

ALLEN COOKE

The Earth is My Ant Farm



Dedication

I dedicate this to the late great Spike Milligan, a lunatic genius, who wished for his headstone to read "I told you I was ill".

A huge thank you to my proof readers, Nicky Larner and Ann Hancox, I am surprised they didn't go goggle eyed from all the grammar checks.

Another big thank you to the illustrator, AJ Hateley, an amazing effort, if anyone requires her artistry then you can browse her work and contact her directly at:

<http://www.pknives.studentartfolio.com/>

Lastly but not least I would like to thank myself for my perseverance and sufferance in writing this story, if you have any comments you can email me directly at:

allencookeemail@gmail.com

I hope you enjoy reading this; it's a personal thing I know.

'O mother, mother!

What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,

The gods look down, and this unnatural scene

They laugh at. O my mother, mother! O!

William Shakespeare,

'Coriolanus'

CHAPTER ONE

The Earth is my Ant Farm, The Creational School gave it to me but I'm a bit bored with it now.

A bigger boy threw a rock at it in the classroom and wiped out all my dinosaurs, I liked them.

Now I'm stuck with the ants and they like to multiply.

I have a favourite Ant, his name is Derek.

This is about him, he likes to travel.

He doesn't know how but I will tell him one day.



A long line of plastic detergent bottles attempted to stand to attention but it was no easy matter on a moving conveyor belt as they raced along on a designated path. Occasionally a few defect bottles would be pulled from the line as if they had forgotten to polish their boots on inspection.

Derek Hill, the line supervisor was busy checking his troops and keeping count with his trusty clipboard and pen, furiously scribbling notes that no one could see or even dared to question. Such was the power of the note scribbler, notes meant order and quality control being the order of the day.

Derek was king of the production line, his minions, dressed in overalls and silly plastic hats were tasked with making sure he did as little scribbling as possible.

The Supersuds Detergent factory dominated the industrial landscape of Runcorn in Cheshire, it had long been a hive of chemical processing since the 19th century, producing the greatest number of Soaps & Liquids ever seen in the UK and kept armpits, nether regions and hair as grime free as possible.

Derek was proud of his post, he had probably been the unwitting catalyst of social grooming, fathering the greatest number of offspring through the fact that no one wanted to date anyone stinky and unclean.

Derek was a modern day marvel of Darwin's Natural Selection theory, mind you, Darwin would have been grateful for some Supersuds Shaving Foam and razors in his day; he may well have spent less time with primates.

Derek's red lobster face matched his levels of stress, he had already been remonstrated by the Line Manager for allowing an extra ten plastic bottles to fail inspection yesterday. He was only half way through his shift and had almost reached the shocking limit of sixty rejections per 10,000. Heads will roll for this he thought, probably his own red head before long.

A portly man appeared with spectacles and shaven sideburns that carried on up to an alarming inch above his ears, he came walking steadily over to Derek, decked out in a Marks and Spencer blue checked business shirt and polyester tie combination, a top dog on the line and one that Derek feared the most amongst them.

"Derek, have you seen these rejections, they are appalling!" the fat man was waving around reams of figures as he had the

benefit of a printer which made his social status higher than a clipboard.

“I’m so sorry, Mr. Driver, I don’t know what’s happening today...”

“Don’t know! It’s your job to know, you are the line supervisor aren’t you?”

“Yes Sir, I am” came the weakened reply

Mr. Driver took on a different persona this time, he loved sarcasm.

“Am I speaking to the Line Supervisor?” he hummed back to Derek, then studied him for a moment before allowing him to speak.

“Yes Sir, the line manager yes”

“Good, well bloody well manage then! I had better not see another repeat of yesterday, pull out all the stops, Derek.”

A line of workers seated at the belt were busy looking around at themselves and smirking, they were glad they weren’t Derek.

The fat man raced off and left Derek to turn a greater shade of lipstick red as he furiously scribbled notes onto his clipboard.

“Everyone get back to work, nothing to see here, no more mistakes” he managed to yell in a high pitched wavering tone.

Every order had a chain of command and each chain shouted down to the other until the work was done or heads were bitten off and left in a pile as a warning to others.

The hours seemed to wind down very slowly as he paced back and forth hoping that not a single plastic soldier was rejected until the end of his shift at five. The pressure was definitely on, sooner or later a ticking time bomb would come rolling down, a misshapen container, a defect plastic cap, maybe a printing error, there were so many possibilities.

Some nights he would wake up from sheer panic after dreaming of disfigured armies of plastic bottles advancing towards him with his general screaming at him from behind the front line to do something to stop them.

Hopefully his workers, who seemed to like the hapless man, would turn a blind eye to a few defects, they would bail him out, they may get a worse replacement if they were too eager, at least Derek let you off for a prolonged cigarette break outside.

The time had finally come, it was 4.58pm but the seconds seemed to slow to a dramatic crawl, not a single error, his clipboard tally had been stuck at sixty since 3.30pm, everything may just be fine after all, he could see the brooding Mr. Driver staring out back at him from behind his glass walled office.

Then it happened, it could have waited till a minute past five but it was on a long headrush to his destruction, Derek eyed it as it made its way through the weaving line and onto Quality Control, it was only a matter of time before its pathetic and weak shape landed as a mark on his clipboard.

Derek began to sweat, his face looked like it was boiling over, like a kettle with a malfunction; His boss had sat up and began to watch him intently as Derek wiped his forehead with the cotton sleeve of his white overall. He had but a few seconds to spare before someone raised the bottle in the air and announced it defunct. Mr. Driver would see the arm and come storming out of

the office, he knew the tally, he knew his authority, he knew Derek Hill was heading for a written warning sooner or later.

Derek's eyes bulged out of their sockets as Mavis Cutter, one of the line workers caught the wretched container and pulled it out of production, she eyed Derek, she knew the rules, she decided to shout out...

"Mr. Hill, would it be okay if I had a fag break? I'm gasping, I don't clock off till seven, be a luv would you?" she winked at Derek as she placed the container in her oversized handbag.

His nervousness took hold of him before he blurted out, "Cert...Certainly Mavis, you could do with a break, you've worked really hard."

A smile spread upon Derek's face as the clock struck five, everyone in the line was in no doubt about what had happened back there, it was a dangerous move by one of their colleagues but it was a life or death situation.

Derek loosened his collar to let out the steam and thanked everyone for their efforts as he placed his clipboard contents into the Control processing tray ready for Mr. Drivers verdict, he eyed his boss nervously as he walked past his office and could see him scowling back as he punched his card and hastily made his way out of the building.

"Thank you Mavis, you're a star," he called as he passed his saviour outside and headed over to his silver Montego estate to escape back to normality; it had been a very close shave indeed.



God Boy was trying hard to understand the theory of social interaction as a micro change mechanism and he had wished his beloved dinosaurs were still around, the only social interaction they did was with their sharp pointy teeth as they devoured each other in the steamy swamps of Pangaea.

He was one of several God Boys attending the Creational School and each had a task of tending to their own designated clusters of galaxies, the figure was huge, in fact billions of them, but only a few within each had anything meaningful to tend, develop too much and you were constantly busy creating and it left no time to play outside.

The grand Visioneer, draped in a white light robe, came around the class inspecting the progress of each of his pupils, he had a few surprises up his sleeve for them today, of course, a day was not an earth day, its size couldn't be fathomed by any other minds except for his own flock.

“Class, I must say without a doubt, that you are one of the most gifted groups I have ever had the pleasure to nurture, a great many variations of species have been achieved over the course of this semester but there is one thing I think you may have overlooked.”

Every pupil seated around the large hovering universe twinkling with luminescence and life couldn't for the life of them think what it was.

The teacher cut all their vague ideas off in an instant, he could see their thoughts floating around the room, “Come, come, I do not expect anyone here present to have the faintest clue as to what I am leading to, so I will enlighten you!”

There were many puzzled looks about the room.

“It is of course, a higher learning and I do not mean instinct, I can see that a great many of you have opted for a barbaric existence, kill or be killed, the great food chain, your savage monsters have wrought a good deal of destruction upon your worlds and as a child I can imagine it has been fun, but...”

He walked around the universe until he had made a complete circle back to his starting point, during that time he had studied all of their creations, admired some, snorted at others and noted a single God Boys unique avenue of thought.

He stopped suddenly and continued his speech. “The semester is almost over and you will all be aware of the prize at the end; Now! I propose a series of experiments I believe will eventually determine the champion amongst you all.”

Instantly, each God Boy received a parchment within his grasp, on each was written the first in a series of four experiments to achieve the ‘Higher Understanding’ Merit, the quality and presentation of each document outshone any printer or clipboard by miles and denoted absolute authority, the first experiment was quite clever, it simply read...

“1. Select an individual specimen, direct it to another colony, marks will be lost for a specimen that perishes, marks will be gained if the specimen survives to experiment number 2”

The Teacher noted with interest his favourite pupils reaction, it was clear to everyone that he was smiling as if he knew something they didn’t. This particular God Boy had seen one of his designated planets and its life almost destroyed by a flying rock 65 million earth years ago, thrown in by his larger, more envious brother.

Of course, it was only natural that out of this complete chaos came a new species, one that the bully hadn't even considered; he was still playing with his monsters and was woefully ill prepared for the first experiment.



The grey non descript Austin spluttered and shuddered to a halt on the road outside Derek's equally non descript semi detached house in the Runcorn suburbs, his car didn't even have the decency to make it onto the drive. Derek slammed his two fists down onto the steering wheel and yelped at the pain it gave back.

"Could this day get any worse?" he thought.

Sniveling wasn't a very nice word but it summed up Derek in as little as three syllables. Upon his head he wore a mop of jet black hair, slightly greasy and pushed to the left, a large but thin nose and small lips but the one defining feature of this amiable man is that he could turn beetroot red at the drop of a hat.

Derek turned beetroot red, he looked out of the window at the summing up of his life and cursed his God for giving him so much grief, he didn't need this right now, he needed God to increase his reject quota at the factory and fix the carburetor on his beat up Montego.

He stepped out of the car and slowly walked up the drive, the only peace he had was the twenty yards from the car to the front door and it was shattered in an instant when his youngest child, Jack, came screaming and bawling out the door in a hurry. He was being chased by his elder twin sisters, Citron & Ella who were quite mean to him.

Jack grabbed onto Derek's leg and wouldn't let go, in his own world he was frightened for his life but his Dad managed to calm the little mite down as he dragged his now heavy right leg along and into the doorway.

"Hi Honey, I'm home!" the greeting never failed to make him snigger as Honey was in fact her name.

His wife rolled her eyes for the millionth time, the greeting never failed to make her hate him just that little bit more for being unimaginative.

He walked into the kitchen to see his wife chopping swedes for dinner, he hated swedes, she knew he hated swedes but he was getting them anyway.

"Hi dear, how has your day been?" he tentatively asked.

His ever loving wife launched into a tirade, "It has been a bloody awful day Derek if you must know; It's alright for you swanning around your factory playing the big I am, but back here I have had to deal with these little reprobates, sort out bills, boy have we had a lot of them too and to cap it all off, next door have only gone and installed a posh new conservatory!"

Derek ignored the rest of the whining and looked out of the window to admire the beautiful three facet Victorian design that now dominated his view.

"Wow, Honey that is fantastic, we will have to go round and marvel at it."

She slammed the swede peeler onto the chopping board in an act of defiance, "We most certainly will not Derek! Do you know how long I have been waiting for our very own conservatory,

hmmm? and now they have pipped us to it, do you know what this means?"

Derek didn't have a clue, it was just an extension to him, he was unsure of his approach, "Erm, it means they have a rather large buy now pay later agreement to deal with?"

She flashed around and waved the peeler at him in a menacing way, "No you bloody idiot, it means Petunia will be having lots of dinner parties and showing off her new purchase to all and sundry, what the hell do we have Derek? Tell me?"

Derek's face had turned a shade darker, Jack meanwhile was pretending his Dad's shoe was a football and began kicking it in a frenzy, the girls were hiding round the corner in fear of the death peeler and all Derek could do was offer a weak reply amidst the pain.

"We have each other?"

"Christ Almighty, Derek! you are the weakest link, really you are; Out of my way, I'm phoning mother"

She pushed past him and stormed off down the hall to grab the phone and deliver the news to the one person he feared the most of all, even Mr. Driver, it was his mother in law, the gatekeeper of hell, Gloria Weaver.

Derek stroked his little boy's head and pulled him away from his sore foot before walking back over to the window to admire the extension once more; Trevor, his next door neighbour, must have scored a few brownie points when he had that installed, he was quite a good chap, it was a shame that his wife was in such a fierce social competition with his own wife, still, he thought, life must go on.

Life didn't go on as much as he hoped when he heard a shout down the hallway, "Derek, Mother would like to speak to you this instant!"

He rolled his eyes and took one of those slow walks that prisoners take when about to be executed, the electric chair being the phone, he hadn't even had his last supper, he was quite sure he had never requested swede?

He gingerly accepted the phone and tried to smile before talking for a sunnier disposition like they train you to do in call centres, "Hello Gloria, nice day, lovely to speak to you again."

Gloria Rottweiler launched into him, "Don't you lovely and nice me you imbecile! Do you know how upset your wife is to have to sit there and stare at a new conservatory without ever having one of her own?"

"Yes I do under..."

"Derek, shut up and listen" she shouted back, "I don't know what you have been playing at but my daughter wasn't brought into this world to sit around and wait for the things that, as a right, should be hers, do you understand?"

"Yes I under..."

"You have entered into marriage and you must, as a man, although I can't for the life of me think that is what you really are, you must keep her in a manner to which she is accustomed. Why haven't you received your promotion yet Derek?"

"Mr. Driver doesn't think I am ready yet Gloria."

“I cannot believe that, Derek, Mr. Driver knows you manage 12 of the 15 production lines, singlehandedly I may add, it is high time he moved you up so that you can afford a better conservatory than your neighbours.”

Derek had failed to mention he only managed one, every time he had had the misfortune of visiting her, the number of managed production lines went up by one, it was all he could do to avoid the hairdryer treatment, he was sure Satan’s breath smelled sweeter than hers.

Derek was sweating again, his furious wife was standing there with a raised eyebrow and folded arms, she looked like Gloria in her early stages, it would only be a matter of time before she too chrysalises.

“Get it sorted with Mr. Driver, Derek, or I will be forced to go around to the chemical plant myself and pay him a visit! do you hear me?”

He sucked in his own breath and choked a little at the thought of his two worst enemies locked in mortal combat and, what was worse, the truth of his real work responsibilities would come to light as well as his incompetence, as of late, in the reject quota.

Gloria shouted down the phone after hearing no response for a micro second, “Derek, are you there? speak up, you blithering idiot!”

“Yes, I am here, I will speak to him, would you like to speak to your lovely daughter?”

Derek didn’t wait for her response, he handed the phone quickly back to his wife and headed upstairs to the sanctity of his hobby room.

He had finally found peace in his tiny study room which doubled up as SETI's satellite backup station, there were various Reflector and Refractor telescopes standing idly about pointing out towards his skylight, on the walls were numerous constellation maps showing famous sections of Aurora, Ursa Minor and Pegasus.

It was still daylight but he peered through his Celestron and saw a large dark shape scurrying in the most haphazard manner across his lens, he moved around to the end of the scope, saw a tiny ant trying to hitch a ride on the next mission to Mars and picked up a ruler from his desk.

Derek believed in Karma and although it hadn't been good to him of late he let the Ant climb aboard the wooden spaceship and moved it over to the window to allow its intrepid Ant-ronaut to disembark on the ledge outside, the red painted brick was about as close as it would ever get.

"There you go, little fella" he called out and went back to studying the blue sky.

He wondered to himself if there really was life up there, he was sure that no green alien had had the misfortune of eking out its existence in a detergent factory; he would instead be zooming around the galaxy having a whale of time in his superfast flying saucer.

Derek let out a sigh and continued to look skyward, he was waiting for night to fall when his own fun would begin, he could still hear the shrieks of his wife downstairs as she bemoaned her life and Derek's incompetence to her mother. No wonder they had bills, they were virtually propping up BT all by themselves.



God Boy was equally peering into his own region of the universe trying to look for a specimen to complete his first assignment; he had so many ants to choose from but which one? Did it matter anyway, whoever was picked may end up with the same fate as any of the others. He thought that as in life, random events ruled the day and he should just choose the first one that caught his interest.

He looked across his world of blue, green and brown; it didn't have a name although his ants had already named it, there were a few of his fellow students who had also managed to culture an existence and named their own worlds too, so he wasn't leading this competition by any stretch.

Something moved across his vision, it was interesting to say the least, he saw understanding between one creature and the next, even though one was a hundred times smaller, he saw a flash of a ruler as it zoomed across to an opening with the explorer onboard and then a giant eye looking up through a tube back at him.

God Boy smiled, he had found his unwitting volunteer, he hoped that this particular specimen had enough fight in him to see his experiments through.

Only time would tell.



Derek had spent quite an uneventful evening playing 'smack snoozing daddy around the head with a pillow' with his three children, it was obvious he was losing and was much relieved when it was their bedtime.

Honey was in an awful mood and had taken residence in the chair opposite, she was still fuming over Petunia's new purchase

and had ripped up an invitation pushed through their letter box announcing its launch party.

He hadn't had time to head into his celestial escape room and decided to call it a night, he was glad it was Saturday tomorrow, TV had nothing to offer except another 100 years of painful talent shows, rich gourmet chefs telling everyone to grow their own organic vegetables like they did on their 100 acre rural estates and extended versions of the Lottery when in reality the only highlight was the balls dropping through the hole.

They both turned off the lights and headed upstairs, Derek watched his wife's posterior as she clambered up the wooden hill and thought that maybe he might get a bit of nookie, a little sweetener to wipe away the dreary night.

"Stop looking Derek, I know you are, you're not getting any until you get me something that outshines Petunia's purchase!"

Derek was sure that Trevor next door was getting his, he wished he could trade places.

Honey had managed to tuck a pillow in between them as a final rebuff, not even a spoon, she switched off the light and left him to suffer a little bit more. He lay there in the darkness thinking about the weekend ahead, it was sure to be mowing on Sunday as spring had arrived, he would have to fix his carburetor somehow and Saturday was his daughter Ella's hockey match, a semi final, he couldn't miss that for the world.

If only I could stop time, he thought to himself, it would be nice just to have a day or two to myself to do whatever I fancied, an adventure, yes that was it. He closed his eyes and went to sleep.

CHAPTER TWO

The world steadily turned on its axis and ate up the hours, dawn had arrived and Derek found himself feeling rather uncomfortable, he tossed and turned and was beginning to heat up, it seemed that Honey had taken pity on him in the night and removed the pillow allowing him to spoon once more but he dreamt that his ever loving wife had ballooned in size and started to smell, it was a strange dream but above all he felt hot, really hot like he was sizzling in a giant frying pan.

His dream was shattered in an instant when a large wad of spit landed on his face followed by a deep rumbling sound. Rubbing his eyes he couldn't take in what he saw when all around him a herd of angry camels came advancing towards him, the one lying next to him had already got up and begun growling too.

“What the?” cried Derek as he raised his arm to shield himself from another spit missile. He jumped to his feet and backed away from the group under the baking sun that had now decided he was quite cooked but he could be flipped again for an over easy.

He was standing in his favourite pair of well worn light blue underpants and could see that all around there was nothing but sand and bloody lots of it too. His hairy companions had stopped in their tracks and didn't venture any further, probably because of the underpants.

“Where the bloody hell am I?” he screamed to himself in a panic, he had heard of stag do's tying up naked grooms to lamp-posts or driving them to remote Scottish islands to make their sorry way back but this was taking the biscuit; A. he was already

married and B. this was no Scottish island and there was not a single lamp-post in sight.

“Honey?” he feebly shouted, what kind of madness was this, was he still dreaming?

A rather angry looking leather faced Bedouin came running over to see why his herd were being restless at such an early hour and stopped dead in his tracks to take in a pasty white man dressed in bright blue Mowgli pants. The camel herder took one look at Derek and came at him with his camel whip, he wasn't about to be robbed of his precious cargo before it had even got to market.

Derek could see the Arab meant business and with a wide eyed stare of fear, he turned heel and ran for his life past the dromedarys and over the sand berm, chased by his pursuer.

He could hear the lashing of a foreign tongue shouting all manner of obscenities but Derek was of fleet foot as he was travelling light, it didn't help that the fierce sun was baking him to a crisp. The irate Bedouin pulled his rifle from his shoulder and tried to take a steady aim as he fired off a shot at the hapless figure zigzagging down the sand bank. A bullet whizzed past Derek's ear as he heard a loud crack like a twig breaking beside him.

The nomad gave up and let him run off as fast as his saggy blue pants could carry him, at least he still had all of his camels.

Honey had woken up pretty early, she rolled over to see that Derek was missing on his side of the bed but gave no thought to it as the morning was still dark and Derek must be in his planetary observation room, she cursed his boring hobby and went back to sleep, at least she had the whole bed to herself now.

“Oh my God, where the hell am I?” was all he could say as he eyed what appeared to be a small village in the distance, the

buildings looked like tall rectangles with a multitude of small windows carved out of them. It was his only hope but he couldn't stop in case the man came back to finish him off, the sun was chasing him now and had already turned up a few more degrees.



God Boy was pleased with his first experiment, his specimen had survived his first colony encounter but he was heading to a larger one now, he glanced over at his fellow pupils and saw that his nemesis had grown quite angry, his multi tentacled Drakapod, the most feared creature on his selected planet had fallen foul of his initial encounter, although he had slain the zong-tipped Megadon, there were more of his angry brethren heading his way.

He smiled back, although he was unsure of his own progress as yet, Derek could well meet his doom as the first experiment played itself out.



Derek was 100 yards off his target but he was unsure of the reception he would get, he didn't know where the hell he was for a start and it definitely didn't feel like a dream now. A young goatherd saw him approach and cried to anyone that would listen to come quickly. Derek was tentatively stepping barefoot over the sharp rocks and had cut his feet as he moved from soft sand to hard shingle.

The boy was wide eyed as he stepped forward and shouted something to him in an equally mixed up babble, just like the camel herder earlier.

“Hello little boy, tell me where I am please?” called Derek, he was sweating a bit now and his back was starting to feel very red indeed.

It was impossible to have a normal conversation when you were dressed in nothing but your underwear, a surprised crowd had gathered a few yards away from him as he made his way to the entrance of the town, a group of girls were giggling to themselves at the mere sight of this weedy vagrant, if only he could grab a towel or a sheet to cover himself then maybe he could get some sense out of them.

One of the elders reeled off something back at him but he couldn't make it out, it sounded Arabic, they definitely looked Arabic for a start.

Derek received a sharp whack to his posterior as another elder surprised him with a goat stick, the crowd laughed profusely as Derek gave a whelp and pushed through them into the main square. The goat beater was hot on his heels however and kept hitting him to make him move faster, it was all good entertainment for the locals.

“Stop hitting me with that stick will you, I'm not a bloody goat!” shouted Derek and he turned around and grabbed the stick off the toothless grinning native.

At last, one of the more knowledgeable natives stepped forward and spoke to him.

“Manchastor Uneeted!” came the cry.

Derek smiled and hoped it would be the start of a beautiful friendship, he covered his walnuts just in case another beater came at him from the front.

“Yes, Manchester United! Nice to meet you, where am I?”

His friend understood him perfectly, “Daved Beekam!”

Derek smiled, “Yes! David Beckham, could you tell me where I am please?”

“Daved Beekam!”

The growing crowd laughed again and Derek realised he was in a lot of trouble.

“Daved Beekam!”

Derek ran for his life, with the crowd of stick wielding Arabs in hot pursuit.



Honey was feeling a little bit guilty for being mean and called out for her beloved husband to come back to bed, his study room was only next door so she was sure the young ones wouldn't wake up and start rampaging.

There came no reply.

She pulled herself out of her cosy nook and drowsily shuffled out to see what he playing at, the door creaked open and all she saw was a number of sad looking telescopes crying out to be used.

She walked downstairs and had a look around but could not see nor hear her man anywhere, even the car was still parked on the road outside. Where could he be? she thought; His shoes were still in the cupboard and there was no sign of him in the garden, the

little knockback she gave him last night wasn't that bad, was it? he sure was sensitive.

She couldn't phone her mother as it was still too early so she went back upstairs and climbed into bed, give him a little time, maybe, she pondered and went back to sleep.

Derek had run to the other end of the village, it was mostly a dusty square flanked by doorways of every shape imaginable, outside stood grinning women getting washing ready for hanging, they liked to start the day early here it seemed. He saw a white sheet as he was scurrying along, it was still damp and he hastily grabbed it and pulled it around him like a badly fitted toga. There were screams and laughter behind him as the crowd looked like they were staging the Arabian marathon. Derek thought of Benny Hill but he didn't hear any silly music.

Even out here they were no stranger to technology and someone had phoned ahead on a mobile; Derek could see in the distance a military looking jeep, making dust clouds as it jolted along the beaten track, heading in his direction. He was glad of their presence as the only reception he could get in this place was a few good whacks with a stick, maybe they would be kinder to him, maybe they would tell him where he was?



The Grand Visioneer was busy noting the progress that some of his better students were making and shaking his head at some of the poorer ones.

God Boy's arch enemy had cried out upon seeing his beloved Drakapod ripped to pieces by a swarm of angry Megadons.

“It seems your creation failed to grasp the simple benefit of kindly interaction, did it not?” called the Visioneer, who marked down a fail in his light scribe.

He turned to another boy who seemed to be pleased with the fact his Terapid warrior had been greeted with such fanfare by the colony of Onglatads, but his smile was wiped off in an instant when his victor was pushed without warning into a boiling vat of death slime ready for the feast later that evening.

He stopped a short while at God Boy’s experiment and shook his head slightly as the outcome did not look good for his selected specimen, God Boy sighed a little, he was sure his pick was equally as strong as a Terapid.



The green jeep that came to a screeching halt was occupied by a couple of serious looking officials; they were dressed in desert camouflage but seemed too old for conscription, maybe they were senior officer’s, Derek couldn’t tell, he just stood there looking helpless as the crowd behind him had laid down their sticks and stood staring in a ‘Who Me?’ pose.

The most senior officer approached and was holding a small handgun that was definitely pointing at Derek, he looked the sorry creature up and down and scratched the top of his forehead to try and make some kind of sense of what he saw.

Luckily for Derek, his English wasn’t too bad, “Who are you? What are you doing here?” came the cry.

“Sir, I am Derek Hill from England. Where am I?”

“You are in a village south of Al Hudaydah, What are you doing here?”

The officer’s tone was slightly more menacing this time, his companion just sat there, staring straight ahead wearing a pair of Top Gun Aviators, it was obvious the film had only just been released there, over 20 years too late.

Derek started crying, he was shaking like a leaf, it was obvious to the man that he was either a spy or an escaped lunatic.

With a smile, the officer gestured Derek to follow him and as he walked slowly around to get into the back of the Jeep, he was astonished at what the man said.

“Welcome to Yemen, Derek Hill!”

Derek looked forlornly at the baying crowd who became all smiles as the Jeep quickly reversed and drove off at high speed away from the village, all he could hear as he departed were cries of, “Daved Beekam, Daved Beekam”

He was driven sun scorched and baked for about 30km, bumping and rocking back and forth as the Jeep driver thought he was the Yemenese rally King. His companion was shouting at him to keep control and every so often he turned around to make sure his prisoner was still attached to the back seat.

After a while, the road became easier and turned into tarmac and for another hour he passed processions of 4x4s travelling in the opposite direction, the modern day camel of the desert. He saw the occasional goat and plenty of locals who waved at him as he whizzed by.

How the blazes had he arrived in Yemen? One minute he was happily sleeping in his bed in Runcorn, the next minute he was making out with a camel on a desert floor, he would forgive his wife a thousand knock backs if only he could be back there with her, even to the point of smiling as he ate swede.

The Jeep rolled along and came upon a magnificent city, which contained thousands more of the buildings he saw in the village, only taller.

“Sanaa” shouted his captor and Derek was in no doubt he was in Yemen this time, he studied the stars and he also took a great interest in geography but what puzzled him the most was how he was going to get out of this one, did his wife even know he was abroad?

Honey had been cruelly awoken by the kids who knew it was the weekend with a vengeance, they were busy screaming their heads off, Jack was playing with a plastic crocodile and was pushing it in his Mommy’s face as she tried to doze. Ella and Citron were giggling and screaming in unison as most twins do, they were clearly hungry for breakfast and it was no use lying there.

She got up and called out for Derek but again there was no reply, she quickly looked in all of the rooms and noticed his shoes were still where he had left them.

“How strange.” she mumbled to herself, it was about time she called the wicked witch and reported him missing, although Gloria would probably hope it was something more permanent.



A bedraggled and burnt Derek sat on a plastic chair with his hands tied behind his back, overhead was a dim light which gave little relief from the dark that enveloped the hot and stuffy interview room.

A different official to the one that captured him stood in a corner smoking a cigarette and stared quite intently at the toga clad individual.

“So, Derek Hill, I am Ali Hadad, Chief of Police in Sanaa, I would like to ask you a few questions.”

He continued to smoke, there was hardly any air in the room as it was, after a quick puff he began his careful approach, “Do you realize that you need permission from the Yemen tourist police to travel outside of Sanaa?”

Derek shook his head, “I shouldn’t be here, I should be in Runcorn!”

“Runcorn, what is this?”

“It is where I live, in England.”

The officer eyed him suspiciously, the man wasn’t making any sense.

“Mr. Hill, where are your belongings? were you robbed?”

“No, I found myself lying next to a camel.”

It was getting stranger by the minute.

“What do you do for a living, Mr. Hill?”

Derek wondered where this was going, how could it possibly help him get back to normality.

“I am a supervisor, I make chemical detergents”

“You supervise the making of chemicals? You mean chemical weapons?”

He couldn't believe the line of questioning.

“No officer, I make washing up liquid! Soap, etc etc”

The middle aged serious looking officer came running over and slapped him hard across the face, Derek let out a huge cry, the pain was immense.

“Liar, you are a spy, you make chemical weapons and you are intent on hurting the good people of Yemen!”

Derek began sobbing, it seemed he was a master at it, “No, No! I am Derek Hill of 43 Blossom Meadows, Runcorn, England, I am a supervisor for the Supersuds Detergent Factory and I don't know what I am doing here!”

The officer had heard quite enough, it was plain as day what Derek was, no papers, no authorization, dubious profession, turns up miles away from the capital but not too far from a military base, it could only add up to one thing.

He slapped Derek hard again for having the cheek to invent a silly address called Blossom Meadows and walked out of the room in a strop.

It was clear he was in big big trouble now, the camel herder was an amateur compared to this man.

A couple of menacing looking guards appeared and yanked Derek from his chair, he was manhandled through the door and led down a narrow corridor which contained a multitude of grey metal doors, there was less air in this corridor than maybe the moon.

Derek received a strong punch in his gut from one of the heavies and was thrown headfirst into a windowless cell, he coughed and spluttered from the shock of the attack and lay there in a heap of tears and spit. The guards slammed the door shut and he could hear them reel off a million words a minute in their mother tongue.

The dark was stifling but not as much as the temperature, as he felt himself heat up even more, they had given him no water and the whole episode made him wish he was still a goat being whipped around the village square; Derek unwillingly passed out.



Honey, sensing the time, had rushed to the phone and dialed her Mother, this was a matter of the utmost urgency, she had wished she had phoned earlier, there was no point waiting, something had to be done now.

She was in a flood of tears, “Mother, you won’t believe what’s happened!”

Gloria could tell there was an emergency unfolding, it was a mother’s instinct, “Calm down, dear, now take it slow, tell me what has happened?”

“It’s Derek, Mother, he has only decided to go for a long walk or something equally daft and forgotten that it’s Ella’s Hockey Semi-final today!”

Beelzebub's Mom was enraged, "The bloomin nincompoop! Honey, I always knew he was next to useless, does he even care about you and the kids?"

Honey was performing her best Norman Collier impression blurting out words in-between sobs, "I don't know mother, he hasn't fixed the car either, I am so mad with him, Ella will be distraught, what am I going to do? I can't drive her there?"

"Never you mind, dear, I'll be coming round this instant, if that idiot can't manage a simple task like this then I surely will!"

Gloria put the phone down and hoped that en route she may accidentally slip the kerb and run over the man she detested the most, for not being Derek the provider.



A few hours had passed and Derek was feeling as if a giant hand had wrung all the water out of him, he could hear commotion outside and was starting to fear what his captors may do to him next, what could he offer them anyway? the top ten expert tips on spotting misshapen plastic bottles or the difference between an asteroid and a comet?.

The door was pulled wide open and 3 extras from Chips came walking in, the aviator sunglass salesman was having a ball here in Yemen. Derek was roughly pulled to his feet while the senior officer he met earlier grabbed him by his hair and led him back into the interrogation room.

They placed him back on his chair and another guard appeared from nowhere with an ice filled jug of water and placed it on the table. Derek sat there and wished he could dive straight into it but

his dream was shattered when the man poured himself a glass and stood there smiling between sips.

“Please, Sir, can I have some water?” gasped Derek.

“Certainly Mr. Hill, but first you must tell me your mission.”

“I, I don’t have a mission, I watch plastic bottles for a living.”

“Come, come Mr. Hill, we can be good friends, just tell me why you are here and you can have your own glass, it tastes wonderful,” he took long sips and exaggerated the pleasure.

It was clear his tormentor was just warming up his routine.



The Grand Visioneer had seen enough, he had made his notes on each pupil’s performance for the first test and decided some guidance was needed.

“Class, I did not expect any of you to grasp the fundamentals of species interaction so soon, as you can see and as some of you have learned the hard way, it takes co-operation and a common trade to occur for it to be successful...”

God Boy was intently listening but could also see out of the corner of his eye his subject slumped back in a chair with a gun pointed at his head, he was hoping the Visioneer would hurry up his speech.

“Most interactions are symbiotic, I have cast my marks and there is no need to play each scenario out, we must make haste for experiment number two!”

A bullet had left the chamber after the Officer grew tired of his captive's weak replies, whatever he was protecting at the military base it must have been important.

God Boy quickly willed his intentions and saw the bullet shoot past the chair and into the wall to the amazement of the three men standing there.



Gloria Weaver was ferrying her Daughter and Grand Kids back from the Hockey match, it was clear that Ella was distraught, she had hoped Daddy was there to see her shot fly home and secure the teams run to the finals, it was the proudest day of her life but he had missed it.

Honey was seething, "Derek is in for a right ticking off when I get hold of him, I don't know what he is playing at but it had better be good!"

Her mother hadn't liked Derek from the start, she never considered he had a backbone, much like a jellyfish, she aimed for tall, dark and handsome but fate had delivered the wrong parcel for her daughter, her precious Honey.

Gloria drove her Mercedes A class down Blossom Meadows and around Derek's pitiful Montego before coming to a halt on the drive, they were about to disembark when Ella suddenly cried out...

"DADDY!"

They weren't expecting anything quite like it. Looking out of the car window they could have sworn that Gandhi had returned and was lying face down on their garden with his mouth attached

to the hose sprinkler. It's not everyday that you see something like that and they remained in the car frozen in time, mouths wide open.

Derek had drunk his fill of the entire reservoir and peered up to see his whole world looking down on him; he was sunburnt red from head to toe, still in his toga and completely soaked by now but it felt good, his face had been chewing a wasp from the blows he received earlier and he was exhausted. He didn't know whether the man was about to shoot him or play some more games but he was glad to be home.

The unusual sight still didn't make up for the fact that he had missed the hockey match and as a soaking sheet came walking round to greet Honey, she pushed her arm out to fend him off, "Derek, how could you miss your daughter's crowning glory, stay away from me! Kids, get in the house now!"

"But Honey, you wouldn't believe where I have just been!"

"I don't want to know Derek, you have picked a fine time to go insane! Just leave it but in future if you decide to have any more tantrums be sure to make it a weekday."

Gloria backed off the drive and drove over Derek's toes, she had managed to get part of him that day, he could see her smiling in the driver's seat as she was glad her day had turned out just fine, Mother from Hell 1, Derek 0.

He yelped with pain and grabbed his sore foot and began to hop back into the house to smooth over the trouble, how could he even tell her where he had been, she would really think he had gone cuckoo this time.

'Honey I have just come back from Yemen, I woke up next to a camel, was beaten with a stick and chased through a village

before being imprisoned by the chief of police, How has your day been Dear?’

It was no use, his best option was a cold bath and a box of Milk Tray for later, in his mind though, he knew he couldn’t have travelled there conventionally, either that or someone had slipped him an acid pill.



God Boy was a little bit disturbed by the near demise of his selected specimen, the Visioneer had insisted that marks would be won only if it survived to experiment number two but it wasn’t as clear cut as that.

Break time had arrived and all of the pupils raced off their seats around the universe and ran outside to play, God Boy was just about to join them when he was summoned back by the teacher.

The magnificent overseer, draped in light, looked at the boy for a few seconds before speaking, “I read your thoughts, child, and I would have marked your effort as a fail but I could see that another one of you had used will on the mind of the one species to exterminate the life of the other.”

He paused again to let it sink in, “but it was not to be, you were too quick for that, they would have handed the creature back to its own species with normal will; It was also impressive that you waited for my speech to end before removing the species from the enclosure, very respectful I must say and so I have awarded you a pass.”

God Boy smiled, he wasn't expecting it and he also knew who had tried to alter his path, it was only right that vengeance be enacted when the moment was right.

"Now go out and play, when you all come back I will reveal the second experiment"



Derek had spent a miserable Sunday morning mowing the lawn, his wife had banished him the night before to go sleep with his tripods; his daughter had refused to speak to him and his son Jack was trying to kick him on his sunburnt shins whenever he got the chance.

He was glad to be heading back to work, it had cost him a fortune to call out a weekend mechanic, the repair bill had cost more than the car was worth, his plastic was getting a hammering and he could see that an expensive conservatory was on the horizon, if only to keep the peace.

He couldn't spend any more time pondering on the fantastical journey he had made without knowing how he had gotten there in the first place, the blisters were a testament to that as well as the red welts he had on his backside. He couldn't fathom it so it was probably best to leave it.

He got into his Montego for the 30 minute trip to the factory and pulled off the drive, another 9 hours of bottle counting and he would be back to the silent treatment at home, could it get any better than this he wondered.

A blacked out Mercedes Sedan pulled out from the roadside and followed steadily behind, Derek paid no attention to it as the traffic was quite busy on the run in to work but it slowly dawned

on him after a couple of miles, that the same car was still occupying his rear view mirror. He had taken quite a few shortcuts and had noticed it parked in the garage forecourt as he stopped for petrol, it didn't fill up and no one had got out.

Derek continued his journey and popped in a CD for the last five minutes, just one little wonder track to help him through the day, he was quite fond of Jean Michel Jarre and listened to Oxygene number 5, he was sure the talented Frenchman peered through telescopes just like himself.

