



You want gonzo? Oh yea, we got it.

Ivan Pavlov's greatest creation: genetically modified Soviet Apemen Warriors from the distant past have somehow found themselves in the present day. Their mission: defend Mother Russian or die. The only problem is their spaceship, the Null, crashes not *on* the Earth, but somehow, *within* the Earth's hollow core. Now, deep beneath the planet's molten mantel, marooned in a massive inland sea, they've upset the locals: mutated Atlantean Warriors who've long been subjugated and warped by the Esoteric Order of Dagon and their Deep One servitors. Now, if only they could all just get along...

But the Apemen see their twisted and wrecked Null as the last remaining fragment of their beloved Mother Russia, and they're not about to back down.

Cyrillic numbers flashed in a descending sequence, cycling downward—ever downward—towards some fateful and inescapable target. Like leaves making the gradual transition from spring to fall, the foreign-looking numerals slowly altered in both hue and shade from a vibrant, life-sustaining green to the color of clotted and diseased blood. This plodding Cyrillic rainbow of digits was soon joined by other, more urgent figures, each of which trailed across the hollow voids of multiple screens like darting comets limned in glowing emerald fire. Despite the silent, but insistent screams from these symbols foretelling something horrible and unavoidable, these numbers and letters fell short of the eyes of their intended targets. Instead, these warning words and numerals were reflected mutely off the polished glass visors of four slumbering beings.

In spite of its utter lack of intuition, something inside the craft detected that its message was obviously falling on deaf ears and blind eyes. A shuddering occurred deep in the vessel's bowels, and several of the screens flickered to life, banishing the quickly repeating messages in Cyrillic with a steadily growing corona of light, movement, and sound. Across these screens, a man appeared: utterly stark in visage, manner, and dress. Despite his remarkably emotionless features, a glint of excitement gleamed in his watery pale eyes, which were buried beneath thickly lensed, dark-rimmed glasses.

He began speaking without prologue or fanfare, his thick Russian syllables harshly scratching their way out of speakers mounted all about the cabin.

“Greetings, Comrades and crew of the Progress Null. I am Ivan Pavlov. I am he that gave you life and I now give you your mission. Together, you four comprise a pinnacle of achievement for Mother Russia. Not only are you the

culmination of the life's work of two generations of my own bloodline: myself and my father, Ilya Ivanovich Ivanov, but also the culmination of efforts for the best and brightest of our military, technologists, and scientists.”

Ivan, or the recording of Ivan, paused, licking his thin lips and straightening his thin black tie and white lab coat before continuing. They were the motions of a man who knew he was making history.

“You four comprise our hope, the hope that Mother Russia will be able to call upon you in her time of need - you, who are the ultimate soldiers the world has ever known! And that is your mission: first, to protect Mother Russia with your life and second, to breed true so that more of your kind will rise to forever keep us safe.”

Ivan's reed-thin fingers scraped through his well-oiled, short-cropped white hair and something akin to a frown passed over his face.

“I cannot tell you precisely what has happened here, in Mother Russia. I cannot even tell you the date which you are hearing and hopefully, watching this message. I can only pray that I am long dead and that the country to which you return will be a different country entirely than the one I know today. What I cannot tell you matters little. Your instructions have been written into the very fabric of your being: into the very cells that made you.

However, what I can tell you is this. You have been awakened because Mother Russia is in dire need of you, or soon will be. I can also tell you that you WILL succeed. Never has another creature like you trod the face of the Earth. Never before has such brutal perfection been crafted by the hand of Man. The ground will tremble before you, my sons and daughters — all of your opponents will flee or fall before the mighty and magnificent APE-MEN OF RUSSIA!”

Ivan's image vanished, replaced by a flashing, glaring red message in Cyrillic. Somewhere, within the confines of the prototype Soviet Progress space vessel, a klaxon sounded. Engines awoke, warming ever-so-slowly after their decades-long sleep.

It would not be enough.

Milliseconds before the ancient Soviet computational engines detected the precise orbital location of the Progress Null and were then able to calculate the vectors and thrust required for safe reentry into Soviet airspace, something collided with the hull of the craft. Thrown out of its lazy orbit, the Null's engines at last fired, stabbing at the depths of space with their angry flames. The vessel's nose shot towards the blue orb beneath it, already warming against the friction of the ever-increasing atmosphere.

But the Progress Null was not heading for home. The damaged and redirected craft was now heading for Antarctica.

