob said.

“Who said we couldn’t learn about rocket science on the interweb?” Cletus asked. “Won’t find any’ a that information coming out of the mainstream media and that cesspool of blood and lies.”

“Hand me that socket wrench, will you?” Billy Bob asked. “I’ve got to tighten this here bolt to that there fuel canister.”

Cletus reached a greasy black hand into the pile of tools scattered across the ground. He sifted through the slender pieces of metal. Holding them up towards Billy Bob one after the other.

“That ain’t it either. Dammit, Cletus. You should know what a socket wrench is by now. How many times we done this?” Billy Bob asked, reaching past Cletus and grabbing the socket wrench from the mound.

“I don’t know, Billy Bob. Rocket science is easy, but it ain’t that easy, ya know?” Cletus said. He took off his straw cowboy hat and wiped the line of sweat that gathered across his forehead like some salty sea bubble orchestra.

“Well we’s experts now,” Billy Bob said. “Look at this ship.”

Billy Bob backed away and spread his hands wide like he was introducing something or someone hidden behind a curtain on a game show. The two rocket experts gazed up at their

space craft. Chrome silver panels of varying shades and tones gleamed bright beneath the scalding Mid-Western Sun, beaming down upon their hairy backs.

Tall stalks of corn swayed in the breeze across the vast field behind the broken down farmhouse, where chipped white paint flaked off of the walls, revealing the plain wood hidden beneath like a veil had been lifted. Panels from the shuttered windows swung wide open. Creaking back and forth, back and forth, with each fresh gust of warm wind.

The space craft was tilted slightly. Propped up by thick bales of hay. A collection of plexiglass panels had been rounded in an oval shape. Forming a see-through dome of sorts around the main cockpit. The ship was equipped with fuel tanks welded together from old planes used to drop pesticides over crop fields. Tied tight to each other with thick brown rope that Cletus found sitting in various places around the farm. Stenciled across the side of the ship, were the words, PATRIOT-17, in a mixture of red, white, and blue spray paint.

“Now that’s a mighty fine spaceship we got here, Cletus,” Billy Bob said. A warm gust of wind sent the whiskers atop his head swaying to and fro like reeds of grass blowing in a swamp.

“Never seen anything like it. You think we got enough rocket boosters?” Cletus asked.

“Twenty-two is plenty. We ain’ t taking any moon rocks back on this trip so no need for too much thrust. We just need enough explosive power to whip around the Moon to get us back to Earth,” Billy Bob said.

“Would be nice to grab us a few moon rocks though,” Cletus said. “Could trade’ em for some barrels of booze.”

“Don’ tchu fret there, Cletus. We’ ll be moon walkers some day. For now, we fly by the moon,” Billy Bob said, waving his hand through the air like he was tracing a rainbow. “Now where in the damn hell is Jimmy John with our space suits?”

“He’ s coming. Had to stop off and grab us a few sandwiches for the trip. You know, being that it’ s a long way and all,” Cletus said.

“Good on ’em,” Billy Bob said.

“Why we even need space suits?” Cletus asked. “Can’ t we just bundle up tight and hold our breath?”

“How long you hold your breath for?” Billy Bob asked, looking down his nose. His mouth hung open beneath a scrunched forehead and bunched eyebrows.

“Who me? Shoot. At least a minute or two. As long as I’ m not drunk or something.”

“And when’ s the last time that happened?”

“Last time I held my breath or been drunk?”

“Drunk. ”

“Well, today. Thought I should be sober to operate the navigation. ”

“Won’t be that hard, Cletus. Look, ” Billy Bob said, pointing up towards the full white ball hanging opposite the sun, “the Moon’ s right there. ”

“True. Howbouta swig’ a whiskey then?” Cletus proposed.

“Alright, go fetch us some, ” Billy Bob said.

Cletus reached a greasy hand into his back pocket and fished out a bottle of rye whiskey. Half drank.

“There we go, ” Billy Bob said, clapping his hands, eyeing the bottle.

