

On a Beach

In the time it takes for Maggie and Perrin to reach the dunes, the drama has settled in. They stand at the top of the sandy mountains that offer a view over the long stretch of beach. The sun is high, the ocean cobalt blue and flat, just small waves rolling quietly on the shorelines.

The beach is swarming with people. There are hundreds, maybe thousands, on the beach, and it is completely out of control. Visible from the top of the dunes are the normal mix from the Moogh Zone. There are Adherents, Flybys and Nonsticks swarming the area. There are also mobs of Moogh Security trying – and failing – to keep order. And right in the middle of it all, the Moogh is ambling, nonchalant and with not a care in the world.

Perrin makes a particularly grim chortling noise and holds his ribs. “This is so cool. Maxine will be shitting herself,” he says.

“Look,” says Maggie, anxiously, pointing into the distance to where a phalanx of Moogh Underground, two hundred angry, drug-addled young men, are running along the beach. At the head of the group, one carries a Moogh Flag. It looks immaculate as it flutters crisply, the orange Moogh Orange material glowing brightly against the blue sky.

Perrin raises his camera, zooms in and fires off some shots. “Awesome,” he mutters as he watches the Moogh Underground butt up against a squad of Level-4 Moogh Security. The stunning women in red-strapped, white catsuits, strut forwards in unison, zapping the Moogh Underground with their Rhinox-25 stun guns. Their handiwork is plainly visible as dozens of young men are tossed unconscious onto the sand. Stunned and paralyzed, they writhe or lie completely still from the electric shock.

Perrin hits the button on the camera and records some headline words, “Stunning women, stunning men. Pop go the corkers.”

On another battlefield, visible from the top of the dune, UNMA forces wade into the melee with rubber truncheons swinging. This multinational group is recognizable by the many colors of their skin and the orange and pale blue of their helmets.

Also on the beach, trying and failing to keep order, is a contingent of self-styled Adherent vigilantes. Normally, the Adherents are pacifists, but with the Moogh’s security in such parlous shape, the white gloves are off.

There are shrieks of pain mingled with whoops of joy as the normally tight-knit order around the Moogh plays out as an uncontrolled riot. In amongst it all, the Moogh ambles along the beach, oblivious to the human drama unfolding all around.

A group of Adherents struggles to form a protective ring around the

Moogh. They do this by locking their arms together, with their backs to the Moogh. Inside the crude human barrier, heavy set Adherents deal roughly with the Flybys who are getting too close to the Moogh.

While the Adherents are typically empaths, there is something distinctly unempathetic about the way that they deal with the inebriated youth; it is elbows and fists at close quarters for these wayward boys.

One lad staggers around clutching his bloody face only to be trampled on by the ring of Adherents, keeping pace with the Moogh as it ambles, nonchalantly along the beach.

Perrin scans the beach, excitedly, like a hungry man assessing a buffet. He focuses on where the drama is most intense, equivalent to where the champagne, tiger prawns, and thousand island dressing would be.

Maggie, standing beside Perrin, is in quite a different emotional state. She's not excited. She's anxious, and her only interest is the well-being of the Moogh. She studies the Adherents in their circle; arms interlocked, a human shield around the Moogh. And just to show its complete disdain for the affairs of man, the Moogh has adopted Pose #8 Swan Dive.

The Moogh is facing the ocean; gazing at the little waves lapping the sandy beach.

"Alright!" says Perrin, slapping his hands together, excitedly. "I am going to cover the stunners." He glances around at Maggie. "You alright?"

"Just go," she says and watches as he moves ahead quickly, descending the sandy pathway between the dunes, careful not to aggravate his wounds.

She follows him and as soon as they reach the beach, they go their separate way in the crowd. Perrin turns and calls back to her, "Paprika. Be careful!"

All on her own again, Maggie finds a path through the madness to where the Adherents form their protective ring around the Moogh. She stands there, observing the Moogh, trying to intuit how it feels about all this chaos and what might happen next.