Inside, amber colored eyes fluttered open weakly. A meter away, beneath a black-stenciled nameplate that read "ГОПИЛИА", a screen flickered to life, displaying vitals and statistics. A feminine voice oozed out of the craft's speakers. "Greetings, Officer Lophyya. Please prepare for immediate re-entry. It is of the utmost importance to note that the Progress Null has taken substantial external hull damage. Please verify the status of the other three pods. Null reports that they are currently malfunctioning."

Lophyya shook his black, shaggy hair-covered head and cursed. Almost of their own volition, his hands, despite being encased in a bulky space suit, yanked the release lever on his stasis pod and he half floated and half crawled, groaning and cursing, out of its confines.

The Progress Null shuddered as the secondary rockets fired unexpectedly, slamming Lophyya against the ceiling. His head slammed against one of the auxiliary maintenance ports and cracks raced across his visor. Lophyya gritted his teeth against the pain and managed to scan his amber eyes across the other three pods, where his promised bride, his despised Captain, and his Captain's bride-to-be still floated in stasis. All three pod's status indicators glowed green.

Just as he opened his mouth to report, something massive slammed into the side of the Null. Whatever it was, it hit the side of the hull opposite Lophyya and he roared. It felt like a T-35 had just rolled over his back and decided to park there. The spacecraft spun away from the impact, flipping end over end, the exterior heat building with each successive rotation.

Coolly, the woman's detached Russian came again over the speakers. "Re-entering Earth's gravitation field in five..."

Lophyya growled, "Crap."

"...Four..."

He tried to focus, and amid the crazily spinning space ship, to locate the manual flight controls.

"...Three..."

Officer Lophyya pushed hard against the exterior wall of the Null, launching himself out across the open space, straining to reach the controls in time.

"...Two..."

Amber eyes brightened as his hairy, strong, and dexterous fingers grasped the double yoke of the flight controls.

"...One..."

Those same eyes then slammed shut as Lophyya felt something in his suit — a respiration hose perhaps — jerk him backwards towards the wall where it was still entangled with the warped frame of the spacecraft.

“...Zero.”

Gravity brutally reasserted itself, regardless of the precarious position in which Officer Lophyya had found himself. The hose, unable to hold his massively muscled bulk, gave way, ripping out of the space suit with a hiss. Lophyya slammed into the flight control panel, all five hundred pounds nearly buckling the yoke and utterly destroying several key components. The cracked visor shattered inward, slicing into Lophyya’s wrinkled face and barely missing his eyes. Blood ran in a slick, threatening to blind him.

Gasping desperately for breath, Lophyya pushed back from the control panel, clouds of sparks and smoke flying. He wrestled with the flight yoke, but even against his prodigious strength, it would not budge.

“Pods One, Three, and Four good. Null, make flight controls to manual, NOW!” Lophyya bellowed, snaking two fingers past the shattered glass in his visor to wipe his own blood out of his eye.

The woman’s cool voice replied and Lophyya wondered how she could be so calm. “Would you care for a verbal briefing on the safety precautions for manual flight?”

“NYET!” Lophyya snapped. “If you do not give control to me, safety will be last of concerns, Null!”

Officer Lophyya barely held onto the yoke as the safety catch disengaged. The G forces were terrible and nearly ripped his massive arms from their sockets. It only took seconds to stop the terrible, gut-wrenching spinning of the

Progress Null, but by that time, even the eternal optimist inside Lophyya knew that he, and his Comrades, and his precious betrothed would soon perish. A massive expanse of featureless, frozen white rushed up to greet them.

Lophyya growled grimly. "Do svidaniya, Comrades."

It was then that the scintillating blue light filled the cosmos.



Lophyya had never been mindful of the many philosophy courses he and his brethren attended in the Russian camps where they were crafted, grown, and trained. Once he had come to the realization and acceptance of the fact that he was a manufactured being meant only to breed and eventually die, a damper was placed upon many of his existential quandaries. Yet, he had taken his training seriously, and philosophical studies were a part of that training. Still, he would have expected the afterlife to be somehow...drier.

Everything around him was wet. The sound of water filled his ears: tricking water, splashing water, dripping water, and waves.

Waves?

Lophyya forced his eyes open and quickly realized that he could only see out of his left eye. The other was matted closed. He hurt everywhere. Everything was extremely bright and shimmering and was covered with a reddish haze.

His blood.

