

The University of the Bleeding Obvious



Annual
2021

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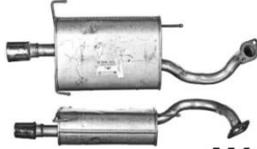
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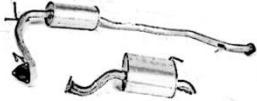
Exhausts!



Exhausts!

Exhausts!

*We sell exhausts, loads of exhausts.
Whatever the make, whatever the model,
we've got the exhaust for you!*



**Fords, Fiats, Vauxhalls,
Volkswagens and Volvos.**

Yes, exhausts!



*And not just for cars. We've got exhausts for trucks.
We've got exhausts for bikes. **Loads and loads and
loads of exhausts.***

*Seriously, we'll put an exhaust on anything. We'll put
an exhaust on your house. We'll put an exhaust on
your dog. We'll even put an exhaust on your exhaust!*

**Buy one exhaust and get another exhaust free. By
TWO exhausts and get SEVEN exhausts free!**

***How many exhausts do you
people want?***

*Fit an exhaust on your children, on your dinner,
on your sofa.*



***We all need more exhausts now! Buy more
exhausts! Go on, buy them - buy them now!***

**Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!
Exhauuuuuuuustsssss!**

**Yes, it's an exhaust
explosion!**

I feel dizzy now, I'm going for a lie down.



Bond, James Bond, Tha' Knows

When the producers of the James Bond movies were looking to refresh the franchise in 2005 they wanted a grittier, more realistic portrayal of the secret agent. "We very much thought it was time for a no-nonsense, tell-it-like-it-is Bond," said Chief Executive Associate Chief Producer Godfrey Cabbage. "That's very much what we wanted. And after considering a number of options, we very much decided that he should be a Yorkshireman."

Of course, Ian Fleming didn't make Bond a Yorkshireman in his original novels, but then he didn't give him an invisible car and fire him into space either, so there is a precedent for the film series taking liberties with the character. In fact, the decision was very much a reaction to some of the comic-book excesses of earlier movies, as Head Chief Top Associate Managing Executive Producer Godfrey Cabbage explains.

"It was the case, we very much thought, that modern audiences did not want to see the hero infiltrating an enemy stronghold disguised as a crocodile or spazzing around Venice in a hovercraft gondola. A Yorkshire Bond, we very much felt, would not allow himself to get involved in anything so absurd. Ask him to escape down a snow-capped mountain on a cello

case and he'd waste no time in telling you where to get off."

However, there were clearly problems with the initial versions of the screenplay. Although the characterisation of Bond's new persona was certainly authentic, there were concerns that it was a little rough around the edges, as this early draft shows.



After knocking out the two sentries with a cricket bat, **Bond** penetrates the control centre of SPECTRE's underground lair. As he walks into the dimly lit room, a shadowy figure swivels his chair to meet him. He leans forward and the light falls on his face. It is **Blofeld**. He sits, contemplating Bond as he strokes the white cat on his lap.

Bond:

How do. The name's Bond, James Bond, licenced t'kill, so think on. What's tha doin' wi that silly moggy? Tha wants to get thesen a ferret, tha knows.

Blofeld:

Ah Mr Bond, we meet at last! May I congratulate you on your excellent disguise. A flat cap and a dufflecoat must be difficult for someone of your excellent sartorial sensibilities to countenance.

Bond:

Aye well, it's reet parky outside. You don't expect me to catch pneumonia, does thee?

Blofeld:

No Mr Bond, I expect you to die. But first, let us be civilised. A drink, Mr Bond - I believe you favour vodka martini, shaken not stirred?

Bond:

Martini be blowed. Get a brew on, I'm spitting feathers here.

In the hope of developing a more sophisticated version of Bond, producers turned to Alan Bennett. Hailing from Yorkshire himself, it was felt that Bennett's mastery of idiom and dialogue would provide the franchise with a fully-rounded and believable character. However, some of Bennett's ideas were questionable. For example, he was keen on creating a new

villain, more rooted in real life. Bond's nemesis was to have been called Trevor Hardcastle and would have been the senior revenues officer for Calderdale Borough Council. The following excerpt is from the film's epic denouement, in which Bond finally stands face to face with his archenemy.

Bond, his arms firmly pinioned by two muscular gentlemen, is roughly escorted to **Trevor Hardcastle's** centre of operations. **Mr Hardcastle** is sat behind his desk, enjoying a cup of Earl Grey and a fondant fancy. He looks up as **Bond** enters and delivers an evil smile.

Mr Hardcastle:

Ah Mr Bond, we meet at last. I'm so glad you could find time in your busy schedule to visit me. Although I think that you will come to regret the intrusion. I'm afraid you owe me a debt and I believe that the day of reckoning has finally arrived.

Bond:

I don't owe thee nowt, Hardcastle. Now tell these fellas to let us go, or I'll chin thee.

Mr Hardcastle:

Oh come now, Mr Bond. Can you have forgotten so quickly? You owe Calderdale Borough Council eight months' worth of council tax. It's no good struggling, there's no escape. We'll go to court and get a liability order if we have to.

Bond:

You monster! You'll never get away with this! And what have you done with Gloria Chest?

Mr Hardcastle:

Ah, Miss Chest, your glamorous companion. I'm afraid you will never see the beautiful Miss Chest again.

Bond:

Oh no, you don't mean -

Mr Hardcastle:

Yes, she's working for me in the accounts department.



Bond:

Swine!

Mr Hardcastle:

Ha, ha! Now, Mr Bond, sign this direct debit mandate.

Bond:

Let's not beat about t'bush wi' all this 'direct debit mandate' nonsense. I know what you're really after - you want to take over the world.

Mr Hardcastle:

Take over the world! Good gracious, no. I really couldn't cope with all that bother. So much fuss and nonsense - and think of the admin. Oh no, no, no, I couldn't be doing with that, at all.

Bond:

Oh no? Then what is it you really want?

Mr Hardcastle:

Well. I wouldn't say no to a slice of fruitcake. And there's many an occasion when I find myself yearning after a chocolate digestive. So, if you could just sign here and Julie will give you a receipt on your way out.

Bennett was confident that Mr Hardcastle could have been a recurring character, and even thought there was potential for him to have a spin off movie of his own. But although there were many things that producers liked about Bennett's take on the franchise, they ultimately decided that something was missing. "We very much agreed that the lack of car chases, stunt sequences and explosions left too great a vacuum," said Associate Head Executive Overlord Chief Executive Producer Executive Godfrey Cabbage. "We thought that the sequence where Bond gets off the bus at the wrong stop was wonderfully tense, very much so, but it wasn't enough to sustain audience interest for the duration of the movie."

What the film needed was a script that delivered blistering, fast-moving action sequences, and it became clear that there was only one man for the job. For thirty years the BBC sitcom *Last of the Summer Wine* had delighted audiences with high-octane thrills and spills as it followed the adventures of three senile old men wandering around the hills and valleys of Yorkshire. Who can forget the classic 'Compo Careers Down a Hill on Tea Tray' episode, the thrilling 'Compo Careers Down a Hill in a Wheelbarrow', or the harrowing 'Nora Batty Gets Shot While Trying to Infiltrate a Secret Underground Missile Installation'.

Writer Roy Clarke was an obvious choice for the job, and he didn't disappoint. He turned in a script in which James Bond and

his fellow spies, Foggy and Clegg, convert an old ice cream van into a submarine in order to penetrate a secret SPECTRE base at the bottom of Ogden Reservoir. They destroy it using plastic explosive hidden in Bond's wellies, then escape by surfing to the shore on bits of the wreckage.

Not only was the script replete with action sequences, it also managed the very difficult balancing act of grounding the film in day-to-day life. Take for example this scene, in which several of the spies' wives gather in Mrs Bond's kitchen for a coffee and a natter.

Mrs Tanner:

Where's your James today,
then?

Mrs Bond:

Up to no good, I shouldn't
wonder. You know what
spies are like as soon as
you let them out of your
sight.

Mrs Leiter:

Ooh, you don't need to tell
me. My Felix stops out
till all hours, then sneaks
home at night, covered in
blood and with his trousers
riddled with bullet holes.
And they think we don't
notice!

Mrs Tanner:

I should say so! Well,
I've told my Bill that the
next time some henchman
lunges at him with a knife,
he can darn his own shirt.
I said to him, you watch
the kind of people you're
mixing with, I said. One
of these days someone is
going to get hurt, so you
think on.



Mrs Bond:

My James is no different. Always coming home with his clothes torn.

Mrs Leiter:

Aye, well, there's torn and there's torn, isn't there?

Mrs Bond:

Now, just what do you mean by that, Myrtle Leiter?

Mrs Leiter:

Nothing. Only that we've all seen the way your James carries on with that Miss Money Penny from the launderette. I'm not saying that there's anything improper in it but, well, happen there's no smoke without fire.

With the major obstacles overcome, the film was set to go into production. The movie had a working title, *There's Nowt So Dead as Folk*, Sean Bean had been cast as the new Bond and the Brighouse and Rastrick Brass Band were going to do the theme tune. Why the project didn't go ahead is not entirely clear, although it's thought that producers got cold feet. "We very much feared that the whole movie might turn out to be a bit crap," intimated Top Whack Chief Executive Head Honcho Producer Godfrey Cabbage. So, *There's Nowt So Dead as Folk*, was shelved and we ended up with *Casino Royale* instead, although we can at least be grateful that the studio retained the scene where Daniel Craig escapes from Le Chiffre by careering down a hill in a bathtub.

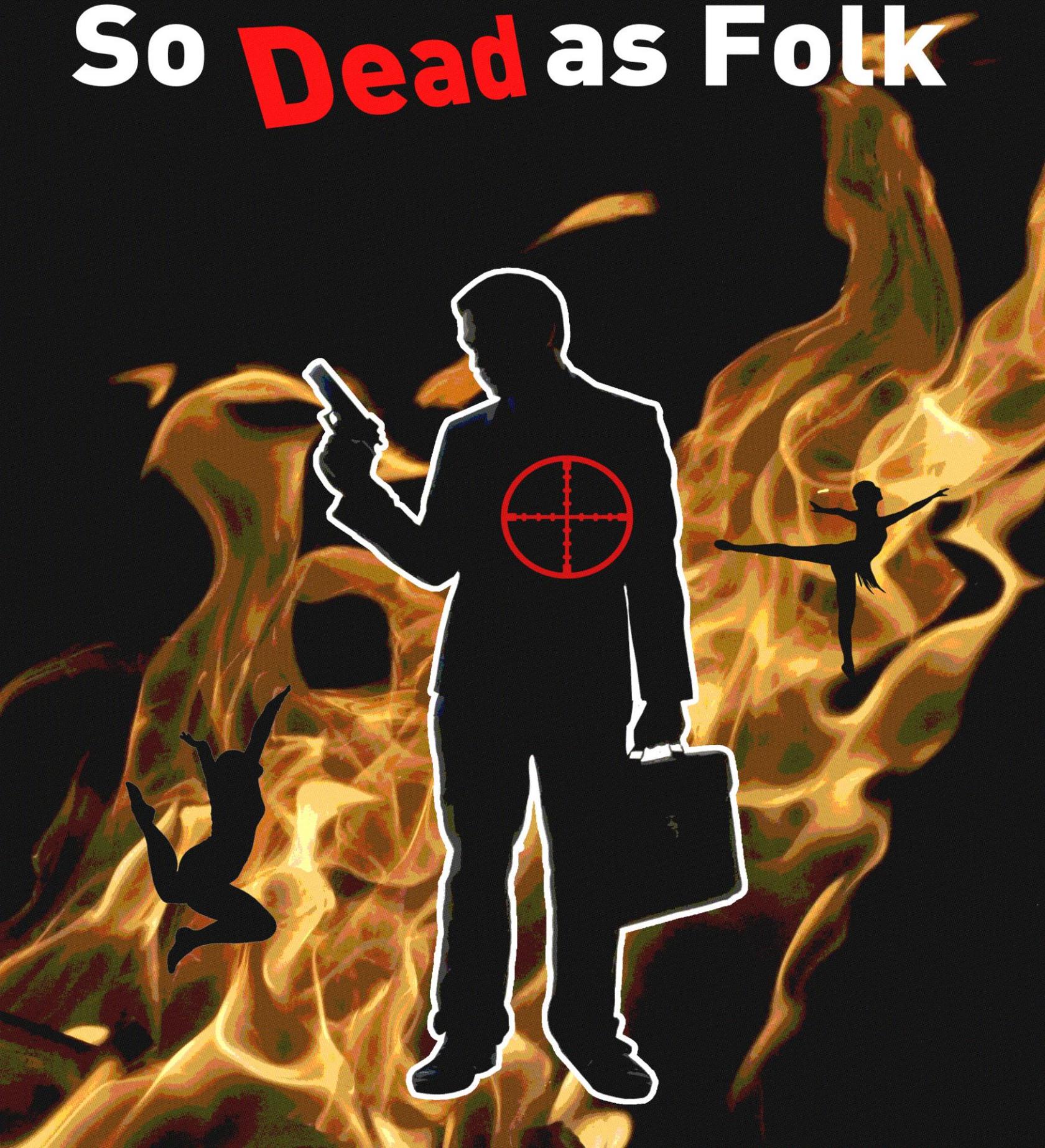


Had the film been a success, there were suggestions of remaking some of the earlier movies with the new Yorkshire Bond. Details are sketchy, although this list of possible titles has emerged.

**Thee Only Lives Twice,
Tha' Knows
T'Bloke wi' Golden
Pigeon
Dr Nowt
Octowhippet**

ALBERT R BROCCOLI'S EON PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS SEAN BEAN AS IAN FLEMING'S JAMES BOND 007 IN

There's Nowt So **Dead** as Folk



So You Want to be a Mime?

Woah, just wait a minute: becoming a mime artist is not a decision to be taken lightly. Life as a mime may seem very exotic and exciting but there's a great deal to consider. We asked professional mime artist 'Bop' to talk us through some of the pitfalls but he point blank refused to speak to us and just started waving his hands about like a moron. So we left the twat pretending that he was trapped in a box and made up a few pointers of our own

1. Real Faith

Have faith, you'll need it if you want to be a mime. You have to *really* believe that the objects and environments with which you are interacting are real. You have to *really* believe that people are genuinely impressed by your skills and don't just think you're a bit of a plank. You have to *really* believe that you haven't completely wasted your life.

Do it right and you'll find that walking into an imaginary wall will give you a *very real* broken nose - you have to *really* believe that and not just assume that some annoyed passer-by has punched you in the face.

2. With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility

There's more to being a mime than pretending to peel an imaginary banana - it gives you the power to bend reality to your will. Oh yes. But you must never use your mime powers for evil. It may be tempting to hold up a bank with an invisible gun, escape by running up some make-believe stairs and then launch yourself from the roof in an imaginary glider, but there are





At the disco

consequences. You would be breaking the sacred mime code and all the other mimes would hunt you down and kill you. With *real* guns.