He pulled through the gates of Supersuds and nodded to the man in the guard booth, he always wondered why anyone would want to protect a bottle of washing up liquid. He parked up in his usual marked spot, it was narrower than Mr. Drivers', even spaces had status it seemed.

As he got out he caught sight of something really peculiar, there was a man, wearing a pair of cheap sunglasses, taking pictures with a professional looking camera; He was pointing it directly at him from behind the fence, it only lasted a few seconds as the shadowy figure quickly got into the passenger seat and drove off at high speed.

It seemed the weekend had continued with a vengeance, Detergent Spotters? whatever next! chuckled Derek.

If he thought that the atmosphere was stifling in the Yemeni prison cell, he was in for a big surprise as he made his way into the Quality Control section of the large factory. Everyone sitting there ready to start the shift were all quite somber faced, there was something amiss and he couldn't quite figure it out.

One of his minions piped up, "Hello, Derek, been out in the sun?"

No one laughed, which made it feel even more strange, Derek suddenly noticed what was missing, “Where is Mavis, is she ill?”

“She has been suspended, Derek, Mr. Driver found a bottle in her bag and accused her of theft, he wants to see you right away, he said to give you the message.”

“How could you call it theft when the bottle was half mangled?” cried Derek.

“Dunno, Mavis is distraught, you had better go now and see him.”

Derek walked unsteadily towards the office, he could see Mr. Driver just sitting there staring straight ahead, he thought how ridiculous life was that a single plastic bottle should matter in the whole grand scheme of things.

He wasn't in a grand scheme however, it was a very, very small scheme and he was about to have his head chewed off.

Derek tried a smile from his cracked lips, “Hello Mr. Driver, you wanted to see me?”

“Take a seat Derek,” cried his tormentor in a solemn tone. Mr. Driver was sweating and the morning hadn't even started yet. He peered through his small glasses at Derek which made his eyes look like pin dots.

“Mr. Hill, could you tell me the difference between chaos and order?”

It was a strange question indeed but Mr. Driver was a strange man, Derek knew a moral was on the horizon.

“Sir, I believe chaos is the opposite of order, without order we would have chaos.” It was a good reply and Derek could see that it had impressed his boss as he nodded his agreement.

Mr. Driver got up from his chair and started to pace around, he reminded Derek of his old head teacher Mr. Billington who used to do the very same thing but would eventually launch himself at you with his ripe cane in full fury.

“Mr. Hill, I believe I have a higher purpose, this factory of Supersuds is not just a mere provider of cleaning agents for the grateful masses, oh no, it is much more than that...”

Derek was puzzled now, he sounded like the David Icke of detergents.

“...it is order from the chaos Derek, thousands of plastic bottles pass through these lines every day, they are a beautiful sight, every single one of them, they are regiments, Derek, regiments of plastic, they have only one mission in life and that is to paratroop off the shelves and into the customers basket...”

Regiments, paratroopers, where was Mr. Driver going with this?

He was still pacing around the office, not looking at Derek, just lost in his own importance, Hitler would have been proud of his fervour.

“...The bottles must be pristine on inspection, any slackers will be removed from the line, I don't tolerate slackers, Derek, but I also don't want to see too many of them either. It seems to me that you have lost that discipline of late, you need to rally the plastic troops back into action, Derek!”

He was completely lost on this one, how could he discipline plastic troops, they either ended up disfigured or not, it wasn't his fault, it was the moulders' fault at the start of the line, what could he do about it?

Mr. Driver finally sat down in his chair and folded his fingers together.

“Derek, what happens when an officer cannot perform his duty to the best of his ability?”

“I don't know Mr. Driver, he takes a holiday?”

Derek watched as a fist came slamming down onto the desk in rage.

“Nonsense, Derek! he gets demoted until he can perform again, I have had it up to here with your incompetence, granted we are not the army so I am serving you a written warning instead, mark my words, three strikes and you're out!”

Derek was trembling now, “For what, Sir, what have I done?”

“Mavis Cutter, Mr. Hill, hiding evidence to save your neck, now get out and back to the line, I don't want to see another reject quota destroyed for the rest of the week, do you hear me?”

“Yes Sir, it won't happen again” cried Derek; he got up and shuffled out of the room, he couldn't very well lose his job too, they wouldn't be able to afford to even live in a conservatory if that happened, he just simply took the humiliation and walked back to the line as he had done countless times before.



Playtime had ended and all of the Creational pupils had wandered back to take their seats around the floating Universe. Apparently older boys had learnt the art of stretching break times to infinite proportions to allow themselves time for other pursuits, sadly for God Boy this skill was eons away, he had to lump it for barely 30 minutes of his own time.

The Visioneer appeared like a cheap magic trick amongst them and told them to look at their parchments once more. The second experiment was even more curious than the first. Not one pupil could understand its meaning and it was left to their teacher again to enlighten them.

“Class, this is considered a simple experiment so I expect all of your specimens to survive to number 3 although complete destruction does happen on occasion, only last semester a gifted child’s prized species was ripped apart most savagely, Because of it, therefore I warn you all to keep a close eye on your own, this can produce rather random results.”

God Boy couldn’t see the link to higher understanding but he set events in motion just like the rest of his class.

The teacher reiterated the marks to be awarded, “Top marks for successful completion, marks will be lost not only by destruction of the specimen but also by the final progress of the individual once I call a halt to it.

The stone was cast, quite a lot of the children were left looking a bit pensive over their original pick.



Derek had spent lunchtime reading his newspaper alone in his car, he had received quite a few stares from his workers over his

ridiculously reddened and sore tan, no one could work out whether he was flustered or not anymore, his bruised split lips made it hard for him to bark orders and he was feeling rather uncomfortable and wishing the day would end so he could get back to his beloved telescopes.

He shuffled back to the factory door and couldn't understand why the group of female smokers took in a huge lungful of air through their nostrils in-between puffs as he passed. It seemed they were happy to see him today, they usually looked miserable and doom laden counting down the seconds before their shift would grind on again.

He noted that Mr. Driver was still busy in his office poring over figures, at least he wasn't parading around his line and giving him reprimands to embarrass and belittle him further.

Delores Firant, one of the longest serving members of quality control, let out a pleasurable hum as her finely tuned senses examined the so called plastic soldiers. She raised her hand to call over Derek, the rule was left hand for attention, right hand for reject, Mr. Driver looked up over his glasses and noticed the meaning instantly and carried on with his paperwork.

A bedraggled Derek walked over to the expectant checker, "Hello Delores, what seems to be the problem?"

"Could you come a little bit closer Derek?, I need to whisper something."

He was used to his workers being quite confidential and was hoping it wasn't a reject, he didn't want any of that today, he bent down to offer her his ear.

Delores said nothing and, to Derek's surprise, licked his face like an excited dog.

“What the bloomin hell are you doing, Delores?” cried Derek, as he pulled himself away from her sticky sandpaper tongue.

She winked at him in a knowing way as an embarrassed and confused Derek backed off, with his arm raised, carefully wiping away the saliva.

Derek grabbed his clipboard and busied himself with the day’s figures, he could feel her eyes boring into him and didn’t even notice a hand reach around and pinch his sunburnt posterior.

This time it was Miss Jumper, one of the youngest of the group.

Derek spun around in complete shock, “What the blazes are you doing Hannah?”

“Sorry, Derek,” she cried back, “but there is something about you today I can’t quite put my finger on.”

“I think you have already ‘put’ your finger on, Miss Jumper, that is quite enough; Ladies, get back to work, stop playing games or Mr. Driver will be out in a shot!”

He was in enough stress as it was, his appreciation for practical jokes had dropped down to a big fat zero.

Derek finished up his scribbling and couldn’t help notice that a number of the women, young and mature, had unzipped their overalls and loosened off a few buttons in the process.

This was indeed getting out of hand so he decided to pipe up, “Ladies, is it hot in here or something because I can’t feel the difference.”

They all stared at Derek with unabashed adoration, oblivious to the dozens of bottles whizzing past at speed, it seemed to them that he was the Supersuds version of George Hamilton but in reality he looked like the man from the Mr. Muscle adverts.

“For god’s sake Ladies, watch the bottles!” shouted Mr. Driver who had appeared like Mr. Benn from nowhere, he was wearing a serious expression and it bought all of the women back into reality, “Why the hell are your overalls unzipped, do them up immediately! Derek, a word, please, in my office.”

Derek frowned at his predicament; he was never far away from trouble at the moment. He tentatively stepped inside of the office and planted himself on the chair to await another hairdryer treatment.

The line workers turned again to stare admiringly at their leader as his hair was blown back into an impressive bouffant by Mr. Driver behind the glass, they couldn’t work it out and wondered why they had never noticed it before but now it was as plain as day.

Luckily for Derek, he had been sent home by Mr. Driver for failing to keep control of his troops. It was left to his boss to maintain order, for some reason his boss was even angrier than before during the reject incident, as far as Derek was concerned it was a few minutes of madness, but he noticed an aggressive tone in his voice, usually his boss was sarcastic with a seething edge to him but he had seemed to boil over at the mere sight of him today.

He jumped into his car and decided to fetch some shopping for tea later on, arriving back closer to 2 pm was probably worse than getting back for 4pm, he could say then to Honey that he was super efficient and Mr. Driver had sent him home for working above and beyond the call of duty.

He pulled into a spot within the huge car park of Shoppermart, apparently Runcorns' number 1 premier outlet for discerning customers. He passed through the double doors and made his way over to the fruit and veg section.

Derek was busy browsing the lettuce and Broccoli display when an over eager female attendant came rushing over to him, "Hello Sir, would you like some help in choosing?" The pretty girl was manhandling a cucumber in such a way that made him feel quite uncomfortable, her eyes were fixed on his and she didn't seem to understand the limits of personal space.

"No thank you, I'm fine," he said abruptly but it was of no use as she thrust her heaving bosom into him and they both landed helpless into the leafy foliage.

An alarmed Derek let out a cry as the crazed girl tried to kiss him passionately in the cabbage patch, the wrestling match between them undid the hours of careful preening and placing of vegetables for future customers.

Derek managed to wriggle free of his admirer, "For god's sake, leave me alone!" he cried as he ran away and around to the beverages section covered in red lipstick.

What had got into them? Was he hallucinating again like before, this was completely unreal; he tried to brush his hair back into place and as he looked behind him he noticed the same girl had advanced a few steps closer and hurriedly made his way to the next aisle past various hums and arrghs.

His efforts of escape were short lived however as other female shoppers had started to crowd him, he received a number of drive by floozings as he shopped and decided to drop whatever he could into his basket, regardless of what it was.

“Keep a cool head, Derek, this is ridiculous, do your shop and get out of here!”

By the time he reached the last aisle of wine and cigarettes, a small army of females had gathered behind him, much to the disgust of their male companions who were staring at Derek in an aggressive manner. He had done nothing to provoke them and it was clear to see he needed to pay and get the hell out of Dodge City before knickers and bras came flying off.

Luckily the checkout girl turned out to be an elderly gentleman who greeted Derek in a normal manner but couldn't take his eyes off the number that had gathered behind him. “Ladies, there are plenty of other checkouts free if you would like to use them.” he called out to them all.

The man was stunned by the reaction as no one decided to move from their spot, from the looks of it he was heading for a dreary afternoon.

Derek detected a tense feeling in the air, “Hurry up please would you, I need to get out of here as quickly as I can”

The old man didn't like this one bit, especially from someone a lot younger than himself, “Now look here I can only go as fast as the beeper will allow me to, you will have to wait like everyone else!”

Derek could feel a presence behind him, definitely a female presence but he dared not look around, he could hear male voices calling for their partners to stop acting funny but it was no use.

The packets and tins were moving at such a slow pace that anticipation had decided to replace tenseness.

A female hand rudely reached around and grabbed Derek's nether regions, it was all too much, shopping or not, he had to get away from there.

"Forget it, Mister, I'll shop somewhere else" an embarrassed Derek shouted as he ran for his life towards the door.

A panicked and sweat ridden Derek had barely made it to his car when he could see a dozen or so women racing out on slower heels towards him, some were cruelly pushed to the floor by the rabble as the others jostled to get closer to the sexiest man on earth.

He jumped into his Montego and performed a Damon Hill maneuver, quite a feat in reality, but it gave him a few precious seconds to avoid being followed as he slipped into the traffic and raced off back to his house.

"What the blazes is going on, first camels and then females! what is happening here?"

He looked up at the heavens and cursed his God for making his week the worst he had ever known, even Gloria seemed pale in comparison to the events he had now witnessed.



Over in the Kingdom of the Drogamites, millions of light years away, an equally passive six legged Drog had witnessed his own demise from the crack of a heavy rock upon his lizard like skull, when he was found trapped in the embrace of the Lizard Queen. It was an honour only preserved for the mightiest of nobles, he was a mere septic wound healer of the lowest order and he shouldn't have been within the palace in the first place.

No one believed that he was dragged there kicking and screaming by the Queen herself as she passed in procession through the crowded streets and back to her bed chamber.



Derek decided to take a detour as he wasn't due home anytime soon, he headed over to the cricket park off Heath Road and parked up, luckily there was hardly a soul to be seen and he pushed his seat back to relax and try to unwind.

As he sat there he noticed a couple of old ladies about to pass each other on the footpath, they were exercising the usual preened toy poodles, they smiled at each other as they walked on but one of the dogs was intent on sniffing the others' backside. It had obviously latched onto something and decided to try its luck humping the other much to the horror of their elderly walkers.

A curious idea erupted within Derek's already frazzled brain, he saw similarities between these randy pets and the reaction he had when he was within a few metres of all the lusty females he met today.

"Musk!" he cried and he sat bolt upright and started to sniff his own extremities, it could be the only explanation, he was used to practical jokes and it was possible that someone at work had sprayed his overalls as they sat in the locker room. Whoever had done it should sell whatever the magical substance was on an auction site, they could be millionaires within a week.

Derek started laughing at the sheer black comedy of it all, he felt much relieved. Mr. Driver had done him a huge favour in ordering him to leave early, he hadn't spent much time simply staring out into space as of late, whether it was green or black space it would do him some good.

He snoozed away an hour or two and decided to drive home, if his luck was in the magical substance may even work on Honey, he hadn't been getting his rightful share for a while, a monk would probably laugh at his predicament. His grey car turned slowly into his road and he was feeling quite expectant, it wasn't until he was halfway down the street when he noticed the same black sedan sitting about 50 yards from his house on the opposite side. Who were they? The factory spotters didn't look like they were about to ask for his autograph. He could make out two figures sitting quite still through the windscreen, it was definitely the same two as before, same shades, same official looking presence.

Derek had had quite enough to contend with, without worrying about these two, so he simply pulled onto his drive and stepped out. There was no screaming or bawling coming from inside the house as he approached which made it seem strange, it was usually part of his daily routine but not a dicky bird.

His fears were removed when he caught sight of his ever loving wife in the hallway as he shouted his usual greeting, surprisingly his new found Adonis qualities were lost on her as she shuffled her way into the living room to have a lie down.

“Honey, are you ok? What's wrong?”

“I've got a bloody cold, Derek, if you must know, I think it's stress, what with having to deal with the sight of Petunia's marvelous extension and your absence at the hockey match, I wish my life wasn't so rubbish.”

She was blowing her nose into a very large hankie, he could see she had taken a delivery contract out on Kleenex.

No nookie tonight then it seemed, “Where are the kids, dear?”

“Upstairs, they have it too, worse than mine, I must have caught it off Ella, it was quite windy that day. Mom is coming over in an hour to look after them”

A cold fear ran down his spine, two sightings of Gloria in the space of two days, it was simply too much to bear for any man.

“Why is the Death Seeker coming round Honey?”

Honey ignored his last comment, “Because you promised me a meal in town tonight for all of your shortcomings, Derek, I’m not going to miss the opportunity of seeing your wallet creak open, cold or no cold.”

Derek’s feeling of release was squashed in an instant as he saw yet another evening away from his beloved telescopes, he could now understand why fisherman scooted off to some unknown place along a canal bank, there was simply no way they would be found by their other half.

“Are you sure Honey, you could do with a break? what about tomorrow?”

“Bugger tomorrow, Derek, we are booked in, I’m not going to change it. I can see Petunia itching to come round with an invitation, I’m not going to give her the pleasure. Get yourself ready, were going out and that’s that!”

Derek groaned and turned back to walk up the wooden hill, he popped into each of his children’s bedrooms to see them all sound asleep cuddling their favourite toys for comfort. He used to have a brown and cream toy dog with a zipped belly for his pyjamas that did the same trick. They would be right as rain in a day or two.

Honey's reaction to the musky man was expected, she couldn't smell him through her bunged up nose but an alarming thought ran through his mind as he remembered Dolores at the factory, she was about the same age as Gloria! If God could strike him down he would prefer it to be now, she was due over soon, heaven knows what her reaction would be, she had the finely tuned senses of a Great White; one drop of musk in a square radius of 20 miles would send her into a feeding frenzy.

Derek shuddered at the thought and quickly ran into the bathroom to extricate himself from the mysterious elixir; he had another trick up his sleeve however, that was sure to stifle her advances if she got too close.

He spent some quality time with the loofah but it was painful enough as it scratched his sunburnt skin, it had to be done however and he changed into one of his worst outfits, one that Honey hadn't seen for a while, a brown and crème checked shirt like maths teachers used to wear, and supertight blue Farahs, fashionable in the 70's but it still wasn't the crowning glory in his arsenal.

Eventually he could hear the sound of a car coming up the drive, his walls were so thin, no better than prefab. He walked down to meet his maker as Honey was finishing up herself in the bathroom.

"Hello you ridiculously evil witch, has your cauldron sprung a leak, did you pop round for some putty?"

Derek opened the door and greeted his mother in law.

"Hello, Gloria, how are you today, you look great!"

He could see her reaction, her eyes were wide, her mouth open just like the other females, was this the end?

“Good Lord Derek, what is that pong? it smells dreadful?”

He gave a huge satisfied grin, his weapon of choice had done the trick, “Hai Karate, Gloria, you bought it for me last Christmas remember? I couldn’t resist using it for a special night such as tonight, thank you”

Gloria buried her pointed nose into her sleeve and pushed past Derek and into the living room for safety.

Derek was feeling rather confident now although he didn’t know how long the effects would last, he may have to go and mail order some more.

Honey came down the stairs, her nose was as red as Santa’s Reindeer, she had tried to mask it under some blusher but Coco would have been proud nonetheless. She looked great in her black velvet evening dress, Derek’s favourite, it didn’t complement his outfit though but he was past caring.

“Derek! what are you wearing? You look awful”

A voice called out from the sitting room, “Never mind the look Dear, have you taken in the smell?”

Honey was confused but her snotty nose was an impenetrable barrier, “I can’t smell him, Mother, I’m all bunged up, Oh Derek you will have to do, you could have made more of an effort but we’re going to be late.”

He shrugged his shoulders, it was his best defense against the female hordes, he could hear Gloria coughing in the distance.

They left the house and waved back before climbing into Derek’s grey limousine, he noticed the same black sedan parked up

like earlier, it slowly pulled away from the kerb and began to follow them.

“Honey, don’t look back, I’m sure were being followed, I don’t know by who but they were behind me all the way to work today, strange”

“Nonsense, Derek, you watch too many movies, just keep your eyes on the road.”

He drove on and wondered as he looked through the rear view what it would feel like if he were driving the flashy sedan and being followed by a Montego instead, it wouldn’t look as sinister, he couldn’t remember whether any film had ever shown a scene like that.

They arrived at Bertrands, the posh French restaurant in the centre of town, but they had half an hour to spare so they decided to park up outside and walk to the Flag and Lamb about 500 metres round the corner; parking was at a premium in these parts, the yellow jacketed council workers in their jobs worth capacity had made sure no usable space existed that wasn’t attached to a parking meter.

Derek took a deep breath outside the pub’s front door, he wasn’t sure of the reaction even with his stink shield in place, only time would tell.

Luckily, as he stepped inside the building he could see in an instant he was no threat to any male as they sat chatting to their wives and girlfriends, he did get quite a few head turns though for trying to bring back the fashion of an 70’s Chuck Norris, it didn’t work however and Derek ordered a drink for his snuffly companion. He could hear quite a few complaints and coughs behind, he was quite sure that every kid in the country had once

owned a bottle of Hai Karate in his lifetime, even if it had been won at the tombola.

They took their seats next to a window and before long all of the tables had been evacuated around them by the disgruntled punters. Derek made small talk to his wife who feigned smiles inbetween yawns like most married couples performed when they had spent too much time together. The minutes passed by slowly and to his alarm he could see the tiny patters of water outside turn into a torrential downpour.

Honey eyed him suspiciously, “You look worried Derek, is anything up?”

Derek had cause to worry, he knew that he was 500 metres away from a feminine stampede if his stink shield didn’t hold up when it was time to walk back to the restaurant.

“Nothing Honey, sorry, just thinking about today, a very stressful shift.”

“Blimey it is chucking it down outside, I don’t have an umbrella, I can’t let it ruin my hairdo, it took the best will in the world to drag myself down the salon today,” cried his wife.

She looked at his red check and fake fur Dockers jacket, it seemed he had pulled out all the stops in the fashion stakes tonight but he wasn’t about to spoil her evening.

Honey piped up quickly, “I need your coat, Derek, it’s an emergency, you will dry off in the warm restaurant, you owe me that much for your antics anyway.”

An alarmed man got up from his chair and viewed the watery carnage outside, his aftershave wasn't waterproof, he should have gone for Old Spice instead.

They finished up their drinks and raced outside and, to Derek's dismay, Honey couldn't run in her fancy heels, he had to slow down to a crawl, why oh why did they always wear such ridiculous shoes?

Broken gutters along the route decided he was a prime candidate for a soaking as he passed and before long he was drenched through, it was only a short distance and it seemed everyone else was running except him.

"Hold out Stink Shield please, I beg you!" he muttered to himself.

They finally made it to the fancy frontage of Bertrands and dashed inside, Honey announced herself to the head waiter who seemed to growl at Derek and summoned them to a table in the far corner. He could hear little sounds around him which appeared much like pigeons cooing but kept his eyes firmly on the route ahead.

He could have sworn someone had pinched his bum as he passed but it could have been the back of a chair, he was getting quite panicky now.

A soaked through and frightened Derek tried to grab the chair facing away from the crowd but Honey had beaten him to it. The waiter seated his wife but pushed his chair in quite abruptly before throwing him a menacing stare.

"Blimey Derek, you really have a way with people, don't you, I don't think he will get a tip for his service skills!"

He hadn't heard her speak, he was looking about the room and could see a number of females loosening off their fancy garments to get some more air, you could have sworn Tom Jones had just entered the building but the Welsh crooner was nowhere to be seen.

As luck would have it, a gorgeously slim waitress appeared to take their order, "Hello, welcome to Bert..."

The waitress gulped and placed her hand on Derek's shoulder, she placed her notebook in her pocket and began thumbing the love heart on her necklace.

An alarmed Honey gave a mighty cough when the hand decided to stay for far too long on her husband's body.

"Excuse me, Waitress, can we order please?"

She was brought back down to earth with a thud and hurriedly pulled out her notebook once more to take their orders but her eyes were firmly fixed on Derek.

"Sir, the oysters are a delicacy, I could order you a plate, they are fabulous."

"Onion Soup," came back the reply, "and heavy on the onions."

Honey was amazed when the waitress was still standing there a minute after taking the order, "You can go now please or we will never eat."

"Sorry, Madam."

Honey was sure the waitress was skipping as she left, “This place has certainly gone down the pan Derek, the food had better be good or I’m not coming back.”

Derek was hoping she didn’t notice the reaction too much, she usually wasn’t that observant when it came to female competition, not that he received attention anyway.

The air was getting quite heated now, Derek wanted to get stuck into his soup and keep his head down but it became apparent that his growing army of admirers were all staring in his direction and not paying an ounce of interest to their partner’s conversation, some were even fanning themselves with the menu card. A number of males had also turned around and began staring at this veritable Hugh Hefner, shooting him some really evil looks.

What could Derek do? he was glad Honey was sat facing away from them, she hadn’t noticed anything.

The waitress was back in a hurry, it was obvious she was flustered and had managed to push up her bra so that her cleavage was almost popping out, she placed the food down on the table with a determined look on her face.

“Thank you, could we have some water” called Derek, it was best to keep her busy. They both stared down at their food and Derek began tearing up the baguette to dip in the soup.

Suddenly, a bosom was pressed into his back as the lusty waitress put her arms around him in a vice like grip, to his astonishment she embraced both his hands as he tackled the bread, he could feel her face pressed next to his.

“Sir, you seem to need some help breaking up your bread, let me help you!”

Honey's mouth fell wide open and released a breadstick, it came tumbling out and skewered her soft pâté. It was all too much for her, "Bloody hell, can you leave my man in peace!" she shouted in a snuffly roar.

The waitress was taken aback and released her victim but not before planting a red lipstick kiss on his cheek.

"What the hell is going on, Derek? you must have flirted with her while my back was turned!"

Honey was sobbing a little, her perfect night was about to be ruined by Derek's wanderlust, not that he had an ounce of it inside himself to start with.

Derek pulled his chair back, "I swear I didn't, this place gives a new meaning to cosy, Honey, let's leave."

Derek could see a way out now, one incident would be forgotten about for sure if they headed back home and he got the shiny conservatory brochure out as soon as he got in.

Honey stared him down, "Derek, sit down, no floozy is going to spoil my night even if she is obviously high on drugs, I'll be complaining to the manager before we leave though that's for sure."

His world caved in again as he took his seat, he could see quite a few arguments going on as men of all ages tried vainly to turn their partners faces away from his direction but it was no use, some men had stormed out while others were looking far more aggressive.

Then it happened, he was only halfway down his soup bowl, was it half empty or half full? he couldn't tell but a rather smart

looking female had managed to pull herself away from her angry beau's embrace and came running over towards Derek.

It now seemed to come at him in slow motion, his soup spoon was about to dislodge its contents into his mouth when he suddenly noticed an hourglass shape advancing his way, his mouth was wide open by this time and Honey caught the sight of him as he looked up, it almost looked like he was positioning his lips.

A body threw herself across their table knocking the contents to the floor like a typical Greek festival. Derek found a pair of longing lips suddenly lock themselves to his as he and his fancy piece came crashing down onto the floor in a lusty hurry, they looked like a pair of kissing gourami as Derek was abruptly molested underneath her in this fine aquatic display.

"Derek!" cried his wife, it was obvious he couldn't reply as he was in the throes of passion as the lady was trying to take her blouse off whilst still trying to hold Derek in a Big Daddy type maneuver.

His wife jumped to her feet and began sobbing as a large and muscular man came rushing over to sort this mess out.

"Not with my wife you don't, mister," he shouted and pulled his harlot off the 70's catalogue pin up. Derek felt a huge fist come down onto his face like an anvil, he could also hear his wife's screaming mixed with the coos of the remaining females, then he blacked out.

CHAPTER THREE

Derek had woken up on a stretcher in a noisy ambulance as it twisted its way through the traffic and on to Runcorn General Hospital; through a half opened eyelid he could see a female paramedic tending to his cuts and bruises but he was surprised at her initial reaction. It was nothing like the interest he had witnessed before during the day and he felt quite relieved, this particular girl was grimacing more than grinning at him as she dabbed a sterilized pad onto his cheek and held her breath from the faint pongy residue.

“You have a distinctive odour Mr. Hill, I can’t quite put my finger on it but please stay still and I’ll have you patched up in no time, the nurses will perform a brain scan on you at the hospital to assess the damage.”

He tried to smile back but his split lips were on strike, “Where is Honey?”

“Honey, Sir? What do you mean?”

“My wife Honey, where is she?”

The medic blew her cheeks out, “If that was your wife who was standing there when we tended to you, I remember hearing her say she was going home, I don’t think she was best pleased with you.”

Derek painfully raised an eyebrow, he knew it didn’t look good, how could it? He had witnessed two liaisons in the space of half an hour at the restaurant, normally people did these kinds of

things in secret but it seemed he didn't care who sniffed his backside in a park, according to Honey.

A beaten and crumpled man had finally arrived at Runcorn A&E with the face of a turnip that didn't stand a chance of winning the county fair vegetable contest.

The whole place was pandemonium and full of drunks, failed DIY experts and even people who came in for tea and a chat, probably a good place to meet people as they weren't about to run away anytime soon.

He noticed here too, as he was ferried in, that no female within fifty yards had batted an eyelid, maybe the musky allure had worn off during the time he was unconscious, whatever the cause he was glad to be rid of it.

It was a couple of hours before he was let out and didn't dare phone for a lift but called a Taxi instead. It was a 20 minute trip back to his home and to his annoyance as he called the driver to pull up he noticed the same Black Sedan sitting there like before, this was getting ridiculous.

Derek was fired up, it had been years since he had been in a fight, he lost that time too but the adrenalin was coursing through his veins, he had to know what they were up to. He stormed off in their direction with his best aggressive looking face; he had made about 30 yards on the two occupants before their car roared into life and pulled quickly away from the kerb.

He had obviously forgotten the Green Cross Code as he was standing right in the middle of the road, the sedan picked up speed and raced directly for him, it was at this point that he knew he wasn't a security barrier and dived for his life out of the way of the two loyal Specsaver customers as they drove on right past him and screeched around the bend.

Derek was furious, “Who the hell are you? Leave me alone, I have enough on my plate already!” he shouted as he pulled his face out of the grass verge, he was hurting all over by now from the attack and the sunburn.

In a perfect slice of God’s irony he noticed that a dog had left its calling card in the exact same spot he had landed, he bet it was the same horny poodle he had eyed earlier in the park, he didn’t know which was worse, his aftershave or the dog’s doo.

A dejected and disillusioned Derek made his way back to the house, it was quiet like before on the outside, at least they had colds, they wouldn’t be repulsed but as soon as he stepped inside he noticed something was not quite right. He called out to no one in particular and received no answer; just for once it would have been nice to see his mother in law for a payback brush by with the canine’s leftovers.

He walked into his kitchen and noticed a handwritten letter propped up on the dresser; he reached out for it and started to take in its contents.

“Gone to mother’s, you horrible vile beast, I have taken your precious kids with me too. I never believed for one minute that you were a player, how wrong can someone be? Don’t ring unless you want to speak to Gloria, Honey”

Derek walked dumbfounded into the living room and crumpled into a heap onto the sofa; he let out a huge sob and cursed his God for making sure his life COULD get any worse.



A hushed silence was in place around the revolving universe as the Visioneer was casting his final marks. It appeared that Derek

had scored quite a few points for managing to stay alive throughout the second experiment but his nemesis, who was grinning a little too widely, had the feeling he was holding all of the cards.

He may have failed the first experiment but he had managed to pick a replacement Drakapod that seemed to all intents and purposes, to be stronger than the first, the rules stated that a chosen specimen had to be picked from the same species as before to keep the challenge competitive.

They couldn't pick a specimen suited to a particular task either, besides they didn't know what each test was until it was revealed to them and at the very least it made the game interesting.

It looked to all in the room that this boy was going to be the clear winner, his Drakapod had morphed into the biggest lothario the planet had ever seen and had mated with a hundred females, if only Rudolph Valentino had been alive to see this, thought God Boy.

It was all going rather swimmingly, as at the same time when Derek was seen to be entering his habitat, the multi tentacled drakapod was just about to notch up his 101st conquest but fate had dealt a cruel blow when suddenly, without warning, the huge and ugly beast keeled over and died from the sheer exhaustion of it all.

The irony of it was that the Visioneer was about to call a halt at that very moment but his scribe turned a tick into a cross and possibly destroyed any hope that the Boy was ever going to be champion.

He turned to the class to address them once more, "Well done to all of you for your attempts at solving experiment number 2..."

God Boy stared down at his parchment to read again the puzzling challenge...

“2. If your specimen survived the first experiment then it must be used for experiment number 2 otherwise pick another. Release a great quantity of pheromones within this individual, marks will be awarded for successful attraction if it survives to the end. Marks will be lost for a specimen that perishes”

The Grand Visioneer continued, “The moral of this higher understanding exercise is that a species must select with care his suitors or face the eventual consequence of annihilation from envious brethren or from excess effort.”

He peered at them all and let it be known they were still lacking in understanding, “it is not simply a case that each creature must attempt to populate, they must understand their social and physical boundaries and exercise great care amongst their own kind. I can see that a great number of you failed to grasp this principle but for others I was most impressed, it could be a matter of luck or creative nurturing, I expect a mixture of both, my marks are cast, class is dismissed, I will see you back here for the next lesson tomorrow.”

A few of the God Boys were excited as they knew they had done well, they patted Derek’s God Boy on the shoulder in a friendly brotherhood gesture but as for God Boy’s enemy, he sat all alone brooding and boiling over. It seemed that every time the special boy was doomed to fail he came up smelling of roses and he flashed his anger at him as God Boy passed to leave for the day.

The Visioneer stood by the door and wished everyone a good playtime and hadn’t noticed a lone boy sitting there willing a small

rock the size of a bus out of its orbit within the Asteroid Belt. To any untrained observer it simply looked to all intents and purposes some creational overtime but they weren't to know that this belt orbited close to Mars and the single hard object was heading on its way on a direct collision course with Earth.

The nasty hateful boy smirked to himself and nodded to the Visioneer as he walked out the door, it would only be a matter of time, he couldn't wait till the next lesson.



Derek had woken early, not that he had managed much sleep in the first place but he couldn't get the number of surreal events he'd suffered out of his mind. He was sure that Honey would see sense eventually; she must see he hadn't instigated any of it to start with but he knew that the wicked witch would be working flat out on her daughter against him.

He got ready for work and gave himself a quick sniff just to be sure, he wouldn't have smelt it anyway but it helped somehow. It was funny that for the last 15 years he had performed the same routine day in day out, shaving seconds off ironing his shirt, brushing his teeth and picking fluff out between his toes the night before just to get the few extra minutes sleep in bed.

As was always the case in life, the more efficient you were, the more tasks you were given and having kids didn't help for they woke up whenever they felt like it, like they had already retired.

He questioned his insane rush to get into work a few minutes early as he battled with other drivers who were in direct competition to do the same thing. He knew that when he did arrive it was only a matter of time before he was humiliated by his boss

once more. It seemed that all bullies graduated from school into managerial positions, control freaks, each and every one of them.

Derek's head ached from the despairing monotony of it all and it only added to the pain he suffered from the two incidents, he would be unrecognizable today, they might think they had a new supervisor, maybe even Joe Bugner himself.

He had noticed the black car was missing this morning which was a good sign and he made haste to avoid Mr. Driver's wrath, he jumped up Napoleon was always banging on about military strategies to him but he never once found out whether he had actually been in the army to start with.

As he pulled up he gave a sigh of relief at seeing Mavis Cutter standing there once more, enjoying a crafty fag outside before the shift started, at least she hadn't been sacked. He got out and walked over to her.

"Excuse me Mister, you can't go in there, that's off limits, the reception is around the corner"

"Hello Mavis, it's Derek," he called back.

Her look of shock was expected, he didn't think he looked that bad anyway.

"Bloody hell Derek you look a mess, what has happened to you?"

Derek couldn't say much, he hadn't understood it in the first place, "The waiter at the restaurant was expecting a bigger tip."

He stepped inside to see a parade of crisp uniforms sitting at the chairs around the conveyor belt, Mr. Driver must have really

stamped his authority on them yesterday. He could see the frightened looks upon all of their faces mixed with some relief that he had arrived to take most of the flak away from them and onto himself.

“Morning, Ladies, I hope you’re feeling well today, bit of a strange day yesterday.”

Of course, like most females, they couldn’t remember the night before and nodded odd looks towards Derek as he took his position at the head of the belt with his trusty clipboard.

Derek was relieved to see that the jumped up dictator was nowhere to be seen and called for the belt to start it’s relentless rumblings.

He was about 15 minutes into his shift, trying his best to stay focused despite everything, when he felt a hand tap him on the back. Derek turned around and to his dismay saw Mr. Driver standing there with a stern look upon his face, he wasn’t alone today as one of the secretary’s from the office had joined him, armed with a fancy notepad and pen.

“Derek, could you accompany me into the office please.” said General Franco who began to march off back to his glass enclosure.

This didn’t look good at all, he couldn’t receive a telling off for being one of the elephant man’s closest friends could he?

He begrudgingly followed, he couldn’t feel any lower than he felt anyway so what did it matter? The secretary sat on a plastic seat and didn’t look up but trained her eyes on the notepad. Mr. Driver sat behind his desk to deliver his speech.

“Mr. Hill, you have been summoned here in the presence of Miss Miteter, the group secretary to answer charges relating to a serious breach of quality control issues.”

A pathetic magician struck again as he produced out of nothing a sorry looking washing up liquid bottle, bent double at the midriff looking like an old hag.

“This, Mr. Hill, should have been a perfectly upright, pristine example of the craftsmanship that exists in this establishment but as you can see it has been handed a sick chit.”

Derek interrupted the man’s interminable speech, “What’s a chit Sir?”

Mr. Driver laughed at the man’s ignorance of basic military terminology.

“Mr. Hill, this bottle is on sick leave; it has been branded in all the wrong places with the Supersuds logo and cannot stand on its own two feet to proudly show off our prime detergent!”

His boss sat there for a few moments tapping and inspecting the pathetic looking bottle, the secretary continued to look down at her jottings to stop herself from laughing.

“Sir, what has this bottle, I mean soldier got to do with me?”

“Derek, when will you ever learn? It is because of you that this bottle nearly left the factory, because of you this deformed waste of plastic could have actually...”

Mr. Driver was quite emotional by this point as he pulled a folded handkerchief from his polyester shirt pocket and began to wipe little dribbles of sweat off his brow.

“It’s unimaginable, Derek, but this could have made it’s way to the shelves of a pristine supermarket chain, alongside countless varieties of our competitors’ products, which may I add would have been inspected properly beforehand, and Bloody Well Ripe for Purchase!”

Derek watched as the man’s fists came slamming down onto the desk in a great whip of fury. The secretary gave a little yelp and almost fell off her seat in surprise at the sudden outburst.

“You are an incompetent moron, Derek! Your slapdash attitude yesterday led to not 1, but 3 of these useless bottles bern packed within a Supersuds box ready for delivery, I cannot imagine the chain reaction that would have ensued after that happened, for Gods Sake Derek, it had our name on it!”

There was no arguing with the feverous man; it seemed that Mr. Driver had been here since day one, even before the factory was built in 1865.

He rattled on without mercy, “I can’t even begin to comprehend the seriousness of this situation, I was due to play golf yesterday evening but, after taking over your shift and being alerted to the grave error, I found I would not have given the sport my full attention. For this, Derek, I am giving you a second written warning, hence the need for Miss Miteter to witness the punishment.”

Mr. Driver sat there waiting for an overreaction from Derek like most bosses did, they all loved to see their poor victims squirm their way out of it or beg for forgiveness to no avail.