He remembered his visor exploding and the cuts on his face. It was at that moment he realized that he was not yet dead, but alive. He cursed and slowly tried to push himself up out of his prone position. He was lying in a pool of water, but he was pretty sure he was still inside the Null.

“Null”, he croaked, “status.”

The vessel attempted a reply but seemed to be tongue-tied.

“So now you get quiet, eh?” Lophyya grouched to himself, ripping his shattered and battered helmet off. Hoping to remove the blood and clear his vision, he splashed water on his face. At the needle stings across his face, he immediately sucked in a sharp breath. He glared at the water beneath him and on his hand like it was poison.

Perhaps it was.

Tentatively, his pink tongue snaked out of his black face.

Salt?

“What tricks are these?” Lophyya asked himself as he assessed his situation, starting with his person and moving outward from there. Minor injuries, at least that he could ascertain. There was no way to tell if he’d gained any internal injuries in the crash, if crash land was what had indeed happened to him. Lophyya knew well that he and his brethren healed quickly—at least quicker than the rate at which human’s healed—but that did not stop wounds from hurting, or even becoming infected. As such, he would need to figure out just how badly he was hurt, and soon.

From the looks of the Null, it had been pretty severely damaged in the crash. Yes, he was almost certain that it was a crash now, getting a better view of things. There was a massive gash in nearly every side of the Null...some larger than others, but for the most part, he was sure that the craft would never fly again. It would certainly never again achieve orbit. Power was still on in part of the vessel, but with all the water that was flooding the main compartment, he was not certain that having power was still a good thing.



Power!

He snapped his shaggy head towards the stasis pods and felt his blood turn to ice. One yellow and two red lights—he had to get to the Captain and the brides! Forgetting his own injuries, Lophyya leapt to his feet--

--Only to feel a massive tremor shake the foundations of the Earth beneath him. The entire structure of the Null quaked as if it were rattled in the hands of a mountain-sized monster. Metal groaned and squealed, instantly echoed by an inrush of more salt water. Sparks showered down from the Null's ceiling and shot up like miniature rockets wherever the water touched.

“Out of frying pan into fire, eh?” the Officer grumbled to himself.

It was then that he heard the splashing from behind him...and the hissing.



E'oth'ian hated patrolling the Inner Sea. He hated the fact that Atlantis even existed, if only partially, within this massive body of salt water located deep within the hollow core of the Earth. He hated the fact that D'Noss and his ruling class of “true Atlanteans” home had betrayed his beloved home – as well as that nearly half the city had been handed over to the Inner Sea Deep Ones. Those fiends, and their twisted Esoteric Order of Dagon had summarily perverted the once great city into a horrific, dark mirror of its former glory. He hated that his folk, the Diluted Atlanteans, had been subjugated by the True ever since Atlantis had fallen beneath the molten sky comprised of the Earth's crust. But, more than all of that, E'oth'ian hated the Deep Ones and he would never let them penetrate the perimeter patrolled by his stalwart Pteroisian Guard. E'oth'ian knew that the diabolical Deep Ones would never permit Atlantis and its citizens to rise again to the Earth's surface and be restored to the glory they'd known before.

So, he begrudgingly patrolled the Inner Sea, but he always held out hope that they could throw off the fiendish yoke of their oppressors.

E'oth'ian felt a massive tremor ripple across his dark, scaled skin. His keen olfactory receptors that lined his long, fish-like lower half detected a coppery scent in the water. It was unusual, but there was something in it that spoke to a deep-seated fear within him. Something was wrong.

The commander of the Pteroisian Guard surfaced to try and scan the horizon of the Inner Sea. The flat bronze color of the sky met the briny blue in a hard line as far as he could see. As he spun, suddenly, a black smear marred the perfect horizon. It was smoke and that could only mean one thing: the Deep Ones were up to no good. Likely summoning some ancient horror or firing up some gods-forsaken weapon.

E'oth'ian dove beneath the still surface of the Inner Sea and powered through the brine with massive strokes of his lower body. He had to get to D'Noss and report immediately, and mobilize his Guard.

A Deep One attack was coming. Of this, he was sure.



Lophyya howled as he fell back into something hard and rounded, ripping one of the accursed leech-worm-things in two with his bare hands. He could hardly see through the haze of pain and blood as the creatures — more and more of them every second it seemed — ripped into his flesh with their razor-toothed, lamprey-like maws.

The water frothed with them now. Thankfully, most of them were still outside the Null rather than within, but the Officer had a bad feeling that this