3. Mime's Elbow

A lifetime as a professional mime will make you prey to a number of mime-related diseases and conditions, quite apart from all the injuries you can expect from walking into invisible walls and being punched by invisible members of the public.

Many a mime veteran will recount the agony of mime's elbow, creaking spleen and chapped knees. These are only to be expected, and are a small price to pay for your art. But are you aware of some of the more debilitating disorders arising from a career in mime? For example, there is lobster thigh, a condition that results from spending extended periods pretending to be trapped in a box.

If that doesn't put you off, there is the misery of loose knees. Mimes need to be incredibly supple but sometimes their joints can become a little *too* mobile, resulting in legs that swing wildly in opposite directions, so that you never know whether you're coming or going.

But what prove to be most distressing are the delusions. Just because a mime has retired, it doesn't mean that their powerful imaginations have stopped working. Far from it - in fact they can go into overdrive, to the point where they genuinely start to believe that their inventions are real. Think what it must be like to be a frightened old age pensioner who, every day, really does think that they are trapped in a box or walking against the wind. Fucking tragic.



Squatting over an open fire

Your Questions Answered

I don't often see women mimes. Is it possible to become a mime if you're a woman?

Women can be anything they want to be: scientists, footballers, astronauts, leaders of nations, entrepreneurs, computer programmers, surgeons... So why the hell would they want to be a mime?

Is it true that I won't put on weight if I mime eating a burger?

Contrary to popular belief, mime burgers actually contain about twice as many calories as real ones. They also contain asbestos, which is one of the reasons why mime-eating has fallen out of favour in recent years.

How do I say 'thank you' if someone gives me a tip?

Obviously you can't speak, so the conventional way to say 'thank you' is to smile and hold both palms upwards. But seriously, don't worry about it - nobody's going to give you money.

How will I deal with the legions of fans who will mob me wherever I go, once I have become a top international mime artist?

Mimes are hot properties: mime-influencers collect millions of followers on social media and are able to command huge fees from appearances and advertising. It's no wonder that they can end up beating off over-enthusiastic fans with a stick. Make sure it's a really sturdy stick, though, and be sure to practise your swing - it's all in the elbow, apparently.

I have been an amateur mime artist for a while but I want to take it to the next level. Is there a recognised qualification?

Established in 1832, the Fair and Laudable Union of Mime Practitioners (FLUMP) has protected the interests of mime artists around the globe. It offers a number of accredited courses, including Level 2 Walking Against the Wind, advanced tuition in Descending Imaginary Stairs and a B.Tech in Being Trapped in a Box

My employer has banned mime in the workplace. Do I have legal protection from discrimination?

Yes, you can take your employer to mime court. If the mime judge finds that your employer is mimist it can result in a hefty fine or even incarceration in mime prison - which is exactly as insubstantial as you'd expect mime prison to be.

In fact, your employer is being incredibly short-sighted. Mime is rapidly becoming the new lingua franca of international business. To connect effectively with trading partners and customers around the world, mime is now the go-to option.

Can I catch scabies from mimes?

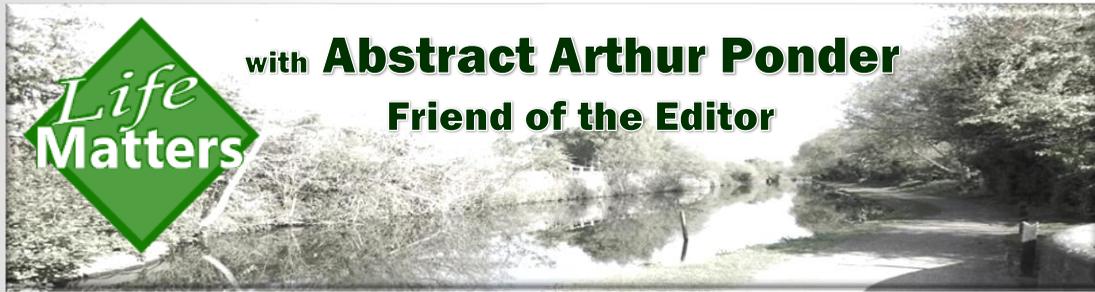
It is a common misconception that you can catch scabies or other skin conditions from mimes, most probably arising from a wave of anti-mime hysteria that swept through Europe in the late nineteenth century. When handled correctly, mimes are extremely unlikely to infect anyone - although, for a number of reasons, we suggest that you don't go around licking them.



Lunging at a pig



Reclining in a wheelbarrow



No. 412 The Bee

The only time I've ever been stung by an insect was when I trod on a bee in bare feet. By which I mean, of course, that *I* was in bare feet, not the bee. Although, obviously, the bee was in bare feet as well. It's not like you're going to find a bee wearing football boots, or something, is it? Bit of an expensive footwear option, anyway, I would have thought. Six feet, you see, so you'd need three pairs. I wouldn't imagine there would be many places that cater for bees, in any case. I should think if you went into your local shoe shop and asked them if they had anything for a six-foot bee, you'd end up very disappointed. I mean a bee with six feet, not a bee that is six foot high, or anything like that. I suppose that if you turned up with a bee that large they'd see you coming and lock the doors. If would be no good you hammering on the glass and shouting 'This is Colin. Have you got three pairs of sandals in a size nine?'

Anyway, back to this bee. Or was it a wasp? Certainly, it seemed quite waspish. I don't mean that it was waspish in the sense that it was making cutting and cruel remarks. I didn't actually strike up a conversation with it. Don't go imagining that there was some sort of altercation that escalated to the point where the wasp finally flipped and vented its anger by stinging me. That didn't happen. No, I merely mean that it was waspish in the sense that it was, etymologically speaking, a wasp. Or do I mean entomologically? Both, I suppose.

Look, I think that a blanket assumption that all wasps are waspish (apt to make sharp, cruel remarks) solely by virtue of being waspish (like a wasp) is waspcist (prejudiced against wasps). Perhaps we can just agree on that.

Anyway, that's my bee story. Makes you think, doesn't it?



Sorry, couldn't find a picture of a bee

NEXT WEEK: The Spider, but I might stray onto the subject of umbrellas.

Topping Talent

Providing some of the best entertainment acts currently on the circuit. Whether you're planning a variety gala, a corporate event or a community celebration, Topping Talent will have the right act for you.

Take a look at a few of our most popular performers.

The Brainiac Twins

Marjorie and Magdalene Brainiac will treat you to an evening of extraordinary mentalism. They regularly astonish audiences with their legendary mind-reading abilities, their psychic levitation techniques and their faultless displays of coordinated bigotry. In addition, Magdalene can fire thunderbolts out of her arse, a skill rarely mastered by someone of her young age.



*"My wife and I were astounded by the Brainiac Twins' proficiency in the hypnotic arts. Following the performance my wife firmly believed herself to be the Archbishop of Canterbury. I should point out that she also thought she was the Archbishop of Canterbury **before** the show. What I'm trying to say is that this show is ideal for everybody, even the Archbishop of Canterbury. She loved it."*

Major FP Featherstonehaugh

Major Featherstonehaugh, a veteran of countless military campaigns, presents an expert showcase of coordinated stabbing. You will be in awe of the Major's legendary swordsmanship as he demonstrates a wide range of chopping, slicing, swiping, hacking and stabbing techniques with the help of terrified members of the audience. It is testament to Major Featherstonehaugh's talent that he has never been given a bad review. Not by anyone who's still in one piece, anyway.



"I'd highly recommend this show to anyone who is interested in sharp pointy things. Just don't sit on the front row, that's all."

Garth Spanners and the Spanner Family

Quite possibly one of the finest ventriloquists in the business. The Spanner family are three life-sized and incredibly lifelike dolls that Garth brings to life using his remarkable voice-throwing skills. They sing! They dance! They recite the alphabet while Garth drinks a glass of water. It is a closely guarded secret how Garth manages to manipulate all three dolls at the same time - especially the middle one. Perhaps we'll never know? Perhaps we really don't want to?



"I was very fortunate to catch Garth's show last month. He does this routine where the dolls all revolve their heads 360 degrees while singing Rule Britannia. It's very funny, but it finishes with Garth spinning his own head round in a complete circle, which is a bit sickening, to be honest."

Mickey's Magic Mangle

Mickey's Magic Mangle is a kid's show like no other. Join Mickey on his magical journey through Mangleland and watch spellbound as his wonderful adventures unfold. Many people have made the mistake of assuming that Mickey is just some old bloke who stands on stage, looking bored and cranking an old mangle for an hour and a half, but seriously, your kids will love it.



"Brilliant. Dropped the kids of while we went and got a bite to eat. When we picked them up they were in a perfect stupor of boredom and were quiet for the next two weeks. It was bliss."

Mrs Tranmere's Rock 'n' Roll Organ Show

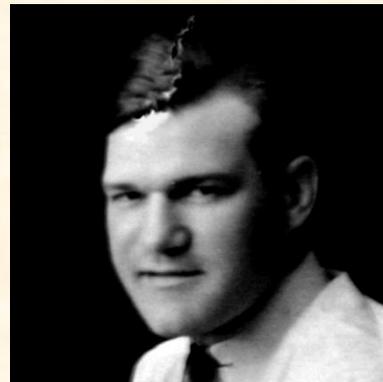
Would you be astonished to hear that Mrs Tranmere has never had an organ lesson in her life? Not if you'd heard her play, you wouldn't. She plays the hits like you've never heard them before - which is why people rarely recognise them. She has now become so infamous that audiences attend her shows purely to guess the tunes, with teams from all around the world competing to identify the melodies. Many have tried to emulate her style - by playing blindfold, wearing boxing gloves or smashing the keys randomly with a hammer - but few have come close.



"As a professional tune-spotter I have been attending Mrs Tranmere's recitals for many years and even after all this time she can still surprise me. Just last week her honky-tonk version of Bridge Over Troubled Water was a revelation, and I would defy anyone to successfully identify which of those cacophonous melees of random chords was supposed to be Sympathy for the Devil."

The Great Escapo

The Great Escapo is an escapist with a difference. Whereas some escape artists demonstrate the art of escaping from chains, padlocks and handcuffs, the Great Escapo has mastered the much more difficult discipline of escaping from contracts and service agreements. Gasp in wonder as he cancels his broadband contract at a moment's notice, reel in shock as he frees himself of his cable agreement without having to have a long-winded conversation with a call centre worker. How does he do it? When, for an encore, you see him deftly terminate an Amazon Prime contract, you'll swear that it's witchcraft.



"I've been trying to end a boiler maintenance contract for years - ever since the boiler blew up, in fact. I've been getting nowhere and I was on the verge of giving up, but after witnessing the Great Escapo I am filled with a fresh sense of determination. It can be done! I'm going to go home now, phone up the service centre and then, after waiting for eight hours to get through to someone, I'm going to damn well give them a piece of my mind."

The Barker Family

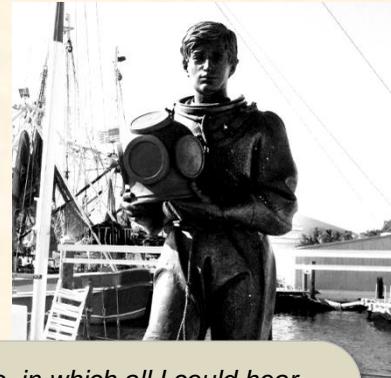
Three generations of Barkers make up this unique and enchanting act. Mr Barker juggles live toads whilst Mrs Barker demonstrates the key elements of successful bicycle repair. Meanwhile Old Ma Barker attempts to raise the dead, with the talented Baby Barker sitting at her feet, playing the trombone. If that doesn't grab you, then you'll be pleased to know that it usually ends in a fight, with three of the Barkers hospitalised and the remaining member of the family emerging as the blood-soaked but triumphant victor. The smart money is usually on the baby.



"An extremely varied act with something for everybody. I personally enjoyed the trombone, and can only lament the fact that young Baby Barker does not have a sibling who can join him on the tuba."

The Marvellous Undersea Kingdom of Colin Chocolate

Join professional diver and underwater photographer Colin Chocolate for a fascinating four hour lecture on the flora and fauna of the world below the waves. Colin talks at great length about the weird and wonderful creatures that he has encountered during his damp adventures, accompanied by an extensive slide show. Be warned that for the sake of authenticity, Colin performs his talk wearing a full deep sea diving suit, complete with helmet, so it is unlikely that you will be able to make out much of what he's saying. You might want to take a book.



"I sat through a talk that seemed to go on for days, in which all I could hear was some indistinct mumbling, and all I could see was a series of blurred pictures of things that may or may not have been marine life, some of which appeared to have been taken at the fresh fish counter in my local supermarket. Still, it was either this or going to see Les Mis again, so I think I got off lightly."

Emmeline 'The Thrasher' Wilson

Ten year-old Emmeline may not look much, but she's got a vicious right hook and she knows when to put the boot in without the ref seeing. Fresh from her prize-winning pummelling of Janice 'Slasher' Pickering, Emmeline is touring the country giving a series of exhibition performances. You will also get the chance to step into the ring and take on The Thrasher yourself, although the management make it clear that they will in no way be responsible for any subsequent medical costs.



"I remember thinking that she doesn't look like much, so she shouldn't present too much of a problem. That was just before I ducked under the ropes. The next thing I knew, I was sailing backwards in a horizontal position over the heads of the crowd, coming to rest in a crumpled heap next to the fire exit. It was a painful and humiliating experience. I'm going back next Tuesday."

The Blaupunkt Sisters

The Blaupunkt Sisters died over fifty years ago, but that hasn't stopped them touring. State of the art hologram techniques have meant that many of our best loved acts are still wowing audiences around the world, and the Blaupunkt Sisters are no exception. In this case, budgetary restrictions have meant that the technology involved is rather more rudimentary, but it is nevertheless remarkable what can be achieved with such an ingenious system of ropes and pulleys.



"I first saw the Blaupunkt Sisters in 1952. I saw them again last year and I have to say that they are as good now as they ever were. Being dead certainly hasn't slowed them down, although Mary Blaupunkt did spend most of the second half drooping at an awkward angle after one of her ropes snapped."

Her Britannic Majesty's Royal Cosmological Society conjointly with His Royal Highness Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, and with the gracious support of Ealing Borough Council, are pleased to announce the...

GREAT SPACE EXHIBITION

of 1853

*Glorious innovations, technological marvels and
divers and wondrous mechanical apparatus!*

With grateful thanks for the patronage of His Highness, the Royal Cosmological Society presents this celebration of British achievement in the arena of interstellar travel, in pursuit of its efforts to put a man on the surface of the moon by the end of the decade, and its pledge to conquer the infinite void for the glory of Her Majesty Queen Victoria and for the Empire.

"Ja, das is very gut! Make eine pop-pop rocket
and get to ze moon. Haben ze plenty gut time.
Dankeschön."

HRH Prince Albert

Miracles, marvels and moon dust.