If it had happened any other day, maybe when things had been going ok for Derek, he may well have been satisfied with his response but to his amazement, Derek just sat there and looked like he was waiting for a bus. Any bus would have sufficed if it got him

the hell away from his current predicament, no wife or kids, beaten up face, stalkers and a rotten old bag for a mother in law.

Derek decided enough was enough, "I have to go now, Mr. Driver, back to my line, make sure everyone is ok."

"As you please, Mr. Hill, but it has been recorded, mark my words, three strikes and you're out. Now go and do your duty!"

It was a plain fact of life that if you appeared not to have a single care in the world then trouble would simply slide away like water off a duck's back.

He returned to his line, what difference did it make if things were recorded anyway? It was simply pen and paper, stored away somewhere musty that no one would ever read and eventually end up being burnt or shredded.

What he really craved was normality again, the constant complaints from his wife, his noisy excitable kids and the pleasure of just sitting in front of his telescope and staring up at the silent, forgiving sky.

Creation wasn't like that however; it wasn't designed to allow utopia, at least not in his particular world.

The factory clock whizzed by at an alarming rate, if his workers were slowly counting the minutes from sheer boredom of staring at the same plastic bottles for the last 10 years, it was not so for Derek. He was contemplating his attempt at winning Honey back and had formulated a plan.

He would get back to the house, have a bath, scrub himself of any remaining odours which may have hidden behind his ears for

safety; pop himself into his best outfit and head over to Gloria's with a huge bunch of flowers and a sorry note.

He was sure she didn't fancy living in the Dragon's lair for the foreseeable future, the kids wouldn't be able to run riot either, there was a slim chance he may even be able to win her round, he thought; bugger to the reject counts, he wasn't about to become a reject himself.

When it really mattered in life, there were far more important things to do than worry about the mundane.



The classroom burst into life once more and each Boy took his seat, it had been a fun packed playtime, they had all taken part in a game of Hoverwill, the aim of which was to will your thoughts onto your chosen brother and make him fly around in spirals and dives until he could create enough mind control to counteract your thoughts to land back down.

It was hard to put into terms the surroundings they played in for it had none, it was just that, a void. There weren't even colours to describe, everything was created with thought alone, consciousness had no shape, it couldn't be detected by the senses. The closest anyone on Earth could describe it, if they even tried, was as an astral plane, a place to conjure anything you wished or desired.

Of course everyone knew that Mother Nature was the creator and this union between will and action was the prime relationship between the two.

The Visioneer called order as a floating Boy came whizzing through the door making somersaults to everyone's enjoyment

until he was willed down by the teacher himself, he, of course, couldn't be controlled even though every boy there had obviously tried.

“Boys, quiet now, we must continue onto experiment number 3, the race to the winning post is still far away but as each task unfolds it will become alarmingly near! This particular experiment is no easy task and I expect a lot of you will fail.”

The master took a grand pause to let the gravity of the task sink in.

“There is still no clear leader amongst you, I cannot tell you who but four of you are so close together and racing away from the rest but there is still time to catch up.”

The parchment lit up once more in a blaze of light as the next experiment revealed itself.

“3. Place your specimen in a habitat that is completely alien to his existence. Marks will be awarded for the choice of habitat which offers the greatest challenge and also for the individual's survival to experiment number 4.

Marks will be lost for calculated favouritism if the choice of habitat does not produce higher understanding within the individual.”

Most of the God Boys looked quite perplexed at this conundrum, in the first instance they had to offer up a habitat that was likely to kill their specimen but at the same time allow it to survive to the next challenge.

Derek's Boy tried hard to imagine what he could take away from Derek what he hadn't already lost

The Visioneer spoke once more to try and enlighten his pupils about this particular task.

“Boys, it appears you need some guidance with this experiment, the habitat you choose cannot favour the individual but it must be able to replenish it's needs, the resources it receives must not be known to it, it must find that out for itself. I hope this makes it clear what you all must do”

A number of pupils smiled back at the teacher, it had helped them decide, but it was not so for Derek's Boy. He was still scouring his world for a perfect transfer, it seemed that the Earth was over populated and there weren't many areas untouched by the hand of this species.

He had but little to choose from but narrowed it down to the great frozen wastes of the Antarctic, the remote jungle of the Amazon or even the large estate within Glasgow's notorious Gorbals.

He decided on the leafy, wet jungle of South America, he would have plenty of resources, tackle dangerous creatures and maybe even appear as a pasty white god to the local tribesman to be worshipped with offerings.

He knew he was out in front with the 3 other God Boys and if Derek could survive this for the duration of the test he may even pip them; it seemed, that through the sheer luck of the extinction event millions of years ago, he had inherited a species that was quite adaptable to many challenges.

The same couldn't be said for the other Boys' efforts, there were a few who stood out, the Lizard King's domain on Yar-

Dakar, the Panovian Trillimites on Centius 5 and even the Glubs on Terragloop, the latter being rather sticky and slow going.

God Boy was about to will his intention on the Amazon when he was called over by his relentless tormentor. It was a strange request, it seemed that this Boy was accepting defeat and offering a hand of friendship to him, it was most unusual but God Boy stood there for a few moments to take in the possibility that he might not have to look over his shoulder anymore.



Derek had arrived back at his house, for the second time running there was no sign of the sinister men from Sunglass Hut. He raced into his hallway clutching a lovely bouquet of Lillies and Roses, expensive too and not the ones you pick up from Service Stations in a hurry and hope that whatever you did would be forgiven, a vain attempt.

He placed them carefully on the kitchen worktop and shot upstairs to choose his wardrobe, it was obvious that only a suit would do, every man had one and it was the same he used for weddings, funerals and socials, like a pair of his favourite underpants except this outfit wasn't bright blue but quite a nice black fleck, more Agadoo than James Bond but it would suffice.

He ran the bath and started to write his love note, it begged for forgiveness and stated he would never do a thing to hurt her but someone had sprayed musk on him at work. It sounded ridiculous but she may just believe him as Honey couldn't have imagined any other female interest up to this point. His hobbies of Astronomy and stamp collecting weren't exactly daring or spectacular and produced an involuntary yawn in most people except maybe traffic wardens or driving test examiners.

The bath was ready and Derek decided to get a bit of loofah action, he dived into the inviting yet almost overflowing water and put his head under for a few refreshing seconds.



“Class! start your experiments,” cried the Visioneer, “and good luck to you all.”

God Boy was still accepting his newly converted friend’s kindness and had not taken his seat, he rushed back but it was too late, alarmingly for him someone had already willed his intention on Derek’s next adventure, it couldn’t be changed once it was set in motion according to the strict rules.

He watched in complete surprise at the events that were about to unfold and turned with anger to see his trust betrayed by the same grinning boy who had offered his friendship in the first place, an evil trick indeed of the highest order.



Derek got the shock of his life when he suddenly realized his bathtub had become infinitely larger and much colder, he couldn’t feel the bottom anymore and the jerk reaction made him gasp. He swallowed a large amount of foul tasting water as he headed back up to the surface.

To his horror and immediately above him he saw the expansive blue sky and all around him was a mass of water, his heart was beating ten times faster as he realized this was no lukewarm measured amount of waste treated council water but the bloody sea in all its infinite glory.

“What the? Oh God, Oh No,” he cried but no one heard him, he looked around and could see land but it was so far away he would never be able to make it, he had failed his swimming association bronze medal and his parents had never bothered to send him back to the baths, in disgust at his lack of sporty prowess.

God Boy frowned at the spectacle, there was nothing he could do, it appeared that this was the end of Derek, he would have to find a replacement for the next experiment, he was growing quite fond of him too it but there was no way he would be getting out of this. This failure would mean a loss of marks and push him back behind the others for sure.

Derek was doggy paddling but he could feel his legs becoming numb from the cold, it would only be a matter of time, the sea was quite calm which helped for a little while longer, at least he could paddle before succumbing to the elements. A rather sad thought came to him that he would never get back to see his wife and children again and to think his flowers had cost a fortune too.

If his troubles only lay in paddling for his life it would be the end of it but there was a menace far greater than he had ever imagined. He could see something move about 200 metres ahead of him, it was unmistakable, a fin, it didn't look too large from this distance and possibly he could be imagining it.

The shape wasn't imagined however, it was real and it seemed to be picking up speed as it turned around and ventured towards him to try and find out if all its Christmases had come at once. Derek eyed the shape with alarm and could see it definitely was a fin, there was no doubt about that.

“Oh No, Oh Please No,” he cried.

With a flash of menace the huge fin came at him, he didn't have a clue how big the mouth was in front of it and awaited his cruel fate.

The goliath dived and swept under him at the last minute but he felt its huge size as his feet brushed over the top of its sandpaper-like surface. He wished he had never read 'Jaws', that book had managed to keep millions of people out of the water when it was published, even in far off places like Prestatyn or Bognor.

He spun around to see it resurface as it acted like a jumbo jet making ever decreasing circles around him before it landed.

To his surprise, he heard something that sounded like a motor engine and flipped round to divert his eyes from his hunter and saw a large grey ship on the horizon, heading in his direction. He began to wave his arms about amid the splashing and hoped they would see him. He couldn't fix his eyes on the large shark that would eventually consume him, it's one thing to be eaten, it's another to watch what's eating you.

The boat became larger and appeared to have seen him, he could make out a large red star painted on its bow, it looked like a gunboat, he couldn't be sure, the ship came closer just as the monster was preparing his attacking run and, to his surprise, he saw a number of sailors standing on its side. A rope was thrown and a lifebuoy came splashing down beside him, while some of the others kept a number of scary looking guns pointing at him.

A few shots were fired from a semi automatic and hit the water behind Derek, it made him jump but the bullets were intended to scare off the leviathan a few feet behind him. It dived again, under Derek, unharmed and made its hasty exit to look for something else equally tasty.

God Boy smiled quite triumphantly and caught his supposed friend's reaction, he knew his last minute intervention would anger him and he was glad, it seemed that Derek was made of Teflon and throughout all the challenges he remained very much alive, his physical and emotional state was a complete wreck but nonetheless he was still scoring marks.



Honey was seated at her mother's kitchen table bemoaning all of Derek's shortcomings, "Honestly, Mother, I don't know what I see in him sometimes, he hasn't even attempted to come round and say sorry"

Gloria was quite satisfied with her feelings so far towards him, "You're better off without him, dear, I always knew he was no good."

"Mother!" cried her daughter.

"Well, he is probably floozying with some other piece of skirt by now, I never liked him, his eyes are too close together!"

Honey was listening but her remarks weren't making much of a dent, it wasn't Derek himself that was to blame, it was the fact that Petunia was winning in the social stakes, it was obvious too that her husband was a bit more successful than Derek. At least he had a greater position of power at the Waterways Board.

"If he is not over here this week begging for forgiveness then I want you to pop round for me Mother and bring back some of my belongings! At least he will get the message then that this is a serious issue."

Honey was welling up, she still loved Derek although she mercilessly nagged him to death. He was the father of her children and she couldn't imagine them without one, what would Petunia think? She was sure to bump into her during a shopping trip and she would ask her all sorts of awkward questions about his absence.

Gloria put her arm around her daughter in a comforting gesture; her best laid plans at removing Derek out of her life would require a few more careful adjustments.



A soaking wet and naked Derek was dragged up onto the deck of the steely grey gunboat; the sailors were wearing a camouflage outfit not at all suited to their deep blue environment. Mind you the band 'Village People' had destroyed any notion of a macho nautical image and luckily the tough guy soldier image was very much alive.

The commander of the vessel came walking over and told the others to stop pointing their weapons at him, he wasn't likely to attack them with anything anytime soon, his only weapon had shrunk to nothing in the cold waters of the cruel sea.

He handed Derek a blanket and called for one of the soldiers to fetch a hot drink, the officer looked Asian along with the others but Derek hadn't a clue where he was.

Hek tried to find out, "Could you tell me where I am?"

Luckily for him, the officer spoke better English than the Yemenese goat herders, "You are in North Korea, what are you doing here?"

He had the same question asked of him before and he still didn't know the answer.

"I don't know, Sir, I was in my bathtub at home and the next minute I'm paddling for my life in the sea!"

Of course it all made perfect sense to the Captain, "Do not play games, what ship were you on? You should not be here."

Derek was mumbling now, his alibi was ridiculous, "I bought some flowers for Honey and picked out my best suit, I even cleaned myself after being attacked with musk the day before."

It was obvious to the Captain he had a lunatic on board or someone who was very good at playing the fool, maybe a spy?

The Officer frowned and shouted to his troops to do something. Derek didn't understand what they were saying but they hauled him up and marched him off below the decks, he was brought into the belly of the ship and pushed into a room which looked like a hold. They slammed the door shut and Derek could hear the engine start up again and turn around, heading back to the coast.



It seemed that some of the boys amongst the group still did not understand the Visioneer's clues to a successful test. One boy had unwittingly placed his strong lizard-like specimen on a plain hundreds of miles away from anywhere.

It was a good habitat but the creature had found that the strangely shaped trees fringing it bore only a vegetable like substance that was equivalent to the Earth's sprout, they were in abundance and as everyone knows, Sprouts are the Devils warts

and this lizard preferred meat. The scaly creature sat down upon the blue soil and cried tears of despair, even a Marmite tree would taste good right now.



Derek again couldn't fathom his surroundings or how he had even managed to arrive here in the first place but he understood the routine he was now forced to endure, like before when he found himself in a desert.

The Korean sailors had handed him over to some senior looking officials wearing red lapels and very large army hats. They all looked serious enough, it amounted to a major international incident in their eyes, but he found them to be courteous even if they barked harsh orders to their subordinates.

He was taken by another Jeep from the docks, past numerous military hardware sitting gleaming in the sun; the two officials who sat either side of him didn't speak and wouldn't tell him where he was going.

Everything was in Korean, he could see villages and locals going about their daily business, oblivious to military traffic; the place was lush with vegetation and here and there were dotted various imposing buildings rising up in the distance, which looked like giant command centres. One thing he noticed more than anything else was the sheer number of posters displaying their leader; they were everywhere, on billboards, on the fronts of official residences, even on small badges worn on the officers' tunics.

He would have enjoyed this day trip even more if it had been run by Runcorn's own luxury coach service, Postlethwaites, but to

his dismay the Jeep didn't even have a rubbish coffee service or hard to fit in toilet.

Derek wondered what was going to happen to him, he had no passport, only a blanket, no concrete alibi to back him up and no reason to be there. He had heard tales of people going missing behind sealed off borders and also the rhetoric spoken about these evil countries. He had never listened to these tales of woe, he was kind to everyone and to him it seemed that all you needed to do was smile and you would get a smile back, the only exception being Mr. Driver or indeed, Gloria

The Jeep pulled up outside a large military base and the officers were waved through. The guards eyed him with suspicion, he didn't look North Korean that was sure. He was hauled out handcuffed and led in a quite efficient manner from building to building, he didn't know where he was going but this didn't look like a British holiday camp, they would probably try to acquire it though when the army eventually moved out of there.

Checkpoint after checkpoint, harsh word after harsh word, was the routine until he had arrived at the interview room. It had to be that all interrogators had the same account with a single furniture store, there were a couple of cheap plastic chairs, a non-descript table and some electrical recording equipment. He noticed though, that the light was better in here than in Sanaa.

The two officers stood to attention as a more senior man, with a bigger hat, came walking in holding two cups of coffee, he ushered the two out and smiled at Derek as he placed a cup in front of him. A guard stood outside staring through the glass partition in case there was any trouble.

“So you fancied a swim in the China Sea one morning, did you?”

Derek was surprised as the man could speak perfect English, a little better than he could.

Derek stammered a bit, “Ye..Yes,” he gulped the coffee down to warm himself up a bit, the blanket he was wearing had only given some slight relief from the elements.

“Who are you and where are you from? Answer me truthfully and we can make it very easy upon ourselves.”

The man was staring intently upon Derek and he could see he had probably won last year’s North Korean staring championships. Derek looked away with unease, as he felt his eyes boring into him.

“I am Derek Hill, I come from 43 Blossom Meadows, Runcorn in England, I work for a liquid detergent factory, I have a wife and three children and I love them dearly.”

The officer appeared to have no eyelids to blink with as he continued his questioning, “So what are you doing here, Derek Hill, this is North Korea, where are your papers?”

It was clear to Derek that his tales of bathtubs, alluring scents and spitting camels did not wash on any of them; he would have to invent a better story otherwise they might just shoot him there and then as a spy.

“I was cruising the China Sea alone on a yacht called ‘Honey’ and I had just had a wash and came out quickly to change the sail because of a storm and next thing I knew I fell in the sea. My boat drifted off and I’m picked up by some sailors, you have been very kind to me though and I want to thank you for that.”

Staring man finally blinked and he nodded his appreciation, “I love sailing too, Derek, there is nothing to compare it with, these things can happen and it is easy to drift into other peoples’ waters without even knowing it.”

With great relief Derek smiled back, the man seemed kind, even the coffee started to taste good.

“Tell me, Derek, what kind of boat is it? A Cutter, Yawl or a Rake?”

The interrogator was leaning back on his own chair by now, drinking his hot beverage. Derek didn’t have a clue about boats, what could he say?

Derek slurped his coffee, “A Rake, Sir, quite a nice one too.”

The man seemed impressed, “A good design, Mr. Hill, what kind of draught does it have?”

Derek was feeling quite confident by now, “It’s not draughty at all Sir, in fact it’s quite cozy, I have sailed her everywhere and never get cold.”

Derek received a warm smile as the man got up and stretched out a hand to shake his.

“It was nice to meet you, Mr. Hill, we will of course be talking to your authorities to arrange a handover; I am sorry for your plight and I hope you find your Rake soon.”

Derek stood up and shook his hand again and felt quite relieved he had met someone quite normal, it would only be a matter of time before he got back to Blighty. At least Honey was at her mother’s, she wouldn’t raise the alarm just yet.

The officer walked out and left him to sit there alone, thinking about all of the crazy things that had happened to him recently, they were just plain ridiculous but how could he explain them to anyone and still appear to have a sound mind.

He finished up his coffee and could hear footsteps coming down the hallway, before long he would be talking to a British official and making his arrangements.

The same man appeared with the two officers who had led him here in the first place. To Derek's surprise none of them were smiling, the two navy officers walked round to Derek and quickly slapped the cuffs back on.

His interviewer stood there with all seriousness as he spoke, "Derek Hill, there is no such thing as a Rake, I do not believe you were sailing in the area and were run off course. You have no documents but you claim to be British, the only conclusion I can make is that you are either a spy for the state of South Korea or a complete madman!"

The cold hard facts came tumbling down onto Derek that this wasn't going to be a mere formality.

"You will be transported from here and taken to a detention camp until we can prove your identity, even then we must prove your intent was non-hostile. Enjoy your stay in North Korea."

Derek was marched out, screaming his innocence, and left the officer to take care of his recordings. The man looked down upon his notes and sniggered to himself at the sound of the silly name, 'Blossom Meadows!'

CHAPTER FOUR

God Boy was looking down upon his specimen with interest, he didn't know how long it would be before the test was over but he knew that he would probably lose marks for his choice of habitat. The sea may be many things but it couldn't conjure up a burger or ready meal for Derek, the only hope he had was if he made it to the fourth experiment.

There were a couple of Boys neck and neck with him by now, according to the Visioneer, the brightest out of the two of them had selected a strange creature called a Gloopbilge; it was shaped like a long centipede, each section of the slimy grey beast contained a stomach and there were fifty such sections, as soon as a morsel entered its dribbly mouth it was sent on a long gastric journey of approximately two years. There was no chance it was going to starve even if it didn't find any food.

To God Boy's dismay even the pheromone experiment had gone well for this crawling piece of bile, all the musk in the world would have had no effect as it was so ugly. It relied on its own sections to break off after a new one was grown, to eventually turn into a new Gloopbilge.

He eyed his own creature amongst the crowd and wondered what he was doing, whatever it was it didn't contain anything for him to eat, no matter how hard he smashed his tool down onto it.

Derek was looking up at the sky cursing his God for the umpteenth time, he was hoping he would transport him back like before, he knew it had to be a God by now as nothing else but divine intervention could do such a thing.

He raised his pickaxe once more and brought it down heavily onto a piece of stubborn rock, large splinters came off and he could feel the vibration in his wrists as it rebounded back.

Next to him, and forming a long line of equally futile rock breakers, stood about 80 prisoners of the state of North Korea. All of them were Korean who may have just managed to get lost across the border like himself. There must have been the same type of camp on the south side of the border too. They looked up occasionally with interest at this white faced big eyed man, he looked odd to them but they all came to the same conclusion, he must be a spy.

Every so often a Guard would shout orders at them to continue digging the foundations for a glorious new road connecting a northern town to Pyongyang.

Derek was sure this was his final card dealt from the pack and what a pathetic card it turned out to be. He could be here for years with no hope of escape, crushing rocks until he keeled over into the dirt. Some of the prisoners were crying because, like him, it was their first day on the job but Derek was used to monotony, he had been trained in the art of it for 15 years at Supersuds, this was a bit of a holiday compared to Mr. Driver's line. If he managed to get back, he would take one of the big guard-hats back to present it to him, it would suit him.

Eventually a break was called in Korean, he did what everyone else did and gathered around a large soup canteen. The food wasn't that bad, mostly fish and rice, better than Honey's cooking in fact and, if he had been Korean, he may well have wanted to stay.

The Visioneer came walking past God Boy and eyed the efforts of Derek far, far below him.

“I can see your subject got into a bit of trouble at the outset,” he said and turned to look at the nasty child sat close by, his intent made the boy shudder and look away, “but this particular specimen has adapted to his challenging circumstances, he has learnt the trade between work and food, albeit forced. Well done.”

God Boy smiled again, he may well keep up with the Gloopbilge after all.

Derek was exhausted and bewildered after a tortuous 10 hour rock breaking day; he shuffled in line with all the others to climb aboard the heavy lorries for transportation back to the detention camp. There was no one to talk to, everyone spoke only Korean. This would be hard on any man if he thought he would be here for a long time and Derek certainly felt it.

The convoy bumped and jolted along the dusty track, it stretched for miles and must have taken a lot of manpower to build. He thought back to the Second World War and the conditions they had to live in when building the Burma railway, it was nothing like this, it gave him some comfort. Eventually the trucks made it back to the large barbed wire enclosed compound, all along the fences were watchtowers and machine guns trained on the occupants.

He got off the back of the truck and looked around to see if a notice had been posted up declaring the new summer acts at this holiday camp, it was sure to be the Chuckle Brothers or even Chas and Dave, maybe a surprise appearance by Emu.

He was ordered to shuffle quick time back to his hut and as he got inside he noticed it was some sort of bed rotation system, the next shift got off and the exhausted ones flopped onto them. He had heard of double bookings before but this was ridiculous.

Derek dropped down onto his bunk within the dilapidated building and began to sob.

“Please God, save me from this hell, let me go back to my home, I won’t complain about another reject again, I’ll order the conservatory and religiously take my daughters wherever they want to go.”

Derek fell asleep after his bedtime prayer and was so tired he didn’t dream of a single thing.



It was already coming up to 3pm and an angry sweaty man was seen to be pacing around looking for something or someone. His pin dot eyes glanced at the telephone number in front of him and he began furiously pressing the buttons. He had tried several times to no avail.

“Where the hell is Derek? He had better have a good explanation for this absence!”

It was Mr. Driver again, he was fuming and everyone on the line was in no doubt that Derek was in serious trouble by now, it was a capital offence to even phone a minute past 9am to say you were ill, the declaration of rigor mortis had to at least be 30 minutes prior to allow for a replacement operative.

Mr. Driver knew this fact very well, he had even sent someone around to knock on Derek’s door but no one had answered.

Everyone on the line were keeping their heads down, they hoped Derek would return sometime soon, they knew Mr. Driver would no doubt hire someone as equally zealous as himself. Since

his transfer from feminine hygiene products to this line almost a year ago, he had led a campaign of terror against Derek.

It was probably his kindness towards others that was seen as a weakness in the boss's eyes. The man commanded authority to bully and harass for no reason other than for sick pleasure. It would be his downfall before long and the two written warnings were a testament to it. Derek would have some serious questions to answer when he finally did arrive back.



The hours passed quite quickly for Derek and he was stuck fast in the land of slumber enjoying his sleep on a cozy mattress with a plush pillow. He could feel the sunlight filtering in through the curtains and heard the sound of birds chirping outside, like he always did when snuggled up in his bed for the remaining hour before work.

The alarm went off. It started off quietly and grew to a strong warble, he couldn't remember owning one so loud, eventually his senses started to wake up and it was his hearing that climbed out of bed first. This was no ordinary alarm, however, but the sound of a humungous bugle outside!. A strong arm grabbed him and started to shake him like a salt cellar, he peered through his half opened eyes to see he hadn't arrived back in his house in Runcorn after all, it was the last shift worker telling him to get out so he could climb back in.

Derek gave out a terrific scream, it was blood curdling like the ones you hear in 50's B movies, he was in one right now and there was no escape. He was pushed outside still wearing his overalls and thrown onto a lorry, this camp was certainly relentless in its efficiency.

Derek watched despairingly as the truck motored its way back to the construction site, he silently prayed again for deliverance, he hoped he would be heard this time.



Honey was sitting in her mother's conservatory looking across the brightly lit green expanse of a finely tended garden. She had spent the evening fighting off arm tugs from her three children. Jack was too young to make much sense but she knew he was missing his Daddy's leg to cling to when his sisters became too much for him. Ella and Citron were more inquisitive but Honey had told them he had gone on a work trip and wouldn't be back yet so they were spending the time with their Nan.

If truth be told, she was missing him herself, but in front of her domineering mother she couldn't really show it. Her past gripes and moans about his inability to function like a normal husband had become concentrated over time, so much so that he had been tainted as a cruel heartless monster, tight with his wallet and clueless about his family's needs.

It didn't matter to Gloria anyway; she compared Derek against her late husband, Ralph, who was a shining star and never put a foot wrong in her eyes, a model husband. She thought Derek matched his Montego perfectly, it summed up his aspirations.

Gloria came in with two cups of tea. "Here you are, dear. I wish you wouldn't keep staring off into the distance."

Honey thanked her mom for the cup of tea. "It's not that. I love being here and the kids love their Nan, but we are a family unit. I know Derek is there, just staring into his bloody telescopes, wondering when I'm going to call."

“Honey, you’re not the one in the wrong, he acted outrageously and it’s him alone that is at fault here. I don’t know why you didn’t go out with Brian when he asked you, before that wimpy man was ever on the scene!”

“Mother! Derek isn’t a wimp and I didn’t like the look of Brian, he had shifty eyes and funny hair. I don’t think I could have trusted him and besides, he always used to wear a silly cravat.”

It seemed that men needed a lesson in appearance if they ever were going to be successful in mating.

“Nonsense. Brian was a lovely man, he reminded me of a young Clark Gable.”

Honey sniggered at the comparison, “Clarke Kent at the Daily Planet more like!”

Her mother was alarmed that her own daughter couldn’t see that Brian was, in fact, his stunt double.

“Anyway I saw Brian outside the gents’ hairdressers in town. He looked as lovely as the day I first met him. He asked after you, I said you were on the hunt for a proper man.”

Honey’s temperament changed from longing to enraged, “Mother! I am not on the lookout. All I want is my Derek back. His hair may not be as bouffant as I’m sure Brian’s still is, he might not look the dashing prince but he cares for me and the kids. I won’t have anymore talk about it!”

Honey stormed off to hide the fact she was starting to cry. Her mother knew it was only a matter of time before she caved in, besides, she had invited Brian for Sunday lunch so they could get reacquainted again but that fact could wait for later. What Honey

didn't know was that Gloria had been on very good speaking terms with a certain Mr. Driver and had been plotting Derek's downfall for quite some time; sooner or later she would smell victory.



The rhythmic hum of metal against rock was heard all along the line of glorious workers for the people's transformation of North Korea. Derek would soon look like a Muscle Beach regular before long. He lifted up his pickaxe for the umpteenth time to make waste to some stubborn rock when a shard came splintering off and sliced some skin off his hand. Derek yelped at the pain. It was only a flesh wound but he wasn't a DIY enthusiast and had never had the misfortune of witnessing the saw of death or hitting your finger on a cold day with a hammer trying to drive a nail in.

He almost fainted at the sight of his horrific one centimetre by one centimetre gash. It was far worse than a paper cut and he screamed for help. One of the guards came running over to inspect and started laughing and ridiculing Derek in front of his comrades. He didn't know what they were saying but ridicule is indeed a universal language; Derek turned back to his rock splitting. He didn't know how long he had to live, it could take months before he succumbed to his injuries.

A fellow prisoner heard his plight and made a mental note to speak with him later. He were curious about his circumstances, he sure didn't look Korean, he was definitely European and they all looked the same.

The sun carried on its relentless pursuit of Derek's remaining pasty white patches; he would be unrecognizable before long. He remembered the scene in City Slickers when Billy Crystal referred to Jack Palance as a 'saddlebag with eyes'. He was heading the same way but the memory made him laugh and forget about the misery of his injury.

The guard called for chow down and everyone dropped their tools to see what was cooking. Derek was dreaming of a Sunday roast and herb mash, he took his dust covered bowl and stood in another line awaiting his spectacular portion to be served.

Fish and rice, it was all the same and his heart despaired again at the thought. He'd heard of people living on beans for years, but it was unlikely they had ended up floating in the sea miles from home before being sent to work in a mine.

The guard slapped the gruel into his bowl and Derek sat down on a rock. He was aching already and it was only midday; another four hours to go, they had started at 6am.

A tired looking Korean man walked over to him, "Can I sit?"

It was music to Derek's ears; he never expected any of them to speak English. He nodded his head in agreement and the man plonked himself down on the same rock.

"You speak English?" asked Derek.

"Yes, a little. I watch you over there. I am Man-Young. Why are you here?"

It felt like everyone wanted to know why he was there.

"Derek Hill, I got a parking ticket and I failed to pay it on time."

The man responded with a dumb look, these English people were very strange. "Are you a collaborator with South Korea?" he asked.

“No, no, I have no clue why I am here. One minute I was sitting in my bath ...” the words were cut short, it was a ridiculous story. “Why are you here?”

The man gave a big sigh, “I am a fisherman. I make wrong turn and end up here. I am South Korean.”

Maybe all of the work crew whacking rocks with metal were fisherman thought Derek. “You should all sue the SatNav companies for bad maps!”

Man-Young clearly didn’t understand and, standing up, prepared to walk off.

“No wait, sorry, I don’t know why I am here. Like you, I drifted off course and now I am in the same boat, excuse the pun, Sir. Were you picked up a few days ago like me?”

The Korean gave a grave shake of his head. “No, I have been here for nine months, like rest of them. I don’t see my family for while, wait for prisoner exchange.” The sad man nodded to Derek, “Enjoy stay here; we make friends, you teach me English, I teach you navigation!”

Derek smiled back at him, he looked a kindly soul. They could have been friends but he was hoping he wouldn’t be here for that long, no one was about to come and rescue him. He could see a bleak future ahead of him and the worst part of it was that Gloria would be itching to file a missing persons report, hoping it would stay that way.



Daybreak had finally arrived and Derek’s nemesis was indeed plotting his demise. Her mental cogs had started to whirl and she

was busy thinking of a way to extract her precious daughter from the arms of a man with no backbone. She likened him to a box jellyfish that had washed up on a beach waiting for inevitable slap of a child's spade.

Knowing that the slimy creature would be round anytime soon, Gloria felt it was high time she put the wheels of action in motion. She would go to see Derek before he came here, tell him some tales of woe and to stay away from her daughter as she had made up her mind and was leaving him. She would make up a few things for theatrical impact.

The phone rang in the lounge and she hurried to answer it, hoping it wasn't him. Pleasingly, it was someone else, the very person she was expecting to call.

"Hello Gloria, how are you this fine morning, any news on his whereabouts?"

"Not yet. I'm going round to investigate today. Has he not turned up at work yet?"

"Not at all and you know I like efficiency. I have an official letter ready to give to him when he does show."

Gloria grinned with satisfaction. "Oh poor Derek, whatever will he do? There are always jobs at the council; I hear they're recruiting for road sweepers at the moment."

The man replied in a military tone, "Quite right too, all he's good for. He was never very good on my watch. Same time tonight, dear?"

"Of course, how could I resist such a handsome man such as yourself?" she replied trying to make it sound convincing.

“Good, well let me know if you see him and tell him to come straight back to work. I’ve been waiting for this moment for a long time.”

Gloria put the phone down; Mr. Driver was easily pleased and catered for she thought.



A dog tired, depressed and bewildered Derek was dropped back off by truck at the compound. He was so exhausted he had to be escorted by his new found friend to the correct barrack room.

“You be fine, we have Sunday half day, Derek.”

It wasn’t something he wanted to hear, that meant almost a seven day working week; this was taking monotony a bit too far.

Derek was beginning to lose it. “Man-Young, I am tired of rock breaking and the soup already, I need to get out of here.”

His sympathetic friend couldn’t say much. “Maybe you out here ten month Derek; prisoner exchange like I said.”

He couldn’t wait that long but Derek had his immediate needs to think of first. He eyed all the beds, there seemed to be more sleeping in them than there were the day before. He looked over at his friend. “They’re sleeping three to a bed! Where do we sleep now?”

His confidant didn’t even raise an eyebrow at Derek’s concern. “We share, it like this all time. You get used to it. Yesterday one bed, you lucky man, work party on late night trip, many rocks break, sleep by roadside.”

If it could get any worse, now was the time. Derek was a mere shell of suffering but he couldn't complain anymore, he had to sleep. He walked over to the best bed in the whole room, which had only two occupants in it and began to wake the men from their slumber to begin a new shift.

Derek climbed in tentatively with his new friend, he knew about personal space boundaries and this was taking it too far. He adjusted himself a little and was almost hanging out of the bed. He could sense Man-Young next to him; it was going to make for a really uncomfortable night. He really was taking a break at a British holiday camp.

"I have wife, Derek, she hog bed just like you."

Derek prayed for Honey's anti-spooning pillow but there weren't any about. He then fell asleep trying hard not to contemplate the next day.



"I'm just nipping out, Honey dear, I won't be long," called Gloria.

The kids were running rampant again; Jack wanted his breakfast and was making quite a racket. Ella and Citron were chasing each other through the bedrooms and landing, screaming at the top of their voices.

Honey was trying to hear over the top of the noise "Be quiet girls!" shouted their mother, it was like a circus. "Sorry Mother, where are you going?"

"If you must know, I'm going round to yours to check if he's still alive."

“But why? Let him come over under his own steam.”

“Honey, men are all the same. They all have to be hand walked everywhere they go, clueless the lot of them. He must get it into his thick skull how upset you are!”

Ella piped up, “Mummy, who’s upset? Where’s daddy?”

Honey glared at her mother. “Now look what you’ve done.”

“Ella precious, me and Daddy had an argument, he hasn’t gone away. We’ll make it better again soon.”

Ella and Citron, being twins, shared a special bond and began to cry simultaneously.

“Mother, now look what you’ve done! Just go, tell him to come over quick.”

Gloria waved her arm and walked out the door. This was going to be harder than she thought, but she had to get something on him. She knew what Mr. Driver had in store for him but was that enough ... jobless and spineless? Honey may even take greater pity on him then. Gloria couldn’t think of anything just now but something would turn up.

She was about to get in her car when she heard a voice calling her from the window. “Mother, I’m coming with you. I don’t want any arguments, I don’t want a scene and that’s that. I’ll be down in ten minutes after I get these ready.”

The new arrangements meant Gloria couldn’t pack up any of Honey’s stuff anymore, it was a wasted journey.

The kids eventually came screaming out, happy that they would be seeing Daddy again. They had missed pulling at his arms and the stories he told them at night.

Gloria rolled her eyes, Brian's lunch date may well be off.

The car slowly took the short drive over to Honey's house. Gloria knew it was only a matter of time, Honey would fall into Derek's clutches once more and job or no job, she would still have to endure seeing him again on painful visits at her house or theirs.

Pulling her Mercedes onto the drive, the kids jumped out in expectation of seeing their Dad again. Over the road, the same sinister looking Sedan was still parked but they were all unaware of its reason to be there.

Honey wondered if Derek may be sitting in his observatory in a depressed mood ... it was best they came in slow and quiet.

"Pipe down children, Ella, Citron, take Jack into the living room and wait there, I need to speak to your Daddy first, if he's in."

They did as they were told and hid behind the sofa in a made up game of 'let's surprise Daddy'.

There didn't seem to be any activity downstairs. The place looked like it hadn't been occupied for the last few days. There were several bills on the mat and it felt cold. Honey looked at her mother with curiosity and gestured for Gloria to follow her upstairs.

Reaching the landing, Honey peered into Derek's sad little room like a professional burglar but he was nowhere to be seen, it looked just as he had left it.



Derek was sleeping rather uncomfortably and could feel an arm draped over him but was too tired to move. He didn't wake but in his slumber he knew it was only a matter of hours before the gong would go again for another day of relentless slavery, every minute counted.



“What’s the point of pussyfooting around, Honey, he’s obviously at work!” cried Gloria in a rather loud voice. “Just check the other rooms then we can all go back to mine.”

They both looked in to the master bedroom, pushing the door wide open.



Derek could hear a commotion; it could only mean the other prisoners were starting to rouse. They had obviously got used to the routine, no one wanted to be ruled by the gong anyway.



Honey gasped and raised a hand to her mouth in shock but it was Gloria who dealt the first blow.

“Derek! You dirty, horrible little man!”

A confused Derek opened his eyes with a start. He could see there were no prisoners, no bunks, no guards and no gong. In their place, across the room from him, stood his lovely wife and horrible mother-in-law.

“Honey! I can’t believe it, how are you? I’m so glad you came back!” he cried.

Honey was standing there speechless, her eyes filling up.

His angry mother-in-law had seen quite enough, “Don’t you ‘how are you’ me, you depraved sicko, who is that with you?”

Derek’s face turned from sleepiness to surprise as he turned over to see his number one Korean friend lying there with a stark look upon his face, afraid to move.

“My God, how could this have happened?” Derek was panicking now, “Erm, this is Man-Young.”

Gloria piped up again, “I can see it’s a bloody young man and to think I had to let my daughter see this. She’ll be scarred for life, you vile creature, you!”

“No, no, Gloria, it’s not what you think, he’s Korean, he was with me when we were breaking rocks together!”

Honey ran out of the room in a flood of tears, she couldn’t speak. She was having trouble dealing with the fact that Derek was a player, let alone batting for the other team.

His Asian friend had no idea where he was, it was totally surreal and he sat up in bed alongside Derek and tried to calm the situation down with a smile. “I am Man-Young, we share bed together after we break backs with our tools.”

Enough was enough for Gloria, it was too much for her. “I don’t want to hear another word from either of you. Derek, I never thought you had it in you. Honey will be staying at mine from now

on. Don't contact us or I'll apply for a restraining order, and to think you are the father of my grandchildren, oh!"