Another phalanx of Adherents arrives and forms a second ring around the Moogh, this one encompassing the first. Maggie finds herself trapped inside. She recognizes some of the Adherents and takes the opportunity to speak with those of them that she likes. She asks them how they feel. They tell her that they are terrified, afraid for the Moogh and yet unconcerned for their personal safety.

There is the sound of a whistle blowing, and Maggie turns to see the riot police arrive, following the protocols laid out in the Declaration of the Adherents. Tear gas canisters fly through the air, and there is the sound of automatic gunfire as the riot police fire over the heads of the rioters. Panic ensues, and there is a mad stampede to get off the beach. Hundreds of

frightened people scramble up the sandy tracks between the dunes. Some fall and are trampled by those behind.

Then the Moogh breaks its pose and begins to amble again. Hundreds of Adherents forming the protective circles shuffle along the beach. The Moogh stops, pivots and then ambles directly towards the water's edge. The circle starts to come apart as the Adherents find themselves knee-deep in the sea with waves rolling against their thighs.

Maggie watches in fascination as the Moogh ambles onto the wet sand and then into the sea. It halts in water knee deep and then throws the Pose #2R My Shoe Lace is Undone, right foot.

The Adherents resume their protective barrier, now forming a semicircle around the Moogh with its seaward side unprotected. The Moogh holds this pose for only a little while and then starts to move again, seaward.

The Moogh takes a step forward, looking down at its feet. It seems to be fascinated by the seawater around its feet. It takes another step and another and slowly walks into the sea.

As the water rises to its belly, the Moogh leans forward and then it allows the water to hold it afloat. Then something more. The Moogh pushes forward its left arm and claws the water with its free hand, holding the clenched right hand clear of the water.

Walking a few paces towards the water, Maggie is stunned at what she sees. Never in years of following the Moogh had she even suspected that it might do anything other than amble and pose. And yet, here it is; the Moogh can swim. That's news!

Maggie suddenly feels journalistically inadequate. She has only a hemp and organic cotton notebook and apple-wood pencil at her disposal. She needs to get her hands on some serious journo-tech. She spins around, hoping to see Perrin snapping away with the wireless camera. But Perrin is not interested in the Moogh. He only cares about the human conflict that the Moogh engenders. Maggie feels lost, inadequate, confused.

Then the reality of the day presses back upon her. Amongst the Adherents, there are screams and howls and a fight breaks out. Someone shouts five words and these are said over and over again, gaining in volume and anxiety every time they are repeated.

"The Moogh is leaving us! The Moogh is leaving us!"

The message quickly spreads across the beach and up the dunes. Soon all the people who had fled the riot police return and the beach is again flooded with thousand of people overrunning the security forces. Some people reach the water's edge and collapse, tears pouring from their eyes. Others plunge into the water and swim out towards the Moogh. One person, unable to swim, starts to drown, and thrashes wildly, calling out.

A security helicopter swoops over the beach with the loudspeaker and the pilot bellowing, “Get out of the water! Get out of the water!”

Around the Moogh, there are suddenly shadows and fins slicing through the water. Someone else shouts, “Shark!” and the swimmers turn and race back to the beach in panic. It is not a shark, but a pod of Tangalooma dolphins accompanying the Moogh on its swim.

Maggie stumbles into the sea, stunned as she watches the Moogh move slowly away from the shore. She is aghast and barely aware of the salty water lapping against her legs. Around her, thousands of Adherents and Flybys flock to the water’s edge, wailing and thrashing their arms.

In the distance, Maggie sees the sleek gray form of a warship cutting a hole in the horizon. She stares at this ominous structure, her mind in a frenzy trying to determine the meaning. Is it a threat to the Moogh or a protective force? She thinks back to the discussion with the Dim Director and the trending story about the Big General’s plan to nuke the Moogh if ever it were to move outside of a national territory. She looks at the Moogh, slowly swimming with one hand out of the water. It is heading to a place beyond Spanish national waters and towards the high seas where the rules of the Peace Park do not apply. Out there, there is no United Nations mandate to protect the Moogh.