Ticket holders will be astonished to witness the very latest that modern science has to offer, all brought together under one roof in Ealing. Try on a genuine **space survival suit** for yourself! Sample **exotic space cuisine**, such as Martian dumplings, boiled Venusian cabbage and space beef! Gaze upon our star attraction, the ironclad space capsule **Deathtrap 1**, the vehicle in which Colonel Harry Chunks and his trusty batman Private Wilkins hope to reach the moon later this very year, space weather permitting.

See fascinating tableaux depicting moon life, prepared by the London School of Experimental Taxidermy. (*Caution is advised: exhibit utilises mixed offal and raw guts and is unsuitable for women, children and gentlemen of delicate constitutions.*)

The exhibition will culminate on Sunday with a spectacular performance entitled **Footsteps to the Future**, envisaging what life will be like when we are all living on the moon. Expect **dazzling costumes, thrilling pyrotechnics** and several **comic songs** on the subjects of the moon, heavenly bodies and the funny thing about eating soup in zero gravity, performed on the piano-forte by the celebrated music hall artiste **J.P. Morrow**.



Friday 3rd - Sunday 5th June

Come along and take a glimpse into the future.

How to be Sweary

with Professor Timothy Bottom

Nowhere is the frenetic pace at which language evolves so excitingly demonstrated than in the field of swearing. If you passionately want someone to know that they are a complete **FRUMPBANGLER**, or a rancid heap of **SPAPCHIT**, or even that they are the inbred son of a **TWANKY FROOTPAPPER**, then you have an almost limitless choice of words and phrases at your disposal. And that choice is expanding all the time as people come up with new insults, oaths and expletives.

So let's take a look at some of the most interesting swearwords in circulation and, if you can get the hang of how to use them, maybe you won't finish up looking like a complete **SPRUNT**.



This word derives from the old German word 'trumpschaft', which was used up until the mid-19th century to describe a major component on a foot-treadle operated loom. The trumpschaft was known to break frequently, causing significant inconvenience, expense and injury - especially when it flew off unexpectedly and hit workers in the rear.

What made it worse was that the trumpschaft was an entirely redundant part of the overall mechanism, serving no purpose other than to provide work for travelling loom menders. Not surprising then that in its modern form **TRUMPSHAFT** is used to describe something that is unreliable, useless and likely to be a pain in the arse.



If someone called you **FRATTOCKY**, you might think that it meant that you were like a frattock. Well, that's rubbish, but it's not unexpected since it's exactly the kind of thing that a **FRATTOCKY** person like you would believe. **FRATTOCKY** is used to describe someone who jumps to logical conclusions based on perfectly reasonable assumptions, but who must be ridiculed and derided for it all the same. There is no such thing as a 'frattock'. You are not to know that but we're going to laugh about you all the same, because you're so **FRATTOCKY**.



SPEEDLETWAP has two distinct meanings, depending on how it is used. If a total stranger was to hiss it at you from their corner of their mouth, perhaps as you were passing them on the street, then it means a small, hand-operated talcum powder dispenser of the type once common in the 18th century. Since such hand-operated talcum powder dispensers are these days quite rare, and since it is even rarer that anyone would want to clandestinely mention such an object to you in the street, the use of the word in this context has all but died out.

Alternatively, if someone was to scream the word **SPEEDLETWAP** at full volume directly into your face, it means the former residence of Baron Otto von Liepstein of Bavaria. The building was demolished more than eighty years ago and the only person ever known to go around screaming it at people is currently in a secure hospital, so the use of the word in this context is equally rare.

I don't know why I mentioned it, really.



In these enlightened times, **TUPPLEMONKING** is no longer an offence in most Western nations. Not if you're doing it right, anyway. That said, you'd probably get a few disapproving looks if you started **TUPPLEMONKING** in the fruit

and veg aisle of your local supermarket. I certainly did, anyway, and the manager wasn't at all pleased when he had to throw out a whole consignment of fresh radishes.



I'm sure most people will be familiar with this one: **CHONK** is one of the most commonly used words in the English language, helped by the fact that it can be used in a wide variety of different ways. You will surely have heard phrases such as "I couldn't give a **CHONK**, mate," "What the **CHONK** do you think you're playing at?" and "This **CHONK** suddenly got real." But what the **CHONK** does it all mean? Well some historians think that the word is Roman in origin, but Professor Kyle Barnabas from the Oxford Centre for Frittering Away Public Funding has gone on record to state that this is a load of old **CHONK**, and that the **CHONKING CHONKERS** who insist on perpetuating this kind of ill-educated **CHONKERY** ought to be **CHONKED** in the **CHONKER**, then perhaps they'd think twice before opening their stupid **CHONKING** mouths.

"The word clearly comes from the Greek," Professor Barnabas concludes. "And I'll have anyone who dares say different. Come on, do you want some!"



A **TOBBLE PLUNGER** is a person who is offensively stubborn or unsympathetic. **Tobble** is the old Celtic word for earwax and a **TOBBLE PLUNGER** was an old Celt who was perpetually sticking his old finger in his old ear to clean it out, much to the disgust of everyone around him.



The first known use of this word was on the Rosetta Stone, an ancient Egyptian decree instructing people to stop **GRUMPFUTTING** in the streets. Ancient Egyptians were forever doing this, probably because they didn't have telly back in olden days, and officials were concerned that it was a public health hazard and was scaring the cattle. Any **GRUMPFUTTERS** who were caught **GRUMPFUTTING** had to have a damn good explanation for what they were doing, else they would be heavily fined or thrown in prison. This last punishment proved to be a particularly good deterrent, since Egyptian prison cells were usually far too small to get any **GRUMPFUTTING** done in any meaningful way.

The word appears on the Rosetta Stone in three different languages, including Egyptian Hieroglyphics, although in most reproductions the symbol for **GRUMPFUTTING** is censored as it is considered obscene.



A **SMUFFIT** is a West Country dialect word for a puncture in the skin of an apple, which might be completely harmless, but could just as easily be where a worm got in. In its pejorative sense, the word would be used to imply that someone who is disagreeable to you is a rancid and poisonous hole.



Finally, the most recent word on our list. The first known use of **SCHLUNT** was a week last Tuesday when a man shouted it at me from his car after I accidentally cut him up at a roundabout. Its exact meaning is not clear, but the man didn't half seem cross.



Latest Travel Updates

The following routes are currently affected by operational issues

Lincoln - Derby

Ongoing delays due to a train pulling into the station upside down.

Express Saver Nottingham - Manchester

Reduced headroom on this service. Tall passengers are advised to find an alternative route.

Grantham - Norwich Local Service

Train currently lost somewhere in Norfolk.

Norwich - Grantham Local Service

Train sent to look for the Grantham-Norwich train. This train is also now missing.

Sheffield - London

All services rerouted via Glasgow due to bricked-up tunnel.

Liverpool - Bristol

Services are experiencing delays due to cowboys on the line.

Penzance - Birmingham

Delays due to speed reductions. We have had to slow the trains down because the passengers kept falling out as it was going round corners.

Coventry - Coventry

Delays due to train taking a wrong turn and ending up back where it came from.

Halifax - Swansea

Reduced timetable due to printing costs.

Bristol - Southampton

Train failed to stop and kept on going into the sea. Service delayed while we dry it out.

Leeds - Edinburgh

Delayed because driver stopped to pick up a prescription.

Chester - York

Cancelled due to odd-looking passenger. We hope to resume service as soon as this passenger has been humanely exploded by the bomb squad.

Colchester - Peterborough

All trains are currently out of service while they have their horns retuned. Also, the thing that makes the 'clickety-clack' noise is being re-greased.

Dover - Warwick

Some trains currently undergoing an existential crisis and may arrive confused and emotionally drained. Delays likely while they sort themselves out.

South-East - All routes

Most services rerouted due to feng shui.

Walsal - York

Train rerouted to Blackpool because the train driver's daughter wanted to go to the seaside.

Gateshead - All inbound services

All inbound services will now terminate at Durham, as Gateshead station has been stolen.

Stoke-on-Trent - Worcester

Trains rerouted because some carriages on the 10.30 service swelled up and got stuck in a tunnel.

Rotherham - Sunderland

Eaten by wolves.

Mr Alan Plantagenet
Shepton Bassett Park and Zoo
Shepton Bassett

Dear Mr Plantagenet

Or should I call you Alan? Perhaps not, under the circumstances. The last time we spoke I recall that you were extremely red-faced and shouty, and your parting words to me were something along the lines of ripping my spleen out through my bumhole if you ever laid eyes on me again. Since this would likely be an unpleasant and messy experience for both of us, I have decided to write to you rather than approach you in person. This way I will be spared the discomfort and you will avoid the cleaning bill for your office carpet.

I expect that this letter may come as surprise to you, as you were most probably thinking that you would never hear from me again. After all, you were quite clear when you dismissed me from your employment last Tuesday that you no longer required my services as a junior zoo keeper at the Shepton Bassett Park and Zoo. In fact, you were extremely vocal about my lack of fitness for the role and my shortcomings as a human being in general. Many people may have been offended and upset by the personal remarks you made, but I would like to assure you that I am made of sterner stuff. Besides, you said nothing that I haven't heard before from previous employers, casual acquaintances and even members of my own family. However, I am now hopeful that you will have had time to calm down and review the circumstances in a more even-tempered frame of mind and so I am writing to you today to ask you to reconsider your decision.

Let me make one thing clear from the outset: I make no attempt to deny that mistakes were made. You will recall that I owned up to it straight away when I ran over that big stripy cat thing in the Land Rover. Also the armoured horse - the rhino? The rhino is the one with the horn, yes? Well, when I accidentally let it out of its enclosure and it rampaged through the gift shop, who was the first to tell you what had happened? My line manager? The emergency services? The relatives of the deceased? No, it was me - I came straight to your office to let you know what had transpired and that I was completely to blame. Didn't try to pin the guilt on someone else; didn't try to justify my error. I just came straight out and said I'd done a bad thing and that I was very sorry and that it would never happen again. And it wasn't just because it was my first day and I wanted to create a good impression - it was because I am a scrupulously honest person and I take my responsibilities very seriously.

That said, I do want to impress upon you that there are mitigating circumstances. I am not trying to make excuses but that fact is that the training I was given was hardly adequate. For example, when I was told to make sure the elephant had plenty of water, how was I to know that it was inadvisable to connect that hose thing on its face directly to the cold water tap? I mean, what else is it for? Any reasonable person would have done the same and I was astonished when I

was told that this was the only recorded instance of an elephant drowning in captivity. You would have thought this sort of thing happened all the time.

And then there were the long-necked cows - those big tall spotty ones. All they told me was to feed them - nobody explained the correct procedure. How are you supposed to give something its dinner when it's got its head in the trees? It wouldn't have been so bad if they had provided me with a ladder. In the circumstances, I thought my solution of using a catapult to fire sausages up at them was quite novel. Ok, so one of them got blinded by an unexpected saveloy, but I can hardly be blamed if the dumb animal wasn't paying proper attention, now can I?

Now then - the stick insects. Well, the clue is in the name, isn't it? They look like sticks, they're named after sticks and, to even the most professional eye, they act like sticks. I was asked to clean out their tank and that's exactly what I did. This, I'm afraid, is nature at its most cruel - if an animal is going to disguise itself as what is essentially garden waste, then it's going to be treated as such and I can hardly be blamed for throwing your entire collection on a bonfire. You will recall that I did my very best to make amends as soon as my blunder was pointed to me and, if it's any consolation, the bag of Twiglets that I put in there to replace them was just as big a hit with visitors as the real thing.

Of course, I do appreciate that during my interview I may have given the impression that I was rather more experienced than is actually the case. That said, I would have thought you would have realised that this was an exaggeration - everyone lies in interviews, don't they? When I said that I had extensive experience working with animals what I actually meant was that I had done a week's work experience in a small pet shop in my local town centre. They mostly sold pet food, cat toys and other accessories, and these rarely gave me any trouble. A twelve kilo bag of premium dog biscuits requires very little exercise and has never been known to bite. The shop did sell animals as well - hamsters, goldfish and suchlike - but these really weren't in the same league as your lions, hippos and those black and white barcode donkeys that you have. Rounding up a herd of gerbils is nothing like as challenging as managing a flock of bison, and when they do stampede it's not nearly as scary. It may surprise you to learn that no one has ever been trampled to death by rodents. Not on my watch, in any case.

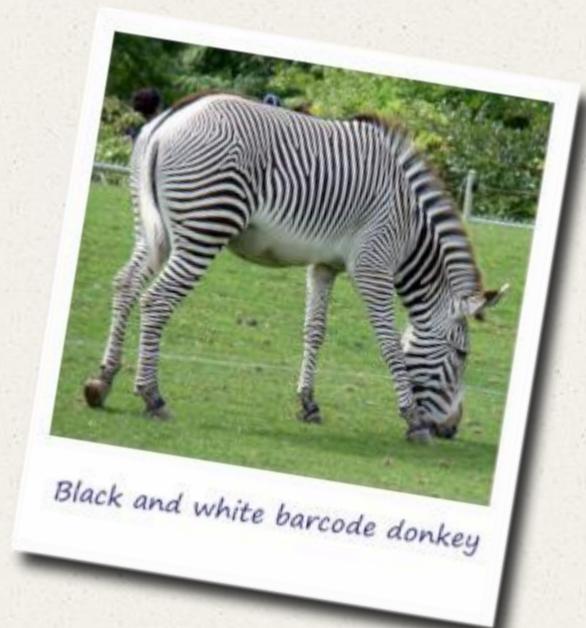
I want to conclude by pointing out that everyone makes mistakes. Even you, Mr Plantagenet, must surely make the odd slip-up now and then: going to the wrong meeting, forgetting to sign an important document, releasing a panther - that kind of thing. Granted, some people make mistakes that are more... I don't want to say 'catastrophic'... let's say more 'significant' than others. But it's all too easy to concentrate on the negatives and blind oneself to someone's more positive qualities. For example, in the three months that I worked for you, not a day went by when I didn't feed the red shiny tube creatures. Obviously, I now realise that the red shiny tube creatures were actually fire extinguishers, but let's not allow that to overshadow my dedication and diligence. I would also like to mention Tuesday 28th

April - a red letter day indeed since this was the one day during my time at the zoo when none of the visitors died. I think that's worth celebrating, don't you. Perhaps it could be an annual event? And finally, I think it is only fair to note that by the time I left, you still had a third of the animals that you started out with. That's not a bad survival rate, now is it?

So Mr Plantagenet - Alan - if you could find it in your heart to reverse your decision, I would be really most grateful. I have some very fond memories of my time at the zoo and loved every minute - right from the morning I arrived and the hairy thing with the banana fixation flung its poo at me, right up to the moment when you chased me off the premises with a pitchfork. I really got to love the animals - those big chickens in the aviary, the funny things with the coat racks on their heads and even the scaly snappy thing that used to eat children. And you can be certain that there would be no repeat of those unfortunate incidents that dogged my time with you. I pride myself that I am someone who can learn from his mistakes and is guaranteed not to repeat them. No sir. Invite me back and I can assure you that all my mistakes will be new ones.