Gloria shot out of the room, she hadn't expected to see anything like that but it had played itself out wonderfully. Honey had already corralled her kids and pushed them back into the car.

Derek ran to the window to peer out. He could see Gloria storming off down the drive to the car and Honey standing there, arms crossed and crying. He lifted the window catch and shouted down to them.

"Come back, it's not what you think!"

"Get in, Honey. Not what he thinks, the depraved monster, I've seen some things in my time but this?"

The A class almost made a handbrake turn as it reversed off the drive, leaving Derek to contemplate his existence with his new found friend.

Man-Young stared straight ahead and blew air out of his cheeks, "I said before, you Westerners strange, Derek."



The Universe twinkled with life from all sides, not that it had sides but it was impressive nonetheless. It was impossible to count how many planets, stars, dust clouds, asteroids and black holes there were, although somebody dull had probably tried it.

The rogue asteroid was hurtling its way towards Earth. There was still a way to go and the only defense Earth had against it was its atmosphere. It had witnessed a huge amount of these in its time but there was no telling what would happen once the asteroid

impacted. It hadn't been picked up on anyone's defense radar yet so the Earth turned on its axis as always and no one was any the wiser except for God Boy's nemesis.

This particular boy was becoming increasingly angry as each experiment unfolded; he was cursing his choice of creature thus far. The Drakapod appeared, to all intents and purposes, useless. It was good at growling, eating, farting and burping, it was skilled at killing other defenseless creatures but it lacked any notion of higher understanding.

If it was put in a cage fight situation it would win hands down but so far it had produced diddly squat. The numerous purple tentacles that hung down its flanks were used for poisoning its victims. Its great snout was shaped like an elephant's to grab hold of its prey; its gnashers could put a great white's to shame.

Again, to an untrained observer, it seemed like the perfect killing machine ... but it was no match for the Pongwart, a crab like creature that appeared soft on the outside but contained an extremely tough shell-like interior, a bit like an avocado. It would sit placidly for months in a boggy swamp until consumed.

The Drakapod had been swallowing these in abundance hoping they would digest in its enormous stomach. It took quite a few of them to fill it up as it frantically searched for anything to eat to stay alive. What this particularly bad God Boy didn't know, was that the Pongwart would cleverly shed its outer jellified layer once it was inside a host and continue to feast itself on the foolhardy creatures' innards until the beast dropped down dead.

This God Boy, along with the Visioneer, was now studying a very dead specimen indeed. It was not a good day for him ... he could see the teacher had already begun removing marks from his overall score.

“Class, a very good effort again! I am most impressed with some of your efforts, while others really need to think about the meaning of higher understanding a little more.”

He studied them all one by one before speaking again. “Now, I would like to share with you the moral of experiment number three, but before I do that I would like to congratulate two individuals for their specimens continued existence throughout. I am, of course, referring to the Humanoid and the Gloopbilge.”

The Visioneer instantly willed his appreciation of their efforts and Derek’s God Boy sat up to receive it.

“The rest of you have had to replace your specimens but that does not mean you are too far behind. There is much to play for, remember it is higher understanding, not longevity, that will eventually prove the winner.”

“The moral for this experiment being, that for a creature to survive in a habitat that is far removed from its own, it must adapt and be willing to embrace that adaptation or perish. It must be careful of its surroundings and try and follow local rules and continue to re-test them as it goes.”

It seemed that life itself was very complicated indeed when it came to interactions. Just like atoms, everything borne of them was subjected to random events and had to adapt quickly to flourish but in a measured way.

God Boy was enjoying his experiments like a lot of the boys, it was challenging but fun. Derek had been a wonderful find, he was sure it could have been far worse with another specimen. Anything to wipe the smile of his enemies’ faces at least.

He couldn’t wait for the next one, it was sure to be bad for the Drakapod.



“I hungry, I go cook us some food,” shouted Man-Young.

Derek was pacing around the bedroom in a real state of despair, “How can you think of food when my family is crumbling before my very eyes?”

It was hard to understand Derek while he was like this and even harder to understand how he himself had managed to end up on a housing estate in Runcorn.

“I think always of food, been hungry for nine month!”

Derek nodded to his friend to go and rustle something up while he stared out of the window at nothing in particular. Once in a while he would notice the black sedan out of the corner of his eye but he was too bothered by other things to care about them. He would deal with them soon enough.

None of it made any sense and he scratched his head thinking about the events that had unfolded so far in his miserable life. He wished he was like his friend who seemed to not care at all, as long as he wasn't breaking rocks.

Could he try and phone Honey? What would she say? Would she even pick up the phone with that Rottweiler standing by? A restraining order! Derek had done nothing so far, it seemed that most of this was down to the conservatory and he hated it the more he thought about it.

Derek decided that he should at least give Honey a ring and try to explain it all to her. She had seen some strange things too; maybe she might relent after a while. She must have come round to see him because she still cared and they had the kids to think

about, he missed all of them, there had to be a way of winning her back.

He walked into his study to make the call but it rang before he could pick it up. Derek felt a pang of hope as he went to answer it, it might be her.

A middle-aged male voice spoke, "Hello, Derek, how the devil are you?"

Derek's eyes widened as he realized it was Mr. Driver. He had completely forgotten about his work and he was two days late as it was. It was all very well being five minutes late but two days was taking the biscuit!

"He ... Hello Mr. Driver, I am so sorry for not coming in, I've had an emergency, a family crisis."

Derek pulled the receiver away slightly to minimize the hairdryer treatment.

"Nonsense Derek, it's quite ok, I was worried about you that's all," replied the softly spoken agreeable voice on the other end.

It was incredible, maybe Mr. Driver liked him after all, although it was hard to imagine after two written warnings.

"Sir, I'm terribly sorry for the lack of communication, it won't happen again, are you sure you're ok about it?"

"Of course Derek, whatever it is, I don't need to know about it unless you tell me, but if you can possibly start your shift tomorrow that would be great, we need all the help we can get."

Derek had taken a journey down Acidville listening to a man who had taken his own journey down Ganjatown. The change was remarkable.

He started smiling again, at least there was hope in his life.
“Certainly Mr. Driver, I’ll be there bright and early.”

“Thank you, Derek, see you soon.”

Mr. Driver rang off, leaving Derek feeling a voracious appetite coming on for some decent breakfast instead of fish eye soup.

CHAPTER FIVE

Man-Young had made himself comfortable on the sofa watching Richard and Judy, he couldn't make head nor tail of what they were saying but watched with excitement while dunking some Hobnobs into a cup of tea and enjoying the life of a housewife.

Derek didn't crave a biscuit right now, he was more concerned with the current state of his affairs. He might have his job, but where was his family? He hadn't a clue how to wriggle himself out of this one. There was no point letting Honey cool down, it was obvious she was going to be traumatized for life. Maybe she thought it was all part of his new found sexual habits when she had found them both lying in bed wearing prison jumpsuits?

Stuck between a rock and a hard place, thought Derek. How ironic.

His Korean friend was rolling about laughing at the Teletubbies now. It was likely he had never seen a television before after a life of seriously hard labour.

"Man-Young, don't you miss your family?" Derek asked curiously.

Between laughing and dunking, it was hard to get any sense out of him.

"Wife big like Sumo, like Teletubbie, any more hob hobs?"

Derek sighed, at least he had company for a while. He decided to head upstairs and log onto the internet to see if anyone else had

ever been abducted from their bed by aliens and zoomed across the world and then found by their wife in a compromising position.

He searched for a while but only found the same links pointing to the National Enquirer so that didn't help. There were quite a few UFO hunters out there but, with no grainy images of green aliens flying hubcaps, he had nothing to hand over as evidence. He believed in alien lifeforms but he still couldn't understand why, even now with silly sized megapixel cameras, no one could manage to get a good shot of them!

He had pondered on divine intervention but it was more like divine molestation. He couldn't see the reasoning as to why he had ended up in these places. Camel dung, musk and lumps of rock were hard to classify as signs.

Even so, Derek felt a little special. He had dreamed of far off galaxies and fabulous new worlds since he was a small boy and, like everyone else, had pondered on the meaning of life – except maybe for his Korean friend who was dreaming of chocolate biscuits and Cash in Your Attic by now.

Derek walked into his observatory. He had missed spending time in his special den for the past couple of weeks; every man needed a shed, if only to get lost in their own thoughts for a while. Blaming a nagging wife, noisy kids or work stress was only really an excuse to escape for a short while.

He eyed all his instruments and gazed at his star maps. Maybe out there somewhere was a planet without tin cars, fat necked bosses or pensions, just a simple place to park a shed and dream.



Gloria was standing rigid with her ear to the toilet door,
“Honey dear, pull yourself together, it's no use locking yourself in

there! I told you he was no good, nothing good has ever come of him.”

She could hear sobs and the blowing of a nose into tissue. The twins had gone into hiding in the spare room without a clue about what was going on. Jack, who was too young to have a clue anyway, was busy running around with his favourite crocodile.

“Grrrrrr.”

Honey was in the land of bewilderment and it wasn't a very nice place to be. She was quietly blaming herself for all of Derek's new found sexual habits. She looked at herself in the mirror, she was quite pretty with a shock of blonde hair quite suited to her name, a small button nose and full lips but even so she looked horrendous right now, like a tap that wouldn't stop running.

“You're better off here, dear, with me, you can stay as long as you like. It will be nice to have my grandchildren around,” she called back.

There was no reply. Honey loved her mother but, like Derek, she was in the wrong habitat and it was only temporary.

Gloria gave up. She would be running out of Andrex quite soon. “I'll be downstairs if you need me, I'll make you a cup of tea.”

Tea appeared to solve all of the world's ills as, after a while, Honey gently prised the door open and walked down the stairs to claim it.

Her mother took hold of her as she came into the kitchen and plonked her down onto the chair.

Honey was first to speak, “Mother, I don’t understand it, who was that man and did you see what they were wearing?”

“Perverts,” cried her mother.

“No, no, listen to me. Don’t you think it’s odd that he ended up in a white sheet drinking water from a spout or was lusted after by women or dressed like a convict in bed with another man?”

Gloria had made her mind up about Derek from the first moment she met him. It would take men in black with a shiny pen to erase the hatred she had built up for him over the years.

“He was always strange, I never liked the look of him, his eyes are too close, shifty.”

Honey slammed her hand on the table to be heard, “Enough, Mother! I am well aware of your feelings for him, you’ve told me enough times ...”

“All of them true dear; Brian was the man for you, a good dependable solid man.”

“Shut up about Brian and let me speak!” shouted Honey. “Derek is predictable, I know where I am with him, it’s one of the reasons why I love him.”

Gloria gritted her teeth, Derek and love didn’t come in the same parcel. “Love? What do you know about love, you need a good strong man with a backbone, not some bloody nerd with a telescope!”

Honey started crying again. “Mother, I think there’s something wrong with Derek ...”

“You don’t say!”

“I think he’s had some sort of nervous breakdown, all of these things I’ve seen must have been caused by stress. I’ve been going on at him over a conservatory, he obviously doesn’t know what he is doing, I need to go back and sort it all out.”

Gloria was taken aback by the thought. “You will do no such thing dear, I don’t want you going round and witnessing any more of his shenanigans, the dirty little man.”

“But I need to see him! I need to find out what’s wrong with him!”

Gloria could see no way out of this, she was going to have to relent just to save her daughter. “Honey, listen to me, if it’s what you say it is then I will go round and find out for you.”

It was like unleashing a pitbull on a kitten, thought Honey. “You can’t go round; you’ll only make it worse. Lord knows what he will do next.”

Placing a comforting hand on her daughter’s arm, Gloria said, “If you love him then so be it, I’m not going to stand in your way. I’ll go round and talk sensibly with Derek, tell him you miss him and see if he needs some professional help.”

If Vlad the Impaler was a Samaritan he would look just like Gloria right now.

Gloria had made her mind up. “Give him a day to think about his actions, and then after he comes back from work, I will smooth things over for you.”

Honey was even more confused than before; she never thought her mother had it in her. Maybe the Cold War was finally over after all.

Of course, Gloria could never be as forgiving as that. She took a sip of her tea, looked back over to her daughter to see the tears had stopped and thought about how all the pieces were falling into place.

Υ

Derek had spent the evening staring at the stars, it was a beautifully clear night and he could make out quite a few of his favourites at this time of year. He dreamed of reaching out and touching them all in their twinkly glory and wondered what would happen to them once he was gone from this world.

He was busy adjusting his Celestron X35 to get a better focus when he was tapped on the shoulder. Man-Young had lifted the Cadbury's Fingers from the children's stash and was hovering one in front of him with a smile.

"English chocolate very nice," cooed his friend.

Derek forgot all about his children's predictable cries, he would buy them some more tomorrow, and took one himself.

He could see his friends' mind working overtime. "Derek, I decide one thing."

Continuing to look through his telescope, Derek replied, "What is it my partner in grime?"

"I like here, I think I stay, Top Gear great show."

His mentor took a deep breath. How could anyone base their decision on biscuits and television?

“Man-Young, you have a wife and children to think of. You need to go home, you can’t stay here. I have a wife and kids of my own too.”

It didn’t seem to make one iota of difference to the Korean. “Wife, pah! Get another, kids grown up now, out to work.”

Derek couldn’t understand his logic. “But you are young, Man-Young. Bloody Hell, I wished you had a different name! How can your kids be grown up?”

“They nine and ten, plenty old, look after themselves on new fishing boat, wife a pig.”

He understood it now, his family thought he was still hitting rocks or washed overboard at sea.

“You can stay here ‘til my wife comes back and then you must find your own place.”

Man-Young had already beaten him to it, “I found place, wood house at end of garden.”

“You mean Jack’s tree house?”

“Plenty big, may build extension.”

If only life was as simple as this, thought Derek. He took a few more fingers and decided to show his best friend some new stars high above.

The morning had come quickly, chasing all of the stars away. Man-Young had revelled in the fact that he wasn't woken by the tugging arm of a prisoner in the early hours and was fast asleep in Jack's bed. He'd had a choice to pick from, but the Toy Story cartoon wallpaper had swung it for him.

Over in the corner, a man peeked through the half opened door. Derek could see Man-Young wasn't about to be woken any time soon and there were plenty of snacks to keep him going until Derek arrived back from work.

He slowly crept out of the door and jumped into his Montego once more, at least this car had some grounded familiarity to it.

He reversed back off his drive.

"Holy cow!" cried Derek and slammed his brakes on.

Behind him on the other side of the road sat, not one, but two cars; the same Mercedes Sedan as before but it had found a new friend, a shiny looking Lexus, long and sleek like the first and the same uniform black.

He couldn't make out the occupants but it was obvious they had all popped into Dollond & Aitchison together and bulk ordered. Who were they? wondered Derek. He had never heard of a detergent watchdog looking for dodgy quality control practices before, it was most strange.

The clock was ticking down for Derek. He was going to be late for his first day back so he pumped the pedal to the metal and got a shift on. The two cars followed in hot pursuit, just like the first one had done before.

He tried to lose them down narrow, twisty country lanes, pulling away on red lights and other such nonsense but the Montego was such a distinctively bad car that it was impossible to lose in traffic. No one owned one any more ... or maybe owned up to owning one.

Derek pulled into the car park of Supersuds and tried to drive into his space but a dirty brown Austin Maestro had gotten there first, forcing him to park in the adjacent spot.

As he got out he could see the happy snappers pointing their big cameras at him again and now it seemed at each other as a dark haired, tanned man clicked off a few rounds at the dark haired, pale man who did the same in return before they jumped back into their cars and drove off.

Derek stood for a few brief moments taking in the whole scene. He tried to fathom it, putting it into context with all the other strange incidents that had happened to him lately, but decided there was no point dwelling on it. He literally had seconds to don his overall and stand at his line ready for the plastic march.

Running inside, he could see all his workers ready for another dull, monotonous day. They didn't seem at all bothered about his absence, it was most strange.

"Nice holiday, Derek?" called a voice at the far end of the line.

"Hello, Mavis, erm, yes, thank you, refreshing," he replied, although wielding a pickaxe for ten hours a day couldn't be called anything like that.

The conveyor started rolling and the soldiers made their way down the track, ready to be inspected.

Derek eyed his boss in the glass office but was astonished to see him wave a cheerful greeting. It was most unusual, if it stayed like this he could see a bit of light at the end of the tunnel.

The day wore on with no sign of the General blustering his way around the troops barking his orders. It wasn't a good day however. A lot of hands were being raised to signal a tick on his trusty clipboard.

"I don't need this, I really don't. Please Lord, no more rejects," cried Derek to no one in particular.

Even with all this commotion Mr. Driver sat like a resting statue upon his leather backed chair. He appeared to be in fine spirits today and Derek was beginning to think he may have had one too many.

The day ended horrifically with one hundred and forty-three rejects, quite a record for Supersuds. Derek was beginning to sweat; it was a strict rule to report anything over a hundred instead of placing the sheet in the tray as normal.

His workers looked worried as they signed off in another line in front of the clocking machine. Derek smiled and nodded to them all as he made his way into Mr. Driver's office, looking like a man set for the gallows.

"Poor Derek," said one of the workers as they left for the day.

Derek gave a very feeble knock at the door. He didn't need this at all, he really didn't.

"Come in.," called his superior.

With a tentative push he walked in and sat down on the plastic chair in front of his Uber-Fuhrer.

“How are you feeling Derek?” asked the smiling man with the bulging neck.

“Fine, sir, but I thought you might want to see these figures?”

Derek handed him the figures and sat there quietly while Mr. Driver pored over the statistics with humming sounds. His neck was wobbling slightly with the vibration reminding Derek of a bullfrog or heron.

Derek almost fainted when Mr. Driver simply placed the sheet in his processed tray with not a care in the world. “Can’t be helped, Derek.”

Can’t be helped? Had Davros been taking happy pills, thought Derek.

His boss leaned over his desk and looked at Derek with the most sincere of gestures. “Now Derek, you’ve worked here for quite a long time, from my recollection, fifteen years, is that right Derek?”

Derek gulped. “Yes sir, fifteen years.”

“Commendable Derek, I think it’s time to recognize your achievements. I have something to give you for the work you’ve put in all these years for the great institution that is Supersuds.”

Mr. Driver reached over and dialed a number on his phone, “Miss Mandible, could you pop over with Derek’s prize please, thank you. Oh, and bring Mr. Petiole with you.”

He put the phone down carefully on its hook and smiled at Derek.

“Fine weather outside Derek, I love this time of year. It leaves Supersuds gleaming in a soft glow when the sun goes down.”

Derek sat there with complete surprise. It appeared there was a God after all. Whatever it was that had turned Mr. Driver into Woodstock’s happiest hippie it was lost on him but he didn’t care anyway. He imagined a big fat cheque, enough to pay for a conservatory to lure Honey back into his arms.

A pretty secretary walked in with a rather gaunt weedy man who looked like he had just won Runcorn’s Nerdiest Nerd contest. Derek didn’t have a clue who he was.

His boss spoke to the secretary in his kindest voice, “Hand Derek the lovely letter would you Miss Mandible.”

Derek held the envelope, it was quite a large, grand looking one and printed on top of it were the words, “Derek Hill, for services rendered.”

“Open it, Derek, I couldn’t have wished it upon a better person.”

Derek’s fingers felt its contents first. It definitely felt like a cheque. Supersuds, although dreary, had apparently been generous over the years to long serving staff who managed to simply not keel over and die from the boredom. He had heard of someone receiving £30,000 over at the packing department but he’d never believed it.

Mr. Driver spoke once more. “Open it, Derek, you deserve it.”

He could see his boss grinning like a Cheshire cat.

Ripping the envelope open, Derek's world spun around quicker than it had ever done before. He stared at the cheque, he couldn't quite believe it, he really couldn't.

On the front were written no lines, no bank logo, no signature, there wasn't even an amount, it simply read ...

"Derek Hill, your services have been terminated immediately for gross misconduct. You are a disgrace to the good name of Supersuds, Mr. Horace Driver, Executive Manager, Q&A, Supersuds."

Derek's shocked and pitiful eyes looked up to meet his boss's, whose own eyes seemed to have turned into red fiery coals. Mr. Driver was grinning with the most sublime satisfaction.

"Mr. Hill, when you lost control of your line the other day I was forced to continue your shift. There were many rejects that day, a very sad day indeed for this fine establishment."

Mr. Driver raised his arm to gesture at the wimpy man before him. "Meet Mr. Petiole, the owner of that rather nice Maestro parked in your spot, sorry, his spot now. He is the new line supervisor, now get out Derek, I don't want to ever see your face again."

A rather teary eyed Derek tried to fight back. "You, you can't do this, sir, how can the rejects be my fault? I wasn't even there."

His boss jumped up from his chair, he had heard quite enough, "Immaterial, Derek, you neglected your duty by going home early and leaving no one to command the line!"

Shaking and bewildered, Derek tried to understand the evil plot against him. “But you sent me home sir!”

“I did nothing of the sort, Derek; you ran off and left me to it. Whatever trouble you’ve been having outside of work, I don’t expect it to be brought in with you, especially when you have a duty to uphold our great tradition.”

Mr. Driver continued ranting. “Miss Mandible has recorded your wanton dereliction of duty, Derek, so you will receive no payout, now get out and leave that overall here, it’s company property.”

The very large rock that Derek had pushed relentlessly up the hill for no sensible reason had rolled back and crushed his little soul, but the pace of industry must be kept up and it was only right that a new worker ant had taken his place to continue that push. Derek slowly walked out of the room doing his best to ignore the laughter that had broken out behind him. It was a great day for Mr. Driver.

Sad, depressed, lonely, distressed and any other numerous words of woe couldn’t sum up the feelings that now plagued Derek as he walked out of the factory for the last time. He stood next to the brown Maestro but didn’t have the spirit to run his key down it; he simply got into his car and slowly pulled out of the car park through the gate. He couldn’t look back at the huge brick and glass building that dominated the skyline of Runcorn in all its soapy glory.

It was all too much to bear as Derek’s numbed body drove on and away from his only livelihood.

The silver Montego navigated the roads and lanes well below the speed limit. Derek looked back through his rear view mirror and could make out the unmistakable shapes of his earlier pursuers

once more. He had ceased to care about them as the lead car aggressively slip-streamed his own.

“Go away, leave me alone,” he called eventually as if he was swotting a fly but they kept on coming.

He was mere yards from his drive when he saw the Mercedes quickly drive past and pull up to a screeching halt on the roadside in front of him.

As Derek pulled onto his drive he saw two sunglasses desperados leap out from their car. They looked like Arabs but what shocked him most was the pair of machine guns that were pointing at him from the curb.

In complete synchronization, the other two leapt from their car also. They looked a bit like his good friend, Man-Young. Sunglasses to the hilt and appearing just as menacing as the first ones, they pulled out an arsenal of guns and got ready to tear up the street.

For some reason known only to Derek, he remembered the 80's cop show 'TJ Hooker' where the great William Shatner always ran in slow motion wherever he went and found himself doing just that as he inched his way to the front door, key nervously thrust in a direction towards the lock.

The men raced in slow motion too, although probably wishing they were a little faster, reaching Derek's Montego just as he managed to unlock the front door.

He could hear Arabic and Korean voices mixed into one giant menacing scream to stop; it was just a question of who got to him first.

Derek dived into the hallway as a mighty crack of thunder was heard overhead. In the same instance he could hear the sound of gunfire and splinters of his freshly painted front door shot right past him.

“Man-Young! Get out!” he cried. He threw himself into the living room just as some more bullets smashed into his kitchen cupboard doors ripping them to pieces; it was a good job he hadn’t upgraded them or else he’d be crying.

Fighting for his own life now, his friend was nowhere to be seen ... probably hiding upstairs or sitting on the loo after a Cadbury’s overconsumption.

Derek’s assailants pushed their way through the beaten up opening and into the hallway, still spouting words he didn’t understand. He knew he only had a few seconds to get out of there before it was too late.

Getting up from the shag pile carpet, Derek quickly ran through the dining room where a large letter sat propped up next to a candle. He had no time to pick it up, running straight into the laundry room.

The Yemenis didn’t know who the Koreans were but through a common bond of secret service they nodded to each other as the aviator clad Arabs decided to head upstairs to see if Derek was hiding there while the Koreans chose the living room.

It sounded like the heavens had opened up outside. Derek could see flashes like lightning streak across the heavens through the windows. He was trying to quietly open the back door with the loudest key and lock combo ever known to man. He was almost there when he looked back and noticed the barrel of an AK47 poking slowly through the doorway.

“Christ!” shouted Derek and flung the door open to escape. It wasn’t the stealthiest of escapes and he was quickly followed by the rattle of gunfire as it made mincemeat of his double glazing.

Derek had barely made it to the postage stamp lawn at the back and sat down on the grass awaiting his fate. He could see the Koreans staring at him through the door and the other two peering out the bedroom window. They all had guns trained on him and they had all adjusted their sunglasses for maximum effect. It seemed that Derek was about to know what Swiss cheese felt like.

Without warning, a huge crack sounded and then the unimaginable happened. From high up in the sky, a huge rock, the size of a hatchback was glowing red with a black trail of smoke behind it as it fell. The henchmen looked up to see what it was but it was too late.

The house erupted in a huge explosion of rock and debris. Derek was catapulted by the force and thrown into a newly tended bed of begonias face down.

The sound was almighty indeed and splinters of tile, prefab, glass and badly designed interior furniture flew high into the air and came crashing down to earth again. It was a well placed hit and appeared to have demolished just the house that Derek lived in but, a few seconds later, a white object that looked like a bathtub came careering down, straight through Petunia’s shiny new conservatory.

Derek pulled his face out of the dirt and stared in horror at the charred black remains of his only sanctuary. “Man-Young! Oh no! Oh please God, no!”

Everything was annihilated except for one thing. A longish metal cylinder had fallen into the flower bed right next to Derek.

He looked at it in bewilderment, it was his Celestron X35, it had not a single scratch.

He was crying now and grabbing his trusty telescope, held it like a baby. The chances of being hit by an asteroid impact were like a trillion to one but uncannily, it had managed to find him.

Deciding enough was enough, Derek stood up, wide eyed and staring at the sky, raised his fists in a defiant gesture, “Why, God, why? What the hell have I ever done to deserve all of this, why me? You cruel, heartless beast, you.

He was instantly stunned when he heard a voice call back, loud and clear.

“Lucky for you we have Hob-Nobs!”

Derek wiped the dirt off his face and turned in complete astonishment. He could clearly see an arm sticking out of Jack’s tree house holding a packet of biscuits from his raided cupboard.

“Man-Young, you’re alive!” cried Derek.

“You no worry, big man. Plenty of wood to build extension now.”

Derek dropped to his knees and cried ... not just for the loss of his wife, his kids, his house, his dignity and his job, but for the shred of human friendship that lay shacked up, oblivious to the crazy events that had occurred over the past week. It added a whole new meaning to ‘at least you have your health’.

He walked over and hugged his friend who had already made up a tea flask and some creature comforts inside the 6 x 4 play shed. Derek accepted a biscuit from his friend and they both sat

there in an eruption of hysterical laughter amidst the mayhem, over the comical sight of Derek's bruised and muddied face.

After a few more biscuits and laughter, they could both make out the wailing sounds of police sirens and fire engines. If their intention was rescue they would be having a wasted journey; there was nothing left of the house. In its place was a large crater surrounded on all sides by ruddy mounds of earth, it looked like a mini volcano.

Derek could hear shrieks coming from the other side of the volcano and decided it was time to climb to the top of this newly formed hillock to see what all the fuss was about. He was past caring by now, how could anyone care for objects they no longer had?

He arrived at the summit and pretended to drop a flag down, but what he saw on the other side amazed him. There was a throng of people standing around, camera crews, emergency services, rubber neckers and even a man with a metal detector who obviously fancied his chances after so much soil had been excavated.

"Are you ok, sir?" asked a man in a bright yellow vest peering back up at the sorry looking figure.

Derek nodded, but to everyone else he looked bewildered. They could see he was caked in dirt and wondered how anyone could have survived such a total annihilation.

He looked into the giant pit but there was nothing there, even his trusty Montego had vanished, probably sitting in somebody's back garden a mile away by now.

"The MOT was due anyway," he quietly mouthed.

“Someone get up there and bring him down, he looks traumatized,” shrieked a senior officer as firefighters quickly leaped into action to rescue him.

One of the firemen called out quite softly, “Sir, we have you now, you’re in safe hands,” taking Derek steadily by the arm.

Derek couldn’t take the irony in. “Safe hands, ridiculous, you don’t know the half of it.”

He was led down through the crowds of shocked onlookers to a waiting ambulance. He could hear people behind him muttering about ‘Acts of God’ together with ‘insurance won’t pay out’ ... a combination he no longer cared about.

A local newsman leaped in front of him just as he reached the ambulance, “Sir, is this your house? Can you tell us what happened?”

“Man-Young!” cried Derek and desperately tried to claw his way back through the crowd before being stopped by police and calmly restrained.

“Man-Young?” he called again, but the noise was too loud, it was no use.

The reporter turned to face the cameras and in a most solemn tone declared to the viewers, “There you have it! A delirious man walks from the debris of an asteroid impact which has completely destroyed his house, a freakish Act of God in suburban Runcorn.”



A china cup with an overflow of Earl Grey dropped suddenly from its grasp onto the pristine Axminster below, throwing a great

wash of liquid over the fireplace as a totally shocked woman was trying to take in the newflash beamed across her television.

“Mother! Your poor carpet, what have you done?”

Honey had been in the kitchen fixing up some cucumber sandwiches and was oblivious to the announcement.

Gloria had seen the bedraggled man being led away from the catastrophe. Her daughter could only see the back of her mother’s head as she sat peering at the box, a half smile at such good fortune had turned into a scowl as she realized Derek was not dead, the slippery eel was indeed like Teflon.

Unbeknown to Honey, Gloria had been around to her house earlier that day and planted a letter on the kitchen table for Derek to see while he was at his most depressed state after losing his job.

The contents told Derek that a divorce was imminent and a paltry cheque was waiting for him if he just decided to get lost out of her daughter’s life.

She was hoping he would have ended it there and then and, seeing the news footage, initially she thought she had hit the jackpot ... not just his pathetic pre-fab but Derek as well, it was too good to be true. And indeed it was, as she had just witnessed.

Honey made sure the sandwiches ended up with the tea as she saw the horror of the natural disaster in Blossom Meadows.

“Derek!” she cried, which made her mother cringe.

“He’s at the hospital, dear, if you want to visit him I suppose.”

Honey looked aghast at her mother's lack of soul. "Suppose? Suppose? There is no suppose about it, he's my husband. Oh my, the house, our life, everything ... it's all gone!"

Honey started crying. It was a wonder she had any tears left in her, the water board could have called on her in a drought.

The TV continued with its bulletin as a helicopter flashed dazzling bird's eye images of the impact site. The only comfort to both of them was the sight of a completely destroyed conservatory next door.

"Mother, look after the children, turn the TV off, they don't need to see it, I'm going to borrow your car and go see Derek!"

Gloria was sticking to her guns, emotion was for wimps. "Please yourself, but it won't do you any good, the man is a lunatic ... unlike Brian."

"Brian! Pah! It's all you talk about, mother, I'll see you later."

Honey stormed out of the house and drove to Runcorn General. She could see quite a lot of cars shooting past in the opposite direction, the town hadn't witnessed anything this spectacular since the great 'Steven Seagal and the Thunderbox Blues Band' came rolling into town a couple of years ago, a versatile performer and a veritable martial arts opponent to Chuck Norris.

Honey raced into the hospital car park, trying to suppress the indignity of paying a fee to visit the sick. She ran over to the A&E department to see if she could find Derek.

A lone figure was sitting on one of the plastic chairs in the corner looking rather sullen; his mind was on other things. Mostly,

his friend who the police had probably found by now sitting in his new found home. Man-Young would probably have a lot of questions to answer, especially about his lack of passport.

A shout came from the doorway, “Derek!”

He looked up and saw someone he wasn’t expecting and gave a painful smile as she ran over to him, enveloping him in a big hug.

Derek winced; he was aching from the blast that had propelled him into the flower bed.

“Honey, it’s amazing, I didn’t think you would come”

“Nonsense, Derek, I saw the news, we’ve lost everything!”

She was crying heavily now and a large damp patch was spreading across his shoulder.

“We have each other though, Honey, and the kids are ok.”

She pulled herself away from the death grip and stared at him with compassionate eyes.

“Derek, if we’re to put all of this right, I want you to tell me everything that’s happened to you. I need to know how you feel mentally, I just don’t understand it.”

“Take a seat, we’ll have hours here, there’s a lot of people in today.”

Honey sat down, both hands gripping his as he relayed all of his adventures of the past week to her. He told her of the Yemenese village encounter, his interrogation, his lusty encounters

with the females and finally his incarceration in a North Korean labour camp.

Honey staring at him, trying to take in the full facts of his disappearances, finally found the courage to speak.

“So, let me get this straight, you were transported by magic to these far flung places and found your sexual libido was heightened as a result, Derek?”

He couldn't read her mood but felt as if he had gotten through.

“I know, it sounds ridiculous but I now know that the world is not what it seems. There are magical forces playing out and I must be the unwitting subject of alien abductions. I feel quite special, that's why after I lost my job ...”

Honey's eyes screwed tight into tiny slits at the revelation, “You've lost your job, Derek? When? Why?”

Derek saw another side to his wife that he hadn't seen before. Talk of alien encounters and camel spit was lost on her but the very real fact of no income wasn't.

He struggled to offer an explanation. “Mr. Driver fired me for incompetence. He said I only had one line to look after but I failed to manage that. It's ridiculous, Honey; do you know how many bottles come rolling off that conveyor belt?”

Honey shook her head in disgust, “No, no, Derek, one line? I can't bear to hear anymore. You've lost your job, our house and you sound like a ...”

She couldn't find the words to sum up her feelings for him. “Derek, it's over, you and me, you're a raving lunatic! I don't

know what has happened to you mentally, but you're not the man I married. I can't believe I stuck it out so long, I've lost all of my faith in you!"

She pulled herself away from his weak grasp and glared at him in a detached, unfeeling way. A few of Gloria's genes had spread to her daughter after all.

"But Honey, I love you, we can work this out, we can find another place!"

A cold eyed Honey had heard quite enough. "Derek, the only place you'll find in future is the loony bin. You're not in a fit state to look after me or our children, I want a divorce, mother was right ..."

Derek was incensed at this classic one liner, "'Mother was right'. Ridiculous, you have no idea what I've been through, I've lost everything, this is supposed to be in sickness and in health?"

His wife started to back away as Derek's crazy eyes became like red coals. "Health I can take but you're too sick for me, Derek ... you're demented, it's over!"

Honey ran out of the door leaving Derek slumped in his chair, a crying mess next to the pathetic beverage machine.



God Boy had noticed the rather large ant hill that dominated the street where Derek's habitat used to be. He could see his enemy sniggering at such an easy attack. The evil boy knew Derek had survived but he was also aware that this particular specimen had little fight left in him.

The earth continued to spin and God Boy gave an impassionate response in return. The events that occurred on this blue and green planet were of no consequence, what really angered him was the pettiness of his fellow pupil who was now so far behind him in the race for the grand prize.

He knew the boy could not flick a rock much larger than the one that killed his dinosaurs, for it would surely have wiped out his planet and probably pushed it onto a collision course with the sun. The Visioneer would have intervened and the consequences would be grave for the boy, but as it was, it was seen as minimal in the whole grand scheme of things.

A weighty voice rang out in the class, "Listen up, children, we have come to a defining moment in our quest for the winner of the Higher Understanding prize. This next experiment, you will be surprised to hear, has never been attempted before."

A hush descended on the class as every God Boy, bar one, sat in complete anticipation of the next quest; it would be exciting to break new ground, whatever it was.

The universe buzzed with life and light from all directions. It was a beautiful hovering display of wonderment and the rest of the pupils stared deeply into its core to marvel at it.

"The next experiment will require extra study. The correct placement of the specimen will determine great success I'm sure. Failure, like before, will result in a loss of marks, a heavier loss this time. We're coming close to the end of the semester and your specimens will have the chance to experience a longer stay this time. We'll examine the impact after a longer break-time, here is the test ..."

The parchment lit up once more with the curious but exhilarating challenge.

“4. Cross-World Habitat test. If your specimen survived the first experiment then it must be used for experiment number four, otherwise pick another.

A random pairing of the pupils’ selected worlds will commence. The specimen will be required to adapt within a habitat completely removed from anything it knows.

Marks will be awarded for successful habitation if it survives to the end. Marks will be lost for a specimen that perishes.”

“The very best of luck to you all.” cried the Visioneer.

God Boy felt a lump in his throat. He knew that Derek was vastly more intelligent than a GloopBilge or even a Lizard King, but his subject would be hard pressed to adapt knowing so much about his current world. The other creatures may not have travelled far and may not be as astounded as Derek, therefore adapting quite quickly.

He could see himself racing out in front with one other contender but failure would bring him straight back to the trailing pack where his nemesis was likely to be. He had a trick up his sleeve however, something he had noticed previously in the earlier experiments. If he had time, he could enact it before the test was forced to run.

Smiling to himself, God Boy shielded his thoughts from the rest who were quite eager to will the return of knowledge they did not possess. Only time would tell.



Various groups of walking wounded made their way through the exit of A&E. Behind them shuffled a lone figure, unsure of where he was going or what he would do once he got there.

He hailed a taxi and waited for a few seconds as the cabbie peered through the passenger window for the initial 'Is it worth my while?' vetting procedure.

"Where you going, pal?" asked the chubby man inside.

"Runcorn Bypass please."

The driver looked confused. "Yes but where?"

"The start of it, I'll pay you well."

Taxi drivers were used to strange requests and didn't give a hoot if the money was good. Derek eased himself into the back seat and gave the thousand yard stare back at the driver through his rear view.

"Cor blimey, pal, did you see that house go up when the asteroid exploded?"

Derek looked on and gave no retort to the Cockney-jellied-eel-Runcorn accent.

"Please yourself, mister," sighed the cabbie and carried on driving.

Eventually the taxi wound its way towards the Daresbury Expressway, a busy section of town. "Which house then, sir?" called the bored driver.

Derek sounded like a depressed Goth. “No house, just here, thanks.”

“Weirdo,” shouted back the driver as he raced away from the scene.

Looking round for the right spot, he saw it standing only three hundred metres away. It would be quick and painless he thought, no one would care anyway except maybe his friend Man-Young but even that could be lost in an instant the next time he traveled.

Derek made it to the top of the bridge that spanned the dual carriageway, it was a narrow cycle track which led onto some parkland in the distance. He could see the thunderous traffic racing under and away from him and thought it was a good choice, at least he had got something right.

