

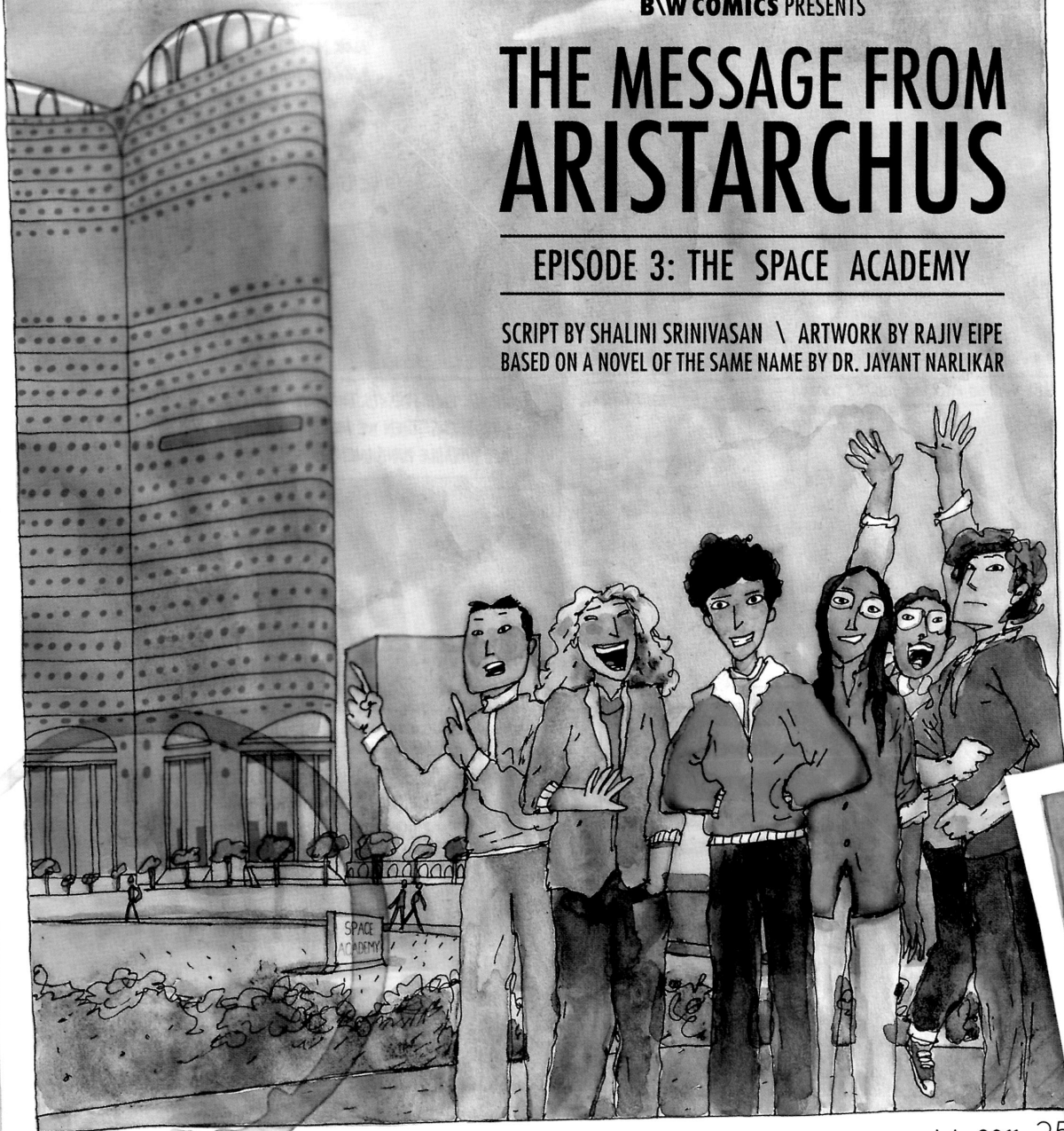


B\W COMICS PRESENTS

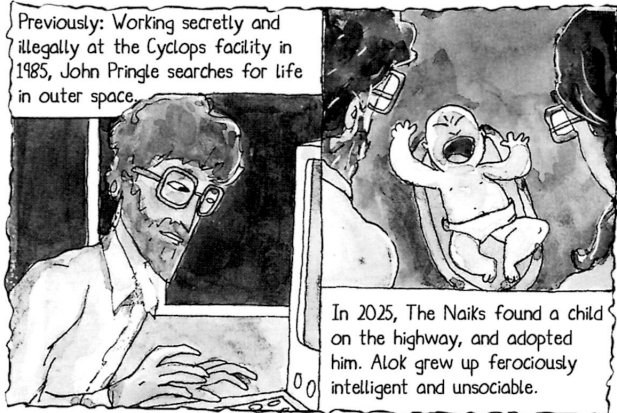
THE MESSAGE FROM ARISTARCHUS

EPISODE 3: THE SPACE ACADEMY

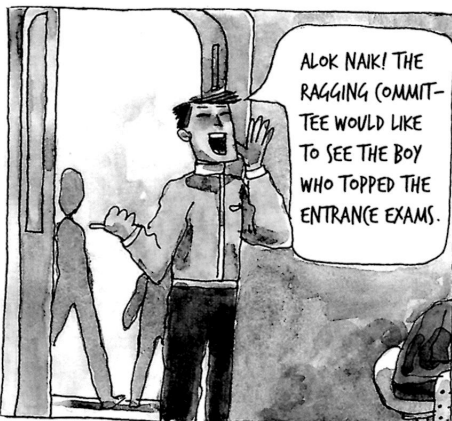
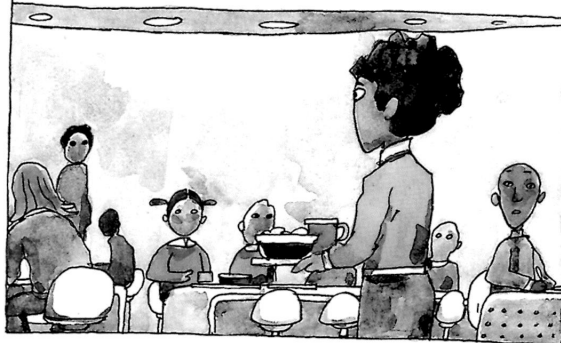
SCRIPT BY SHALINI SRINIVASAN \ ARTWORK BY RAJIV EIPE
BASED ON A NOVEL OF THE SAME NAME BY DR. JAYANT NARLIKAR



Previously: Working secretly and illegally at the Cyclops facility in 1985, John Pringle searches for life in outer space.



At the age of 11, Alok was sent to a preparatory school for the Space Academy. On his first day -