Yours Sincerely

Simon Plunger





Anyone visiting the small and relatively obscure settlement of Little Mungford is in for a treat. The village boasts many attractions and wonders, including a theme park, museum, waxworks, medieval castle, the Eifel Tower, a valley of pyramids with *two* sphinxes and the Taj Mahal. Or at least is does according to the village's official website. Intrigued, we found the contact details for Little Mungford's chief tourism officer, Ian Balls, and decided to pay him a visit.

Mr Balls lives in a bungalow at the edge of the village and, if the signs displayed at his property and on the various vehicles parked outside are accurate, his main business is skip hire. He is a man in his fifties, impressively well-balanced for a gentleman of his excessive size. The top of his head is an arid plain on which little has grown for the past twenty years, but he compensates for this with a grey ponytail and a long goatee, this latter feature dripping with gravy as he opens his front door to us. He is part way through devouring a sausage speared on a fork clutched tightly in his pudgy hand, but he is no less welcoming for having his dinner interrupted. In fact, he generously offers us a nibble, which we politely decline.

"There's big money in skips," he tells us as he urges us to take a seat and hands us a beer. He resumes his dinner, but is talented enough to continue speaking whilst simultaneously pushing chips into his face. "Although, a lot of people in the village didn't really approve," he dribbles. "They thought my line of business lowered the tone. They also didn't really like me very much - I wasn't their type, you see. A self-made man, me, not one of those snooty Oxbridge commuter-belt types. So, anyway, I had quite a bit of money to invest so I started buying up property and moving them all out. That's when I hit upon my idea."

Mr Balls' big scheme was to turn Little Mungford into a major tourist attraction. The village, we gather, already had a number of natural features and structures of historical interest to recommend it. Mr Balls invested in a programme of restoration and improvement. He also sought to expand the appeal of the village by purchasing new attractions from around the world, including, as we mentioned earlier, the Taj Mahal. This puzzles us since, as far as we are aware, the Taj Mahal is still in India.

"Well it wasn't easy," Mr Balls acknowledges as he ploughs through a steak and kidney pie like a rip saw slicing through a tree trunk. "But I know a bloke. If you've got the right contacts and you're prepared to bung 'em a few quid, you can get pretty much anything you want. The one in India is just a copy made out of plasterboard and chicken wire. We've got the real thing here."

He wipes his grease-stained fingers on the tablecloth, reaches into his back pocket and hands us a small damp square of paper. We unfold it gingerly and find it is an illustrated brochure and map of the village, showing the many and varied attractions on offer.

"You can have that. For free," he says with a wink.

"Thanks," we reply with a reasonably convincing show of gratitude. "It says here," we say, after studying it for a moment, "that we can visit the Grand Canyon on the edge of the village."

"A Grand Canyon, not *the* Grand Canyon," Mr Balls corrects us. He rises and goes to the kitchen, returning moments later with a loaf of bread and a large tub of what appears to be lard. "I did express an interest in the original but moving a canyon presents certain logistical problems. Luckily, Little Mungford already had a canyon of its own."

We express surprise at this. Mr Balls acknowledges our reaction as he tears off a chunk of bread, dips it into the lard and explains.

"Well, I say 'canyon' but then one man's canyon is very much another man's trench. Anyhow, after a couple of day's work with a JCB, I reckon we've got a chasm that can rival anything you're likely to see in Arizona."

There is a sharp rap at the front door and Mr Balls springs to his feet. There is a gleam in his eye that looks very much like lust and the way that his tongue is hanging out is disturbing. "That must be the curry that I ordered," he drools. "Listen, it looks like I may be busy for some time. Why don't you take that map and go and look around the place for yourselves. I guarantee you won't be disappointed."

This seeming like an excellent idea, we leave Mr Balls to deal with his curry - and the four other takeaway deliveries that are standing in line at his front door - and proceed to the centre of the village, where the map tells us that we will find the Eifel Tower. Presumably the one in Paris is just a crude facsimile made out of pipe cleaners and Blu Tack. We can find no trace of it, which is a puzzle since our understanding is that it is really quite big and difficult to miss.

In search of answers, we step into a nearby pub. The place is empty and the bar is unattended. We rap politely on the counter and in response to our call the barman springs forth. To our surprise, he is immediately familiar.

"Mr Balls!"

"Who sir? Me sir? No sir, my name is Jenkins," says the barman. "Sidney Jenkins. Although one or two people have noted



that I do seem to share a slight resemblance with Mr Balls."

More than slight, we'd say: the ponytail, the goatee, the sausage roll held securely in his fist, even the fact that his girth means that he is wedged so tightly behind the bar that he is unable to turn round - it all seems to point to Mr Balls. However, we take 'Mr Jenkins' at his word and ask him where the Eifel Tower has got to.

"The Tower sir? Why, it hasn't gone anywhere, sir. There it is sir." He points out of the window. We tell him we can see no sign of it, but he insists and suddenly it dawns on us that he is indicating an electricity pylon. Clearly he's very proud of the structure and we don't want to upset him, so we humour him, 'ooh-ing' and 'ahh-ing' appreciatively.

Aware that time is pressing, we study the map and decide our next visit will be to Great Mungford Falls, which - according to the description we have been given - 'cascade majestically into the sparkling azure pool of Mungford Water'. We check our directions with the barman and, this being nearly lunchtime, our thoughts turn to whether we can get some food to take with us. Sandwiches, perhaps?

"Oh yes, sir. Of course, sir," says the barman. "We do sandwiches, sir. What

kind of sandwiches did you have in mind?"

"Ham?" we venture.

"All out of ham sir," the barman says. "But I'm sure we can find something for you?"

"Cheese, maybe?" we ask. "Tuna fish? Beef?"

"Sorry sir, all out?" says the barman. "If only you'd been here earlier."

"How about pork, or even... "

"Actually, I've just remembered, we're all out of sandwiches," the barman says. "All gone. Yum yum."

"A sausage roll, then? Or a pasty?"

"No pasties, sir," says the barman. "And I've just eaten the last of the sausage rolls. I've got a packet of salt and vinegar crisps."

"Well that will have to do," we tell him.

The barman opens the packet, tips the contents down his throat, scrunches up the bag and throws it over his shoulder. "Sorry sir, all gone."

We tell him not to worry. He isn't worried. He thanks us for our custom, such as it was, and we depart on our way to the Great Falls. The path takes us round the back of a row of semi-detached houses, across some scrubland littered with builders' rubble and though a scraggy copse of rotting trees. Where Mungford Water ought to be, there is a muddy pond surrounded by rusted barbed wire, on which there floats a solitary duck that fixes us with one evil eye and issues a single, contemptuous quack.

There is a fellow lying on the bank with his hat over his eyes, and from the noises he's making he's either snoring or having an asthma attack. We attract his attention and he lazily removes the hat and props himself up on his elbows, revealing himself to be either Mr Balls or somebody else who looks remarkably like him. The noise we had



heard had been the sound of him gnawing on a chicken leg.

"How do, my dearies," he says, spitting out a lump of gristle.

"Sorry to disturb you, Mr... Balls?"

"Ah, now then, many folk makes that there mistake, my dearies," he responds. "People do tell as I look remarkably like that there Mr Balls. I couldn't rightly tell you whether they is right or wrong about that, but what I can say is that my name is Isaac Wurzel, so it is."

"Please beg our pardon," we entreat him.

"Well, Mr Wurzel, we were - "

"Yes, I is a Wurzel, just like my pa was a Wurzel, and his pa before him, right back to Gascoigne de Wurzel, who came over with William the Conqueror - although people do say as how that was a mistake, and that he only got on the boat because he thought it was a day trip to Boulogne."

"Ah, right. Well, we came to see - "

"Of course, I be a Wurzel on my pa's side. T'other side of my family are Murgatroyds. You ever heard of the Lincolnshire, Murgatroyds? No, neither have I, I don't know why I brought them up. Now, the Murgatroyds was once very big in beetroots. There was a time, not so very long ago, my dearies, when t'other side of the hill was all beetroots right down to the river. Course, it's a shopping centre now. You can get all sorts of stuff there: televisions, carpets, picture frames, packets of fruit gums... You can probably get beetroot, as well. You wanted to ask me something, dearies?"

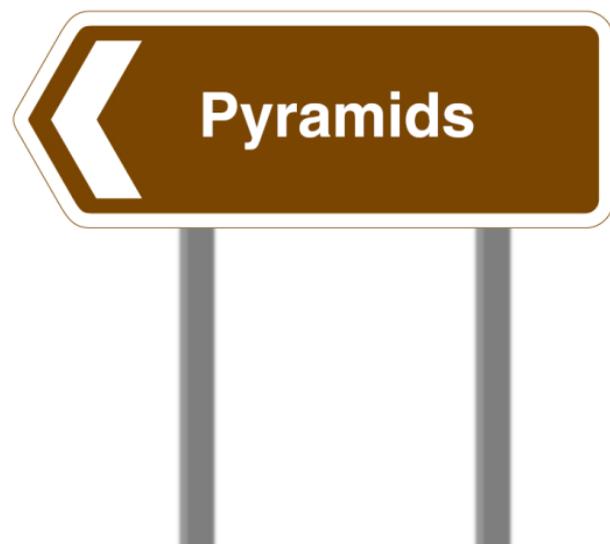
He suddenly falls silent and it takes us by surprise. We quickly gather our wits and ask him where we can find Mungford Water. We'd found it, he tells us. And the Great Mungford Falls? He points to a trickle of rusty brown water dribbling from

a pipe, and we realise with a sigh that we should have expected something like that.

"Course, what you should really be interested in is the monster!" he informs us in a hushed voice. "Monster, we ask? "Oh yes, my dearies," he continues. "It lives in the deep dark depths, rising to the surface only occasionally. They've had all sorts of scientific people here, hunting for it, but it's eluded them, so it has. They reckon as how it's some ancient prehistoric beastie."

He suddenly jumps up and points excitedly. "Look! Look! There it is! You're in luck - few people have ever seen it. See how it rises majestically from the waters, the spray cascading from it scaly back, before it crashes back into the foam, and dives down, down, down into the obsidian blackness of its underwater lair."

He is pointing at the duck. We leave him to it. Consulting the map once more we set off to find the Taj Mahal. Mr Balls had assured us that it was the real thing. We didn't believe this for a moment, but we hoped at least that he'd made an effort. We discover that the building is surrounded by a high fence and that we have to pay a small charge for entry. Fumbling in our pockets for change, we approach the ticket booth and find it occupied by a large middle-aged woman with platinum blond hair, long gaudily-coloured earrings and plastered in so much makeup that it



appears to form some sort of protective shell. 'She' also has a long goatee beard, is struggling gamely to chomp her way through a giant Toblerone and is clearly Mr Balls in drag.

"I'm not Mr Balls," is the first thing she says to us.

"We never said you were," we reply wearily.

"My name is Patty Grinder, and I'll have you know I'm a respectable woman, so none of your coarse language and nonsense."

We have no idea what nonsense she is referring to and we haven't used any coarse language - although by now our patience is wearing thin and there is every chance that we might let rip at any second. We hold our tongues long enough to purchase our tickets, and are told that they also allow us entry to see the Giant Monkey. We start to ask about the Giant Monkey, realise that

there is probably no percentage in it, and silently pass through the turnstile.

The Taj Mahal turns out to be a shed. An actual shed. They haven't even bothered painting it. We turn around, walk straight out and keep going until we reach our car. It's time to call it a day, but Little Mungford does have a final treat for us. On the way out of the village we pass a sign for the Giant Monkey, and since we have the tickets we decide to stop off and have a look. And we're glad that we have, since the Giant Monkey is a twenty-foot high animatronic gorilla that dances whilst performing a surprisingly emotional version of Elvis Presley's 'All Shook Up'. It is easily the most impressive thing we've seen all day and for this reason and this reason only we heartily recommend that you consider paying Little Mungford a visit.



Great Mungford Falls

Giant Monkey

Theme park

Mungford Castle

Taj Mahal



Pyramids

Eifel Tower

A Grand Canyon

Every night millions of people experience anxiety dreams in which they find themselves at work, at school or in some other public place without their trousers. This is a deeply humiliating and damaging experience, but thankfully it is one that can be avoided.

Introducing Dream Strides

The very best in somnolent trouser solutions



We are a team of fast response tailors who have set up an emergency trouser business in dreamland, just off Junction 5 of the M6. Wherever your embarrassing dream takes you, however excruciating your predicament, we can deliver a pair of emergency trousers to you in the rapid blink of an eye. Lucid dreamers will even be able to choose from a range of exciting styles and ethereal fabrics, all expertly fashioned from dreamdust, or something, and charged to your credit or debit card when you wake up.

Not convinced? Hey! Wake up! I said, not convinced? Well, listen to what one satisfied Kevin had to say.

Hi, my name's Kevin. The other night I dreamt I was at a meeting, addressing a group of very important potential clients from a major South-East Asian multinational - which is weird, because I'm a welder. Anyway, just as I was about to stand up to speak I noticed that I wasn't wearing any trousers. Crikey, not again, I thought! It's like our Sandra's wedding reception all over again.

Luckily I remembered the number for Dream Strides and quick as a flash they rushed over a pair of voluminous pink pinstripe pantaloons that turned about to be quite a talking point. Well, I went down a storm and, needless to say, we won the contract. Thanks Dream Strides! Incidentally, I noticed that my opposite number from South Korea was wearing a pair of glow-in-the-dark jodhpurs with red piping and a glittery motif on the hip - another triumph for Dream Strides?

Anyway, I must crack on - this axle mounting won't weld itself.

So don't get caught out. Sidestep the embarrassment of night-time trouser deprivation with Dream Strides

***Dream*
STRIDES**

The very best in spontaneous imaginary tailoring

Business Skills Courses

from

The Yeovil Centre for Sharp Practice



That great industrialist Henry Ford once said that no one could ever hope to succeed in business without the right qualifications. In fact, he said no such thing, but falsely attributing made-up quotations to notable business leaders can help you to carve out a successful career path and is, incidentally, just one of the many courses we offer here at Yeovil.

It is most certainly the case that employers seek and reward skills, experience and accomplishment, and by exhibiting these qualities you can climb the corporate ladder. But getting to the top is a lengthy process and takes a great deal of hard work. Demonstrating that you have the aptitude and ability is the long way round - far better to have a certificate which says, quite clearly, in black and white, that you've got what it takes. Why spend years persuading your employer that you are

reliable and capable when you could have a recognised qualification in Reliability and Capability that will fast-track you straight to the boardroom?

And that's where we can help.

Here at the Yeovil Centre for Sharp Practice, we offer a complete range of courses tailored to the requirements of today's budding managers, executives and high-performing deal-makers. Concerned that you don't have the academic aptitude to complete the course? There's no need to worry. If you're *paying* for a certificate, we don't expect you to have to *earn* it. As long as all fees have been settled, then a pass is **guaranteed**. If you do find that you're struggling, have a quiet word with one of our highly trained team of cashiers and we're sure we'll be able to sort something out.