He could never imagine that, in the space of one week, his whole life could be ruined beyond belief in such random circumstances. He almost missed the monotony of Supersuds and the inevitable sarcastic tones of Mr. Driver to ease him into the day.

He could accept all the moaning in the world from Honey if she would have him back, but that was impossible now. Gloria had gotten her evil mitts into her and wouldn't let go, he would become a weekend dad to his kids and suffer the pain of seeing someone else move in with a squarer chin and moralistic attitude towards his early fathering techniques.

In his final moments on earth, he desperately tried to conjure up something important or meaningful to say but he cursed his lack of verbal skills because he couldn't think of anything.

“Goodbye, cruel world,” cried Derek and cursed his God once more for his pathetic descent into the shell that he now was. He

never for a minute thought it would end up this way, but it was better than being hit by a blue frozen toilet brick from a passing airplane or falling into a farmer's cesspit without anyone ever knowing where he lay.

He finally plucked up the courage to jump, let himself go and dropped rapidly like a brick; it seemed to happen in slow motion and he suddenly had flashbacks of happier times appear in his mind. It was a curious sensation and he now felt at peace with the world. Derek stretched out his arms to receive his maker and ...

Thump!

All Derek could see was a mound of freshly dug soil as his whole body fell completely into it like a dirty snow angel.

He imagined he was in heaven and had fallen into God's daffodil bed. It was his second munch of soil in a day and he didn't like the taste of it.

He looked up quickly and, to his complete amazement he found no such divine transportation but the great lumbering of an earth laden tip-up truck that happened, by chance, to be passing as he jumped.

Derek screamed up at the sky, "God! Oh why, oh why must you torture me this way? I can't even get this right, I'm pathetic, are you happy now? Have you had your fun? Answer me, goddamit!"

Exhausted by the lack of reply, he fell into the dirt once more. What surprised him the most, as he glanced around, was something curious sticking out of the rich crumbly darkness and he carefully crawled over to see what it was.

Derek peered at it for a few moments. It was a carefully drawn star map stenciled onto an even bigger constellation chart. Unfolding only a part of it to stop it becoming a sail and flying off, he could make out a name printed in the corner.

‘D. Hill, 43 Blossom Meadows, Runcorn’.

He couldn’t stop laughing at the irony of it all and just lay there, on his back at 60mph as if he was having a lazy Sunday in his own garden, which in fact he was.



Honey had arrived back at her mother’s and, in between cups of tea and comforting hugs from Gloria, was busy reassuring her kids that although daddy was a deranged lunatic he would be round again to take them to the park or cycling along a towpath. She was unsure of her conviction but there was nothing else to say.

She closed their bedroom door and made her way back downstairs.

“It’s all gone, Mother, what will I do now?”

Gloria looked at the pitiful sight that lay in front of her. Fortunately her best laid plans had included victim support and she tried her best to ease her daughter into her new life, much like an abused foal who had found a new paddock to run about in.

“Forget Derek now, dear, you must think of yourself and your children. Stay here for as long as you like until we can arrange for a new home, maybe something a bit nicer, hmmm?”

Honey smiled, she knew she was beaten and had no other option but her mother had several and one included Brian, who

would be coming round this weekend as arranged to fancy his chances.

“I hope, mother, that he finds himself again but I can’t do anymore for him. Poor Derek, he’s completely lost his trolley but you’re right, I must think of myself and the kids.”

Gloria nodded, a great execution of a well thought out scheme indeed.



The Universe continued its own monotonous rumbling as it slowly revolved. The Visioneer acted as if curious to know which boy would be paired with which for the cross world colonization experiment.

What each pupil didn’t know was that his will had already been set in motion and there was no such thing as completely random events, everything could be controlled, it was only a lack of experience that allowed chance to drift in but the pupils were progressing quite well.

“Class, I have the selected pairings before me, you will see yours appear on the parchment in front of you. I would like you to carefully choose a specimen that would favour this transfer if yours has been lost. Be mindful of its selection, it will determine your marks and may propel you to the front of the pack. Good luck.”

Chance, luck, fortune, simply a few made up words that impersonated the fundamental truth of an experienced practitioner, such variables did not exist in any universe, everything was calculated and the outcome had a mere randomized knock on effect but there was order nonetheless.

If you hit a pack of reds on a snooker table it would appear random but they all had determined paths and could affect each others, unless you were meant to hit a colour then your opponent would gain four points and make you look stupid.



God Boy watched the carefully written pairing appear on his parchment. For some strange reason he was expecting it, the universe was built on conflict and it was no surprise where his specimen would be travelling to.

He glanced up and caught the eye of his brother who appeared to be smiling back as if he knew it was a no-contest.

“Pupils, I will also remind you that, during this experiment, if your specimen perishes before the pairings selection then you will lose marks. It is an added variable and I do like a challenge. The test will begin shortly. Good luck again!”

God Boy knew there was little time and he needed to will his subject into action before it was too late, this was going to be tricky, very tricky indeed.



The heavily laden truck decided it was time to offload its soiled meal and lifted up its back to disgorge its contents. Derek, holding onto the remnants of his life, slid down the slope onto a mound of rubbish ... a huge mound of rubbish that made up Runcorn Council's landfill depot.

The stink was incredible; gulls were swooping low overhead and making an awful racket. A big pile of guano dropped from the sky and landed on Derek's head with an almighty splat; to every

squawking bird it appeared that a new kid was in town ready to steal their food and they made sure Derek ran for his life, as they continued to harass him amongst the rancid pong until he was a safe distance away.

Fat council workers in orange vests were busying themselves lazing around and shouted over to him to get out of there. To all intents and purposes Derek looked like a tip scrounger and they hated those the most.

He ended up on a service road about three miles from town. There was a queue of cars offloading all the crap they once wanted for a few brief moments, before making space for something equally useless and unfulfilling. They glanced over at Derek, mostly with looks of disgust, as the tramp like creature shuffled his way up the road.

Eventually he saw a cabbie heading in his direction and hailed it, but there was no way the man was going to stop, even for a big tip. Derek cursed the heat and his predicament as he watched the black taxi disappear into the distance.

Shuffling along at a depressingly slow pace, somewhere between sloth and snail, it was about two hours before Derek finally arrived back at his volcano. He could see the police had cordoned it off with yellow tape; the mound was much smaller now and streaks of dirty tyre tracks snaked away from the scene.

The only people near the tape now were some children who were contemplating making it into some fantastic play area. Derek caught the eye of a little girl who watched the dirty dump monster make its way over to where they all stood. She stared for a few moments like all kids do without embarrassment before taking pity on him.

“Ice lolly, mister?” she called in a rather small voice and handed him the half contents of a blue plastic tube.

Smiling at her, he took the offering, “Thank you, that is kind of you.”

It was a simple gesture but, to her, he looked like he needed it.

If Derek ever desired a refreshing drink it was right now and it was always at moments like this that you really appreciated things. Anything attained through hardship was always remembered more than that which was not.

Sucking back the icy contents, he continued to walk up to the mound and into the depths of its belly. The little girl watched the monster descend until he was seen no more.

Derek arrived at the back of the garden and could see the tree house with not a soul around. He was half expecting his friend to appear with a friendly face and down to earth attitude but even Man-Young was gone. A note had been pinned to the wall of the wooden exterior and he pulled it off to examine the contents.

‘Police come, taken prisoner, break more rocks, goodbye, Man-Young’.

He stared at the hastily scrawled note with sadness and was ready to crawl into the six by four hole when a cry suddenly came over the fence.

“Derek, my God, you look awful!”

A concerned pair of eyes and nose appeared and stared at him in awe.

“Hello, Trevor, I’m sorry about your conservatory, you only had it installed the other day.”

“Never mind that, Derek, your bloody house is missing, that’s far, far worse. You look a mess, come over to mine and get cleaned up!”

Derek sighed; it didn’t seem to make a difference anymore whether he was scrubbed or dirty. “It’s ok, I was just going to take a nap in my new house.”

Trevor eyed the abode that could pass as a new starter home and shook his head profusely. “Nonsense, Derek, you need a shower and a stiff drink, you’ve been through a lot, come over here now.”

Complying with the request he made his way round to his new drop in centre. He could see Petunia busying herself, placing plastic bin liners on the floor after each step he made towards the shower, “Hello Petunia, nice to see you again,” he beamed.

“Oh, Derek, you look awful, this won’t do. Get the man some clothes would you, darling?”

“Certainly, right away.”

Derek hadn’t spent much time with his neighbours on account of Honey’s delusional competitiveness, but he saw a side to them he hadn’t seen before and it was comforting.

He scrubbed off the soil and the gifts from his flappy friends as he basked in the gloriously warm shower. A huge puddle of dirt was forming a pool of black that blocked the plug hole.

Trevor had laid out a rather dapper tweed trouser and jumper combo with a nice cotton shirt; a bit much for the weather outside, but he found it quite light and comfortable.

A transformed Derek made his way back down the stairs and thanked his hosts for their help in his time of need. Trevor handed him a stiff brandy for his troubles.

“Get this down your hatch, it’ll perk you up.”

Derek gulped the rich contents down and smacked his lips. “Thank you, Trevor and Petunia, for being so kind. Would you mind if I used your phone? I need to find out from the police where my Korean friend is.”

They both looked at him a little oddly. “Sure, Derek, whatever you like.”

He was known to be a strange fish but they liked him the most as he was the most approachable of their neighbours and in an instant he was handed a cordless phone.

He dialled the local station and a gruff voice answered, “Hello, Runcorn District Police, how can I help you?”

“Hello officer, Derek Hill here, I’m looking for my friend, Man-Young. He said you’d taken him away, is that true?”

There was a slight pause on the other end while the bored officer asked around for information, “Yes, do you know, sir, that he’s an illegal immigrant?”

It was plainly obvious to Derek what his situation was. “Of course, officer, we were breaking rocks in a North Korean

detention camp before we escaped and were transported back here.”

An even more gruff reply came shooting back, “Don’t make jokes Mr. Hill, this is a serious issue; harbouring someone who does not have the legal right or documentation to remain in this country is a criminal offence.”

Derek had had enough of bureaucracy but he couldn’t push it too far. “Sorry, sir, I had no idea, where is he now?”

“Doncaster, at the Lindholme Immigration Removal Centre to be processed for deportation. Can you tell me how you came to be in the company of this man?”

“I woke up next to him in my wife’s bed” Derek’s reply sounded rather wincey.

“Sir, I must warn you again, this is a serious matter. We would like you to come down to the station and answer a few questions.”

Derek slammed the phone down in disgust. At least he had an address. He quickly turned around to thank his neighbours for their kindness but was instantly greeted with fixed eyes and gaping mouths as Trevor and Petunia tried to take in his last comment to the officer.

“I’ll just see myself out,” he mumbled. It was obvious he needed to leave. “Thank you, I’ll bring the clothes back when I’m done.”

A stammering Trevor could only mouth, “Keep them, Derek, they’re yours now,” as he discreetly shepherded the symbol of depravity out of his front door.

Turning to his wife, who was shocked beyond belief, he said “The dirty sod, I always knew there was something dodgy about that pair; keys in the bowl and pampas grass, I suspected it all along!”

A transformed, dapper looking Derek hastily tucked his star map into his breeches and grabbed his Celestron telescope, in case it fell into enemy hands, before marching off to the bus stop for a day trip to Doncaster.



God Boy was running out of time. He needed Derek to be closer to his goal for him to have any chance of success in this experiment. The other boy was busy plotting his transfer; it would be a freakish munch-fest once his specimen arrived on Derek's planet.

He willed Derek a little closer. Judging by the poor transport links from Runcorn to Doncaster, especially if he took the discounted coach with his shortage of cash, it was likely to be nine hours after a million dreary stops.



The bus stop was crowded with the usual motley crew of old ladies, teenage dole wallers and foreign students; they all looked at the modern day intrepid explorer with interest.

Derek smiled back and was peering at the timetable looking for the next pickup time, when everyone around him gasped in sheer wonder at the fact that this eccentric man had simply vanished before their very eyes.

A few micro seconds later and Derek gave a big jolt of surprise when his bus stop was replaced with another of equal uniform dullness and, to his surprise, directly in front of him was a pristine looking detention centre instead of the familiar row of houses that bordered his mound of soil.

A panic stricken Derek looked around and could see a new group of mainly Afghans and Eastern European looking men who were equally aghast at his Mr. Benn like arrival. Derek ran across the road towards the centre and found that the plaque said he was in Doncaster.

He was so used to transportation by now that he thanked his god for saving him a pound and calmly strode into the old RAF compound; he signed in at the security gate, announced he was a visitor and took his seat amongst the couple of dozen family visitors in the plastic chaired official reception area.

He could only make out foreign sounding tongues and wondered if he would see his friend again if only to say goodbye and to wish him well.

Derek took a ticket and waited his turn, whiling away the hours reading 'Hello' magazine. He noted with interest the socialite parties with the likes of Henrietta Asquib-Smythe and Rupert Baritone-Trump in attendance and wondered if his new found look would allow him entrance to the next one.

A rather bored official called out for the umpteenth time of the day, "Derek Hill to see Man-Young Chin."

He raised his hand and walked over. "No gifts, sir, you will have to take that telescope back with you."

Derek laughed. It wasn't the kind of parting gift you would hand to people as you saw them off, maybe a locket or a letter but not a telescope.

He nodded in compliance. It was pointless arguing, there was always a fixed, pre-rehearsed answer to any argument, with further layers of obstruction if you managed to get past the first one.

He was led into a room which looked like it was modelled on the Yemenese style of interrogation he had seen before, a couple of plastic chairs and menacing looking guards standing around in case of trouble.

Derek rested his telescope on his lap and waited for the detainee to emerge. A few minutes passed and eventually a jumpsuited Korean walked in.

“Derek! I knew you come, my friend.”

Man-Young, who now had a Chin at the end of his name, smiled widely as he looked at his cohort.

“Friend indeed, ‘Chin’, I came back to the tree house and you were gone.”

Chin eyed him from the other side of the table and, with a heavy sigh, began to speak. “I thought maybe I live new life here, eat biscuits, watch Richard and Judy, but man take me away, now here.”

“No more rock breaking for you though, Man-Young, you’re going home!”

It was an odd conversation and the guard eyed them suspiciously because of it. He was more used to conversations about the quality of food and sleeping arrangements.

“Wife still pig, Derek, she wait for me back home. Only reason I end up in North Korea.”

A confused Derek looked back. “What do you mean ‘only reason you were in North Korea’? You got captured after straying into their territory?”

Chin shook his head in a sorrowful gesture, he hadn’t told Derek the whole truth. “If you had fat wife like me, Derek, you would make trip across border, break rocks more enjoy than break buns with wife!”

Derek was bemused, no wonder his friend didn’t want to go back.

“You could always go across again, Chin, if it gets too much.”

Chin nodded his head, “What about you, Derek, what you do now, no house? Where wife?”

“Lost them all, Chin, they left me, I don’t know, everything you see here is all I own in the world.”

His friend gave a big smile back, he knew a solution. “Derek, you come to South Korea, we fish together, you be happy, we share wife, less trouble then, simple.”

The guard had heard quite enough by now, it was time to process the next illegal immigrant. “Gentleman, that’s the end of the visit, you need to go now, Mr. Hill.”

An anguished Derek looked over to his friend for the last time, his only friend in the whole world and he thought about the bridge again. The chances of a second soil truck passing were very slim indeed.



Outside of the universe, a trillion billion light years away, a plot was forming and the creational clock was ticking. God Boy had mere milliseconds to up his odds of success. He gave one last will before the experiment started.



“So long, friend,” called Derek and he offered his hand in a final shake.

Chin was teary eyed now; he had a lot to thank his friend for. Although he pretended to like breaking rocks, he knew it hadn't been an enjoyable holiday. He stretched out his hand in friendship and ...

A flash of light and a cosmic boom erupted, mostly for effect to make it sound more dramatic than it was and the whole scene completely changed before their eyes. The dour guard and the grey interview room were gone and there stood Derek and his good friend Chin with locked hands and exasperated faces, trying to take in something completely unimaginable ... far, far away.



An equally surprised police officer at the Runcorn nick was starting to become baffled at several witness reports claiming a man had done a vanishing act at a bus stop and, to cap it all, a call from the detention facility claiming a Mr. Derek Hill had

kidnapped a South Korean deportee and simply disappeared into thin air from a locked room within the centre.

He checked his calendar to make sure it wasn't April 1st and noted down all of their comments. What surprised him the most was the fact he had been the one that had originally spoken to Mr. Hill. He had checked the time and logged the phone number of the original call, but couldn't tie in his rapid arrival at the centre, the times just didn't add up.

Being a keen amateur astronomer himself, he started to think about the asteroid impact and its possible connection to a space/time continuum. He'd watched a lot of episodes of Quantum Leap and also counted William Shatner as one of his heroes. The whole thing had excited a deep interest in him and he gave a quick call to the head of the local UFO spotters chapter, a renegade spin off from the other spotters club.

"Bob, strange goings on in Runcorn, possible alien abductions after the impact in Blossom Meadows. I think you should get some men over to the crash site for investigation, it might not be an asteroid!"

The rather nerdy man on the other end noted his words with interest but, as he was the chief geek amongst them all, he would be coordinating his own investigation.

"Thank you, Ted, I'll take it from here," he replied.

Any normal man would probably go 'Ooh and Aah' but not Bob Spade. Runcorn hadn't seen anything quite like this for sometime ... like never ... and he was glad he was in charge of the local chapter when something substantial had come to light.

He quickly paged his troops with cryptic messages and pulled out his trusty one megapixel camera for the expected grainy

images and ignored the fact his new mobile had a five megapixel facility. Hastily drumming up some peanut butter sandwiches and a weak flask of tea, he made his way out the front door and into the unknown.

CHAPTER SIX

Derek had half expected to be propelled to another silly so called 'Axis of Evil' country such as Iran but he couldn't have been anymore wrong; his alien abductors had plans a bit further field.

He and Chin could not believe the scenery. It was beyond fantastical; the best efforts of warped artists who normally painted unicorns running across silver streams could not have imagined in their wildest dreams such a place, even after munching a dozen gold top mushrooms.

They were standing on what appeared to be a beach, underfoot was a very fine light blue crushed substance which looked like flour and immediately behind them stood an abundance of white wispy feather like trees with fat stumps that ascended into almost a fine point. The breeze made the branches dance about and sway in rhythm.

What was surprising was the translucent body of water that spread out unimpeded to a distant horizon, the light blue sand underneath made it appear quite dazzling.

Derek was the first to speak, "Where the hell are we my friend?"

Chin was mesmerized by the sheer beauty and pointed at the creamy sky where a sun, not dissimilar in size to Earth's, blazed away. He finally spoke as he caught his breath, "Not sure, hope plenty good fish in sea."

It looked to Derek like a set straight out of Star Trek and he hoped he wouldn't have to start beating up the locals. He favoured the later episodes that tried to make friends with them but he knew in his heart that Captain Kirk was right, fists first, talk later.

It was ridiculous to believe he was still on Earth, no Kuoni brochure had ever displayed a place like this; he could however, see the same crash of waves in the distance as it relentlessly battered a wall of something that must have resembled coral, maybe the same as what he was now standing on.

His Korean friend decided to walk up the slope to investigate the trees, he was a practical man at heart and it could be strong material for building anything from a boat to a new tree house.

“My friend! Be careful, you don't know what's out there,” called Derek as he decided to see what the water felt like; for all he knew it could be acid. He dipped his tripod into the clear liquid and saw that it hadn't sizzled or dissolved into nothingness and decided to put his foot in.

The liquid felt warm, just like the temperature you would find on Tonga, but he decided not to step into it in case there were the same kind of monsters that appeared on old sailors maps with tusks and ridiculously sized heads.

A lonely frightened Derek started visualizing instant death and ran off up the slope to find his friend; it was so unfamiliar it made him feel completely uncomfortable.



Trevor and Petunia were sitting in their pristine living room trying to get over the shock of their neighbour's revelations. They were quite relieved that number 43 didn't exist any more in case they were sucked into a lurid world of debauchery and perversion.

Both were devout Christians and had no intention of growing Pampas on their front lawn as an invitation.

Trevor was sipping a large whisky in his comfortable reclining armchair next to the window and noticed something rather unusual happening outside near the earth mound.

“Petunia, there’s a man in an anorak with some sort of electrical device he’s prodding into the dirt!”

Petunia peeked through the net curtains at the sight of a rather large bald man in a kagool taking notes and using what amounted to an oversized microwave meat tester.

“Strange, what on earth is he doing?” she said but Trevor was none the wiser.

“Darling, do you think I should go out and investigate?” he answered as she carried on staring.

“Trevor, you will do no such thing! He could be one of Derek’s friends and you have no idea what he might do with that prong if you get within one foot of him, we’re safer here.”

He took another sip of his whisky and continued to watch.



Meanwhile, outside number 43, Bob Spade had been joined by some elements of his counter-invasion group made up mostly of traffic wardens, rail controllers and retired model aeroplane builders. They each had brought along similar probes and even something that looked like a box with red and green flashing lights you wore as a backpack. It was obvious to anyone that they meant business.

“Right, team, we need to spread out, quadrant formation, we can cover this whole area in less than half an hour and be gone before we raise any suspicions. You know what to look for; I think this could be the breakthrough we’ve been looking for.”

The whole nerdy team nodded in unison. They were a very serious bunch, as alien hunting was a serious business. The six strong group split up into pairs and covered the front, middle and back quadrants of number 43.

γ

“Darling, I’m sorry but my curiosity has gotten the better of me, if I’m not back in a few minutes ring the police.”

“God speed, dear,” replied Petunia as she watched her devoted husband walk towards the front door.

“Trevor!” she cried as if she had just witnessed a very close call indeed.

He turned back and was caught by surprise as she hastily grabbed his collar and began to fumble with it. “Your cravat, darling, you can’t go out looking like that!”

γ

Bob’s metal detector started to beep in the very heart of the crater; he hadn’t expected anything quite so soon. He started digging the freshly disturbed soil and just as he was about to retrieve the item he heard a shout coming from the back of the garden.

Placing his position stick into the ground, he ran up and over the slope to see one of his friends holding something that appeared

to be a jumpsuit; he nodded to his colleague and looked at the striped outfit with amazement.

It was human sized with prison type striped patterns that wrapped around from front to back but what really caught his interest was some strange looking symbols written on the front.

“Thanks, Colin, these symbols look almost like hieroglyphs, this is an amazing find.”

Another shout rang out from the front of the garden; someone had found a matching pair, a little smaller but with the same curious logo on the front.

Bob couldn't believe his luck. “Bag them up guys, they're coming with us!”

He walked back into the pit where his stick lay to dig up his find.

A sharp looking, tweed wearing local suddenly appeared from nowhere. “Hello, can I ask what you're doing here?”

The group leader jumped back with a start but quickly nodded to his friends to hide the items they had found before turning to Derek's neighbour with a smile that only a poker player could pull off. “Local council, sir, we're on a clean up operation.”

Trevor eyed him with suspicion, “But you're not wearing the regulation green overalls that council workers normally wear, do you have some ID on you?”

A shout came up from the back garden as another find was called out. “Would you excuse me, sir, for just one second?”

A nervous looking Bob Spade strode up the bank again to find out what the item was. “Colin, we’re rumbled, we need to get out of here, what have you found?”

His friend lifted up a pair of y-fronts with much excitement, “Bloomin’ amazing find this Bob.”

“It’s a pair of pants, Colin? What’s so spectacular about these?”

The nerdy understudy was still beaming and pointed with a twig to the back of the dazzling blue pair, “A stain, Colin, but not what you think. It looks like green ooze, hard to say but it’s dried now, worth a closer look?”

“Bloody hell Colin, amazing; I think this investigation goes deeper than we first thought. Bag them too and make your way to the cars before the real council gets called!”

An enquiring voice came bellowing out from inside the pit once more, “I say sir, could you come back here and tell me what the hell is going on?”

Bob, still smiling, returned once more to meet his suspicious on looker.

“Nothing to worry about, sir, everything is under control.”

A flustered Trevor became a little angrier at the shroud of mystery over the whole operation. “I can see that, sir, but I would like to see some credentials please or I will be forced to phone the authorities immediately!”

“I have them right here in my bag, I won’t be a moment.”

Bob knelt down to feign the rumbling of his satchel contents while he carefully turned his back to dig with his hands and pull up whatever was hiding under the soil. He only had to scrape a few inches before he stumbled across something so out of this world it raised the hairs on the back of his neck.

“Will you please hurry up or I am marching back into my house and calling straight away. This is preposterous!”

Bob grabbed the item and pushed it into his rucksack before pulling out something he’d packed to aid his getaway.

“Found it, it’s right here, sir.”

With a quick spin and a lunge of pure, raw fear, he dislodged the inside of his fresh peanut butter sandwich into the face of a startled Trevor, who fell back into the soft, dirty pit with a shriek.

Bob ran for his life up the slope and back to the waiting getaway cars as Trevor desperately wiped crunchy peanut butter from his eyes to focus again. “You maniacs!”

The group leader jumped into the car quickly and, with a screech of tyres from the old Fiat 500, it was gone, although from a standing start it took about 20 seconds to reach the end of the short road.

“Colin, you wouldn’t believe what I just pulled out! I couldn’t believe it myself, look at these, twisted but unmistakable.”

Colin almost lost control of the tiny car as he tried to take in the enormity of the item that now lay in front of him. “Aviators!”

Bob grinned with satisfaction, he knew like the rest of the carefully controlled group that they weren’t your everyday

sunglasses of choice, these particular specimens had turned up in virtually every alien abduction novel ever published. They could only point to the mysterious group of people who came to every scene of abduction to subdue witness statements and make them forget they ever saw green men prancing about on a picnic.

“Colin, get that suspicious sample analyzed, I fear from the looks of it that the Government have already got a hold of this case. I’m going to come back tonight for a closer look, see what else I can dig up!”



Derek and Chin had trekked into the wispy forest through enormous foliage, the most common of which was a blue and white speckled flower that looked like a cross between a lily and a daffodil. The petals alone were bigger than Derek’s head; he didn’t stand too close to them just in case they spat out something toxic and evil.

He called out to his friend who was making good headway through the brush, “Be careful, Chin, there could be anything out there!”

His friend just waved his arm up in the air as if to call Derek a sissy. He was trying to find a well worn path made by the locals but he couldn’t find any. Suddenly, something that resembled an orchid closed its petals and began to run away from him along with a few other spooked plants.

“Plant that walk!” said Chin. It was incredible, he watched as their root feet made haste to hide behind another giant blue flecked monster. “I hope that not walk,” as he looked up to take in its size.

Eventually they came out onto a beach that looked exactly like the one they had left. Derek sat down on the fine sand to take in the view once more.

“It’s not exactly big, is it my friend?” said Derek.

Chin began to survey the coastline and could make out, from this side, the curvature of a bay. “From guess, I say not very big at all.”

“Thank you my friend, very accurate guess it was too. Shall we carry on and explore the rest?”

“No bother, we find food, we eat, we make shelter.”

Derek loved his way of speaking, it didn’t require many syllables but he managed to get the point across very well. “One thing you missed though, what about water?”

His Korean friend didn’t have a clue, that was a tricky one indeed, but he was very skilled in scratching his head.

Derek was reminded of the Ancient Mariner rhyme as he looked out across the light blue bay, “Water, water, everywhere, Nor any drop to drink.”

Chin just looked at him and started laughing, “Derek, I fisherman and you one very strange fish, we go.”

There was one thing that Derek did remember; at some time in the history of man, for every edible morsel that had ever been tasted, someone had died tasting things that were not. It was going to be a lottery to see who would choke first to save the other.

They both ventured back into the creamy coloured forest, it was so white, in fact, that only a polar bear could blend into it ... luckily they hadn't met any just yet.

What was eerie though was the clump of walking plants about knee high that followed in their wake about ten yards back. Each time Derek looked round they would assume the painted statue pose and wait until he turned back to venture further.

There was not a single cloud in the sky, it could be the height of summer as far as they both knew, it did feel warm but not humid which helped. The planet's sun was going down over the horizon and it would be dark soon.

Chin eyed a rather nice clearing almost halfway between the two beaches. The foliage was quite sharp, looking a lot like palm leaves but harder, like wood with huge fingers. He walked over to one and tested its strength with a slap of his hand. "Like balsa, strange wood." he called and he pulled a big leaf from its root and joined it in an interlocking way with another next to it.

Leaf after leaf he joined until it looked like an igloo hut but with the kind of pieces you would find in a toddler's play set.

"Ingenious," cried Derek, who knew that his expertise lay only in watching plastic bottles run down a belt. He was lucky to have his friend come along or it would be curtains.

"Something missing, Derek," called his friend as they now sat within its wooden confines with a view to the sea.

"Women, beer, guitar, steak?"

"Insects."

It was not the answer he expected but Chin was right, they hadn't come across a single alien ant, fly, mosquito, caterpillar or anything creepy apart from the runner plants.

Derek and Chin peered out of their narrow entrance and could make out a group of plants, not rooted, just standing there because they had walked there of their own accord.

They both looked at each other with a slow rising fear, "Chin, I think some plants eat insects!"

His friend nodded and decided a door was needed so he took a spare leaf and locked it into place.

They could hear the rustle of roots brushing past in the sand and could see through the tiny slits created between leaf joins as a large band of curiously hungry looking flora descending on the hut.



A ridiculously large eye peered through a magnifying glass at a bright blue specimen that was so musty it could have stood up on its own accord or even climbed a wall.

"Donald, I've never seen a green stain on the back of underpants before," said Colin to his friend.

A bearded senior trekkie played with his hairy growth before delivering his verdict, "Just be glad it's not any other kind of stain!"

"Thanks, Donald, for that insightful offering. We need to get some sort of result before Bob rings in again."

“Could be an exclusive for our club; wipe a smile off the other group’s face!”

“Indeed, Donald, indeed, we had better take a sample.”

Colin and Donald were moonlighting a shift at Runcorn’s pathology lab, everyone else had gone home. A pathetic table lamp cast a sickly glow over the medium sized underpants and Colin scraped at the sample to deposit the dried green mass into a Petri dish.

Donald eyed the sample with a keen interest. “Colin, this could be the greatest breakthrough of our time, this could put us on the front cover of Seti-World.”

His colleague nodded enthusiastically in agreement, “I never thought I would see the day. I always believed it, like we all did, it could have happened anywhere but there’s no reason why our alien friends wouldn’t want to visit Runcorn.”

“Quite right, Colin, an alien visitor wouldn’t simply travel to a human’s favourite landmark as it is, of course, alien to this world, so it would be a random visit. The outstanding beauty of Runcorn must have enticed it here.”

The tension and excitement filled the small confines of the lab as the dish was placed into the sample analyser ready for the verdict, they knew that a negative result would signify alien matter and make them very famous. It was like watching the last National Lottery ball drop through the hole after they had marked off the previous five.

Meanwhile, a lone figure was treading very gingerly up the remaining mound of dirt left by the council workers in Blossom Meadows.

Bob Spade had parked his Fiat 500 around the corner out of sight of the angry neighbour he had assaulted earlier with the peanut butter sandwich, in case the well dressed man appeared again. He couldn't afford a visit by the police, they would ask a lot of awkward questions and he was afraid of getting his friend at the nick embroiled in what could possibly be something as important as Area 57.

The moon had decided to go on strike and it was an impossibly dark night. Bob was busy scouring the site with his faithful torch which threw a red glow over the remaining debris. The air was quite still and he could smell something not altogether pleasant as he made his way over to the back of the garden to look for more clues.

"Just stay calm, gather what you can and get out of here, Bob," he whispered to himself.

Over at the lab, the machine whirred away for what seemed like eons but eventually its digital display spewed out the results. Colin and Donald looked tentatively over at each other in astonishment, they couldn't fathom it, none of it made any sense whatsoever.

A surprised Donald stroked his beard once more and shook his head in an act of bewilderment.

"Better make the call, Colin. Bob won't believe this one bit."

A small vibrating sound erupted in Bob's black anorak jacket; it seemed that there was an anorak for all occasions and this one was suited for night time foraging. As a safety measure, Bob had smeared boot polish over his pink featureless face in case he was forced to hide in a crevice away from an angry cravat wearing lunatic, hell-bent on revenge.

He flipped open the phone just like Captain Kirk would have done on the Enterprise. “Colin, I hope this is important, do you have the results?”

“Affirmative, Bob,” came the eager reply.

A few seconds ticked by as Bob stared at his phone waiting for the answer but he had suddenly become aware of a faint growling sound, a deep guttural rumbling he had not heard before. It was followed by the same intense stench he had caught a whiff of earlier but this was singeing his nostrils. Whatever it was, it was coming closer to where he was standing.

“Colin, there’s something here, I can’t make it out, tell me the results so I can be on my way.”

His friend loved the theatrics but his silence was broken by Bob’s impatience so he delivered his results as best he could.

“Bob, it’s ridiculous to say the least, but the sample seems to have indicated that the stain is in fact ...”

A growl erupted a little too close for comfort as Bob lifted his red torch to finally illuminate the dark object that was now within five feet of his existence. Bob’s hairs stood up on the back of his neck as he took in the sheer enormity of the shape as it sidled up to him in the most fear inducing and horrifically menacing way possible.

“Sorry Colin, say again...”

“As I say, Bob, the sample is in fact nothing more than a ...”

Colin was waiting for another impatient reply but all he heard was a blood curdling scream on the other end of the line as a

purple tentacle had shot out from the dark and stunned its helpless victim into paralysis.

Bob's mobile dropped to the ground along with his trusty one megapixel camera that had managed to flash off a shot and illuminate the ugly great beast for a millisecond.

All Bob's bulging eyes could do was watch in horror as the long snouted brute moved in closer for a sniff, huge swathes of saliva drenched his face before it finally realised that humans could be a tasty alternative to a Pongwart and less dangerous too.

There was an almighty crunch as the Drakapod's teeth slammed down onto its helpless victim and in a split second, there was no more Bob Spade.

"Bob, can you hear me, come in Bob?" cried Colin on the other end of the line.

The great beast sniffed at the strange sounding device before lifting it up with its elephant like snout and crunching down on that too.

The line went dead and Colin turned alarmingly to his cohort, "Donald, I think Bob's in trouble, I never got chance to tell him the stain was nothing more than harmless camel spit!"

Donald begrudgingly nodded to his friend, "You know as well as I do that he's always playing practical jokes on us. Leave him be, let him come to us, he's always trying to keep us in suspense."

"I think you're right on this one. I don't know how dromedary spit came to be stuck to someone's underpants but it's definitely not what we thought it was. I had high hopes that, for once, this was going to be a great find."

Donald placed a comforting hand on his friend's shoulder. "Never mind, Colin, let's wrap up for tonight and go and get a well earned ale down at the Flag and Lamb."

The dim light was switched off as two depressed looking individuals shuffled out the door of the lab and decided it was time to drink away their disappointment.



Over what appeared to be a trillion light years away, a couple of frightened humanoids were bunched up inside their balsa like igloo awaiting their eventual fate.

"What are we going to do, Chin?"

They both sat entombed within the belly of their makeshift hut and all the while the sun was relentlessly beaming down through the slats and baking them like a Walkers crisp. Derek felt like all his water had drained out of his body, leaving something dry and unpleasantly brittle in its wake.

His equally parched Korean friend had run out of answers. He had about as many solutions as he himself had, which was none.

"I do not know, I very thirsty, place is hotting up!"

Derek nodded in agreement as he peered out through the slits to gawp, in fear, at the crowd of walking orchids that were busy running around the hastily constructed home, trying to find a way in.

"I'm glad you built it well, my friend, otherwise we would be toast by now but we can't stay here to rot."

“Not build good, Derek, look in corner!” cried his friend.

Derek turned his head in horror as he saw a group of white orchids slowly scratching away at the soft, fine sand as if they were dogs hastily burrowing into next doors’ garden.

“Oh my God, Chin, this is it, we’re going to die!”

His Korean friend gave a shrug of deathly acceptance as they huddled together to await their fate. It was no use filling in the holes as, by now, all around, the plants were digging in unison. It was only a matter of time before they managed to get in.

Chin grabbed hold of Derek’s hand in one final act of solidarity, “We have saying back home when face death, I translate, ‘Body turn to chop meat, head ripped from neck but face still smile’.

Derek’s lunatic friend had quite possibly delivered the worst ending speech to an inevitable demise, “Great, thanks, Chin, that really helped a lot.”

“Just a saying, Derek, you not Korean, you not understand.”

Derek and Chin finally let out a scream as an advancing army of ravenous orchids shot through a tunnel and headed straight at them with lightening speed.

What happened next was a blur but, in sheer panic, Derek had wet himself as he and his friend were dragged by hundreds of feelers out of the igloo through the large tunnel entrance and towards the beach.

They were both gripped with sheer terror as they were finally dumped unceremoniously onto the soft sand.

A orchid, larger than the rest, summoned the group to disperse and form a semi circle around their captives and Derek eyed the creature nervously as it sauntered over to him appearing to sniff at every part of him as he lay there, just like a dog would do if it was fed tripe instead of prime cuts.

Chin had got over his primeval scream and had begun to laugh at the sight of Derek whimpering in the sand. “He think you stink like dog doo, Derek, maybe you not good enough to eat?”

“Shut up, Chin, this is no laughing matter, we are going to be very much dead in a couple of minutes!”

The apparent leader summoned, with a leafy gesture for the plants closest to the water to make way for him as he walked casually over to the sea to gulp the water with a satisfying slurp.

The others soon followed and joined in with their own hearty gulps.

“Christ, Chin, look! They’re drinking the sea water!”

They both stared, in utter bewilderment, at the sight as hundreds of leafy natives bent their petally heads to slurp from the vast watery trough.

With a flourish of leaves, the leader motioned for Derek and Chin to join him and for a split second it appeared to be a friendly gesture and they both made their way to the water’s edge. Derek was too thirsty to care whether he was about to taste the salty alien contents and spit it out and dived in, with his head half submerged in the liquid.

As a child he had remembered very well the accidental gulps of brown, murky water at the seaside in Morecambe and looking

over curiously at the waste pipe that stretched from the beach to some unknown source hidden behind the sea wall.

Chin stood back for a few seconds, happy that his friend had decided to sacrifice his life, in the name of testing, for his; for all Derek knew he was about to drink acid. His worries were dispelled instantly when his black head popped up and turned around to his friend with utter glee, “Chin, it’s fresh water! I can’t believe it!”

Chin didn’t require a second invitation and dived into the water head first and drank to his heart’s content, laughing as he poked his head up between sweet gulps of nectar.

“Chin, we’re saved, I thought we were going to die, those plants were just trying to help us, ridiculous.”

The whole scene took on a rather South Pacific feel to it as they both looked back at the tribe of plants standing on their rooty feet gawping in wonder at their new discovery. The leader decided drinking time was over and again motioned to Derek and Chin to follow him back to the beach.