Alok walked into the ragging room.



They spread a red carpet with a black back, 5 m by 5 m on the floor. They put an apple in the middle.



Alok rolled the carpet, touching only the black underside.



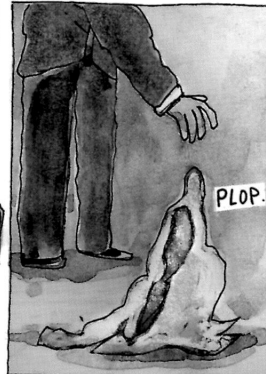
For the second task, they asked Alok to put on a waistcoat, and a coat over it.



NOW REMOVE THE WAISTCOAT WITHOUT TOUCHING THE COAT.



Alok wrangled and manoeuvred and soon -



PLOP.

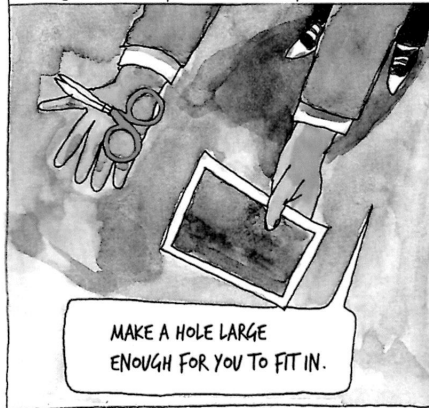
For the first time, the ragging committee looked bit non-plussed. They hadn't anticipated that Alok would get this far.