These are just some of the most popular courses available for the current academic year.

Modules LM301-303

Levels 1-3 Infiltration and Entrenchment

This course shows you how to guarantee job security by becoming an irreplaceable member of the team. In Level 1, we teach you how to ensure that you are the only person with the passwords for social media accounts and essential corporate software. We also explore techniques to monopolise lines of communication between major suppliers, customers and other key contacts.

Level 2 deals with the development of complex systems and processes that only you will be able to understand, making it impossible for any other member of staff to effectively operate in these areas, and ensuring that all decisions and requests must be referred to you.

Level 3 takes you into the area of advanced blackmail techniques. We show you how you can obtain sensitive and embarrassing information about senior members of the company, and how best you can leverage this intelligence to advance your interests.

Module LQ105

Legal Compliance

All companies, large or small, have certain legal obligations that must be met. These are many, varied and often complex, and it is difficult for one individual to maintain a comprehensive understanding. However, the key to successfully manipulating a company's legal obligations is realising that you don't have to know *everything* - you only have to know, or *appear* to know, more than anybody else.

In this course you will learn to quote the names of a number of intimidating regulations and statutes, and bluff your way through their major implications without anyone suspecting that you haven't got a clue what you're talking about. Many graduates who successfully completed this course have gone on to land cushy jobs such as 'Equality Lead', 'Head of Environmental Compliance' and 'Wellbeing Officer' on the strength of misinterpreting and misrepresenting the requirements of various Acts of Parliament.

Module LQ130

Social Media and Digital Marketing

Social media has become a major factor in building corporate identity, and it offers a unique advancement opportunity for employees. We show you how to use your personal social media to wheedle your way into your boss's' good books by adopting the company branding, endorsing all its self-congratulatory posts and gushing unrelentingly about what a wonderful organisation it is to work for. You will learn how to post messages about 'how great it was to meet so-and-so' or 'how wonderful it was to attend such-and-such a meeting' without sounding like you're being sarcastic. By the end of this course you will understand exactly what it takes to give the impression that you are on message, and be able to effectively utilise your social media presence to brown-nose your way to the top.

Module L010

Effective Management

There are two schools of thought when it comes to management. The first is that it is necessary for a manager to be able to do the jobs of all the people they manage, or at least to have enough of an understanding to recognise the requirements and challenges. The second is that it isn't. We very much subscribe to this second line of thought.

Indeed, having no understanding of the work and responsibilities of employees being managed is key to our approach. We believe that the real skill of management lies in being able to allow other people to shoulder the burden when things are going well, and for those same people to take the blame when it goes wrong. In this course we show you how to ensure that you remain strictly hands-off, remaining visible and available when you aren't actually required, but able to recognise when the shit is about to hit the fan so that you can make yourself scarce when you need to.

Module L095

Basic Business Communication

If we were to say that this course will help you to modify your output expectations through the prism of a person-focussed approach to phased individualisation vectors, would you know what we meant? We guarantee that after completing this course, you still won't know what it means, but you will find it far less intimidating.

Becoming fluent in business speak is really about mastering the art of obfuscation. It's a sleight of hand technique where the quickness of the tongue deceives the mind of the listener. If you were to report that you had failed to meet your monthly targets, you are inevitably creating an unfavourable impression. However, if you were to report that a programme of systematic assessment had determined that due to an unforeseen combination of market, environmental and regulatory factors, the accomplishment

threshold had been fixed at a level in excess of the maximum real-world achievement plateau, then everyone would be so glad by the time you reached the end of the sentence that they would completely fail to notice that you'd missed your targets again.

Module LG400

Advanced Embezzlement

Truly successful people know that day one in any job is just the first step that will ultimately take them to the upper reaches of senior management. Really truly successful people know that upper management is just the first step in squirreling away stolen cash for their retirement.

Once you get a say in how the company spends its money, you will finally get an opportunity to make sure some of it comes your way. This course covers all the basic techniques: kickbacks, handing out contracts to friends and families, and setting up phony companies and schemes. We'll also show you how to make sure you have a scapegoat in place, so that if things turn sour you can be sure that some other poor bastard ends up doing time while you're sailing round the Mediterranean in your shiny new yacht.

A Member of the
International
Association of
Questionable
Educational
Establishments



A satisfied customer writes:

"I am happy to admit that I am a know-nothing dipshit who can't even open a door without smacking myself in the face. And yet, here I am holding down a senior position with a highly successful company. I have no idea what I'm supposed to be doing, but whatever it is I am paid a ridiculous amount of money to do it. None of this would have been possible were it not for a qualification from the Yeovil Centre for Sharp Practice. And the certificate looks really fancy, as well."

Horace Clump

**Senior Head of Retrogressive Statistical Acquiescence
Frisbee Digitally Tracked Logistical Interface Solutions**

The Yeovil Centre for Sharp Practice

683 Station Road
Yeovil
BA20 1SW

Dir. Dr A Bongo. All fees are non-refundable

MINDFULNESS

EMPOWERMENT

SELF-ACTUALISATION

INNER LIFE

BULLSHIT

Hi There

My name is Dick Smidgin, motivational keynote speaker, and I want to talk to you today about my take on mindfulness. 'What is mindfulness?' people say to me. Or even: 'Where is mindfulness?' Sometimes people ask: 'When is mindfulness?' But those people are just being difficult.

Now, I know that some folk say that mindfulness is simply a load of old cock, devised to pander to the paranoid egos of a bunch of pathetic snowflakes and provide a lucrative income stream for silver-tongued bullshit merchants like me. And this, of course, is quite true - hey, I've just bought a house! But I'm sensitive to the validity of the observation and this is why I have developed my own form of mindfulness, which I call mindlessness.

What is Mindlessness?

Mindlessness is similar to mindfulness in many ways, especially the spelling, but it's cheaper and there is less paperwork. Some commentators describe mindfulness as 'noticing the world around them'. This is clearly a terrifying prospect, which is why one of the key principles of mindlessness is to rigidly define areas of our lives that it is perfectly ok to ignore.

Obviously, this requires concentration. It's very easy, for example, to ignore the sound of an animal in distress or the appearance of a particularly ugly child, but there are other stimuli that we need to train

ourselves to ignore - the smell of an old lady, perhaps, or the sensation of being on fire.

Mindfulness is all about being 'in the moment'. *Mindlessness*, on the other hand, teaches us how to be a week last Tuesday. The great advantage of this is that a week last Tuesday is done and dusted - there's nothing that can be done about it now, so you may as well forget it. And remember, a week *next* Tuesday will soon be what a week *last* Tuesday was two weeks ago. So yeah... that probably means something as well.

Becoming Mindless

So how does one go about becoming mindless? Well, there's hard drugs and alcohol but not everyone has the advantage of having a limitless income and a titanium liver. Nevertheless, there are two basic things that can help you.

Breathing

Mastering your breathing is one of the main mindlessness techniques. Breathing is an incredibly wasteful and time-consuming activity and if we can learn to do less of it we can save a great deal of time.

But be warned, if you stop breathing altogether there will be a number of unpleasant side effects, including giddiness, nausea and death. Instead, try building up to it in gradual stages by holding your breath for longer and longer each time. One good technique is to alternate breathing in and breathing out on successive days. So, for instance, do all your breathing in on a Monday and wait until Tuesday to breathe out again.

Awareness

Awareness, in mindlessness terms, is a double-edged sword. It's great to be 'aware' of some things - for example chips, television, shoes and so on. Sometimes being 'aware' means that we can avoid trouble - so, if you are 'aware' of a ten-foot hole in front of you, it can save you the trouble of being made brutally and abruptly 'aware' of your broken legs and an urgent need for medical assistance.

However, there are some things that we would prefer to remain unaware of - things like chickens, whiney little shits and Marmite. Unfortunately, the state of awareness comes with two problems. Firstly, it's automatic - it happens whether we want it to or not. And secondly, even when we're not aware of something, it doesn't mean the bleeding thing isn't there.

BREATHING

AWARENESS



So, you think you're ready to start your journey towards mindlessness? It isn't easy, but it's not like you've got anything more interesting to do. Anyhow, here are some exercises that may help you on your way.

Some Useful Exercises

1. Vocal Feedback

For this exercise you will need an empty metal bucket and some understanding neighbours. The aim is to promote awareness of the sound of your own voice and, by extension, understand your impact on the world around you.

Find somewhere comfortable - sitting cross-legged on the floor is a good idea - then shout as loud as you can into the bucket. It's important that the words you shout are random - Wanker! Teeth! Wardrobe! are some good examples. Concentrate on the shape of the words in your mouth, the force of the echoes as they return to you and the smell of some of the more sibilant syllables. Do this until your ears start to ring or the bright red face of your angry neighbour appears at the window.

2. Give yourself a hug

A lot of us fail to show ourselves enough self-compassion (this is not to be confused with self-love, which is an altogether different and messier thing). Giving yourself a hug is a marvellous way of reinforcing your self-worth. Inevitably, it can be difficult if you don't particularly like yourself. After all, you might be a bit of a dick. You may wish to build up to it gently by giving yourself a firm handshake, a friendly pat on the back or a quick peck on

the cheek. If you find yourself sticking your own tongue down your throat or fiddling with your trouser area, then you've probably gone too far.

3. Self-Interrogation

There are times when we all need to ask ourselves some searching questions. Questions such as: Where am I going? What am I doing with my life? Where did I put my car keys? And what was I doing round the back of the Co-op last Tuesday with my trousers round my ankles and a cherry tomato inserted up my fundament? But it's important to recognise that sometimes there are no answers - not if you don't want to get anyone into trouble, anyway.

That said, don't let yourself give yourself any shit. You have every right to expect a straight answer to a straight question and so if you find yourself giving yourself the run-around, it's perfectly ok to give yourself a little slap.

4. Connect with Nature.

Whether you live in a city or in the countryside, nature surrounds us. Give yourself a moment every morning to take it all in. Step outside, breathe deeply. What's that smell? Is it the dead fox in the flower bed or the rotting badger on the grass verge? Look at the way the trees sway in the wind, dropping their leaves and

clogging the gutters. Look at the bin that's been knocked over by the kids next door, spreading all that crap in the road. Some poor bastard's going to have to clear that up. Cold out, isn't it? I should go back inside, if I were you, and put the telly on.

5. Mindless Driving

About 95% of all drivers are wankers, so the chances are that you are too. No offence. It can be very easy to become angry, frustrated or impatient when you're on the road - especially the way I drive. The mindless approach to driving is to try and remove those petty distractions such as traffic signs and road markings. Try to concentrate on pedestrian areas, shop windows and other roadside points of interest. Your journey will be much more interesting, even if it is more 'accidenty'.

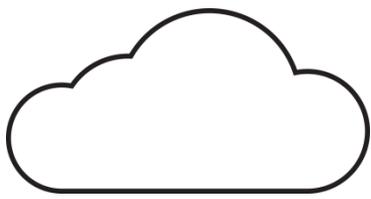
6. Consider the Sauce

This exercise is a wonderful way of avoiding thinking about stuff that might actually matter. Place a medium-sized bottle of tomato ketchup in front of you. The technique works better if you use a bottle that has already been opened. Try to concentrate on every detail of the bottle. Consider its shape, the colour, the smell, the way the light falls on the streak of ketchup dribbling down the side, the texture of the cruddy bits around the lid. Do this for at least three hours or until someone comes along and asks you what the hell you are doing. Then stand up, angrily knock the bottle over and storm off. Works for me.

Dick Smidgin has a Level 2 Diploma in Mindlessness, Vapidity and General Disengagement and is available for corporate events, group sessions and one-to-one consultations as long as the money's right.



MINDFUNNEL



The Beaufort Scale

Invented in 1805 by Frank 'Gusty' Beaufort to help prevent sailors from blowing off unexpectedly during perilous sea voyages, the Beaufort Scale is still employed by professional windologists today. The simple scale can be understood by even those of moderate intelligence, who, if they stop dribbling on their

shoes for long enough and concentrate, will grasp that the higher the force number, the windier the wind. However, if anyone should find the concept of numbers far too confusing, the scale also includes descriptions, which will leave no one in any doubt about whether it's advisable to hang their washing out.

Force	Description	Conditions
0	Rigid	No wind. The air is static, almost solid, like thick gravy or a melting Cornetto.
1	Slight Waft	The feeling you might get if, say, a beetle ran over your foot or the nape or your neck was gently brushed by a pervert.
2	Uninvited Pump	A sudden unexpected parp of warm air. You don't know where it came from, you don't know where it's going to, and by the time you realise you felt it, it's already gone.
3	Draughty Burble	A gentle but steady breeze, enough to rustle a newspaper but without turning over the page when you're trying to read the TV guide. Akin to the steady escape of air you get when you over-inflate an amphibian.
4	Flappy Throbber	A pulsing series of gusts which can interfere with headwear and cause the wing mirrors on a 2007 Nissan Micra to rotate.
5	Monstrous Blast	A sizeable gust, usually sufficient to dislodge a small rodent from a drainpipe or to inconvenience an unwary cow.
6	Sustained Buffeting	A continuous stream of fast moving air that can strip the veneer from a dining room table, dislodge street furniture or spontaneously redirect traffic. It is not unlikely that you could look out of your front window during a sustained buffeting and see your neighbour cartwheeling down the street.
7	Squally Chuff	Can blast all the wax out of your ears in two minutes flat. This type of wind can also go round corners without slowing down, so there's no escaping it.
8	Wild Quivering	Can uproot large trees and replant them in new locations. Under certain conditions, a bout of wild quivering has been known to rearrange all the vehicles in an underground car park.
9	Severe Tremble	Strong enough to blow all the words out of books, magazines and other printed matter, leaving just blank pages in its wake.
10	Thunderous Clattering	Winds powerful enough to drive clouds into the sides of tall office buildings, causing substantial structural damage and making it difficult to reach the coffee machine.
11	Exceptional Vicious Gustiness	Deliberately malicious winds that will trash your garden, upend you dustbin and carry off your greenhouse, usually while you're out.
12	Spontaneous Directional Tempest	Theoretically, this weather phenomenon is strong enough and precise enough to pick out an individual in a crowd and remove a single item of clothing in one concentrated blast. Although it has proven to be mathematically possible, it has never been observed in nature. One man did claim to be a victim when he was discovered wandering around Trafalgar Square without his trousers, although the judge who subsequently found him guilty of indecent exposure said he wasn't fooling anyone.

Ricky Stratocaster's



Captain Bazalgette's Trouser Phenomenon

There's exciting news for fans of seminal British prog rock group Captain Bazalgette's Trouser Phenomenon with the announcement that the group is set to reform for a major world tour. This is the first time that the 'Trousers' have reformed since they last reformed in 2016, and the twenty-eighth time they have reformed since the group recorded their first album, *Stitches*, in 1968.