“Maybe food now, Derek, we should follow?” cried Chin, whose belly had taken on the sound of a grumpy grizzly.

Derek shook his head at his hungry simpleton, “You’re always thinking of food, Chin, we could BE the food for all you know!”

“No choice, Derek, sit here until look like prune or follow and eat.”

With a great feeling of apprehension, they both clambered out of the sparkling water and followed the leader up a well beaten path. The multitude of curious orchids quickly gathered behind their feet creating an impenetrable barrier that allowed no retreat.

Derek turned to his hungry brother and with a sigh announced, “Well, if we are modern day explorers I’ll name this place ‘Nelly Beach’ after my mother, not that it makes any difference now.”

Chin nodded in approval, ever the optimist but he had a nagging feeling in the pit of his stomach that all was not well, or maybe it was a hankering for Hob Nobs, he couldn’t tell.



A coiffured and cravat clad gentleman, who had risen early to greet the morning sunshine, took a stroll up and over a mound of freshly impacted soil. He was curious to know why so many people had visited the sight looking for clues to something that he couldn’t fathom. For all intents and purposes, this was a normal suburb in Runcorn and the only frequent visitors, apart from residents of Blossom Meadows, was the swarm of Jehovah’s Witnesses who had yet to witness anything worthwhile.

Trevor Carpenter trod very gingerly in his brown loafers across the soft soil. He could make out very little of interest that hadn’t already been taken away by the council but something shiny had caught his eye near the end of the garden, something he hadn’t noticed before.

He stooped to pick it up. It was a small Nikon camera, a little the worse for wear, and had some sort of sticky dark ooze dripping from it.

“Nice choice of camera, Derek,” he exclaimed to no one in particular, “but you should be more up to date, this is the 21st Century, my boy.”

As he was standing there, he suddenly had the weirdest sense of being watched. It was the creepiest of feelings and he looked

again at the ground and noticed he was standing in the footprint of something ridiculously large, he counted not five pointy claw imprints but fifteen.

“Good God, what is this?” he exclaimed, as he backed away steadily from the large bushes that dominated the rear of Derek’s garden. His fear alone made him turn heel and run back to the house just as a poisoned tendril shot out from the undergrowth and missed his tweed by a whisker.

Petunia watched as a flustered but permanently stylish man came bursting into the reception room. “Trevor? Are you ok?”

She stood up from her comfy lounge chair to see what all the commotion was about.

“Darling, I just recovered this camera from the back of Derek’s garden but what really gripped me was the sight of a giant footprint laid bare in the dirt, it was so large I was literally standing right in the middle of it!”

Petunia scoffed at such a remark, “Nonsense, Trevor, next you’ll be telling me a remake of Jurassic Park is in the offing; what I’m more interested in is what that grubby man has stored on that camera!”

Trevor nodded and looked at the camera with distaste, “From what we’ve witnessed so far, darling, I’m reluctant to even venture within that man’s sordid little world. Shall we just hand it over to the police to deal with?”

His wife’s eyes widened and bulged on stalks. “We most certainly will not, Trevor, I, for one, would like to know how low this man has decided to descend!”

Petunia quickly ran to the kitchen and donned a pair of Marigolds and proceeded to wipe the sticky contents off the camera with a tissue. "I wouldn't even like to guess what this substance is."

Trevor was taken aback by her curiosity but he said nothing and flipped open the cover to pull out the memory card. "If you're sure, darling? The contents of this could be very disturbing, but so be it."

They both ran upstairs to load the images onto the computer. The screen flickered into life and began processing the contents in that ridiculously slow way that makes you think that only the camera casing had made any advancements in design over the years.

As the grainy images eventually flickered into view it was no surprise that Petunia and Trevor's expressions turned from wonderment to horror as they clicked, tentatively, from one picture to the next.

"The disgusting, puerile degenerate, how could Honey have put up with this type of carry on?" Petunia remarked quickly.

"Beats me, dear, whoever these people are, I'm certainly glad we have no involvement in their sordid existence!"

The camera memory could only hold about fifty low resolution images but several contained unmistakable shots of men wearing oversized rubbery suits and breathing apparatus straight out of an army surplus catalogue.

They all appeared to be standing proud with various items of electronic equipment, something you would find if you allowed Ghostbusters to be filmed by a Berlin underground S&M movie director.

The last image took Petunia by surprise as it was so different to the rest. The frame was completely dark around the edges but a flash had illuminated the image to reveal the most ugliest creature imaginable.

“It looks like an elephant, Trevor!” she exclaimed.

Trevor scrutinised the image carefully. “More like the elephant man, look at those rows of teeth! I’ve never seen a set of gnashers like those on any elephant I know!”

“Trevor, this is serious, whatever these images are I don’t want anything to do with them.”

Her obedient husband nodded his head, he had seen enough but he still couldn’t get the footprint out of his head. “Shall I phone the police about these images and tell them about the print on the floor I saw earlier?”

Petunia decided to take action and with a deft click of the mouse deleted the last image of the horrific Drakapod.

She turned and scowled at Trevor in the most menacing way, “You certainly will not, Trevor, I’ve had my fill of people trampling up and down the bomb site next door. It’s obviously children playing pranks. I would like some normality around here again. Throw the camera over the fence Trevor.”

The Nikon was thrust into his weary hands and he walked out of the room to dispose of it once more.

Petunia was left to stew in her own juice, “Derek Hill, I cannot believe after all of these years as neighbours that I, Petunia Carpenter, failed to see you for what you really are, you sick, twisted little man. Words fail me.”

She switched off the computer in disgust and hoped the images hadn't infected her innocent looking machine.



In the furthest reaches of the universe, even further than any earth bound telescope had ever reached, there sat a small island of the purest cream and blue, the centre of which was a great volcano that arched up alarmingly into the sky. Its dominance over the island had been hidden to Derek and Chin because of the abundance of foliage way down below.

“Where do you think they’re taking us, Chin?” asked Derek who was, by now, used to being led away by some measure of authority.

“Probably drop us in top of volcano, like giant cooking pot,” came back the matter of fact reply.

It was certainly heating up as they clambered towards the summit, surrounded by thousands of the nimble plants they had met earlier. In the distance they could make out the leader climbing steadily along the well beaten path.

Eventually, after a couple of hours' hard slog, they levelled out onto a plateau. It was shaped like a baseball field and held a magnificent view over the whole island. About five hundred metres along they could see the unmistakable cone like pipe of the volcano that was hissing and bubbling, every so often emitting wisps of smoke into the clear creamy sky.

“Derek! Look over there.”

His Korean friend had spied a gathering of larger plants, the same blue and white as before but, in this instance, they all

appeared to be wearing some sort of ceremonial dress made out of a fine plaited substance that looked very similar to what natives would wear on a Polynesian island.

They were seated in front of a small table made out of the same wood that Chin had erected his igloo from. "Practical, Derek, this wood, many uses, I like, maybe build boat?"

Derek was not impressed with his childlike friend. "For Christ's sake, Chin, we're not on vacation, this is serious."

Chin rolled his eyes, these westerners sure were suspicious.

An awkward pause ensued as the crowd of plants each walked past the visitors and seemed to nod their petals in a greeting before scampering off to what appeared to be a seating area where they dropped their roots and stood awaiting the next development to unfold.

The leader who had dragged them towards the water and up the mountain was the last to bow. It was a strange idea to communicate with a petally alien when Derek, for the life of him, couldn't make any eye contact, shake a hand, talk in a common simple tongue or exchange gifts. He wished he had popped a bottle of Baby-Bio in his pocket before he had been whisked away to this ridiculous place.

Derek and Chin were suddenly jerked out of their awkward silence by the aggressive beating of jungle drums which sounded quite primeval. They turned to see a group of plants knocking the same wood again in a rhythmical fashion.

A line of runner plants came forth with torches. The sticks they were holding in their leaves suddenly burst into flame in unison and were placed around the semi circle of wooden tables.

The drums beat faster as the plants scurried back to the crowd of plants that had gathered around.

Several more plants stepped forward, the same shape and colour as the others but could be seen to be carrying bowls. They approached the intrepid ‘explorers’ table and dropped the large vessels onto it. Derek and Chin stared in wild excitement at the contents, it was ridiculous to imagine but it was clearly not what they had expected.

“Fish,” cried Chin and dug his hands into the cooked tasty meat and gulped it down, handfuls at a time. It was no use remembering table manners as they were both so hungry by now.

Derek cried in wonderment, “I can’t believe it my friend, I feared the worst I really did, they just want to be friends with us.”

It could be said that, for the whole universe over, if you were going to be creating fish, it was likely they would all look and act the same over millions of years. The hairy man who was Darwin was pretty clued up on this matter, evolution had deemed it so.

Chin looked up from his feasting bowl with bits of white meat hanging from the corners of his mouth to see that the other plants were eating also, “Maybe human not on menu tonight, I like plants, Derek, they think like me, like same diet.”

Derek nodded and accepted a bowl from a passing plant that contained the same sweet tasting water they gulped from the shore earlier.

A little while later, after they had gorged themselves enough to ever remember they had been starving previously, the sound of the drumming stopped.

Seated at the end of the tables stood a very large but gnarled plant of white and blue who decided it was time to stand up and address the crowd.

A high pitched musical rhythm appeared to emanate from this particular flora and he moved his head of petals around to take in the whole crowd. Everything stood in silence as he sang and it was apparent to Derek and Chin that he was the leader.

He clapped his branches together and sat down. Instantly, a chorus of singing erupted into the sky from the rest of the group.

“Chin, it’s so beautiful, the sound is amazing, I never knew plants could sing.”

His friend was speechless for a change; he was still gorging on his food, like a pig in a trough that had found a little more room.

The drums began to beat once more as the chief sat down. A parade of root bound beauties came tumbling forth into the circle and began to sway to the rhythm of the jungle drums and the high pitched melodies.

Derek nudged his friend to take notice. “These plants, Chin, must be female, look at the plaited skirts and the creamier leaves.”

“Wife never dance like that, but pig don’t dance, all make sense.”

The feminine leaves danced in a rhythm so beautiful and in time to the beats that a bystander could be forgiven for thinking they had arrived at Tahiti in the 1800’s. The air was balmy and calm and the sky was now beginning to be tinged with orange from the sun. The smells of the flowers together with the sweet water they drank made a definite heady impression on them and, for

once, Derek forgot where he was and began to tap his fingers on the table to the rhythm, just as he would have done if he had been hiding away in the corner at an 80's nightclub afraid to get up and dance.

The plants grew wilder and wilder and the drums began to speed up and reach a crescendo when suddenly a couple of female plants leapt from the circle and wrapped their leaves around the two visitors.

Derek let out a huge cry ... he wasn't expecting this. It had been the dread of many a disjointed man with no soul in his feet to be called up onto centre stage and strut his stuff.

He was visibly sweating, but for Chin it was a welcome distraction and he was the first to reach the centre and dance in time to the beats. As a fisherman, he had come back to many a feast and soiree and he couldn't understand why Derek was so stiff within himself but put it down to him thinking too much and not letting himself go.

"Dance, Derek, dance, it easy," cried his friend in fits of laughter, as he eyed the hapless Derek trying to remember Agadoo or the chicken dance.



"I can assure you, madam, it is highly likely that your husband is not missing at all, he's probably sleeping off a heavy drinking session with his friends the night before."

Ted Postlethwaite had been fielding calls from concerned residents for an hour at the local Runcorn nick and he was growing tired of all the nonsense that was spewing forth. Try as he might though, there was a nagging feeling that all wasn't right in the

Blossom Meadows suburb and as much as he wanted to continue chewing his doughnuts and slurping his tea, he had better mention it all to the sergeant.

He rang off from the last irate and frantic call to head over to his office and see what the big chief had to say.

Sergeant Brian Argentine was sitting comfortably at his desk, with a hand mirror placed a few inches from his face admiring his wonderful new bouffant, when he was rudely interrupted from his narcissism by a hefty knock at the door.

“Come in,” he shouted and watched, with interest, as one of his minions strolled in looking a little flustered.

“Ah, Ted, nice to see you, what brings you here? Has the front desk run out of Krispy Kremes again?”

Ted brushed off the reference to his rather portly exterior and sat in the chair opposite to deliver his news.

“Not this time, sergeant, ever since the Derek Hill disappearance I’ve had several missing persons reports from the public, many in the last few hours.”

His coiffured superior listened with interest, feigned a smile, but noted that time was getting on and he had a date tonight with the one lady he had pursued for a long time but who had brushed him off time and time again.

“Look, Ted, can’t you just file these along with the rest. It’s just blind panic as always, most people are usually found in a stupor behind bins or prancing around playing the field and simply missed the last bus home.”

Brian glared at his over eager officer, time was ticking on and he had other affairs to deal with, particularly affairs of the heart.

“Sergeant, I would, but a pattern is forming; I think we may have a serial killer on the loose!”

“Bloody hell, Ted, I think you might have spent a little too much time with your nerdy friends down at the saucer club.”

“It’s not a saucer club, sergeant; it’s a UFO investigation unit.”

Brian rolled his eyes and wished his promotion would come quicker so he could get out of this district and into a larger unit where there were fewer misfits. He got up and paced around the room, stopping by a large mirror to admire his hair before turning back to the hapless officer once more.

“It’s all the same to me, so tell me, Ted, what makes you think we have Runcorn’s answer to Hannibal Lecter in our midst...hmmm?”

Ted was sweating a little but he couldn’t just file it away, this time it was too important. “Sergeant I’ve had four calls from the Blossom Meadows area, all have said that there’s been no sign of their beloved. They are all completely unrelated. I think it’s worth an investigation.”

Brian scratched his chin. “Blossom Meadows again, I’m sick of hearing about the place. Do you think it could just be prank calls from over zealous alien hunters?”

“I don’t think so, sergeant, the more I think about it the harder it seems to shake off the feeling that something is just not right. Bob Spade, the leader of our UFO unit, is missing also. I was told he was heading over there to investigate a possible encounter. We

haven't heard from him since although he does spend a lot of time in his room."

Sergeant Argentine delivered his verdict. "Bob, I'm not surprised at all, he's a little weird anyway, but for the rest, I suggest you send a patrol car around there and visit each caller in turn and take the particulars. I want to know where they were going, what time they left and when they were expected to return, see if we can build up a picture."

Ted breathed a sigh of relief, "Righty ho, sergeant. One more thing, I noticed you have a new hairdo. Are you heading somewhere tonight? A date maybe?"

Brian felt his cheeks reddening. "None of your business, Ted, now get out, it's getting late."



"Honey dear, your tea is going cold, how much longer are you going to be in that bathroom?" called Gloria from the foot of the stairs.

"Mother! Stop fussing, a girl has to make sure everything is perfect," came the muffled reply.

Gloria scrunched her face up in a ball and made her way back into the dining room to keep order over the children. "Stop that, Jack, your mash is mashed enough! You don't need to keep bashing your spoon into it!"

Citron and Ella were busy giggling to themselves once more at the sight of the little creature's headlong destruction of his potato mountain.

“Girls, stop that at once and eat your dinner.”

She was beginning to wonder whether the temporary living arrangements would become a permanent fixture and looked around in horror at the chips, marks, pulls and tears that were springing up all over the place.

Finally Honey made her appearance. “What do you think, mother?”

Gloria took in the heels and silky red dress that hugged her daughter’s figure like cling film, “My word, child, you look simply fabulous!”

Honey smiled at the compliment and sat down to dinner. She had welcomed the chance to think about something completely different than the horrific events over the past few weeks. Derek didn’t seem to come into it once she took in the uniformed gentleman who had graced her door the previous Sunday for tea.

Gloria had done her homework and, inside her calculating mind, a thought of a better future for her daughter and grand children rather than the one she had been faced to endure over the years in the shape of Derek Hill, was forming.

“Don’t eat too much, Honey dear, you’ll develop a belly bulge, that won’t do.”

Her daughter continued to eat to stifle the nervous feeling she had in her stomach, it had been years since she had been on a date and the last one at the restaurant was best forgotten about.

“Mummy, where are you going, is daddy coming?” asked Citron.

“No my darling, daddy has gone away for a while, I have a friend coming over.”

Jack continued to smash his potato which now resembled a starchy swamp.

Ella was next to interrupt, “Are you going to meet that man with the big hair?”

Honey sighed, it was the one striking feature she had noticed above the uniform and she didn’t like it. “Yes, Ella, but something’s can be changed, anyway it’s not important. Mummy needs to go out and enjoy herself, as she’s had a very hard time of it of late.”

A big dollop of mash came flying over and hit Honey’s left breast with a splat.

“Jack! For God’s sake, will you stop doing that,” cried Gloria as Honey leapt to her feet and ran out the room. “Mother, I can’t wear this now, it’s ruined!”

Pandemonium ensued. The girls shrieked with laughter at this sight, and, with their Nan remonstrating them severely, their mother Honey rushed up the stairs, crying loudly.

The doorbell rang and brought order back to the house. “Children, be quiet now, this will be Honey’s friend, on your best behaviour.”

Gloria got up to answer the door and could make out a large shape through the front glass as well as an extended hair do tipping a few inches above the frame.

“Brian! So nice to see you again,” she cooed.

A posy of lilies and roses came tumbling forth from behind his back, "Hello Gloria, these are for you."

Here was a man that knew etiquette she thought, as she welcomed him in.

"Honey dear, Brian's here," she called in a rhyme. Even that sounded better without the name Derek.

"I'll be down in a minute," Honey answered.

Sergeant Brian Argentine made his way into the house clutching a larger bunch of flowers for Honey. He greeted the kids in the stern way that most officers do and the children looked back at him in the way they always do without awkwardness.

Gloria ushered him into the kitchen for a discrete conversation, "So sergeant, or should I say Brian?"

"Brian is fine Gloria, I'm not on duty now."

"Any news of Derek?"

"Sadly no, Gloria," he offered with a feigned hint of compassion. "We think he may have skipped the country. I don't know what mess he's got himself into but he's wanted for harbouring an illegal immigrant from Korea."

Gloria smiled inside, this just might be her lucky day. "Well, you take good care of Honey, she needs to be treated like a lady again. I never did like that man Derek, there was something wrong with him. I can't quite put my finger on it but ..."

Brian clasped her arms in a comforting embrace. “Don’t you worry, Gloria, or is it too early to say Mother?” he offered back with a cheeky glint in his eye.

“I never knew why Honey allowed herself to be ensnared in those grubby mitts of Derek’s, I really don’t, when you were always there for her.”

“Well, we all change eventually; I daresay I was too handsome at the time.”

Gloria chuckled, here was a man with big prospects, he had retired his clipboard and printer a long time ago and made sure his minions did all the work for him. This translated into another notch up the social status ladder as far as she was concerned.

Honey finally appeared after blow drying the wet patch which had resulted from Jack’s attack, she was determined to wear the dress she had picked earlier, mash or no mash. Smiling at Brian, she took in the whole height of the man with a hairdo that looked like a giant wave about to come crashing down.

“Hello, Brian,” she purred.

“Wow, Honey, you look fabulous, these are for you,” he offered as he handed over the big bunch of red roses.”

Her eyes glistened at the sheer sight of them. Over the years, she was used to seeing Derek appear at the back door in his wellies, filtering out pansies from a big bunch of weeds he had gathered in the back garden.

“Let’s go, Honey, I have a table booked for nine. We can’t be late; the music starts at nine-thirty.”

Gloria watched as her wondrous plan began to take shape; it had indeed bought a warm rush of blood to her cold, frozen heart.

γ

“Right men, listen up” called Colin to the various spectacled brigade members of the Runcorn Counter-Invasion group.

“I don’t need to tell you all that we are facing certain peril, all the signs point to it. Take a look at the back pages of the Runcorn Echo and you will see several missing person notices, a four hundred percent jump over the annual average.”

Every concerned member nodded in agreement which caused a crescendo of squeaky anoraks to rub together in unison.

“Bob Spade is missing and so are at least four other people around the Blossom Meadows area. Ted down at the station tells me that they are making it a low priority unless more people vanish, ridiculous I say.”

Donald was the first to speak, “Colin’s right, the analysis was a red herring, it is quite possible our alien brethren planted it there to throw us off the scent. I visited the site where Bob’s last call was made and I couldn’t find any trace of him, even his trusty camera had gone.”

The hairs stood to attention on the backs of most observers’ necks, although you could never tell where the hairline ended. Sci-fi enthusiasts were all the same and they all shared the common wish of making the first contact.

Nigel Timmins, the least hairy of the group, spoke up, “Bob Spade was our leader, we can’t let this go. Maybe we should take matters into our own hands, Colin?”

It was obvious who the leader was now. Colin had been waiting for his chance to shine for a very long time but for some reason Bob had beaten him to it, probably on account of the fact that he had the entire back catalogue of Deep Space 9 and a projector.

Colin was a bigger fan of the original series; mess up the aliens and have a laugh about it afterwards. The newer series never did have that black comedy aspect, they were all for making friends and pacification with not the slightest hint of real humour.

“I say we form teams of two for four hour shifts around the clock, schedules permitting, starting tonight. We’ll camp out around the impact site and keep a watch out. My guess is that there is something buried deep in that earth and the aliens will be back to retrieve it.”

A junior nerd piped up, “Could it be an escape pod, Colin?”

“Thanks, Darrel, it may well be. Bring all your equipment, cameras at the ready. If it does try to abduct anyone else we’ll be there to record it.”

There was great excitement within the group as each member wrote down their daily schedules which were passed on to Donald to accumulate and assimilate. Several members had penciled in conflicts with the aero modeling club and philatelic society meet, but there was one entry that stopped Donald dead in his tracks.

“Colin, we have a problem, the re-run of the 4th Star Trek episode ‘The Naked Truth’ is on tonight at 10pm, that’s a classic, we can’t miss that?”

The leader scratched his hairy chin for a few seconds before declaring, “You’re right, postpone tonight’s investigation, we can

start tomorrow, everyone round to mine then. Bob will have to stay captive for one more night.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

The rhythmic drums beat on into the night as Derek and Chin's legs finally decided to pack in after jiving for hours with the petally natives.

"I'm done in, Chin, I need to take a rest, these plants must be drinking something strong to keep going like that."

Chin nodded his compliance and they both sat down to feast some more on the delicious fish that had been prepared and also some strange fruits that resembled white bananas but tasted acidic like oranges.

What happened next was a marvel as the drums faded to a faint rumble; it appeared the locals had waited for their guests to finish prancing around to allow the next floor show to commence.

The great chief stood up on his gnarled stumps and clapped his bushy hands together to welcome in a group of male and female plants to gather opposite each other in a long line.

There they stood, in complete silence, before the first male in the line rushed headlong at the female and, with a great crash of flowery heads, they emerged to cough and splutter seeds as if they were suddenly attacked by hay fever.

The others followed suit and before long all suitors were wheezing, bent double by the effort they had just made.

"Blimey, Chin, look, that's how they pollinate, they just head butt each other until they've mixed, and that's evolution! That's because there were never any insects, ingenious."

“I could have given wife head butt, may have fixed problem from start,” sighed Chin.

Derek looked over at his melancholic friend. From the sounds of it, he was glad that he hadn't had the misfortune of meeting Chin's other half, but it suddenly brought him back to earth with a shudder when he thought of his own Honey, the woman he so desperately wanted to kiss once more.

“Chin, I have no idea how we got here but I feel very sorrowful right now. I wish I could get back and start again with my wife. I would give anything to be back at the Supersuds' Factory. I would love to go home to my problems and my kids screaming and wish this was all a big dream.”

Derek looked down at the soft creamy ground and hoped that his prayers would be answered like they had been in Korea. He couldn't envisage the thought of spending the rest of his life on this planet eating fish and watching a violent daily mating ritual.

“It's not enough, Chin, I want to go home.”

His friend thought for a moment before replying. “Not me, Derek, I like here, build big fishing boat, do what I please.”

Derek stood up and walked over to the chief who raised himself on his rooty stubs to greet his visitor. “Your Highness, I wish to go back to the beach and look up at the stars now, through my telescope.”

The wizened old bush hadn't a clue what he was talking about as he possessed no ears and could only feel the rumble of sounds. He just stood there perfectly demonstrating how proper plants should stand.

Derek bowed and turned to make his way back to the beach, the crowd of demanding plants stood there for a little while before parting in a flowery wake as he strolled despondently past to the amazement of his friend.

“I see you later, Derek, eat more fish, then join you.”

It took an hour to get back to the beach where it had all started and Derek knelt down to slurp some more of the delicious water. The stars were out in the unpolluted heavens and he assembled his telescope to see if he could glimpse anything that could be familiar.

There were definite formations twinkling up overhead but as he zoomed around from section to section he came to the realisation that he was definitely sitting on a planet in a distant galaxy that had been untouched by any earth bound observers.

“It’s remarkable, it really is, not a single constellation is known, how can this be?”

The silent mass of pin pricks in the black velvety sky could offer no answer. They were who they were and that was that as far as they were concerned.

Derek had seen enough after an hour of gazing and decided it was time to turn it in, so he made his way back to his wooden igloo to lie down on the soft sand cooled by the warm balmy breeze that constantly wafted overhead.

“When I wake up, Lord, please let it be Runcorn or even Widnes, at a push.”



“Thank you for a lovely evening, Brian, the show was amazing,” cooed Honey from the comfort of his sports car.

“Don’t mention it, Honey, we should have done this a long time ago when we were teenagers.”

Honey quickly replied, “Let’s ... let’s not think about the past and just take each day as it comes.”

Brian nodded his approval which made his hair brush the roof of the low seated pocket rocket as if he was valeting it. It was quickly picked up by Honey who was coming to see it as an impediment, much like a stammer.

“Brian, can I ask you a personal question?”

“By all means, anything you like.”

Honey shifted uneasily in her seat at the mere thought of asking, it seemed too early in their relationship to say but it had to be said. “Have you ever thought of, well, you know, ermm, well, it’s hard to say really.”

Brian was already formulating the idea of the awkward question being something more intimate. He had chased the ladies for years but somehow Honey had always slipped the net and now it was time to close in.

“Don’t be shy, Honey, I know what you’re getting at.”

“You do?”

“Yes, I get asked it all the time, it’s black and white with me, you’re entitled to ask so go ahead and say it.”

Honey smiled back as Brian thought it was about the time he got asked in for a discreet coffee. He leaned over with a quizzical expression to hear her say it ... he loved the chase as much as he loved the chasing.

Honey couldn't hold it in much longer, "It's your hair, Brian, ever since I've known you it's been quite high, I thought you might have something a little cropped and manageable by now?"

Brian's whole world came crashing down, all the mirrors in the world shattered and the narcissistic minions rushed in wild panic to the sanctity of their bathrooms after hearing that statement.

"Wh ... wh ... what's wrong with it, it's my crowning glory, Honey?" he feebly offered as a reply.

"Well that's just it, Brian, it is a crown, it sits aloof on top of your head. If we're to date more I think you should get it cut. I can't keep my eyes off it. I'm sorry, we could never visit the cinema or other gathering for fear of upsetting other visitors. I hope you understand?"

Brian sat wounded in his two seater as Honey planted a kiss on his cheek as a thank you for the evening and made her way up the driveway to Gloria's. She turned to wave goodbye but was met with a cloud of smoke from the screech of tyres as Brian raced away, his wounded pride seeping all over the floor of the cockpit.

"Cow," was all he could say.

He screeched into Blossom Meadows at a rate of knots, repeatedly glancing in the rear view at his so called 'crowning glory' and failed to see the metal skip that had been placed just outside Derek's property for the final clean up.

He slammed on his brakes at the last minute before careering left up the mound and into the metre deep depression that formed the base of Derek's house.

"Damn this to hell!" he cried as he tried to reverse the BMW Z3 out of the ditch but it was no use.

"How am I going to explain this to the boys at the station? Ridiculous, I'll be the laughing stock."

He could imagine them making all sorts of tongue in cheek references to holes, dips, depressions, chasms and the like and he tried to conjure up a plan of action that no one would know about.

A thought popped into his head that he could get the vehicle reported as stolen but that wouldn't work as it had happened only five minutes after dropping Honey off. The only solution he could think of was to find an out of town tow man to take it away but it would cost an arm and a leg.

He stepped out of the car and could see no visible damage, only his pride was damaged and he quickly lit up a cigarette and stood in the hole contemplating Honey's last comment.

"I never did rate you anyway, Honey, I just wanted to conquer you." he crudely remarked as he took a large puff on his Marlboro.

He reached for his comb and stroked his bonnet back into shape before looking over at the road to see if anyone has noticed his Evil Knieval stunt. Luckily no one had except maybe for one bystander who had been watching him intently the minute he had clambered out of his car.

This particular resident didn't care whether his reputation was at stake or even the height of his barnet ... it was hungry and wanted a feast.

Brian had almost smoked to the end of the cigarette when he heard the low rumblings, a gurgle that stirred a kind of primeval terror within his very core, something he had never experienced before.

He turned quickly to see what the source was and was greeted with the most hideous sight imaginable, its rows of menacing uniformed teeth and dripping saliva were but a few inches from his face.

He didn't have time to scream, the only sound that could be heard was the faint plop of the cigarette butt as it hit the soft dirt below, audible only to a worm that happened to be passing.

The night air returned to normal in Blossom Meadows, the only clue that something was amiss was the red flash of the rear tail lights sticking out of the muddy trough at number 42.



Derek woke up between crisp linen sheets in the most comfortable bed imaginable. He couldn't believe his luck, maybe there was a god after all and he'd answered Derek's prayers. He took in the soft furnishings that definitely had a feminine touch and although he didn't recognise his surroundings, it was quintessentially English and he let out a big sigh of extreme happiness.

"If someone comes screaming at me through the door I don't care, I'm just glad to be back," he muttered to himself.

There was no sign of Chin, which was a big shame, but he knew that his friend would probably be as carefree as the day they had met, living on that island with the myriad of plants and of course, his favourite creature, the fish.

He could hear the sound of sizzling downstairs and the smell of bacon had wafted itself through the bedroom door, enticing his nostrils, so he got up to investigate. He was tentatively making his way downstairs when a female voice called out.

“Derek, your breakfast’s ready.”

Instantly he froze, the voice sounded so much like Honey’s but the house wasn’t his. It had a grand air to it as if it was a vision of Derek’s success in another life ... somehow it just didn’t feel right.

He reached the hallway and could see the back of a figure standing over the cooker. The hair and the curves told him it must be Honey and he ran towards her in sheer joy.

“Honey, oh, Honey, I can’t believe it’s you, I’ve had an awful time ...”

She turned to face him and Derek let out a scream ... it was Honey’s body but with the face of Chin.

“Arrrggghh!”

Derek awoke drenched in sweat and felt the soft sand pressed against his face once again, it had all been a horrific dream.

“Why you scream, Derek?” asked his familiar friend who was busy constructing something outside of the igloo from a large gathering of wood.

He just lay there cursing his god and his misfortune yet again; there was no escape, no transportation, nothing.

“We’re doomed, Chin, we’re never going to leave this island!” sobbed Derek.

“You calm down, my friend, we leave island as soon as boat built.”

Derek crawled out of the narrow opening to be greeted by the sight of Chin’s frenetic activity while he had been asleep.

A big smile lit up on Chin’s face as he gestured towards his creation, “Wood good for boat, easy make, we fish.”

The same wood the igloo was built from had been collected and laid all around in various states of construction as Chin worked feverishly to build a rudimentary half raft/half boat.

“No sail so we make paddle, wood over there like bamboo, make good spears, see what we find.”

Derek shook his head and flopped down into the sand, if he had a single coin in his pocket and a phone line the only call he would make would be the Samaritans. It was just too much, he could see no future, just bleakness, as much as the island dazzled like a jewel in the South Pacific it didn’t help his predicament.

“I want my family back, Chin, I can’t spend the rest of my days fishing and watching floral dances!”

Chin nodded but he wasn’t really listening as he laid the foundations of the hull with the interlocking pieces.

A small flower came scurrying over and stared at Derek in wonderment. He reached out with his leaves and touched his leg as if he was offering sympathy. Derek reciprocated and held the faint blue bushiness in a kind gesture.

“This reminds me of Jack, my youngest. I really miss him and the girls.”

The infant plant ran off and joined another group of plants further up the beach for playtime.

Derek started to cry, it was impossible not too.

“Happiness is mind state, Derek, help build boat, we find happiness.”

He wiped the tears away with the palm of his hand and slowly stood up to join Chin.

“Nothing else to do, Chin, may as well occupy my time.”

Chin laid a hand on his friend’s shoulder, “Derek, you complicated man, I teach you simple life, simple mean happy, Chin say that.”

“You’re a ridiculously simple man my friend and I don’t know what I would do without you, let’s build.”

They worked tirelessly for hours in the hot baking sun stopping only for drinks from the shore and eating offerings of fish by the locals who would come scampering down to the boat to take in the wondrous sight.

The Sun beat its relentless retreat into the horizon; after a while a thought popped into Derek’s head as he passed sections of

wood over to his friend. “Chin, we’ve worked relentlessly for what seems like ages and there’s one thing I’ve come to realise as we’ve been working.”

“You not notice much, Derek, but what you notice this time?”

“Why the heck are we building a boat when every hour, on the hour, we receive fish from the locals, what’s the point?”

Chin stood up from his work and scratched his face as if to ponder the question.

“Good point Derek, stupid idea, put tools down, have wash then eat?”

As there were no tools it was easy to put them down and they both abandoned the almost complete ship on the shore and wandered back into the clearing to take their seats at the next feast.



“I must congratulate those of you who have managed to persevere with the very same specimens that embarked on the first experiment.”

All eyes were fixed on the Grand Visioneer as he strode with authority around the ginormous sizzling globe that dominated the lecture room. Each God Boy, even the ones that were not in the running anymore, stopped to will their best wishes to each other.

Of course there was always one, no matter what plinth you happened to be sitting upon. It was clear that envy lurked behind every nook and cranny and God Boy’s nemesis was indeed venting his anger at him for his lucky lottery choice in the form of Derek Hill.

The Visioneer continued. "A most marvelous group of pupils this semester and I must announce that we have two clear leaders within this competition. I cannot tell you who, of course, and I can feel some of you have already attempted to will this information from me, but you will fail."

Several God Boys gave up the attempt sensing they had a lot to learn; the Visioneer would make an excellent poker player.

"Now, listen very carefully, class, the Cross-World Habitat test experiment will end very soon and for the two pupils who have raced into the lead, I will only hint that it is important that your specimen survives to the end. The very best of luck to you both!"

It was clear to all who the two leaders were and there was really no ill will towards either of them. For one of them it was plain sailing all the way, you couldn't really kill a Gloopbilge, there were far too many sections to them, each capable of growing again if the need arose.

The specimen couldn't have been anymore placid and non aggressive either. It was so dull and non descript in fact, that your mind would simply forget it had seen it in the first place, much like looking at a piece of grey cardboard or trying to remember a musical talent show hit.

An idea formed deep within the evil boy's mind, one that could not be accessed by any of the others. Perhaps the Visioneer had sensed it but if he did, he showed no reaction.

Derek Hill had made friends with the flowery inhabitants but there had to be a way to dispose of him before the experiment ended. He eyed the largest natural feature on the island and wondered if he could will it enough to spring into action; did he have enough strength?



A couple of weeks had passed quite uneventfully for Derek and Chin. The only benefit of their incarceration was the superb tans that now donned their bodies, sort of a castaway George Hamilton. Their diet had been simple and it reminded Derek of a certain pub in London he had once visited on a day trip to London Bridge that displayed taps such as Beer, Lager and Wine.

It proved to them both that monotony had its benefits but for Derek his life remained unfulfilled and it was clear to Chin that as the days rolled on, his friend was becoming increasingly depressed.

They were sitting on Nelly Beach yet again watching a fire flicker away and illuminate the dark, starry surroundings. Derek was perched on a piece of flat pack furniture Chin had fashioned from the same boat material but such creature comforts had failed to assuage his mood.

“You no talk, Derek, your friend very lonely,” said Chin.

Derek turned sullenly to his confidant and with a shrug of his heavy shoulders declared, “I miss my family, I like you, my friend, but it’s not enough.”

If Chin had been westernized he might have thought he was stranded on the island with only a copy of REM and a tape player with a short battery life that warped the sounds into a slow deep tone.

“Life strange, maybe we go back again like before, Derek?”

A big sigh released itself into the night, “Fat chance Chin, the labour camp was a couple of days but this time I’ve lost count of the days. I think this is it, I can’t go on anymore.”

His Korean friend had heard enough, “You stupid man, Derek, you laugh, I laugh, simple life or we die from boredom.”

“Death sounds like a holiday, my friend.”

Chin had heard quite enough and shot up to kick his seat into the fire, “You stupid, stupid man, I go and speak to flower, make more sense than you.”

Derek watched as his aggrieved companion stormed up the beach and into the clearing with a wave of his arms in frustration.

“You’re better off, Chin, I don’t think I will be good company from now on.”

A thought flashed across his mind as he watched the dark lagoon gently sway to and fro, it was only about three hundred metres to the outer wall of the coral; he could just simply swim out there until he could swim no more.

For once there was wasn’t any hint of evil will from his unknown watcher from the heavens, this was almost free will and Derek rose from his chair and slowly paddled out into the balmy waters to meet his fate.

It seemed so natural to him now but once again he was robbed of any inspiring last words, all he could say was a very clichéd, “Goodbye, cruel world!” it was the same tired words from his earlier attempt.

Suddenly the sky lit up with an intense flash followed by a huge explosion and Derek was propelled head first into the water. For a millisecond he thought that maybe it was the start of a great journey but as he surfaced, he turned to see huge flames of molten red shooting out of the great volcano that dominated the landscape of this small island.

“Bloody Hell, it’s another Krakatoa!” he screamed and could hear the sound of breaking foliage as his partner raced back through the undergrowth to appear again on the beach.

“Volcano! Derek, quick.”

“Oh, my God. Quick? What do you mean?”

“Make boat, gather wood, finish, we paddle away.”

Derek was panicking now as the thought of instant death had lost its appeal, especially death by barbecue. He could see the boat lying there in the flickering glow of the dying fire and Chin’s frantic efforts to build a makeshift Meccano set.

Another almighty blast erupted from the dark shape above and plumes of lava shot high into the sky, the shrouded scenery was lit up all around from the spew of its hot contents as it slowly streaked down the volcano’s flanks and consumed all that lay in its path.

Suddenly the undergrowth was yet again alive with noise and the sound of scampering was heard from all directions as their flowery friends shot out from the treeline in wild panic. Some dived into the sea and just lay there like pond lilies but it didn’t offer any relief.

“Derek, I say again, quick, gather wood, help make boat.”

As always Chin remained quite calm but even he was showing signs of strain.

A multitude of plants noticed his efforts to construct the strange shape and decided to scurry back into the bushes to help retrieve the materials he so badly needed.

Derek started gathering odds and ends and handing them to the feverish worker, a few plants had made it back with the interlocking parts to drop them at his feet before running back into the dense blanket of green.