The bronze liquid sloshed around the glass container. Cletus took a long swig and dropped the bottle from his lips. “Yeehaww!” he screamed, handing the bottle over to Billy Bob. “That’ ll put some lead in your pencil, ” he said, behind his puckered face.

Billy Bob tilted his head back and let the liquid flow from above his lips, pouring in a long stream of the brown booze. His bearded face turned sour as he shook the rye whiskey cobwebs from his head.

“Sorry, don’t know if you got the herpes is all,” he said, handing the bottle back to Cletus.

“No worries. I do got the herpes,” Cletus said. “Don’t make me a worse person though, you know?”

“Course not, Cletus. Just a poor rocket scientist with the herp. There’s worse in the world. And after we fly by the Moon, I’m sure you can get that herpes fixed right up,” Billy Bob said.

“Fellers!” came a voice from the corn stalks.

Billy Bob and Cletus turned towards field, shielding their eyes from the glaring Sun.

“Fellers! You there?”

“Over yonder, Jimmy John. Yonder!” Cletus said.

The edge of the corn stalk field ruffled, swaying back and forth as footsteps crunched across dried leaves strewn over the crop field ground.

“There you is,” Jimmy John said, head poking out from the thick corn stalks.

“Why you come through the brush like that?” Cletus asked.

“The tractor broke down,” Jimmy John said, climbing out from the corn. He plucked pieces of corn crop from his bushy brown beard.

“Darn,” Cletus said, swiping down and snapping the fingers on his right hand.

“That’s a fine tractor, too,” Billy Bob said. “At least you made it with the supplies.”

“Well, not so fast now… we ahh… got a small problem,” Jimmy John said.

“You forget the sandwiches?” Cletus asked.

“No, course not. I got the sandwiches in this sack. See here,” Jimmy John said, lifting up a tattered brown rucksack.

“What’s the problem, then?” Billy Bob asked.

“It’s the darn space suits.”

Part 2

“Watchu mean the space suits?” Billy Bob asked.

“Well…” Jimmy John said, scratching his head. “Just on account’ a the tractor breaking down. And having to trek through that there cornfield back yonder. Well… seems that the suits got tangled on some of the corn stalks. Tore the seams right open. Busted em. See here,” he pointed to one of the suits draped around his neck.

“Why didn’ t you put them in the sack?” Cletus asked.

Jimmy John was silent for a moment, staring back at Cletus with a blank face. “And squish the sandwiches…?” he asked.

“No one’s squishing sandwiches,” Billy Bob said, stepping forward and raising his hands up, palms open like he was pleading a case for his innocence. “Those stay in the sack for our galaxy journey. Toss me a suit, will you? I’ll assess the damage.”

Jimmy John grabbed hold of one of the suits draped around his neck, wadded it up, and threw it to Billy Bob.

“See there,” Jimmy John said, pointing. “Top of the right shoulder down the back. The others ones ain’t as bad.”

Billy Bob held the suit close to his face, examining it. It was covered in a variety of random patches stitched together with thick black thread. Some large red flannel squares. Some long beige corduroy rectangles. A few strips of light blue jean. A few circular patches of blackish-brown grease.

“Cletus, you got any of that duck tape? That gray industrial kind. None of that clear see-through crap.”

“Sure do. Got some in muh shed round front,” Cletus said, hitching a thumb over his shoulder. “You think that will hold the suits closed?”

“Course I do. We won’t need much. We got the ships shield to protect us,” Billy Bob said. “After we punch through the atmosphere and get to space, it’s smooth sailing

all the way to the Moon. Jimmy John, toss the sandwich sack in the cockpit. Then let' s get to fixin' these suits."

Jimmy John strutted over to the ship and stepped onto the silver ladder tilted against the hull. Up he climbed. Higher, higher. Ladder rattling with each step. When he was about halfway up, he stopped. Shaky hands gripping the sides of the ladder as he peaked over his shoulder towards the spacemen watching from below.

"Why' d ya stop?" Cletus asked.

"It' s higher than I thought," Jimmy John said.

"Psh!" Billy Bob said, flicking his open palms forward through the air. "You ain' t even that high up, Jimmy John. We are flying to the moon for heaven' s sake. Best get your nerves set straight before we take off."