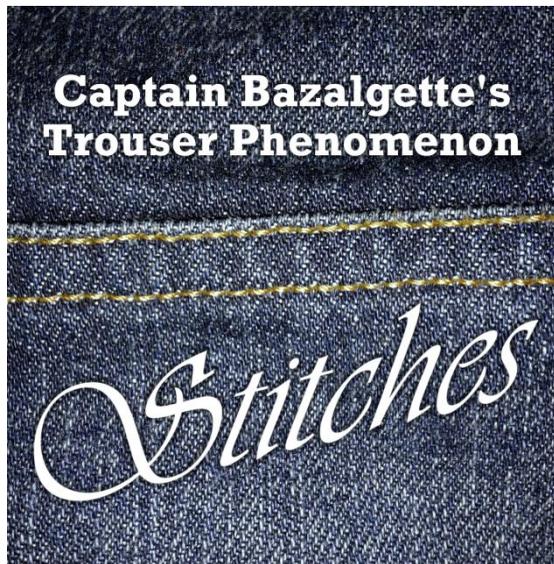
Inevitably, the group has changed a great deal since then. Their debut LP was a bold but ultimately misguided attempt to combine traditional German oompah music with Cornish sea shanties, and was, quite rightly, shunned by a record-buying public more attuned to the trippy psychedelic tunes and

dreamy bucolic melodies of the summer of love.

However, the band was quick to learn from their mistakes and their second album, a collection of trippy psychedelic tunes and dreamy bucolic melodies called *Hey Man,*

Far Out, was an instant hit. Unfortunately, the Trousers were unable to capitalise on the record's success because they had split up before recording it, citing musical differences, medical differences, financial irregularities or because it was way past someone's bedtime, depending on which member of the band you were asking. It appears that only

thing that the Trousers could agree on was that they couldn't agree on anything, and so they went their separate ways.

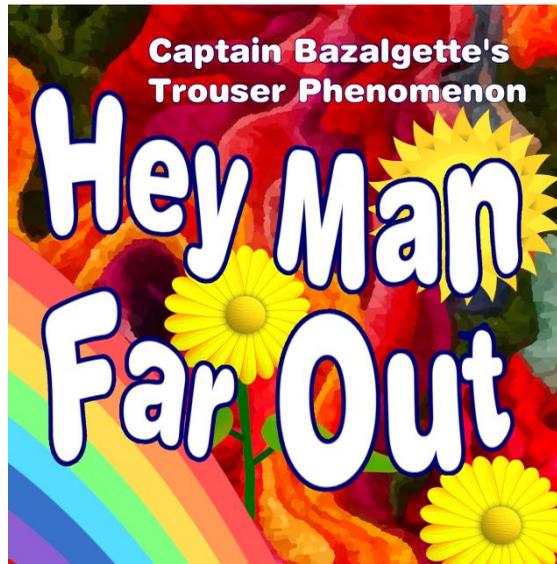


Stitches 1968

Lead singer and one half of the band's powerhouse writing team Frankie Pastels launched, in this order, a high-profile solo career, a prime-time advertising campaign for wash powder and a premium carpet cleaning business. Meanwhile, his co-writer, bassist Isaac Crumble gained a reputation scoring films and TV

programmes, and famously wrote the theme tune for BBC TV's *Newsnight*. Even before the split, lead guitar player Jet Teflon had been much in demand as a session musician, and he continued to lend his prodigious skills to many of the biggest hits of the '70s, including 'Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep', 'Disco Duck' and pretty much everything recorded by The Wombles. As for drummer Morris Trott, he left the music business entirely and formed a jazz quintet.

However, despite their various solo accomplishments, they never replicated the success of their former band, and demand for more product was high. When calls for them to reform were ignored, the Trousers' record company dug deep into their archives and managed to cobble together three more albums



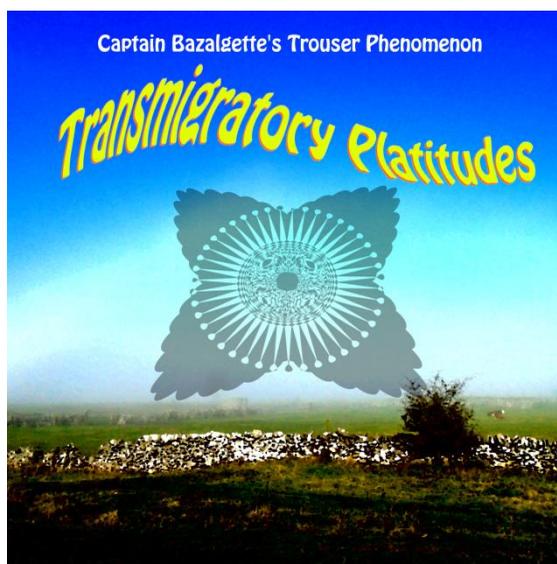
Hey Man, Far Out 1969

from various outtakes, run-throughs, studio chatter, bangs, thumps, farts and whistles. The last of these, *Polyamorous Echo Location*, released in 1976, was remarkable in that the entirety of side two consisted of the sound of Jet Teflon stirring a cup of tea and saying the word 'cucumber' to himself in a variety of different UK regional accents.

Nevertheless, it managed to knock *Wings at the Speed of Sound* off the number one spot, and finally convinced the band, all of whom had mortgages to pay, to reform.

Much had changed since Captain Bazalgette's Trouser Phenomenon had last recorded together. Tambourines were 40% bigger, an extra note had been added down at the bottom end of the piano keyboard and somebody had invented David Bowie. It was an exciting time of experimentation, musical fusion and

revolutionary new techniques. Emboldened by the success of 'The Cucumber Tea Suite', the Trousers put a number of other beverages through their paces, including hot chocolate, Ovaltine and several different blends of coffee. None of these initial recordings made it onto the finished album, although an edited cut of 'Morris's Percolator Adventure' did appear as a B-side.



Transmigratory Platitudes 1972

What did become apparent was that the song-writing team of Pastels and Crumble was as strong as ever and, coupled with a willingness to explore new sonic landscapes, they produced an album which many fans believe still stands as their finest. *Bozkonk*, released in 1977, is a concept album about a magical cookbook, in which each song takes the form of a recipe. But these are no ordinary recipes - each track has a deeper meaning and is heavy with symbolism. For example, 'Creamy Herb Chicken with Garlic' is about Winston Churchill's decision to return to the gold standard in 1925, 'Beetroot Tzatziki' is a heartfelt lament to a lost lover and 'Ginger Drizzle Traybake with Cream Cheese Icing' is both a chilling reminder of the futility of war and, if followed literally, a rich but refreshing summer desert, ideal for serving at a barbecue.

Initial copies of the album were issued in a pastry sleeve and it was an instant commercial success. It reached number one in both the mainstream and cookery charts, so a follow-up was inevitable. But this time around there were problems from the get-go. Flushed with success and bloated with cakes, the band wanted their next effort to be bigger and better. This was no problem - the record company were happy to put out a double album. The bone of contention was Isaac Crumble's insistence that in order for the album to be environmentally friendly, the entire recording had to be horse-powered. The rest of the band soon became unhappy

with having so many horses in the studio and things came to a head when guitarist Jet Teflon slipped and fell on some manure, seriously injuring his main twanging finger in the process.

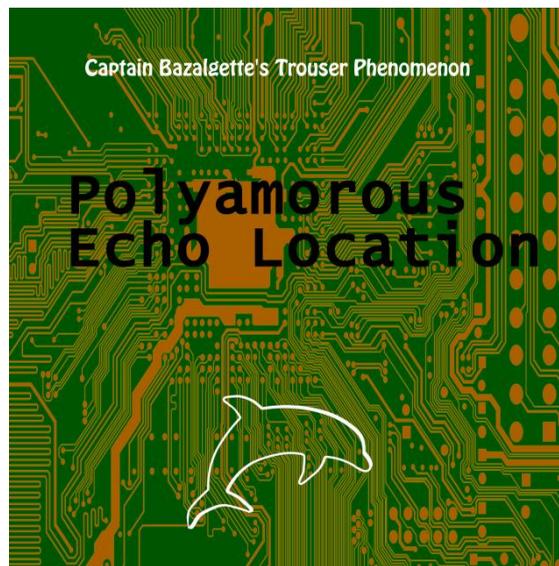
The remaining members continued to work on the material, often recording separately in horse-resistant cubicles. However, when they delivered the final album, *Giddy Up a Ding Dong*, company bosses decided to

recoup some of the money they had spent on hay and horse tranquilisers by squeezing everything onto one disc, rather than the planned double album. The result was an LP which was bloated and unstable. If dropped or knocked it could easily explode. There followed a number of tragic accidents and record shops ultimately refused to stock it.

Captain Bazalgette's Trouser Phenomenon split up again.

It was during this hiatus that Frankie Pastels scored his greatest success outside the band as part of the short-lived supergroup Anderson, Bruford, Pastels, Wakeman, Hackett, Crosby, Emerson, Fripp, Blunstone, Howe, Pert, Wetton, Eno, Cuthbert, Dibble and Grubb. The group released only one album, *No Room For the Title*, then disbanded for logistical reasons.

Lured back to the studio once more by the smell of freshly baked money, the Trousers next reconvened in 1981. Always keen to explore new ideas, Isaac Crumble had become very interested in electronic music and installed a broad array of new gadgetry in the studio. This was mostly vacuum

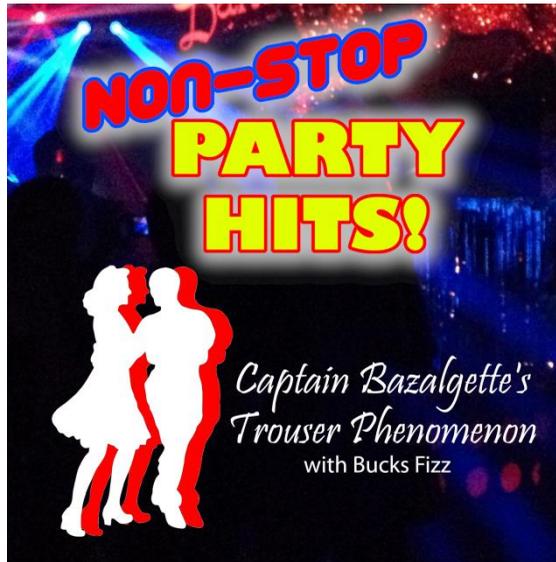


Polyamorous Echo Location 1976

cleaners, spin driers and pop-up toasters - a far cry from the synthesisers that most other bands were using at the time, but it did help them to create a unique sound.

The new album would certainly be less guitar-heavy than previous releases. This was partly because Jet Teflon's twanging finger was still hurting, but mostly because the guitarist had recently enjoyed a massive solo hit, an achievement of which the rest of the band were insanely jealous. As a result, Teflon spent most of the time locked in a cupboard.

The sessions went extremely well, everyone seemed to get on with each other and the album was progressing on schedule. Something felt wrong, so after eight weeks they split up again, purely out of habit. The record company, well used to this by now, had a contingency plan and brought in outside musicians to finish the record. Specifically, they brought in Bucks Fizz and



Non-Stop Party Hits 1981

the result was a first for the Trousers - a smash hit album that spawned four top forty singles.

It's a pattern that has continued to this day, the band reconvene to record an album then split up midway through the sessions. During the recording of 1987's *Ravioli Nights*, they managed to break up three times during one afternoon, all of which happened while Morris Trott had popped out to

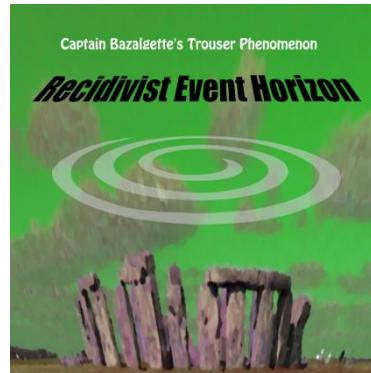
the shops to buy a packet of Rolos. However, the group's fans have remained loyal, continuing to buy their records and flocking to their live shows, even though there is a good chance that the band will quit halfway through a gig.

And demand is as strong now as ever. Tickets for the upcoming tour sold out within forty minutes of going on sale, prompting the band to add more dates. Fans can also look forward to... Oh hang on... We're just heard, it's all off. Oh well, same time next year.

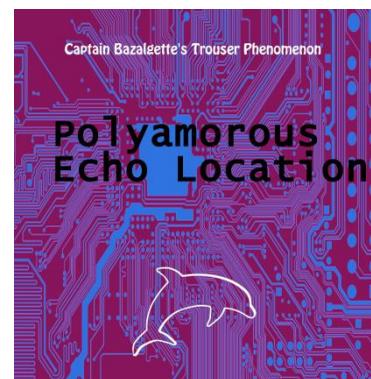
Captain Bazalgette's Trouser Phenomenon

Album Discography

Year	Title
1968	<i>Stitches</i>
1969	<i>Hey Man, Far Out</i>
1972	<i>Transmigratory Platitudes</i>
1973	<i>Recidivist Event Horizon</i>
1976	<i>Polyamorous Echo Location</i>
1977	<i>Bozkonk</i>
1978	<i>Giddy Up a Ding Dong</i>
1981	<i>Non-Stop Party Hits (with Bucks Fizz)</i>
1982	<i>Left Hand Down a Bit</i>
1983	<i>Bilbo's Mucky Puddings</i>
1985	<i>Spanners</i>
1987	<i>Ravioli Nights</i>
1989	<i>Bozkonk II: Second Helping</i>
1994	<i>Twiddles and the Legion of Doom - Original Soundtrack Album</i>
1996	<i>No Flies on Us: Captain Bazalgette's Trouser Phenomenon Live in Lowestoft</i>
1999	<i>This One's For the Captain</i>
2004	<i>Hoochie-Coochie Bongo Man</i>
2007	<i>The Marvellous Undersea Kingdom of Colin Chocolate</i>
2012	<i>Mindfunnel</i>
2016	<i>Third Exit on the Left</i>
2019	<i>Hmmmm, Chunky</i>



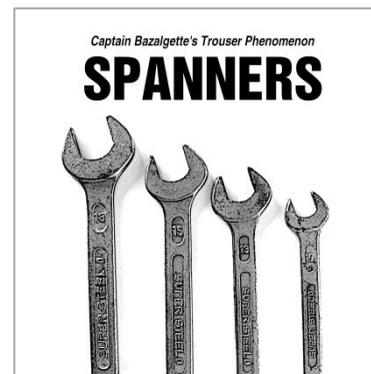
Recidivist Event Horizon, 1973



Polyamorous Echo Location (alt Finnish cover), 1976



Bozkonk, 1977



Spanners, 1985

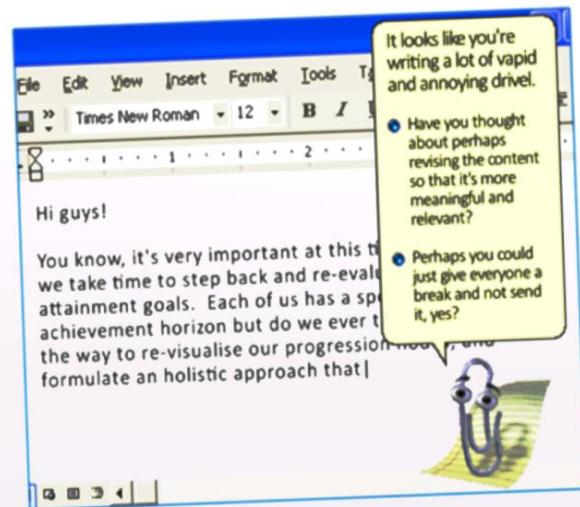
Customers Unhappy with New Bullshit Filter

We're not getting through to our staff, say business leaders.