The nasty God Boy sat sniggering from above at the specimen's plight; He had taken the advantage of a recess to stay behind to see his plan unfold, although to the departing pupils it had meant an Earth week had already passed. This particular boy had wanted to explode it as soon as he had conjured the thought, such is the impulsive power of the scheming wrong doer.



“Blimey, Chin, I can feel the heat already, it won't be long before this boat is burning too.”

The smoke, by now, was intense and flames could be seen in the background as they continued their fiery path towards the boat builders.

“Keep build, Derek, important.”

The boat was close to completion but there was no certainty whether it would float at all. It wasn't very big either, definitely

not on the scale of Noah's, but perhaps he had wanted to scoff at the plans of his poorer neighbours who could probably only afford to take a single badger or a scrawny fox.

Hundreds of panic stricken plants had descended on the beach in formation. Derek could see that the chief who had entertained them on the first night was busy trying to keep order for the full scale evacuation but didn't have a clue what to do.

“Even if this boat floats we can't take them all Chin, they might even hijack the vessel and throw us overboard.”

Chin looked up at his friend who was sweating like only Eric Roberts could do and scratched his chin, “You make good point, Derek, but they feed us, we help them.”

Derek ran off to gesture to the chief who, without any form of clipboard, could not count his flock or create any order. He flapped his arms and waved his hands to try and describe a picture of a coastguard rescue but it wasn't a very good example and the chief continued to stare at him in puzzlement.

An almighty crash was heard as several burning trees toppled onto the beach. A few plants had been caught in the incident and ran with leaves burning into the water to douse themselves.

The hot gases and smoke from the intense destruction stifled the air and it was becoming hard to breathe.

Through tear filled eyes, Derek could see in the distance that Chin had successfully fitted the last piece of the intricate build and was now trying to haul the contraption into the water. He eyed the small flowery creature that had greeted him on the beach who had reminded him of Jack and decided one final dramatic act may make them all see the plan.

Derek pulled the small child into his arms and ran for his life down the narrow sandy strip, jumping over flaming stumps to reach his friend who was nearly in the water. The Chief raised his leafy arms into the air and ran towards them, followed hastily by the huge mass of fearful flora.

Derek placed the petally creature into the boat and began to push; it took immense effort to dislodge it from the sand where it had lain for quite a while but the rest of the group was upon them and, having got the message, decided to heave too.

The boat slid into the shallow depths and miraculously stayed upright. "Get in, Derek, we paddle."

There was no hesitation on Derek's part and he picked up an oar and began to splash furiously.

The plants snaked into the water after them as the volcano spewed streaks of molten red lava balls into the lagoon.

A large number of female plants had clambered aboard and began to hang over the sides. The chief was the next one up and commanded his flock to perform the most bizarre display of co-operation ever seen.

Derek watched in wonderment as he paddled like crazy from his floating botanical garden, "Look at this, my friend, they are joining lines on the water to float along, it's marvelous."

Chin glanced over but he had only one mission ... to reach the opening in the outer coral wall. "Stop talk, paddle, paddle, we slow down, Derek, water too strong."

It was clear to Derek that indeed they had been pulled back towards the beach as the weight of the plants seemed to be forming natural anchors.

He let out a huge cry of despair, “Chin, it’s impossible; they’re holding it back, they don’t understand, they don’t want us to leave!”

The island had become a firestorm, the Volcano was indeed consuming every last morsel of it and it appeared that a barbecue was about to begin for Derek.

What happened next was a miracle. The light from the burning tree line had illuminated the flowers to display lines of rhythmic plants as they moved in unison to form daisy chain oars. The boat took on the wonderful shape of a giant pond skater as each line performed their stroke in turn.

“Bloody hell, Chin, they’re rowing us out of here! I can’t believe it!”

Chin could feel the tiny craft begin to pick up speed as it glided against the current towards the opening. It was the most marvelous feeling imaginable.

Eventually they reached the outer edge of the wall where the seas were rougher but it was unmistakable what was happening to the island in the background.

“Derek, look back, the island, it sink.”

Sure enough the flames had engulfed the tiny atoll and even the volcano itself was slowly dipping its huge mass into the sea.

Derek watched with an intense feeling of sadness as it slowly disappeared beneath the surface. The only comfort he could gain from it was the sight of the little plant perched on his lap; the resemblance was too uncanny to bear.



The smile was wiped off the evil God Boy's face as he smited the most fearful smite upon the slippery specimen. There was only one thing for it and he thought back to his own specimen, the Drakapod. If he could will it to carry out the most foulest deed upon this planet called Earth then at least his nemesis may not win after all.

He could see the creature lazing in the bushes at the back of Derek's garden after a hearty meal and decided to spring his next plan into action.



Gloria Weaver was busy tending to the morning breakfast and had made the most sumptuous Eggs Benedict, Honey's favourite, in a bid to extract some information out of her about the liaison the previous evening.

Honey was sitting at the dining table with a confused look upon her pretty face.

"So, dear, did you have a nice evening with Brian?"

"I don't want to talk about it Mother," came the sullen reply.

The plan was stalling as far as Honey's mother was concerned, but like most things it could be rectified.

“Nonsense, you must have talked, he is a dashing man.”

Honey picked at her breakfast but didn't have the stomach to eat it. “It was a fun evening but I couldn't take my eyes off his hair, it's like a helmet!”

Gloria snapped back immediately, “Ridiculous, Honey, he always had a good head of hair, not greasy and limp like the other man I won't mention.”

“Let's not talk about Derek, mother, it upsets me. If I'm to continue to date Brian he must offer up his hair for a cut, he's had that silly hairdo ever since I've known him.”

A faint glimmer of hope was restored and Gloria poured the Earl Grey with a satisfied smile. “You see, men can be moulded. They get attached to things, you just have to wean them off but it takes time, they are nothing but children.”

Honey shrugged her shoulders, she still wasn't sure. “But he raced off when I made the remark about his hair and he hasn't sent me a text to say he had a nice time, I'm confused, Mother.”

“Eat your breakfast, he'll be round, I know he's keen on you. Give him a few weeks then take him to the barbers.”



A short distance away, a richly dressed gentleman was getting ready for an appointment. He had risen early to enjoy the morning sunrise, eaten, with relish, his boiled eggs and soldiers and stepped out of the door to breathe in the new day.

“Good Lord, Petunia, there's a car sticking out of the hole next door!”

Trevor's wife called down from the landing, "Don't be silly, darling, stop your pranks and get off to the dentist or you'll be late."

"I'm not fooling around, whatever next? Now it's a ruddy car park, this is getting out of hand!"

Petunia came running downstairs after judging the tone to be genuine and craned her neck to take in the view outside. "I have had just enough of this, Trevor, I really have, I'm going to phone the police! Now leave or you'll be late."

With benign compliance, Trevor put on his driving gloves and reversed his Saab out of the front gate muttering about the state of the neighbourhood and the UK's foreign policy.

A few minutes later the phone rang at the local Runcorn police station and Ted, the ever present desk officer, picked up the buzzing receiver, "Hello, Runcorn Police, can I help you?"

"Yes, this is Petunia Carpenter, I would like to report an illegally parked car."

Ted scratched his head, it wasn't worth getting excited about. "Madam, there are plenty of cars parked illegally around Runcorn, that's a parking control matter for the council, not the police."

"Young man, it's parked in a hole and I would like it removed."

"A hole you say, well as I say, that would be a matter for the council."

Petunia had heard quite enough. "So can you tell me what is it that you uniformed officers actually do then?"

Ted sniffed; an awkward customer not to mention a posh one at that. It was possible she was a member of the local citizens' watch or maybe even a local councillor so he decided to tread carefully.

“Ok, calm down, madam, where is it parked?”

“Number 42 Blossom Meadows.”

Ted froze in his tracks as the recurring nightmare reared its ugly head once more. He pulled the phone away from his ear and stared at its uniform dullness.

A high pitched shriek rang out from the contraption, “Hello? Hello officer? Are you still there?”

“Ye ... Yes madam, can you give me the registration and describe the car please?”

The nerves began to show as his hand scrawled the details down onto his trusty notebook but there was no need to run an identity check ... the car was very familiar.

He abandoned the phone and ran through the corridor to the sergeant's office but his knocks met no answer and a line of sweat began to form on his brow.

A shrill female voice could be heard calling for attention from the other end of the line but no one came.

Ted burst into the staff canteen where a number of officers were busy eating bacon sandwiches and slurping tea, hoping for a quiet day.

“Lads, get yourselves down to 42 Blossom Meadows quick, it’s the sergeant’s car stuck in the crater, no sign of Brian, this has turned into something altogether more serious than we thought!”

Chairs were pushed over and tea slopped over the edges of the tables as frantic policeman jostled past each other to be the first to put on the blue light. Runcorn hadn’t seen anything like this for a long time, if ever.

Ted hurried back to the front desk. He could hear the phone line had gone dead and carefully placed it back on the hook before dialing out again. He was sure that Colin would be all ears about the latest developments.



The bushes at the back of Derek’s house were shaking once more as the foulest, most ugliest creature imaginable had decided it was time to stop stewing in its own filth and rise up to see if it could find something to gorge upon.

The Drakapod had adopted the simplest of mentalities which consisted of sleeping, eating, defecating, eating and sleeping again. If nature had intended it that way, it was a beautiful solution and didn’t require much brain power to maintain.

It was also a question of scale. On its home planet it dominated the putrid swamps and bogs with ruthless efficiency and was the largest carnivore ever created.

On earth however, it was the size of a kitten but it had the capacity to suck in air through its tentacle flanges and blow itself up like a puffer fish. This gave it the marvelous ability to eat prey much larger than itself, although on its own planet it had no use for it as it was much bigger than anything else.

To an ant, a matchstick casually lit and discarded would crash to the floor in a thunderous explosion as if the largest tree had fallen onto its path.

Scale or no scale, the late morning had brought about the concerned cries of Blossom Meadows residents' calling for their beloved pets. This had stirred the vile Drakapod into action. For some reason it felt the need to move on and find a different hidey hole. Whatever or whoever was influencing it could not be seen and it stepped out into the bright sunshine to take in the view.

It had gnawed its way through a newly painted fence and slithered along like a slug, its purple tentacles feeling the ground for vibrations from potential prey and it cut a path through vegetable patches, children's play houses and those kind of gardens that look more like tips.

In its wake, about four hundred metres behind, the wailing sound of police sirens could be heard as they screeched to a halt opposite the blue BMW stuck in the hole.

The Drakapod had no reason to return as it eyed its destination six hundred metres further on in the shape of a large conservatory where someone equally vile resided.

"Ted, cordon off the area, we need to do a thorough search," ordered the now acting sergeant, Abe Dormen, a no nonsense officer with a much lower buzz style haircut, unlike his predecessor.

Petunia was the first on the scene, standing quite defensively across the privet hedge with her arms folded as a protest at being treated in such a haughty manner on the phone.

"It is about blasted time, officers, I want that car removed this instant!"

Ted recognised the voice from earlier and slowly walked over to pacify the resident. “I am sorry, madam, you must be Mrs. Carpenter?”

“Carpenter, officer, and I would like to know the whereabouts of the tow truck?”

Ted decided it was time to deliver the news. “I’m sorry, madam, but we believe this is a potential crime scene, the car will have to stay where it is for the time being.”

Something erupted inside the very core of Petunia at hearing this and as the heat began to rise within her she vented her fury upon the hapless man,

“Officer! I have had quite enough, first my beautiful new conservatory is blown to bits, followed by strange men poking around looking for god knows what ...”

“Yes I understand ...”

“Shut up and listen you silly man, my ex neighbour is a degenerate, my husband is assaulted by a flying peanut butter sandwich and now this. I cannot take anymore and I would like you all to go away, please.”

“I am sorry, madam, we cannot do that, not until we’ve exhausted all lines of enquiry. Now can you tell me if you noticed anything unusual over the last twenty-four hours?”

Petunia was completely flabbergasted at this last question. “Anything unusual officer? Anything unusual?”

Ted stood there with an expectant smile but all he could see was the broken down form of Petunia as she grinned like a mad

woman and slowly slunk back into the house before slamming the door shut.

He scratched his head in confusion. “Strange folk around Blossom Meadows.”

An officer called out from the back of garden, “Abe, Ted, come quick!”

They both ran up the slope to be see what all of the fuss was about and met one of the forensic investigators crouched low over what appeared to be a lead.

Abe was the first to speak, “Strange, those footprints sure look like they could belong to Brian, there’s also a cigarette lying in the dirt but look at that, Ted, what do you make of it?”

Ted craned his neck to peer closer, “Beats me, Abe, looks like someone has gone over the ground with a rake to cover their tracks. Apart from that camera lying there, I can’t see anything else of interest.”

They both scratched their heads in unison at the sight of the perfectly combed soil, what did it mean?

After a pause of what seemed like eons, a tiny flicker of a clue began to form in their minds.

“The camera! It could show the culprit!”

Everyone smiled at their good fortune and patted each others’ backs as a man dressed in an Abercrombie overcoat carrying a garden implement, stared in disbelief from across the fence.

By now the Runcorn Echo, the most widely read gazette in the borough, had appeared on the scene together with their equally informed cousins ABC News Runcorn. This could prove to be the largest scoop of the week.

Abe appeared over the brow of the hill to meet the reporters. This was going to be messy, he thought, as it appeared that now there was a serial killer on the loose. He stepped slowly down the bank trying to formulate a statement, he knew Brian was a better speaker but, by all accounts, he appeared to be one of the victims.

“Gentleman, I cannot tell you very much at the present moment but it would appear we may have a serial killer on the loose. There have been five missing persons’ statements from this area to date. We believe this car to belong to Sergeant Argentine.”

The crowd of reporters gasped at the news, a veritable bolt out of the blue.

“We have been treating each incident as separate but we have come to the conclusion that they may all, in fact, be related.”

The cameras flashed and the pens scribbled and roving reporters filmed eagerly as the show unfolded.

“Terry Buchanan, Runcorn Enquirer, do you have a description of the suspect?”

Abe spoke, whilst holding the sternest of expressions, “All we know is that he’s armed with a rake and is highly dangerous. He has a habit of covering his tracks with the implement and making his getaway. There have been no sightings of the suspect as yet, so we don’t have a lot to go on.”

Petunia was sitting in her armchair with one eye on the curtains and the other on the television as the news flash was transmitted live to all homes within the Runcorn district.

“Silly man, they’re all silly, did you make sure there were no footprints, Trevor?”

“Yes darling, those stupid kids. I left the ones that were by the car as it would look odd otherwise, I wish they would all go away.”

“Me too, dear, me too,” replied his appreciative wife.

The bold red letters on the bottom of their television set simply read out ‘Serial rake killer on the loose, six missing persons feared scraped to death, Runcorn reeling in a state of garden panic.’

CHAPTER EIGHT

The prow of the boat glided effortlessly across the crystal waters of the yet unnamed planet as Derek turned to take one last look at the island he had called home for a brief period; he was dismayed to see that by now there was nothing left.

A plume of steam rose up from the place where the huge volcano once stood, Derek had come close to naming this special island, but you couldn't name land if it wasn't there anymore.

"Where do we go now, Chin? I can't see anything," he sobbed to his shipmate.

"We find place, look where birds fly."

Derek rolled his eyes for the umpteenth time, "There aren't any bloody birds, there aren't any insects, all we have is plants!"

The small flower child turned its head to stare at him which made Derek wonder where his eyes were. He stroked the top of his petals to comfort him as he looked back over the huge expanse of ocean.

To either side were the committed lines of plants swimming away with all their might towards their unknown fate.

Derek prayed for divine rescue but he had been doing this for the past few weeks and it seemed that his God was taking a sabbatical or had finally forsaken him.

He was grateful that Chin was still alive though, as he couldn't imagine doing it all on his own and probably would have perished along with the island and the contents of B&Q's garden section.



Back on Earth the media frenzy had whipped up a huge storm; 'Rake Killer' had appeared on every Runcorn Echo newstand in the town. People were forming queues to get their copy before they ran out.

The news stations were in full force briefing Joe Public on every minute detail they could lay their hands on, some were even postulating on the size and type of rake used to perform the vile acts.

The police couldn't say for sure if it was a serial killer on the loose but hearsay, whispers and rumours had already established that no one was safe. People locked their doors and tuned into Richard and Judy to escape the carnage.

"Mother, come quick, they're talking about our house!" exclaimed Honey.

Gloria hurried to the lounge to take in the newsflash and almost dropped her plate of French Fancies; it was only a matter of time before 42 Blossom Meadows reared its ugly head again.

"Citron, Ella! take Jack outside for a play, will you? He needs some exercise." Honey called in an attempt to ensure their ears were hearing something else.

The twins grumbled in unison and took Jack by both arms and marched him out into the garden to throw balls at him.

"My God, Honey, what's going on now?"

A reporter, face filling the screen with the most serious of expressions and like all reporters, perfectly groomed, announced

the latest developments in the pause filled style that always ends with emphasis on the final word.

“Today is a very grave day in Runcorn. Five people are missing and evidence points to a possible serial killer the papers are dubbing ‘The Runcorn Raker’. We’ve just learned that the latest victim is none other than Brian Argentine, the district sergeant.”

The camera panned down to the tail section of the car and Honey let out an enormous cry.

“Mother! It’s Brian’s car, it’s the same one!”

Honey started to cry and Gloria froze on the spot. It wasn’t so much as dreadful news for her but more of a rethink in strategy.

The reporter continued, the cameras zooming away to the roadside where several rubber suited freaks stood.

“We can exclusively reveal that the gentlemen pictured here have arrived on an altogether more mysterious mission. We have learned that they believe it is the work of UFOs and that the first to disappear was a Mr. Derek Hill, the occupier of 42 Blossom Meadows.”

Honey’s sobs were stunned into silence as she tried to take it all in. “Mother, they say Derek was kidnapped by aliens.”

Gloria let out a snigger. “Don’t be stupid dear, there are no such things as aliens!”

“But Derek is missing and how do you explain all those disappearances?”

“I won’t hear another word, Honey, Derek is in some loony bin by now and I say good riddance to the vile man.”

Honey stood up, her face as red as Derek’s used to be, “Mother! How dare you, Derek is still a human being and the father of our children.”

Gloria, the ice queen, didn’t flinch. She could make the most dangerous Pitbull think it was a Shitzu.

“I’ll say again, there is no such thing as aliens!”

Honey stormed out of the room having resumed her tears, leaving Gloria to stand proud of her convictions. Outside the children were busy screaming and attracting the attentions of something altogether slithery. Citron had bounced the ball off Jack’s head and it had rebounded off into the bushes at the back of the garden.

“Fetch the ball, Jack, you touched it last.”

Jack, outnumbered by two, had no choice but to saunter down the garden to retrieve the ball for another mindless game of Jack-bashing.

He waded through the smaller bushes to where the prickly nasty ones were and as he stooped down to pick up the ball he noticed something very odd. It was about the size of a normal cat in Jack’s eyes but it was hideous and slimy and its long trunk was sniffing the air about five feet away from him. Jack froze on the spot as the creature began to bear its teeth.

“Hurry up, Jack,” called Ella, becoming impatient.

The Drakapod had never seen a human as small as this before; it was about the size of the dog it had eaten the night before but it didn't smell like a dog.

A shrill voice called out from the back door, "Children, get inside now, playtime is over, time for your tea."

Citron noticed that Jack was standing perfectly still without any sign of a ball, he hadn't even turned to look round which was extremely odd indeed.

She called to him, "Jack, Nanna's calling, leave the ball."

Jack watched as the creature started to puff itself up to a size that would suit a morsel as small as he, but fear had gripped his legs and bolted him to the spot.

He was trying to cry but the tears just wouldn't come. The purple tentacles were bristling and slithering about like a King Cobra and there was nothing he could do.

Suddenly a single tentacle shot out from the undergrowth in a direct path towards the little mite and then a whip cracking sound reverberated as the poisoned barb hit out at nothing.

Jack, in that instant, had been pulled away by Citron after she had got tired of standing there. It had missed her leg by a few millimeters as she spun around and ran with him up the garden.

The flatulent creature blew its air out and returned to its normal size and lay there in the bushes waiting for something to happen. Food seemed plentiful in this habitat, the putrid creature didn't have to venture far.



The sun was slowly dipping its feet back into the horizon as the flowery ship pushed on looking for landfall. Derek was dozing on the hastily constructed seat while his Korean friend was standing on the bow like Captain Ahab.

The seas were quite calm, the planet did have its own moon but it must have been on a wider orbit which was a blessing. The lines of makeshift oars rowed on although the plants had no concept of other terra firma and Chin began to wonder whether they would all just give up at some point and resume the classic pond lily pose.

Then something magical happened; it was only a speck at first and Chin had written it off on his first inspection as a mirage but, as the boat got closer, it was evident that the speck was becoming a blob and then the blob was spreading out across the horizon.

Chin let out a huge bellow, "Land! Look, my friend."

Derek awoke from his slumber, in truth he was quite glad to do so as he was having a dream of quietly cuddling up to Norah Batty in her garden. He rubbed his eyes for a few seconds before realising that they may well be saved after all.

"It's a miracle, I can't believe it," cried Derek. The plants showed no emotion as they couldn't understand it and it was still doubtful they had eyes to take it in anyway.

Chin raced to the stern with his huge paddle and twisted it to turn the boat towards the long strip of land that lay so tantalizingly close.

"We saved, Derek, plenty food on island, I bet."

Derek nodded his approval. "At least a man doesn't need to slake his thirst; I'll rewrite the Ancient Mariner when I find something to write upon."

His friend eyed him curiously, sometimes he just didn't make sense, like most westerners.

After a while, treetops began to pop up in abundance but, from afar, it didn't look anything like the island they had left, with its white wispy colours and soft creamy blue sand. This particular island rose up stark against the horizon, with brooding colours, jagged edges and what appeared to be black volcanic sandy beaches.

It looked like a place where Death might take his vacation.



"Eat your sandwiches, Jack, they'll go cold," called Gloria.

"He can't, Nanna, he's frozen," said Citron.

"Don't be silly, it's not that cold outside."

Citron and Ella continued to stare at their little brother whose face was fixed in an expression of horror. He looked like a waxwork and it was beginning to frighten them.

"Maybe Jack saw a monster?" said Ella.

Gloria finally snapped, "I have just about had my fill of people telling tales of aliens and monsters, none of them exist!"

Citron cut in quickly, “But Nanna, Jack saw something at the bottom of the garden.”

As always, parents and grandparents solved every crisis by shovelling food down their children’s throats. As they got older, tea would take over as the sedative.

Jack remained as still as a street statue and it was becoming clear to Gloria that he had seen something. She decided to take on a softer tone but it didn’t suit her.

“Look, children, if you eat your tea your Nanna will go down to the bottom of the garden and scare away the silly monsters, is that ok?”

Citron and Ella nodded and Jack tried.

Honey was still upstairs sobbing. In her heart of hearts, she still missed Derek but she couldn’t bring herself to admit it and as for Brian, there wasn’t any love lost owing to the bouffant. If it hadn’t been for the meal his car would never had ended up in a ditch and she began to play the guilty, ‘what if’ game.

She imagined that she could have invited him in for a nightcap but every time she thought of his face all she could think about was the hair and so she decided to stop beating herself up about it.

She got up off the bed, her tears leaving a substantial damp patch and walked over to the window to watch her mother walking down the garden towards the bushes.

“What is mother doing?” she wondered to herself, as something unbeknown to Honey and smelling like a pot of boiling sewage and rotting cabbages lay in wait eyeing a tasty shape that was getting bigger by the second.

It was feeling a touch of hunger at this point and began to suck air.

Gloria could see the football lodged in the prickliest of bushes and decided to turn back after cursing the children. The creature began to deflate again sensing another failed attempt.

A few seconds later the shadow began to grow again, much to the Drakapod's excitement as Gloria, donning gardening gloves from the shed, returned to extract the ball.

"I hate you Derek, for everything you've plagued me with over these years," she muttered to herself as she leaned into the bushes to try and pull out the half deflated football.

A flash of purple appeared across her vision and then a feeling of paralysis quickly overcame her. Gloria was half bent over at this point and fell into the undergrowth out of sight of Honey and the children who were peering from above and below from their respective vantage points.

Gloria looked in horror as a huge row of pearlies revealed themselves to her. She could see great gobs of spittle form at the corners of its disgusting, misshapen mouth.

Sadly, horror only works if the victim happens to be the most naïve, friendly, happy go lucky person on earth, but when evil meets evil, it inevitably cancels itself out and to anyone who ever knew Gloria, the munchfest would have been satisfying viewing.

"Silly mother, falling in the bushes," called Honey.

"Nanna's hopped into the bushes," laughed the children.

After a minute however, it appeared that Nanna was not hopping back out and Honey dashed downstairs past the gawping children, to see what her mother was playing at.

She ran down to the bottom of the garden to where her mother had been standing and encountered a completely empty space, just plants and thorny things.

“Mother? Where are you?”

The bushes backed onto a solid fence where just a half chewed hole had appeared. The ball was still stuck in the prickliness but there was no sign of Gloria.

Nothing. Zip. Nada.

The purple creature had retired having satisfied itself of a meal, albeit a little tough, like old mutton.



The Runcorn police station was in full flow; printers, clipboards and notepads were furiously churning out information as Abe, with his trusted servant Ted, were trying to piece together some sort of pattern but it was proving tough.

On the wall had been arranged a giant map of the Blossom Meadows district. At various locations were mug shots of potential victims.

The urgency had all started with Brian and his face was pinned to number 42 as well as a rather nerdy image of Derek. The others were dotted about in a neat circle around the impact site.

“Look at that, Roger, it all points to Derek Hill’s house but as he is missing too we can’t pin it on him.”

Roger, the fledgling constable, was busy scratching his head, “It doesn’t add up, Sarge.”

Ted had been promoted to senior desk sergeant and he quite liked the reference, it had been years since he had joined the force and promotion after promotion had passed him by. He always wondered if it was Brian’s influence or the fact that he never wore his hair like a trophy as his superior had.

“It beats me too. There must be a link somewhere, I just can’t quite put my finger on it. Did you check the local hardware stores to see if anybody had purchased a rake within the last few weeks?”

Roger flipped open his notebook, “Too many to list, Sarge, it’s a popular item this time of year.”

Ted was starting to panic. Abe had spoken to him earlier to tell him he had every faith in him and if he was expecting another promotion anytime soon, he had better come up with the goods.

Another officer poked his head round the door, “Ted, there’s a lady on the line, a Honey Hill, says it’s urgent, shall I stall her?”

“Bloody hell, no, I’m coming right now!”

Thoughts of a Columbo style breakthrough fluttered across his mind as he picked up the receiver.

“Hello, Mrs. Hill, how can I help?”

“Please, officer, I can’t explain but something terrible has happened!”

Ted waited for the words to roll forth but all he got was silence, “Madam, do you have anything for me as I have to get back to an urgent investigation.”

The sound of sobbing could be heard quite clearly on the other end of the line as Honey tried desperately to explain.

“My mother, she was at the bottom of the garden and the next minute she just ... she just vanished!”

Slowly, a dynamo inside of Ted’s cranium began to wind up and produce sparks; he may be enjoying the comforts of Brian’s office after all.

“Mrs. Hill, stay where you are, we’ll send an officer around right away to help you.”

“Thank you, officer, I knew I could count on you.”

The line clicked off and a huge smile spread across Ted’s face, like a Cheshire cat.

“Roger, I think we have a suspect. Another person’s gone missing and it all ties to Honey Hill. Get your car round there right away!”

Ted walked back into the operations room to pour over the map once more. For some reason he felt like his hair had grown two inches during the phone call.



The good ship Geranium ran aground quite gingerly on the black shore, even the water appeared to recede rather than lap across its wide menacing bay.

The plants stopped rowing and scurried ashore to group up in front of the dark crimson storks that weaved like impenetrable mangrove trees along the whole beach.

Derek and Chin stared apprehensively at each other as they tried to imagine whether the island was as peaceful as the first; however its darkness cast a feeling of foreboding within them and they dared not move an inch further up the beach.

The chief hopped over to the wimpy humans cowering in the boat and laid his leafy arms across their backs in a friendly gesture of companionship before heading back to the group.

As a thank you gesture it was like giving an elderly lady a lift out of the pouring rain and dropping her off in a Brazilian Favela.

The tribe scurried eagerly into the undergrowth to colonise their new land. To them all it meant nothing, but it gave Derek and Chin a new feeling of hope that maybe this place wasn't so bad after all, despite the gothic colour scheme.

“Listen, Chin, my friend, if anything happens to me, I want you to know that without you being here I would have ended it all back on the last island.”

Chin placed his hand on Derek's shoulder and nodded his approval, “Derek, if wasn't for you, I would break rocks and wait for release.”

It didn't seem the most encouraging of speeches. If it wasn't for Derek he would be eating, sleeping and working until he was reunited with his family and not facing imminent death.

Derek looked up at the heavens and cursed his God once more for his heavy responsibilities.

They beached the boat just in case there was a need for escape and slowly trudged up the sand which felt crunchy underfoot as if it was just a mound of ground down bones.

It took a monumental effort to climb through the thick vine like undergrowth to take a peek at inland. When they finally pushed through, the words 'pleasantly surprised' had completely failed to enter their minds.

Instead of a lush oasis of cascading waterfalls and the smell of hibiscus, the only smell was a pong, a very flatulent pong at that, for the ground was a mass of swampy bogs and bubbling gas. What plant life there was only resembled weeds rather than gorgeous lilies or frangipani.

Derek stopped in his tracks for a few seconds, "I have a really weird feeling about this place, it looks like something out of a horror movie."

Chin nodded his agreement and pulled a rather sharp looking stick from its roots that resembled bamboo, at the end of it was a mass of thorny protrusions, like razor wire. It didn't take long for Derek to join him as they wandered further in like caveman, feet sucking and squelching along in the greasy mud.

There were no impressive volcanoes sitting central on this island, whatever had been there must have exploded a long time ago.

"Keep your eyes open for skulls, Chin, especially ones on sticks!"

His friend squelched along, finding the ground hard to move over but something in the distance caught his eye.

“Derek, a cave! We go there, we sleep, we look for food tomorrow.”

Over at the far end of the swamp was a brooding rock with several entrances, all dark and eerie but better than lying in the mud and waking up shivering like a hypothermic polar bear.

“I don’t like it one bit, my friend, but we have no choice, I don’t know where the plants went, maybe they are all in there?” exclaimed Derek, whose brow had instantly grown a few more worry lines.

It was a mystery to them both ... the tribe had simply disappeared and they weren’t very far ahead of them at the outset.

As they got closer to the cave, something let out a deep throaty roar from inside; it was so blood curdling and downright scary that they both turned tail and ran slowly for the beach once more, feet sucking and slipping in the mud.

“Jesus, Chin, run! It could be anything.”

For anyone who has ever tried running on a wet weekend at Glastonbury without wellies, it was ridiculously hopeless and Derek soon found himself face down in the putrified gloop.

A hand reached down and pulled him from his misery as a worried looking Chin grabbed his arm to steer him away from the menace within the cave.

“Derek, you smell bad, like fish too long in sun, we hurry!”

Eventually, after much effort, they managed to squeeze through the wild vines once more and onto the dirty beach.

To their horror, they both noticed the reason why the plants were missing in the first place.

Derek dropped to his knees in the sand and began sobbing, “The boat, Chin, it’s gone!”

The wide-eyed Korean stood there, gob smacked, unable to speak, it appeared that mutiny had just taken place.

“Why didn’t they wait for us, Chin? Why? We were their friends.” cried Derek, now a blubbering wreck of a man.

Chin shook his head in disbelief, “No wood to build boat again, we stay here now, look for food or die.”

Dying seemed like a good option when faced with a growly monster hidden in a cave, mud for land and powdered bones for a beach, but the human spirit was tougher than that and Chin sat down next his friend to offer some comfort.

“Derek, we have saying in Korea, ‘When face danger close by, best to do is pee pants and sit, wait for death’.”

Derek mentally crossed his friend off as a candidate for the best man’s speech in case he ever got married again and carried on crying into his lap.



A stern looking officer walked up the primrose bordered path towards Gloria’s freshly painted door. Roger, the local bobby could hear blood curdling screaming as he got closer and quickened his pace to reach the door bell.

He unclipped his baton, just in case, as the shouts intensified and was ready to pounce when he saw a teary eyed woman open the door; there was absolute mayhem as two girls were busy chasing a smaller boy down the stairs and along the hall pretending to be the monster that ate their grandmother.

“Are you Mrs. Honey Hill?” asked the officer, who was relieved to have not stumbled across the house of Hannibal Lecter.

A solemn looking Honey nodded back and let him in. It seemed strange to Roger that Ted would jump at the chance to lock her away without any hard evidence. The fact remained that there really was no evidence to suggest she was the Runcorn Raker.

“Madam, there’s been several disappearances around this neighbourhood in the past few weeks, can you describe to me exactly what happened to your mother, a Ms Gloria Weaver?”

Honey’s pretty face was drowning in a wash of tears as she tried to relate the past events but it was tough as she had nothing to describe.

“Mother went out to retrieve Jack’s ball and then she fell into the bushes and just vanished.”

Roger stared at her for a few brief seconds, the tears seemed genuine enough.

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Hill, people don’t just simply disappear. Can you tell me about your husband, Mr. Derek Hill?”

“Officer, I haven’t seen him either, the last time was at Runcorn A&E, he was being treated after our house blew up.”

“Mrs. Hill, your husband is still on the wanted list for aiding an illegal immigrant. We will eventually catch up with him, no one is immune from the law.”

Honey stared at the fresh faced officer who seemed too young to be given the opportunity to spout worldly determination. He was not long out of nappies.

“Can you direct me to the back garden where your mother vanished?”

She quickly wiped away her sobs to stare wild eyed at the officer. “You can’t go down there, it’s not safe!”

“Nonsense, Mrs. Hill, I need to look for evidence of a struggle, clues and anything else to aid this case. If you would just direct me to the spot?”

The PC looked confident enough as Honey led him to the door.

“The back door is over there ... I’ll direct you from the window,” came Honey’s frightened response.

“As you wish, madam.”

The haughty boy in blue walked out of the door and headed down the garden while Honey pointed with a finger to the spot where Gloria was last seen.

The soil was undisturbed apart from a few large footprints that Roger could not make out. The area was quite bushy and he fumbled around looking for a shred of evidence, even a shoe would suffice.

He placed his helmet on the grass in order to push through the undergrowth. Honey's heart was racing ten to the dozen as the bushes started to shake.

After a few seconds of pretending to be David Bellamy he turned around and popped his head up to check whether she had indicated the right spot.

Honey was gesticulating wildly to tell him it was the same spot but as she was about to point again, the most horrific looking facial expression crossed the officer's features.

Roger, it appeared, had attached himself to a rather large purple tentacle or the tentacle had attached itself to him. Either way, he could not see what had injected him with so much venomous liquid as to render him immobile.

All he could do was wait...

Honey screamed as Roger was catapulted backwards into the bushes, vanishing completely only to be followed by perfect calm once again in Blossom Meadows.

"Kids, stay upstairs and don't come down!" cried Honey as she rushed to the back door to lock it and grab the phone.

Runcorn's answer to Hollywood's version of an FBI negotiator was the first to pick up, "Hello, Runcorn incident desk, can I help you?"

"Oh, God! Police, come quick, one of your officers has vanished into the bushes!"

Ted was quick to reply now he was running the show,
“Madam, calm down, I hope you’re not wasting important police time? We have a murder enquiry on the go.”

It only took a few seconds before he realised it was the same voice as before, “Mrs. Honey Hill?”

“Yes, come quick please, there’s something evil outside.”

The hairs began to stick up on the back of Ted’s neck as it dawned on him that, in an enquiry as critical as this, police should be going in two’s.

“Men! Get your raid gear ready, call SO19, suspect is Honey Hill, officer down!”

Pandemonium ensued as various boys in blue rushed and bumped into each other to grab their equipment ready for a showdown in Blossom Meadows.



“We go back to cave,” exclaimed Chin who was sat on the black sand, shoulders slumped and dreaming of food once more.

Derek was busy pacing up and down trying to find a fix to their immediate problems, this time there didn’t seem to be any useful wood to make a ship, not even a pirate ship which would have suited the mood of the island.

“Look, Chin, we don’t know what’s in there, it could have twenty eyes and really sharp teeth, it’s hopeless, my friend, I think we’re doomed.”

If the island was indeed a putrid swamp, it left Derek to ponder whether killing a ferocious animal would help in the long term. Everything looked poisonous and he was sure the fish kept their distance out of fear.

Chin stood up and grabbed his long barbed stick and started to walk back into the creepy undergrowth, “We go, my friend, we stay here we die.”

Derek was left with a feeling of dread; if Chin didn’t come back he would be left alone and through all the strife they had faced, it was his friend who was always there to help him out, or even help him survive.

He watched the determined man step back into the thicket, “Chin! Wait, I’m coming too, we might as well die together!”

Derek scurried up the beach like a feverish rat, sweating and beetroot red from the sun and fear; His Korean friend reached out and grabbed his arm to help pull him back through.

The light was fading again, a day here never never felt as long as an Earth day. It was over before it had barely started. They trudged on, regardless, through the familiar squelch of the swamp towards the cave once more.

At each muddy step they could hear the growl deepen and become louder. Whatever the creature was, it appeared to be forever grumpy which was understandable living on an island like this.

Derek remembered a famous saying which went something like ‘Your outlook is defined by what you look out onto’. It was a terrible saying and probably came from an American motivational speaker called Chad Chadnik with a pearly white smile and greedy

eyes. Wherever it came from, it would never have been written if the author had been born on Devil's Island.

Chin was a few steps ahead and not far from the cave when he spotted something sticking out of the mud. It looked like an avocado but couldn't have fallen from any of the twisted and gnarled bushes close by. He stooped down to pick it up to see if it was edible.

"Careful, my friend, it could be something nasty," cried Derek.

"Look like fruit, but under bottom has legs!"

Chin was carefully examining the creature which appeared to be immobile and even if it had sensed a grasping hand it didn't appear to care.

With one flick of a wrist, he lobbed it into the cave entrance like a stone to see if the growling beast would be stirred.

Derek screamed out, "Chin! You idiot, we were supposed to sneak up on it! It might come racing out now, find some cover!"

His friend realised his stupidity and took refuge behind the nearest blackened stump. The ground smelled awful but both of their minds were now fixed on the entrance.

The growling sound had stopped for a few brief seconds followed by a crunching noise and then nothing.

Derek and Chin looked at each other simultaneously as they waited for something to develop but all they could hear was eerie silence.

"We go look, Derek, might be sleeping?"

Whatever was sleeping obviously had a mouth bigger than an avocado and Derek imagined his arms would probably end up as a cheese string for them when the monster decided it was time for tea.