Jimmy John stared straight at the ladder. He mumbled something under his breath and struggled up the last few rungs.

"Now open the hatch and toss those damn sandwiches in so we can get to work on these suits. Don' t squish them now, you hear?" Billy Bob said.

Jimmy John slipped his right arm underneath the strap of the rucksack. His left arm stayed glued to his side with the sack hanging off of his shoulder. Veins in his forearm popped

as his left hand gripped tight against the side of the ladder, its metal beams shaking all the way down to the gravel floor. Digging two small divots into the ground. Slowly, the sack slid down his left arm. With a handful of rustic brown cloth from the sack gripped in his hand, he snuck a few fingers beneath the handle of the hatch and lifted. The plexiglass clicked, the metal hinges groaned. With his left hand still clung to the side of the ladder, he raised his head and wedged it beneath the hatch as leverage. Keeping the hatch high enough to sneak the sack with the sandwiches beneath, dropping them into the cockpit. He removed his head from under the cockpits lid and hobbled back down the ladder.

“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!” Jimmy John shouted after his feet were planted back on solid ground. He turned and faced the other astronauts.

“Geez, Jimmy John. You’ s covered in sweat,” Cletus said.

“Cletus, you got any’ a that tasty rye whiskey?” Jimmy John asked.

“Sure do,” he said, reaching into his back pocket. He handed the clear container over to Jimmy John who twisted to cap and wiped the tiny mouthpiece on his sweaty shirt.

“No hard feelings, Cletus. Just taking the necessary precautions,” Jimmy John said.

“I get it. Go on then,” Cletus said, sweeping the air with his right hand.

Jimmy John tilted his head back and poured the brown booze into his mouth. His eyes watered, face puckered. Swallowing the liquid in one big gulp.

“Yeehaw!” Jimmy John shouted, flinging his head backward. “Makes my hairy arms tingle.” He handed the bottle back to Cletus who slipped it back into his pocket.

“Alrighty then,” Billy Bob said. “Let’s get to moving.”

The three rocket scientists trudged across the dry, crunchy dirt around the side of the farmhouse. Its windows hung wide open, casting out a strong fruity aroma like a mystical spell through the warm summertime air.

“Muh old lady’s whipping up some peach cobbler,” Cletus said. “Maybe she can rustle up a piece for each’ a us. He raised himself onto the tips of his toes and stuck his head through one of the side windows.

“Betsy!” he screamed. “Betsy! Where you at?”

“What you want you old fool?” came a piercing voice from somewhere in the house.

“The boys here want some of your peach cobbler. Can you rustle us up a few pieces?”

“Oh shit!” Cletus shouted. He ducked beneath the window frame just as a slender black spatula whipped through like the blades of a miniature helicopter. It tumbled across the gravel and skidded to a stop about twenty feet away.

“I told you it ain’ t gonna be ready until you get back!” she screamed.

“Well I forgot! Geez, woman,” Cletus said. He turned around and shrugged.

“Betsy means well. She gets a little angry when I forget about things though.”

“No problem, Cletus. We all forget about things from time to time,” Jimmy John said.

“That’ s true,” Billy Bob said. “We’ ll just grab us a piece of peach cobbler when we get back from flying by the moon. The sandwiches’ ll hold us over. Now let’ s hurry up.”

The three space travelers shuffled along the gravel the rest of the way to the shed tucked beneath the shade of a tall apple tree. A tire swing hung from a low branch, the inside of it filled with dirty green water. The tiny home of a small tadpole nursery.

The wood shed was a dirt dusted grey, covered in patches of water soaked brown. The front panel door slung half-way open without a lock or a handle. Each small gust of wind sent

to the creaking, back, forth. Back, forth. Cletus reached behind the door panel and flung the door all the way open. Shepherding the light from the Sun to illuminate the inside of the shed.

“Go on, fellers,” Cletus said, shooin’ Billy Bob and Jimmy John in with his right hand. They stepped through the narrow doorway and stood by the entrance.

“What in God’s name!” Billy Bob shouted from inside the shed. “Cletus… what in the hell is that?”

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