There has been a steep rise in complaints following Microsoft's introduction of a new bullshit filter on Outlook. This has mostly affected their business customers, who are reporting that many of their emails are no longer reaching their destinations.

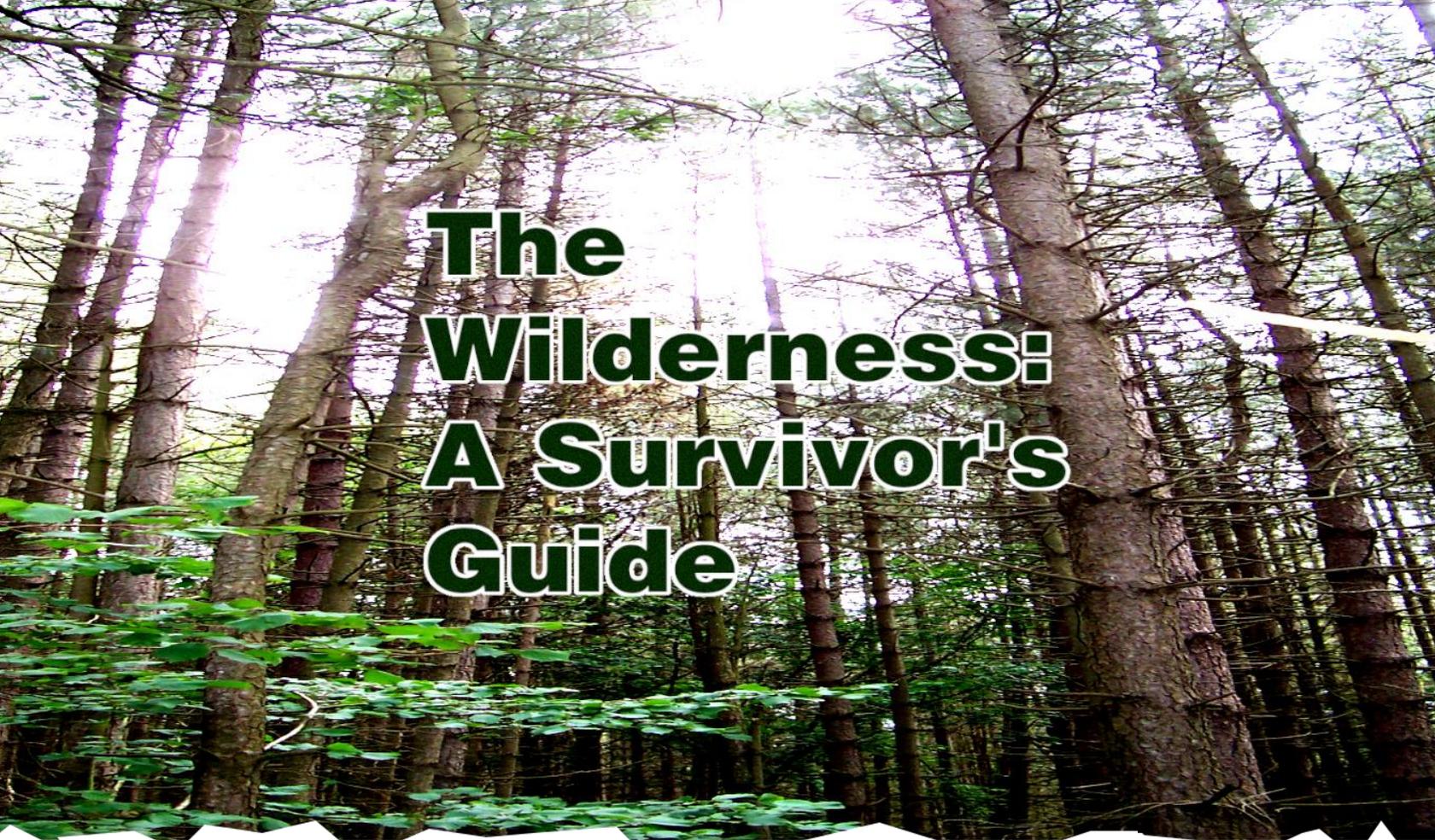
Matt Plankton, Head of Corporate Niceness at Frisbee Digitally Tracked Logistical Interface Solutions, sends out a weekly wellbeing email to all staff, designed to empower and inspire them, usually by sharing vacuous and trite motivational memes culled from social media. He reports that he has been unable to send these emails for the last three weeks and he is worried that employees may become dangerously unmotivated.

"I'm much too important to be ignored by software."



Meanwhile, Suzy Canker, Senior Lead in Organisational Deference at Cooper's Multi-Phased Intelligent Deficit Analysis Systems told us that she is important enough to have a contact within the software giant who provided her with the direct contact details for 'someone high up'.

"I emailed this person - I'm not at liberty to divulge their identity - and explained, quite firmly, that this so-called 'bullshit filter' was interfering with the performance synergy of our stratified management vectors and seriously impacting the overall referencing windows applied sequentially to our kennel terrace funnelling artichoke," she told us. "Unfortunately," she admitted, "my email doesn't seem to have got through."



The Wilderness: A Survivor's Guide

with Alec Bivouac

Very few people will ever find themselves lost and alone in the wilderness after setting off on a short trip to the supermarket. But sat navs can go wrong, freak weather conditions do happen, and there's always a risk that you could inadvertently find yourself wandering aimlessly across the slopes of a remote mountain, entwined in some dark and impenetrable jungle, or trapped on a desert island.

Could you survive?

The answer is yes, just as long as you follow a few basic survival tips. My name is Alec Bivouac and my adventures have taken me to every corner of the planet, not always intentionally. If you find yourself lost in the wilderness, my advice is guaranteed to get you, and your shopping, home safe and reasonably sound.

Shelter

Guess what, there are no four star hotels where you're going, so your first priority is to find shelter. It can be tempting to make use of a convenient cave, but your problem is that you don't know what's living there already: bears, big cats, squirrels. And they're going to turn nasty when they find out their home has been invaded. I lost a very good friend when he chose to make his base in a cave that was occupied by a horde of wild chickens. The search



team found him in the morning, covered in blood and feathers, having been pecked to death in the night.

To avoid this grisly fate you're going to have to build your own shelter, and for this you'll need to make sure you use the right materials. You'll want something sturdy that's going to protect you from the elements and keep you safe from wolves. We all

remember the story of the three little pigs. Make your shelter out of sticks or straw and pretty soon you're going to be bacon. Unfortunately, bricks are in short supply in the wilderness, so in the absence of a decent building supplies outlet you're going to have to improvise. In 2002 I was marooned on a blip of an island in the Indian Ocean, and I managed to make a pretty decent shelter out of tortoise shells. It can be a little difficult to persuade the tortoises to stay where you put them, but usually if you keep them supplied with lettuce they will behave themselves. Luckily, wherever you find tortoises you usually find lettuce.

Survival Checklist:

- Find tortoises
- Find lettuce
- Watch out for the wild chickens.

Sustenance

Your next problem is going to be finding food. What are you going to eat? You can't eat the tortoises, you'd be literally eating yourself out of house and home. When I was stranded in Borneo, I was fortunate enough to have brought a Twix with me, and by sucking the chocolate off and then nibbling a little bit at a time I was able to make it last most of the week. But what do you do once your chocolate stash has run out?

Snake meat is one option that is often suggested, but snakes are notoriously stringy and difficult to digest, so more often than not you're better off just sucking the tail. But even this is not as straightforward as you might think, since the snake is likely to turn around and have words with you, and this can be very embarrassing.

However, with some knowledge of common flora you can quite easily get the nourishment you need. Take the custard tree, for example. This grows quite readily in most parts of the world and when tapped can supply a steady stream of tasty, nutritious custard. The tree can be identified quite easily due to its distinctive yellow and purple leaves. Drive a sharpened stick into the trunk and you will have enough custard to last a month or more. Be careful though, tree custard is under considerable pressure and once punctured the resultant custard geyser can cause serious injury, or worse. A very good friend of mine fell victim to a custard tree



Survival Checklist:

- Find custard tree.
- Stand well back.
- Don't go around sucking snakes.

incident only last year. When they found him, almost every bone in his body had been shattered and his lungs were full of the stuff. It was a dreadful but delicious way to go.

Water



Generally when it comes to water you'll either have too much of it (monsoon season) or too little (your standard desert). If you've got too much of it then your biggest concern is going to be staying afloat. I find that two armadillos, correctly inflated to the right pressure, make ideal floatation aids. How do you inflate an armadillo to the right pressure, I hear you ask? Well, it's really quite simple: you just put your finger over one end then blow down the other.

Not having enough water is a much bigger problem. Your best bet is groundwater or, as I like to call it, Earth juice. If you dig down deep enough you will reach the water table and be able to access a plentiful supply of fresh water. Or you could

get really lucky, like I did when I got lost in the Gobi Desert in 2014, and hit a water main. Of course, success is not guaranteed. A good friend of mine has just been designated missing presumed dead - they found the hole he was digging but weren't able to reach the bottom of it. As far as we know he's still digging.

Survival Checklist:

- If it's dry, dig for water.
- If it's wet, don't dig for water - you can't dig your way out of a flood.
- Remember to put your finger over one end.

Fire

Fire is what separates us from the animals - apart from fire ants, of course, which are the only species known to be capable of starting a barbecue. Our ancient ancestors were able to create fire using just a few twigs and a piece of flint - and they are generally thought by most anthropologists to have been a bit thick, so if *they* could do it then *you've* got no excuse. However, it still means that you have to find a bit of flint, and even if you were lucky in this regard, bashing away at a rock for half the day is a lot of hard work. That's a significant amount of energy that you're expending, energy that you're much better off holding in reserve in case you need to fight off tigers, crocodiles or wild chickens.



Survival Checklist:

- **Don't waste time rubbing sticks together.**
- **Find something sturdy to put your lightning in.**
- **Keep your trousers on.**

Thankfully, nature has provided us with a ready-made supply of fire from the sky: lightning. Catching a bolt of lightning is not really as difficult as it seems, just as long as you're careful and you keep your fingers out of the way. You need to be patient, obviously, you need to find a high spot and you need something sturdy to catch your lightning in: a metal bucket, a coconut or a turtle shell, for instance. Just don't do what a good friend of mine did when he lost his way while climbing in the Andes. The lack of oxygen having seriously clouded his judgement, he scrambled to the summit of the nearest mountain during a thunderstorm, bared his arse to the sky and shouted, "Come on Prometheus, do your worst!" They found his teeth, still smoking, in the car park of a convenience store in La Paz.

Rescue

Your ultimate aim, obviously, is to survive long enough to be rescued, unless you're some kind of weirdo who wants to live off custard for the rest of your life. But what is the best way of attracting the attention of a rescue party? The first step is to be someone who is worth rescuing, and for this you need to have put in the groundwork in advance: being a generally likeable person, not being a dick, that sort of thing. It also helps if you're rich and important, of course.



By the time you've got yourself stranded, however, there's not a lot you can do about this so it's a question of working with what you've got. You'll be pleased to learn that there are a few tried and tested methods. You could climb a tree and shout for help, although this does depend to a large degree on how loud you are and how close your potential rescuers are. You could spell out a message using rocks so that it could be read from the air, but please try to avoid just writing 'Help'. It's so clichéd and unlikely to get anyone's attention. Instead, try to write something witty and original: perhaps a pithy remark about coconuts, or something. For best results you want something that's going to go viral.

By far your best option is to put a message in a bottle - contrary to popular belief, this is surprisingly effective. It

even works if you're nowhere near water - a desert or a jungle, for example - you just have to be a lot more patient. The key to this method is that your message must be properly addressed. When I found myself drifting helplessly on a raft in the South Atlantic, I addressed my message to the RNLI lifeboat station at Burnham-on-Sea and was rescued within a matter of hours. Just don't make the same mistake as a good friend of mine, who addressed his message to 'Whomever it may concern'. The problem is that everyone who received it assumed it was meant for someone else. I certainly did, anyway - I mean, I've known the guy for years and if he can't bring himself to address me by name, then frankly he can rot.

Survival Checklist:

- **Bring a bottle.**
- **Address your note correctly.**
- **Don't write to me, because I'm not going to help you.**



The Society for the Preservation and Promotion of Tuesdays

Good evening. Or indeed, good morning, whichever is your preference. I'm speaking to you today on behalf of The Society for the Preservation and Promotion of Tuesdays, and I know what you're thinking. You're thinking: why does Tuesday need to be preserved? After all, there's no shortage of them. It was Tuesday only last week and I'm pretty sure there will be another next week. So what exactly is the problem?

A very good question! You are quite right, of course. But what you probably didn't know was that there is a growing movement to abolish this plucky little weekday, supported chiefly by The Association for the Conservation and Advancement of Wednesdays, who meet in the town hall every Thursday. They, of course, wish to see Tuesdays eradicated because it will elevate the status of Wednesdays. But, as everyone knows, Wednesday is a particularly worthless and insignificant part of the week and, if any savings are to be made by shortening the standard British week, Wednesday ought to be the prime candidate for the chop.



PRESERVE TUESDAYS!



TRASH WEDNESDAY

Let's take a look at the facts. Firstly, the case against Wednesday:

- **It has a weird spelling**
- **It's half-day closing**
- **There's nothing on the telly**
- **It's usually raining**

Tuesday, on the other hand is a bright, hopeful, joyous day of the week, on which nothing bad ever happens - or, at least, if it does happen, it happens to someone else. It's also a momentous day in history. Did you realise that the following events all took place on a Tuesday?

-
-
-
-

Alright, nothing. Nothing of significance ever happened on a Tuesday, but that's not to say that it won't at some point in the future. Just imagine all the great scientific breakthroughs and the wonderful discoveries that will be made on Tuesdays yet to come.

Things like:

- The invention of teleportation
- The discovery of a new kind of jam
- Electric sandals
- A cure for ingrowing toenails

Can you imagine what it will be like if these things never happen? There are people out there who are crying out for a new type of jam. Do you want to crush their dreams, scatter their hopes to the winds and render their lives worthless? No, I thought not - but the bottom line is: no Tuesdays, no jam.



JAM! JAM! JAM! JAM!