They stepped closer and were now about ten yards from the mouth of the cave. Derek's heart was beating ten to the dozen as all his horrors came tumbling forth. He lowered his pointy stick towards the entrance in case it came rushing out.

Suddenly, a blood curdling scream rang out and Derek and Chin dived into the foul mud out of sheer fright.

They poked their heads back up from the soft gloop and could only hear silence once more.

After what seemed like eons but was probably only a few seconds, the avocado crawled out of the cave, covered in slime. It scurried back from the cave entrance and waltzed past the hapless pair back to the mud where it once lay.

“Derek, we go in, if crab make it, we can.”

There was no arguing with Chin's logic; whatever was growling was growling no more and they both made their way a few feet inside the cave. It was barely high enough for the pair of them and the darkness shrouded the rest of the miserable enclave but what they witnessed was unmistakable.

Over in the corner lay a disgusting creature no bigger than a kitten with a trunk for a nose and purple tentacles lying limp down its flanks. Its teeth were set in a grimace but it was clearly dead. A trail of purple ooze trickled from its jaws and away from the cave.

A feeling of relief gripped Derek as he dropped his pole onto the ground, "The avocado must have killed it, Chin!"

His friend stooped down to inspect the creature, "Uglier than ugliest fish I ever see, Derek, no good to eat, like puffer fish."

Chin prodded it with his stick to make sure but the brute was indeed dead.

"Let's get out of here, I don't fancy staying in this cave any longer," cried Derek who was starting to hang out with Mr. Fear and Mr. Tremble once more.

Chin stood up and sniffed the air, "Smell very bad in here, we go, we find something else to eat."

Derek stepped out of the cave entrance to survey the landscape, "We have got to push further on in, Chin. There must be something to eat on this god forsaken ground!"

There was no answer from behind as he walked a few steps back into the mud, "Let's go make camp on the beach and see what we can use as shelter."

Chin watched as his friend walked away, muttering to himself. He would have liked to have joined him but something sharp had shot out from the darkness and lanced his back. He couldn't move and worse still, couldn't shout for his friend to help.

Derek was about fifteen yards away when he suddenly realised he couldn't hear the squelch of his good friend. He turned around and saw something quizzical in the face of Chin, who appeared to be standing like a statue, grimacing back at his friend.

"Come on, Chin, stop playing games, let's get out of here!"

There was still no movement from his friend; Derek started to replace fear with anger, “I can’t be fooling around now, this place is freaking me out! Come on.”

Derek took a few steps closer but it was too late, without warning, something equally as ugly as the first creature stood inches behind Chin with gnashers the size of a tyrannosaurus. Derek could see spittle appear at the edges of its mouth.

“Chin! Get away, there’s a ...”

A sickening crunch followed as Derek watched his whole world collapse as his loyal friend was no more to be seen. The great purple beast had swallowed him whole and began to shrink back down to its original size after a giant belch.

“Nooooooo!” A mortified Derek turned tail and ran for his life back towards the beach, he could hardly see where he was going for the tears.

He pushed back through the bushes and flopped onto the beach, sobbing in his own misery and loneliness.

“Oh, Chin, oh no, oh why, oh why?” he cried, but no one heard him.

The sun began to dip once more and cast a rather gloomy shadow over the figure that sat dazed and confused on the beach. Soon it would be night time when the creepy nasties would come out but Derek, in his despair, had already lost the will to live and ceased to care anymore.



“This is the Police, come out, Honey Hill, we know you’re in there!”

Citron and Ella were the first to peer out the window at the sound of the loudspeaker and were aghast at the sight of it all, “Mummy, there’s lots of policeman outside, that man has a gun!”

Honey raced to the window where the children stared wild eyed and fearful. She couldn’t decide what was worse, the strange disappearances from the back of the garden or an angry buzz of blue bees outside with trained weapons.

She opened the window and shouted out to the officer who seemed to be commanding the showdown. “Officer, why are you pointing those guns at me? I have children here, put them down this instant!”

Ted was standing twenty yards away behind an unmarked car. Further down the road, police had cordoned off the area with tape and residents were starting to pour out of the houses and form a line of nose neighbours behind the barricades.

“What’s she done, officer?”

“I knew something was dodgy about that house.”

“She’s the Runcorn Raker!”

The questions were coming thick and fast but the controlling officers were saying nothing.

Ted continued, “Let the children go, Mrs. Hill, we only want to speak to you. If you come quietly nothing will happen to you, do you understand?”

Honey became alarmed at the man's insistence. "Officer, whatever you want is at the back of the garden, it took my mum and the police officer. What have I done?"

"Madam, let the children go and no harm will come to you."

Honey had heard enough, "For Christ's sake, man, it's got nothing to do with me!"

With that she slammed the window shut, "Children, go upstairs now, I don't know what's going on but this is serious, get up the stairs now!"

The children complied as they all ran hurriedly up to the sanctity of their bedrooms to lie cowering in fear.

"What's happening, Mummy?" cried Citron.

A teary eyed Honey tried to comfort her kids, "I don't know, I wish Derek was here."

Ted looked around him to survey the scene. By now there were camera crews and reporters standing by the road blocks, zooming in to catch all of the drama and numerous residents were standing gawping at the unfolding crisis.

"Ted, what do we do now?"

The officer looked back at the house to ponder the question, it was the most fun he'd had for ages.

"Let's wait for a little while, see if she comes out. If not we send the armed boys in, save what we can."



The Universe spun on its virtual plinth as the stars twinkled life from inside the giant orb. Several God Boys had made their way back into the classroom to await the final results of the excellent creational competition that had raged for a long while.

God Boy was feeling confident with the divine fact that his specimen had survived all the way from the start, regardless of the evil intent from his brethren. Through thick and thin, his ant had remained resolute. It seemed that nothing could break him and he was as eager as the rest of the pupils to find out who the supreme creational champion was.

From the corner of his universe came the sound of incessant grief and smiting and God Boy looked down from above to see his specimen in complete angst and suffering.

The Visioneer had not yet appeared but now the experiment was finally over, it could have been a very simple act to ignore this creature. The child had grander things on his mind but he felt a small tinge of sympathy deep within himself, something he hadn't felt before.

It was beginning to rise up a little more and he cursed himself for his benevolent stance. Previously it had all been about the competition but for one micro second he felt ...

“Damn you, God, you’ve taken away everything I loved, I’ve lost my family, my house and now my only friend. I curse you, I hate you, this isn’t right!”

Derek slumped down onto the crunchy sand and cried some more. He never thought for one minute he could be so lonely and

abandoned. Sooner or later he would meet the same fate as Chin ... it was only a matter of time.

For time and nature had not been kind to him one bit; nature had given him greasy hair, beetroot red complexion and an ability to get stressed out at the slightest problem. In short, nature had made him useless and pathetic.

Time, on the other hand, had allowed each waking moment to become a perpetual nightmare and Derek was enraged at the unjust turn of events in his life.

“Lord, I haven’t done anything to upset you yet you plague me at every turn! I just want my family back, I want it all back, I just want to wake up and enjoy my pitiful existence like everyone else, surrounded by constant distractions.”

God Boy studied him for a moment and then looked back at the door where his teacher would soon appear. He pondered on his choice to just ignore Derek and await the results but he caught sight of his evil brother who was smirking at the thought that even though he may not have won the competition, he would have some sick satisfaction from willing his Drakapod to eat Derek when the night finally came a calling.

A competitive streak rose up once more inside God Boy and he decided that sometimes rules have to be broken.

Derek’s head was still buried in the sand like an ostrich. His tears had dribbled down into the mire and made sticky sand balls.

Suddenly a great crack of thunder erupted in the sky above him. The wind, which was normally slightly breezy like a calm trade wind, whipped up furiously and began to turn into a crescendo of howls.

Derek's tears were replaced by tiny droplets as rain started to fall and begin to turn into watery pellets.

He pushed his head from the sand and looked up at the sky. In the distance a lightening flash struck the unimpeded horizon, followed by more thunder.

An enraged Derek ran to the nearest gnarled bush and clung on.

“So you thought you could make it much worse, eh! Well, I'm ready for you now, do what you like, I don't care anymore, my life is over, damn you!”

A great storm erupted overhead as fierce winds turned the rain horizontal to lash Derek's face. The noise was so loud that Derek couldn't hear himself curse anymore. It felt like a great Pacific typhoon but what was strange was the fact that the seas failed to rise to join the fierce banquet of nature.

Derek clung desperately to the black stump and now saw that the storm appeared to be directed only at him as further down the beach, the ugly branches failed to sway.

“I hate you, I hate you, leave me alone ...”

The storm suddenly stopped, stillness like rigor mortis, had again returned to the island. Derek looked around him, completely perplexed.

Then it came, a voice so pure and magnificent had started to speak from the clear sky above.

“DEREK, YOU ARE INDEED A WORTHY SPECIMEN.”

A puzzled Derek looked around but could not see where it was coming from. It seemed to be all around and, for some reason, it sounded very much like a child's voice.

“Who are .. where are you?” he cried.

“I AM YOUR GOD BOY.”

Derek looked as confused as the worst contestant on ‘Who wants to be a Millionaire’. “My what? I must be going mad.”

“I AM YOUR CREATOR, DEREK. YOU ARE MY ANT AND THE EARTH IS MY ANT FARM.”

God Boy's specimen stood up and laughed. This was getting ridiculous now. It was as clear as day now he had gone insane but he thought he might as well humour the voice.

“My Creator, eh ... My God, well, since you are who you say you are, then tell me, what is the meaning of life?”

It was a question that everyone on Earth at some time had asked, people had spent their whole lives trying to search for the answer but time and time again it had faithfully eluded them. Derek, for one, had not expected an answer to come tumbling forth.

“A CLASS EXPERIMENT.”

Derek pondered the divine fact. “A class experiment, great, that's one to tell your children, I'll remember that.”

The silence was deafening and for a few seconds it appeared as if that was the end of the conversation, not really a show stopper at a cocktail party but Derek decided to probe some more.

“So, God, can you tell me why there are several gods then?”

“GODS GIVE MEANING TO LIFE, THEY ARE ALL THE SAME, THEY ARE ME, THEY ARE US.”

Parkinson would have given his right arm to be sitting in an armchair across from God asking the questions and would have been gnashing his teeth that it was thrust upon someone as pathetic as Derek.

“Clever answer; is there life anywhere else in the Universe?”

Again it was the perennial question, not quite as good as the first one but everyone thought about that one too, usually after a few too many.

“LOTS BUT EARTH IS MY FAVOURITE.”

The childlike voice sounded as if it was merely playing with toys and Derek didn't have a clue how true that statement actually was.

“Is the Universe infinite?”

“NO, IT'S A CLASS EXPERIMENT, AT MY CREATIONAL SCHOOL.”

Derek started to scratch his head, he couldn't take it all in. Everything that had happened to him over the past few weeks had indeed been extraordinary. He tried to pretend he was hallucinating but the voice was so lucid and beautiful it could not be ignored.

Slowly but surely, his mind started to accept the facts and his whole outlook on life was beginning to alter.

“So tell me, what is beyond the Creational School?”

God Boy thought about this for a second, habitats and society were not a part of his own existence and it was a tough question to answer.

“MY HOME.”

“Your home? So what’s beyond that?”

The third and most unanswered question of all in the history of mankind popped up again. Scientists with crazy white hair had thought about this for a long time and they could never imagine that everything around them did not have to be encased within something. Even a void was invented to describe it but a void became an object and felt physical again.

“WE DON’T HAVE STARS OR SKY, IT IS BLANK, THAT IS WHY I CREATED THEM FOR YOU.”

“SOME BOYS DON’T HAVE THEM. ONE OF THE PUPIL’S IS A MINIMALIST, HE JUST HAS ONE PLANET, A SUN AND ON THE PLANET IS A SINGLE ISLAND, ONE TREE AND FOUR ANTS.”

Derek began to laugh at the ridiculous nature of it all ... he was merely an experiment, his world was merely invented by a child and there didn’t seem to be any purpose to it all.

He walked along the beach to gather his thoughts, a great wash of freedom suddenly came over him and for once he felt no sadness, no anger and no fear anymore.

“God, what is the point of me working if I have nothing to strive for then?”

God Boy chuckled to himself, it was an easy answer.

“NO POINT, BUT YOU WILL SCORE ME MORE MARKS.”

Derek’s mind became as crystal clear as the voice and as clear as the ocean that surrounded him. He only had one more request to make.

“If that’s the bloody case, you might as well send me back to Earth as the second coming.”

God Boy could see the Visioneer come striding in with a great and wondrous parchment which contained the results of the experiments that Derek had been unwittingly subjected to.

There wasn’t much time and it pleased the boy to grant his single wish. Besides it was a small gesture and Derek had done so much for him.

“CONSIDER IT DONE BUT YOU HAD BETTER TAKE THIS PONGWART WITH YOU, GOOD LUCK, DEREK.”

An avocado like creature appeared in Derek’s hand and he looked at the ridiculous looking creature with curiosity.

“What do I do with this?”



Pandemonium erupted outside Gloria’s house as feverish reporters were busy pushing foam headed microphones in front of startled witnesses; Ted was getting his fair share of attention too and could feel the tension rise.

“Listen, all I can say is that we have a very dangerous suspect holed up within the house. As you all know, we lost our most senior officer last night, Sgt Brian Argentine, and there are still several local residents unaccounted for.”

Officers with firearms were perched in various spots perfecting poses reminiscent of a blockbuster action movie and at some point Bruce Willis would appear and blow everything up.

Everyone was loving the media circus, except for a group of nerdy looking train spotters standing further back and dressed in boiler suits. To all intents and purposes they looked like forensics or morgue attendants. Whispers and rumours circulated that they must be a mop up crew for the bloodbath that was to follow.

“Donald, we’re not going to get through, I think that, whatever it is, it must be at the back of house, it’s a simple abduction case.”

The bearded geek nodded his agreement and saw that the situation was useless. “I agree, Colin, we should take the group around the back of the property; they only have the snipers in front.”

It was a good observation and it was clear Ted hadn’t a clue on strategy.

Donald pulled his group together, “Listen men, we’re on the verge of the most important event in our Earth history, an actual encounter, we know they were bought here by the asteroid shaped ship and I want to make sure we find it first before the authorities get to it. Let’s move!”

The boiler suited brigade stomped off to snake their way around the corner, out of sight of the throng of onlookers. Each was carrying an important piece of highly technical monitoring

equipment, mostly stuff that could be knocked up after a trip to Maplins.

The ubiquitous one megapixel camera had indeed claimed its place amongst the various flashing and buzzing components, the preferred choice of the professional UFO hunter.

A low wall offered a glimpse of a vegetable patch but it was a good entrance point to the back of Gloria's garden. Colin raised his fist in a military style gesture and beckoned them all to clamber over it. Wellingtons and Dunlop Green Flash trainers stomped through the tomato plants and marrows that were basking in the sun, leaving a squashy mess in their wake.

They could hear the loudspeaker fire up again as Ted was frantically calling for Honey to let the hostages go and to give herself up. Donald eyed a rickety wooden fence and ran over to crash through it, bringing it to the ground. Boots stomped over the back of their sacrificial comrade to gain access to the last piece of ground separating them from the fence enclosing Gloria's house.

Colin stood like a field general addressing his troops, "Men, we are on the brink of the most important discovery of our lives, what we uncover here will propel us all into the limelight, life will never be the same again."

The apprehensive nerds nodded their heads in agreement and felt very proud.

Colin continued, "All the evidence points to a hive situated right behind this fence, be on your guard but I don't think they are a threat, they just want to communicate with us."

A muddy Donald jumped in with his offering, "It's obvious they're cornered and probably want to get away back to their planet, but get your cameras ready we can't miss this."

Heartbeats were racing ten to the dozen as cameras fired up ready for the grainy spectacular. Colin cursed himself for forgetting his rechargeable batteries; his camera tended to squeeze out of juice after a few shots.

Soon the group were up and over the last fence and had landed in the bushes with the stealth of Bigfoot on eggshells.

“Mummy, there’s some strange men at the back of the garden where Nanna vanished,” cried Citron

Honey was busy moving from window to window lifting up the lace curtains to take a peek at the madness outside. She was frantically fearing for her children’s lives after seeing the armoury gather en masse outside.

“Citron, get away from that window, it’s not safe!”

“But, Mummy, they look like spacemen!”

Honey reached out and pulled her from the window ledge and caught sight of the strange looking men thrashing around in the seriously prickly bushes at the back.

“What are they doing?” she pondered.

The whole UFO spotters group had finally wrenched themselves free of the thorny thicket that Gloria had planted to ward off ASBO teenagers.

The blip on Donald’s modified metal detector finally intensified, “Colin, I have a reading, it’s in the other corner!”

Honey watched as the group moved gingerly over to the friendlier looking bushes.

Basking in its own filth and ooze lay a fattened Drakapod, sleeping off its earlier meals. A giant lump had formed in the middle of its stomach, much like a boa constrictors but the previous morsel had proved tough to digest.

“My God! Colin, look at this,” exclaimed Donald, not believing his eyes.

It was the strangest sight and put Area 57 in the shade. The ugliest creature imaginable had opened up the theory that there definitely WAS life elsewhere.

The group formed a semi circle around the sleeping beast who was just starting to wake up.

Colin decided a speech was in order. “Men, it’s fantastic, look at its trunk and those purple dangly things hanging off its sides, it’s much smaller than I ever thought.”

Cameras started to flash but as each member held their own lenses in to view it, it was becoming increasingly hard to focus as the creature had already begun to expand itself for its lucky afternoon lunch.

“Damn these cameras.” Donald said as he quickly fumbled his zoom controls to take in the other-worldly specimen.

None of them were paying attention to the fact that it was actually growing in size in front of their very eyes. The only witness who could see what was happening was Honey with a ringside view from her vantage point in Gloria’s bedroom.

“Oh my God, it’s horrible!” she cried but it was too late for the hapless crew as several tentacles shot out in all directions to temporarily paralyse its victims.

Ted was just about to lift his megaphone up for another warning when the sound of screaming could be heard from inside the house.

“Men, this is serious, we have got to act now! Get those armed officers up to the door, break it down!”

CHAPTER NINE

A great storm suddenly blew overhead in Blossom Meadows, the angry wind caught everyone outside by surprise as a number of onlookers were blown off their feet by its ferocity.

The armed officers were almost at the door ready to break it down before retreating hastily back to their positions behind the vehicles.

Then suddenly the wind stopped as quickly as it had started.

Ted picked up his hat to perch it back upon his head and looked up at the heavens to see the sky had returned to its uniform blue.

A man appeared in front of the house as if by magic, looking resplendent in white robes clutching an avocado.

The crowd gasped in amazement at the sudden appearance; all except for Ted, who only believed in rules. He picked up his megaphone to point it directly at the gloriously confident looking individual.

“Put down the weapon and place your hands behind your head!” he cried.

Derek pondered his statement for a few seconds with a tilt of his head and looked down at the Pongwart which was sleeping off its long journey in the palm of his hand.

He had seen life now as it really was and any drama directed at him seemed to pale into insignificance as his thousand yard stare looked on and beyond the amazed crowd.

Normally, for Derek, he would be lost for words or just about manage to string words together, words he thought sounded good together, but this time his mind flowed in the most fluid way.

“I expect everyone to go home now, the show is over, none of you understand the true meaning of existence.”

Ted lifted the loudspeaker again to his wet lips to announce his intentions. “Sir, put the weapon down or we will be forced to shoot, this is your last chance.”

To the officer’s amazement, Derek turned round and walked barefoot up to the front door of Gloria’s house still clutching his Pongwart, although he didn’t know what it was for.

“Fire!” came the order and several officers clicked their triggers in unison.

Derek continued to walk; he had a smirk upon his face. He could hear the sounds of cursing behind him as every weapon jammed and refused to work.

The front door opened with a wave of the hand and Derek stepped inside. He knew where his family was and walked swiftly or maybe floated up the stairs.

Honey was standing, still staring out of the window in horror. The children had run to the side of the bed and hidden themselves as best they could.

A hand suddenly reached out and caressed her shoulder in a comforting gesture; she turned to take in the sight of the man she had missed for so long, it felt like a dream.

“Derek?”

His kindly eyes shone with a brightness she had never known before. They seemed to display understanding far beyond being able to screw together a piece of flat-pack furniture from an overly complicated map.

“Honey, it’s been too long. I can sense you’ve had a bit of trouble?”

She hugged him tight and the children, on hearing his voice, came running to grab hold of their long lost father.

“Daddy, daddy!” they screamed in excitement.

Through the corner of his eye, Derek could see something lazily moving through the bushes at the back. He didn’t know what it was but somehow he felt familiar with it.

“Stand well away!” he thundered.

Honey and the children jumped back in shock as Derek pulled open the window and threw the avocado towards the strange purple creature. He didn’t know why he did that but something deep inside had willed him to do so.

The Drakapod was feeling rather full by now, it had never eaten five in one sitting and was full to bursting, but being the vile, disgusting creature that it was, it had a gluttony that could not be appeased.

The Avocado dropped to the ground with a thud a few inches from the slithery monster.

Its trunk sucked at the top of the shell before popping it into its slathering mouth. After a few chews it swallowed the hard shelled

creature like a peanut and began to lay down to take a nap ... but not before trumping loudly to ease its indigestion.

Derek and Honey stared as the vilest creature ever devised in the whole of creation took on a quizzical look, pondered its existence and with some sickening internal crunches, slumped to the ground, dead as a dodo.

Ted had finally seen the light and summoned his troops around the back to ward off an escape route. His officers sprinted through the side gate and into the back yard before they suddenly stopped in their tracks at the sight of the putrid Drakapod.

No one had ever seen anything like it, it looked like a shaved Chihuahua that had swallowed a full fisherman's net. A crab like vegetable came scurrying out of its mouth and ran for cover into the undergrowth.

As they peered closer, weapons cocked at the ready, they noticed an arm sticking out ghoulishly from its bared teeth.

"It's moving, the arm's moving, what the hell is it, someone pull it out!" cried an officer.

Several men caught hold of the arm and wrenched with all their might against the mud like gloop of the Drakapod's internal orifices. A bearded man wearing spectacles and a jump suit slithered out like a birthing foal.

He sucked for breath and lay there in a bewildered state wondering if God had hired a private security force before realising he was still alive.

“Donald Crump, alien investigator, I think we have definitely found the first extra terrestrial.” He spluttered, wiping the ooze from his face.

“Keep pulling men!” roared a satisfied Ted.



There was complete silence in the room as the Visioneer completed a full float around the universe taking in the wondrous creations that had been devised by his very own pupils.

He perched himself up high on a plinth and addressed his audience.

“Class, the time has now come to announce the winner of the final exam within this Creational Semester. You all must be certainly curious to know who had pipped the others into the lead. Some of you have tried and inevitably failed in your quest to obtain this knowledge, however, you are not quite ready to learn those skills at this juncture.”

His mind remonstrated with a couple of boys who had attempted to use will alone to find out and each one jumped from their seats as if they were electrified.

The Visioneer chuckled to himself, they were all far from ready.

“Before I announce the winner I would like to enlighten you on the basis of creation, the principles of which you need to understand fully if you wish to progress.”

God Boy looked on in wonder at the wisdom of his teacher. Unlike his evil brother, he had been created to learn from and

respect his elders and this had given him a great advantage over his rivals.

The Visioneer delivered his final speech with aplomb, “For any species to survive it must be mindful of its boundaries, its competition and also its physical limits, this is the foundation of successful creation. To flagrant these principles is to go against the very essence of creation itself!”

Considering the length of each experiment it came as a surprise to all to receive a speech so short but God Boy knew the reasons. It seemed creation was a very simple matter with extremely simple laws. As time had moved on, creation had become increasingly complex and frustrated and it was rather like a dog chasing its own tail, eventually it would eat itself.

All of the God Boys looked around at each other wondering who the Creational Champion would be but there was only one name on the glorious parchment that the Grand Visioneer had finally begun to unravel.

“Class, it has been a pleasure to guide all of you along this beautiful journey and the winner is ...”

The evil God Boy was willing it to be someone other than his most hated brother but it was all in vain.

“God Boy number 8! Please step up.”

A huge clap and hearty cheers rang out within the room as a wide smile stretched across the winner’s face.

Evil God Boy gnashed his heavenly teeth at the prospect but he could do little more as he watched the boy rise up from his seat to receive his accolade.



Derek was sitting quite comfortably in his soft linen robes within the stunning conservatory that Gloria had purchased to get one over her own neighbours. He was sipping Darjeeling from Gloria's china tea set that he never saw except through a locked glass fronted display stand.

"I'm so glad you are back Derek, I don't want to know where you've been and I can't take another speech like last time. Let's just take things nice and slow," said Honey from the kitchen.

Derek smiled. There was no longing to tell her in the first place, these things simply didn't mean anything anymore.

The television was in full flow as the media circus frantically pieced together the news about the Drakapod encounter and the demotion of Ted for almost bringing carnage to the Runcorn streets.

Derek watched his children scurry around playing hide and seek once more, Jack being the one to always seek as usual, and he felt a happiness that had not been seen within him for quite some time.

He walked into the living room and pulled back the curtains to see if his suspicions were right.

Camped outside and resembling the feel of a Glastonbury field were hundreds of people with all eyes trained perpetually on the house. He could see various placards held aloft as if a demonstration was in order.

'The second coming', 'Derek will save us', were scrawled on quite a few as word had got round about his mysterious

disappearance and re-emergence. Everyone was in no doubt that the alien sighting and a robed Derek was a divine sign from high above.

Honey had tried to ignore the sounds of chanting and singing outside to maintain some sort of normality within her household.

There were continuous knocks at the door but she never answered them and the phone had been pulled out of its socket for fear of constant ringing.

Eventually, she appeared with a plate full of Hob Nobs and Derek picked one up and dunked it in his tea., For a brief moment it made him think of Chin but these attachments were far gone within his mind now and he gave it no more thought.

Honey, being domestic as usual, decided it was time to broach the subject of work, “Darling, it’s been a week now since you arrived back, do you think you could go back to Supersuds and ask Mr. Driver for your job back?”

Derek smirked to himself at the thought of it, “Honey, work is nothing more than a man pushing a heavy rock up a hill, eventually his legs will give way and someone will step in to replace him and continue the push.”

It all sounded perfectly logical to Derek but Honey had become enraged at the speech, “Derek! I’m not having you on the dole, it won’t look good to the neighbours, how will we eat?” she shrieked.

Derek turned to comfort his wife, “Honey, we have all the food we could ever need, when you open the cupboards do you ever see a bare shelf?”

It was a true enough, Derek's magical powers had produced an abundance of food but Honey still wasn't satisfied.

"It's freaking me out, Derek, I don't know where it all comes from but it's not honest is it, we should do the weekly shop like everyone else. You must go back to Supersuds, I can't take this anymore!"

He could see that she was upset and he knew that waving his hand around to conjure up things really wasn't going to cut the mustard.

"My dearest Honey, it's not all about appearances but, if it makes you happy, I will go and visit him now."

A tear had fallen onto Derek's robes as she hugged him for eventually backing down.

"Derek, there's a suit upstairs. Please put that on before you go."

Within an instant the tear she had dropped had fallen onto a pinstripe and she pulled back from his embrace in a shudder.

"Stop doing that, Derek! No more tricks."

He smiled at her and walked in to the hallway.

"One more thing, use mother's car, I don't want you teleporting again."

A normalised Derek stepped out of the front door to meet the glare of cameras as he strode past the throng of people who surrounded him. Some shot out arms to touch his shoulders but others simply backed away to offer him a safe passage.

He started the car with his mind alone and drove it out of the driveway, past the camera crews who were lying in wait for him to appear.

Various so called 'witnesses' were talking to reporters but the speeches were always the same.

"He cured me of baldness."

"My points were removed from my licence in an instant."

"I got front row tickets to see Prince."

As he drove on towards the factory he knew that an entourage had appeared in his rear view mirror but he had little interest in being followed.

It was a bright sunny day as Derek lifted the security barrier with his mind and entered the car park of Supersuds., He could see the brown Maestro of Mr. Petiole, his replacement, sitting in his old parking space.

This was of no concern to him as he simply flicked his wrist and a gold Vauxhall Vectra parked next to it was violently tossed aside and rolled into the brick wall with a sickening smash.

His followers had gathered outside of the fence to watch the spectacle unfold as a sweaty man with a huge flabby neck appeared abruptly outside the staff entrance after hearing the crash.

"What the blazes is going on?" cried Mr. Driver as he hastily combed his hair back into place and peered through his spectacles in an angry way at Derek.

His pin point pupils tried to focus on Derek but his mind was slowly trying to take in someone he thought he would never see again.

His anger turned to surprise which lifted his shaved sideburn skin an extra inch above his ears.

“Derek?” he called, “What are you doing here? How did you get past security?”

“Honey wanted me to come and ask for my job back, so when can I start?” asked Derek.

Mr. Driver started to go red at the sheer cheek of the man, “Mr. Hill, how dare you come here and expect your supervisory position back again, you are an incompetent idiot! I’m going to call security to have you removed!”

A casual looking Derek shook his head. “Still a pompous ass, Mr. Driver? Some things never change.”

“Security! Security!” called Mr. Driver, but for some reason, no one came.

Derek could see his old boss had got himself worked up to boiling point, as he paraded back and forth like a drill Sergeant demanding action.

All of his old fellow workers came stumbling out to see what was going on.

Mavis Cutter was the first to respond, “Hello Derek, nice to see you again, you look well.”

“Will someone get him escorted off the premises, please?”
shouted Mr. Driver.

Derek decided he had had his fun and addressed his old boss,
“Come, come Mr. Driver, you are but a man, does it really matter
if you shout louder than everyone else? Does it matter that you
have a printer and I had a clipboard? Let’s have some quiet around
here now, you were never in the Army too, so drop the pretence.”

For some reason his mind shot back to his childhood and the
one trick he had always wanted to pull off. It was every sci-fi
fantasist’s dream to be able to do so.

He pulled his arm up to shoulder height and moved his thumb
and index finger into a wide pinch that became increasingly close
together.

Mr. Driver began to choke, “Wh ... what are you doing?”

It was no easy matter to talk when you were suffocating and
Mr. Driver dropped to his knees as his onlookers began to scream
in horror.

Mr. Driver grasped at his throat and tried to loosen off the top
button but his numerous chins impeded his progress. His eyes
started to dance on storks and by the time Derek’s fingers had
finally touched, his big red face had slumped onto the tarmac.

Hundreds of Supersuds workers poured out of the factory in a
frenzy and ran for their lives as Derek walked back to his car to
drive home.

“I guess I won’t be working here after all.”

He passed Mavis, who was frozen with fear at the sight. “Mavis, best be going home, knock off early, you’ve worked really hard again.”

Mavis complied and dived for her car before speeding off to join the others.

Derek was the last one to leave and as he pulled out of the gate a huge explosion ripped through the factory and tore off its roof, flames shot high into the air as the chemicals inside ignited to produce the most amazing fireworks spectacle, high into the Runcorn sky.

For miles around, the giant fireball could be seen from every suburb of Runcorn as Derek calmly replaced the cigarette lighter back in its spot on the dashboard.

“Whoops!”



“I must congratulate you on your achievements against all the odds. Your specimen has outlived all of the others. I could put it down to sheer luck, but I know you differently,” said the Visioneer.

God Boy was standing before the plinth willing his acceptance of thanks. Through all of the trials and tribulations, his ant had weathered it all.

“Class, you would do well to study the efforts of this particularly gifted boy, he has managed to grasp everything that I have taught over the whole semester.”

The Visioneer glanced over at the evil boy for an instant and willed his intention that he would be back tracked to the same class when it resumed again.

“I have the trophy here, you know the rules and you know what you must do.”

A triumphant God Boy nodded his acceptance and began to summon up his will.



Derek drove back through the streets of Runcorn past the numerous retirees toiling away, mowing their lawns or cleaning their cars and thought to himself that life as he knew it would never be the same again.

He had crossed into another realm entirely and he knew that time had now become a little short. All of his ponderings on the nature of the Universe had been revealed to him, he knew now how little he had originally known.

The Merc pulled up into the driveway and he got out to stroll past the masses once more, back into the house.

“He’s a miracle! He’s come to save us,” they all cried out in unison.

Honey had dished up some spaghetti bolognese and the smell wafted through his nostrils, somehow it felt like a last supper.

“Hello, Derek, did you get your job back?” called Honey.

There was no point telling the truth so he simply nodded and sat down to join his family to eat his favourite dish.

Singing could be heard outside along with a number of police sirens but Derek paid no attention to it.

After the meal had ended, he got up and hugged his children, telling them to be safe and always be good and not to strive too much in their lives.

It was an odd speech and not one a parent normally gave, but Honey was used to his weirdness by now.

He kissed her on the cheek and stared at his wife for a few seconds before declaring, “Honey, I’m going away but upstairs you will find a pile of money sitting on the bed, it will see you all good.”

“Where did it come from, Derek, what have you done?” she shrieked.

“Just a gift, it’s all legitimate,” he soothed.

Honey unhooked herself from his grasp and ran upstairs. To all intents and purposes, it looked like he had won the lottery and she almost fainted at the sight.

“Derek! What have you been up to?” she cried, but it was too late, the front door was already open and Derek had taken a stroll outside.

He walked down the path, followed by his worshippers and made his way around the corner. No one knew where he was going but since they had nothing better to do they all started to march behind him.

The police, for some reason, sat idly in their cars unable to move as the locks had become stuck solid on the doors.

News reporters rushed to take pictures and film live for the television channels to broadcast nationwide.

Eventually Derek reached 42 Blossom Meadows and trod steadily up the dirt mound before stopping to turn and face his audience.

“To all of you, I have very little to say and it is this ...”

The nation were glued to their TV sets as they took in the marvel that was Derek Hill, the man who had vanished and returned, the man who could stop dogs from peeing up lampposts, the visionary, the soothsayer.

It was an important message; they simply couldn't miss it for the world.

The internet buzzed with activity as the pictures were streamed live across the tiny globe of green and blue

Derek's pause had had the desired effect so he continued...

“Life is an experiment; there is no point in striving.”

For a few seconds, everyone stood slack jawed as they tried to take in the veritable words of divine wisdom but eventually, after a long silence, several shouts began to ring out from the crowd.

“That was lame.”

“Pathetic, you're a charlatan!”

“I want my money back, I bought a T-Shirt!”

It appeared that the party was over as the hustle and bustle of people began to get increasingly angry. It felt like a late cancelled rock concert and the police could do nothing to control the angry crowd. Soon there would be violence in the streets.

Derek stood there bemused by it all. What more could he say, what did it matter anyway, silence would have been better. He could have stood facing a wall for forty years or sat under a tree for better visual effect.

But the visual effect came sooner rather than later when suddenly a huge crack of thunder erupted like a thousand kettle drums and the skies turned dark and foreboding.

The wind decided to have an off day but it was spectacular nonetheless and everyone was in no doubt that something was about to happen, maybe the rock concert might be starting up after all.

A dark shape rapidly appeared behind the clouds and pushed its way through the angry jumble of vapour. Derek smiled and looked up to see the thing he had sensed all along after arriving back at the planet.

People started to scream at the sight and the cameras just kept on rolling. No one moved an inch but took in the jaw dropping splendour of the wonderful unearthly stage show.

Eventually the clouds broke apart and a giant arm appeared and pushed steadily down towards the once robed figure on the ground who had miraculously changed his attire once again, donning his favourite blue underpants.

Someone screamed out, "It's a child's arm?"

It was indeed the arm of a child and it reached down and clutched Derek between its fingers like a boy would pick up a plastic soldier.

Derek stretched his own arms out and closed his eyes as he was received into its grasp and carried up by his personal elevator to the skies.

Gasps filled the air as the man they had thought phony could never have pulled off a trick as wondrous as this without getting a Hollywood studio involved and certainly not in Runcorn at least.

“Goodbye, world, I’m about to embark on a journey that will open my mind to the wonders of the cosmos,” shouted Derek.

He was pleased with that parting speech for he had never said anything quite so eloquent ever in his life.

“Goodbye, Derek,” they all shouted back.



Of course, Derek didn’t know that his superhuman powers couldn’t possibly stretch to producing his own oxygen in space and, by the time he was pulled out of the Universe and into the Creational class, he had effected a lifeless scary bear pose together with an imbecilic grimace.

The Visioneer nodded to God Boy as he received the specimen and walked over to the amber vat and dipped Derek in, like you would a toffee apple.

When he was pulled out, he was frozen in time within a perfect crystallized circle and placed majestically upon a wooden trophy, the kind you win by playing in a darts championship.

There were another twelve circles like Derek already placed on the trophy. Within each circle, and also frozen in a death pose stood wondrous looking specimens of all shapes and tentacles extracted from other worlds, a veritable alien collection and the Visioneer admired his handiwork for a few seconds before instantly etching the accolade underneath Derek.

The silver shield simply read:

God Boy Number 8, Semester 13, Creational Champion.

The Visioneer handed the trophy over to the beaming God Boy and patted him on the shoulder. He decided a speech was in order.

“When your favoured dinosaur species had perished a long time ago you could have started again, destroyed your world and picked another.”

God Boy willed his understanding to the teacher.

“You decided to carry on, even though the ants gave you no pleasure. It was because of your thirst for knowledge, rather than a selfish need for fun that I awarded you the top prize, well done.”

Claps and cheers again rang out throughout the classroom and all the God Boys ran for the door to play outside, the evil God Boy had made haste a little earlier than the rest.

“Thank you class, for making this semester such an enjoyable one,” called the Visioneer.

There was no one left in the room and the Visioneer decided to look down upon the world that God Boy number 8 had created, it was a great achievement to behold.

Far below him he could see time pass very quickly, in fact three millenniums had zoomed by and during that time Derek had been renamed D*Rok. Thousands of dirt mounds had been erected in his honour as a place for worship and numerous hours of badly rhyming rap hymns sung in his name, no one was ever happy and continued their relentless search for a higher meaning which made the Visioneer chuckle somewhat.

But, of course, it was all in vain and somehow perfectly natural that it should be this way. The Visioneer watched the God Boys skip down the hall and made quite certain before he left that all the lights were switched off, all parchments were stored away and the most important final task of all, the flicking of the creational switch ready for the next semester.

He smiled to himself, it seemed everyone in the room had understood the ultimate point of his teachings to a large degree, he was looking forward to the next semester and a fresh batch of wonder filled God Boys.



As he was about to leave the room he paused for a moment to look up once more at the light switch with its elegantly simple lettering which read:

‘Creation’.

His wizened finger reached up and deftly clicked it down and a trillion worlds, moons, dust clouds, life giving suns and space instantly folded up within itself into a single infinite point, ready for the next semester.

The Visioneer then strode out of the room to take his well earned break.

Derek was right, what was the point of striving?

THE END

About the Author

Allen Cooke was born in the North, raised in the Middle and resides in the South, he has family in the West and once went to Cromer in Norfolk so that completes the compass.