LAST TASK, AND THE HARDEST.



He gave Alok a postcard and a pair of scissors.

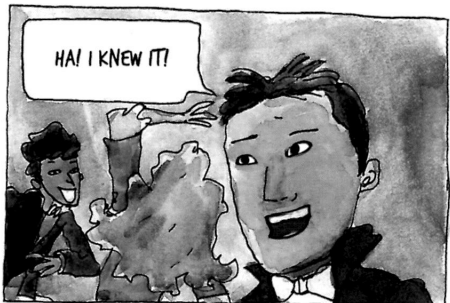


MAKE A HOLE LARGE ENOUGH FOR YOU TO FIT IN.





At sixteen, Alok and Sandra graduated from the prep school and went to the Space Academy. Cheng was there a year before them. Alok soon settled into life in the academy. He loved the studying, and found to his surprise, as the years went by, that he even liked the social life.



But later that evening, when Sandra went out to the terrace –



Sandra waited quietly, until Alok came out of his trance. He seemed to have no memory of it. Unwilling to upset him, she didn't ask any more questions.

Two years later, when Alok was 18, the Space Academy sent the whole class on a trip to one of the first space programmes in the world: Cydops.



They were taken around by a Major Sykes, a crisp, dignified military officer. Alok was silent, almost awed.



In the old control room -



WHAT A BEAUTIFUL INSTRUMENT! I WISH WE COULD USE IT.

As the tour ended, Major Sykes took them back to their stop outside.



ANYTHING ELSE I CAN CLARIFY?

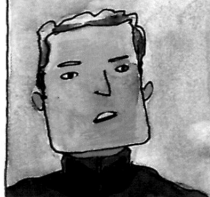
HOW COME YOU DON'T LET SCIENTISTS USE CYCLOPS?



WE USED TO, UNTIL WE FOUND ONE MAN USING THE TRANSMITTER ILLEGALLY. THIS WAS WAY BACK, IN THE NINETEEN EIGHTIES.



HE WAS A SCIENTIST, AND SMART ENOUGH TO COVER HIS TRACKS. ONE OF OUR MEN, MCCARTHY, HAD BEEN SUSPICIOUS OF HIM FOR A WHILE. HE'D HIDDEN HIS ACTIVITIES WELL.



Dec 4th, 1985.

CYCLOPS HAS CHANGED DIRECTION, JOHN. WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?



BLAST! WHAT DO I SAY?



John thought up a quick lie.

IT'S A NEW UNIDENTIFIED SPACECRAFT. RUSSIAN, I THINK.



WHAT WAS IT ABOUT? WHO WAS HE?



WE ONLY MANAGED TO FIND THAT HE HAD BEEN TRANSMITTING SOMETHING. WE THINK HE WAS A SPY. HIS NAME WAS JOHN PRINGLE, AND HE DIED THAT VERY NIGHT BEFORE MCCARTHY COULD CONFRONT HIM.



That evening, when they got back to the Academy, Alok was in a trance again.



Sandra took him to his room and waited for him become conscious.



IT'S BEEN THE SAME ONE SINCE I WAS LITTLE. IT FEELS SO REAL, IT FRIGHTENS ME. I'M IN A SPACESHIP. IT'S FULL OF CORPSES - PEOPLE LIE EVERYWHERE.



A MAN AND A WOMAN, TARU AND MARU, ARE SPEAKING SOFTLY ABOVE ME. MARU IS HALF-FAINTED, HER EYES ARE ON ME. TARU IS SPEAKING INTO A MIC. AS I WATCH, MARU DIES, AND TARU SLUMPS.



THEN THERE IS JUST THE DARKNESS OF SPACE.