**SQUEEZY
PLASTIC
LEMON
THING**

Not convinced? Well consider this: if you lose Tuesday, you lose Shrove Tuesday along with it. Bye bye, pancakes. Nothing to look forward to except nasty horrid old Ash Wednesday, and what treats does that have in store for you? A mouthful of cold cinders and good luck to you, mate! And you can also say goodbye to those little squeezey lemon-shaped bottles of juice. After all, nobody buys them at any other time of year.

Finally, and in conclusion, let me sum up by reminding you that Tuesday's child is full of grace, whereas Wednesday's child is a right drag, just like it says in the rhyme:

**Monday's child is fair of face,
Tuesday's child is full of grace,
Wednesday's child is hard work and not worth the bother,
Thursday's child is something else,
Blah. blah. blah, you get the point.**

A compelling case, I think you'll agree. So why not join us in preserving our marvellous Tuesdays and abolishing all those pointless, dismal Wednesdays? Then, when we've triumphed in that endeavour, let's have a crack at Thursdays, because they're a waste of time as well. Thank you.

WEDNESDAY



The Language of Dance



Dance Wars

The Mungovian ambassador to Wasidia has come in for criticism after apologising for his country's historical role in the colonisation of the tiny island state. Mungovia invaded Wasidia in 1882 and occupied the island for almost sixty years, before finally granting it independence in 1940. Many people feel that the official apology has come a little late, but what is really making Wasidians so angry is that the ambassador chose to deliver it through the medium of dance.

"Dance is very important in Mungovia," said the Ambassador. "It is a very solemn and stately activity, and a traditional way of showing respect and honouring nobility."

The Ambassador's 'solemn and stately' apology took the form of a three minute video message in which he danced to 'YMCA' by The Village People,

with all the actions and in full costume (he was the motorcycle cop). Not surprisingly, the people of Wasidia have judged the apology to be less than sincere and, during a recent session of the United Nations, Wasidia's permanent representative responded by doing the Macarena, while the foreign minister accompanied her on a kazoo.

There have been suggestions of Mungovia retaliating with the chicken dance and in Wasidia they are openly talking about flossing in the streets. There are genuine fears that the situation could rapidly escalate to the point where one side goes nuclear - Gangnam Style - and nobody wants to see that.

Plans are currently being drawn up for a UN Peacekeeping Dance Troupe to be parachuted into the region and there will be harsh penalties for anyone caught moving in an even remotely rhythmic way.



Effective Communication

Just how effective is dance as a form of communication? We asked professional dancing person, Judith Twirl

UBO: Hello professional dancing person, Judith Twirl. Please tell us, how effective is dance as a form of communication?

JUDITH: Hello interviewer person. Well of course dance is the most intimate and personal form of self-expression and we all have an innate understanding of movement and form. Thus, when I do this...

At this point Judith gracefully lifts her arms into the air while slowly sliding the top of her foot up her calf, then suddenly and dramatically droops and finishes in a low bow.

JUDITH: ... You instantly know what I'm trying to convey

UBO: Yes, you've got an itch.

JUDITH: No, it means I'm sad.

UBO: Yes. You're sad because you've got an itchy leg.

JUDITH: No, I'm just sad. This is the power of dance. At the heart of each performance there is truth. It's a form of communication that bypasses mere words and instead reaches for something deeper?

UBO: Okay then, let's say that I was in my local newsagents. How would I use dance to tell the person behind the counter that I wanted a Mars bar?

JUDITH: Well it's not really about that kind of communication. It's more about the

fundamental thoughts and feelings that drive deeply at what it is to be human.

UBO: I think wanting a Mars bar is highly suggestive of what it is to be human. Some come on, how would I say 'Give me a Mars bar'?

JUDITH: Well, how about...

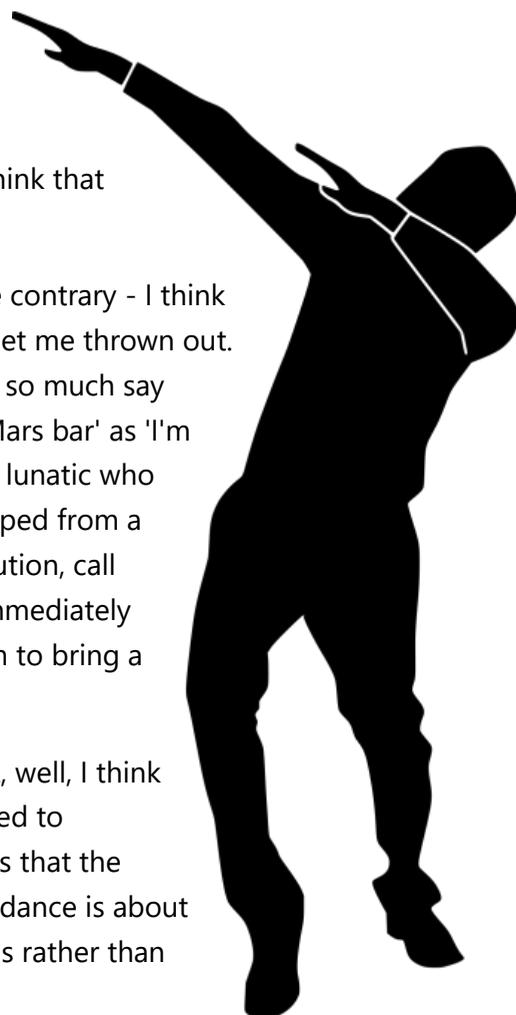
Judith places her hands on her stomach, sidesteps to the left, spins around and finishes with jazz hands.

JUDITH: I think that would do it.

UBO: On the contrary - I think that would get me thrown out. That doesn't so much say 'Give me a Mars bar' as 'I'm a dangerous lunatic who has just escaped from a secure institution, call the police immediately and tell them to bring a big net'.

JUDITH: Ok, well, I think what you need to understand is that the language of dance is about broad strokes rather than detail.

UBO: Broad strokes? You're talking about painting now?



JUDITH: No, it was a metaphor. You see -

UBO: Hang on - metaphor. That's quite a complex linguistic concept. How would you use dance to convey a metaphor?

JUDITH: Well now, in many ways, *all* dance is metaphorical.

UBO: So it's just the purely literal that you



struggle with?

JUDITH: No! No! No!

Judith now repeatedly beats her fist into the palm of her hand, from which I am able to deduce that she is conveying anger and frustration.

JUDITH: Your problem is that you are dance-illiterate.

UBO: No, 'illiterate' can't be the right word. If 'innumerate' is numbers, what's dance?

JUDITH: No matter how hard we try, there are always philistines like you who refuse to open your minds to wider forms of artistic expression.

UBO: 'Terpsichorean' - that relates to dance, doesn't it? So the word would be 'intersichorate', I guess.

JUDITH: Whatever.

Without warning, Judith lunges at me, slaps me several times about the face, knees me in the groin and then waltzes off. From this performance I conclude the our interview is at an end and, as I tenderly clutch my aching plums, I can't help but reflect that, in the final analysis, she did indeed manage to drive deeply and quite forcefully at what it is to be human. Ouch.

The Basics

A handy guide to some common dance expressions you can use in everyday life.



"Hello, could you please tell me the way to the train station? Thank you."



"I would like to return this deluxe four-slot electric toaster. It is faulty."



"Would you kindly instruct your dog to stop widdling on my foot?"



"I am most awfully and terribly sorry that we invaded your country in 1882."

An Appeal on Behalf of the Disgusted and Appalled

Dear Friends,

My name is Gertrude Trumpet, you may recognise me from the popular TV show *Shouty Cockneys Down the Old Kent Road* and many dodgy late-night bingo ads. I'm here to tell you about the plight of a group of people who have been largely ignored - people who have nothing better to do than be offended by stuff.

You've seen them, spitting streams of poisonous invective from outraged orifices like hateful threads of angry spaghetti, the words dripping in ropes of mucus from cracked and swollen lips. The start of every tedious and tiresome sentence signals a fresh assault on the world in general and some poor group of harmless, blameless and entirely powerless individuals in particular. "It's them!" they scream, their bloated faces burning redder and ever redder as the bile bubbles up from deep within to explode as a vicious, volcanic spume from which no one is spared. "They're to blame! Stop them, lock them up, send them home, burn them all!"

They are disgusted and appalled. At everything. Anything - the smaller, pettier, more frivolous the better. At the kids playing in the street, the way the neighbours park their car, the potholes in the road, the jaunty angle at which the refuse collectors left their recycling bin this morning, the fact that everybody calls them 'refuse collectors' now and not dustmen like they used to in the old days. Each gripe and grievance a tiny dagger thrust into their flesh, each prick and jab and stab adding to their rage until they can take no more; until they burst their cosy suburban shackles and emerge roaring and screaming and demanding that the powers-that-be, the defenders of public standards or whoever's turn it is this week to be responsible takes action, provides compensation and smooths their fevered brows.

"Honestly, Sarah," you hear them whining in coffee shops, hairdressers and health food stores across the nation, "It makes you wonder what we pay our taxes for."

Many of them don't pay taxes, of course, but that doesn't stem the torrent of entitlement that constantly blasts and batters whichever poor sod is unlucky enough to attract their attention, until defences crumble, all resistance is eroded and their victim caves to each and every demand, for the sake of a quiet life.

It's a terrible affliction to be this angry all the time, not least because the people who really suffer are us, the poor bastards who are assailed by this relentless bombardment of shit. What these pompous, whining leeches really need is the sense of perspective that comes with genuine hardship, adversity and misfortune. And that's why I'm speaking to you today. We are an organisation dedicated to giving these wankers a hard time and we're asking you to put your hands in your pockets and give what you can to help fund our vital, worthwhile and incredibly satisfying work. Your donation, however large or small, will help us make life genuinely difficult for some smug, ungrateful git and, who knows, perhaps in time it will lead them down a more useful, more fulfilling and far less aggravating path.

Please send your donations to:

We Want to Give these Fuckers Something to Really Complain About

BOX 99

Colchester

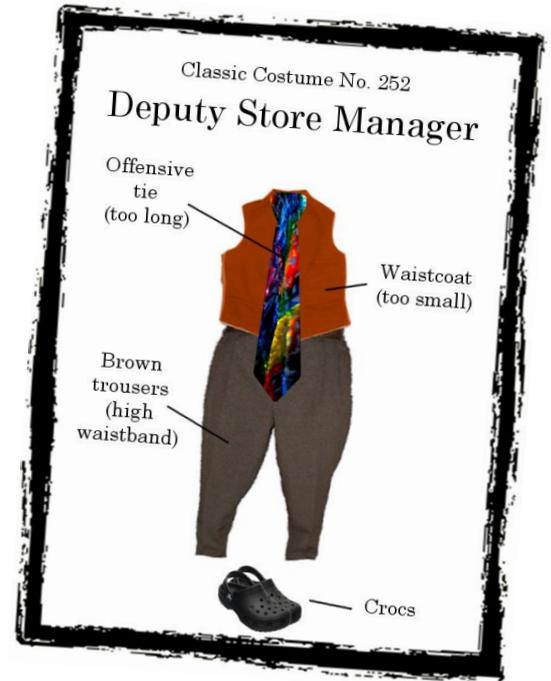
CO22 0CK

Ordinary People

Patrick Kraft is a cosplayer with a difference: rather than recreating the costumes of fantastic characters from comic books, movies and TV shows, Patrick chooses to dress up as a thirty-three-year-old data entry clerk from Braintree.

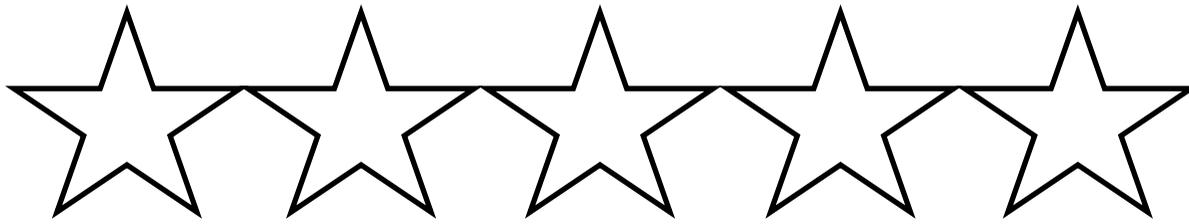
"I tried dressing up as a wizard once," Patrick admits with obvious embarrassment. "It wasn't for me. It just seemed so phoney, so pointless. Cosplaying as a real person is much more exciting - I feel like I'm really walking in this guy's shoes, living his boring life, eating his shitty breakfast. Lovely."

It seems strange to us that someone would actually want to experience that level of everyday tedium, but when you consider that Patrick is by profession a stunt pilot, who risks his life every day, it starts to make sense. And he's not alone: there are plenty of others who feel the same way, including Formula 2 racing driver Colleen Vee, who relaxes by adopting the persona of a divorced, middle-aged cleaner from Huddersfield. Colleen is a regular at many of the specialised cosplayer conventions that take place around the country. She recently attended a two-day event at a plush hotel in Manchester, where she spent most of the weekend scrubbing out the toilets.



"It was great," she told us, still smiling joyfully and smelling of bleach. "My day-to-day life is full of fast cars, glamour and excitement, so the opportunity to spend a few precious days up to my elbows in shit was not one to be missed."

It's a sentiment echoed by many - such as Super Explodoman, for example. By day he is a regular superhero: righting wrongs, leaping tall buildings and doing all that superhero shit that you people seem to like; by night he revels in anonymity by becoming 'Gavin', a mild-mannered car park attendant with a limp, an official-looking hat and an unfortunate habit of reducing you to ash with his laser eyesight if you make the mistake of parking in a reserved bay. Hey, each to his own.



Very Disappointing. Avoid.

Because he knows how important it is that the world has access to his opinions, Garth Vazio has invested a great deal of time in posting reviews of pretty much everything

online. All his reviews are negative, naturally, because Garth is a fellow of exacting standards and therefore extremely difficult to please...

Shepton Bassett Memorial Gardens

Reviewed by [Garth Vazio](#)

★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆ 1 ½ Stars

Go to Shepton Bassett Memorial Gardens and you will find a big stone obelisk with a plaque attached. And I hope you're a big fan of big stone obelisks, because you'll find precious little else to amuse you. Big stone obelisks do nothing for me, I'm afraid, and neither do flowerbeds and oddly shaped patches of turf. I even failed be amused by the park benches, which is unusual because outdoor seating is something I usually take an inordinately keen interest in. There were some ducks, but they didn't do anything interesting - just sat and looked at me with beady eyes, smug grins all over their smarmy beaks. I suppose if you're really into grass then this is the place for you, but I won't be returning. Very disappointing. Avoid.

500g Pack of Munchy Flakes Breakfast Cereal

Reviewed by [Garth Vazio](#)

★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆ 1 ½ Stars

I was really looking forward to receiving these and when they arrived I couldn't wait to open the parcel. But, oh dear, what a let-down. Let's start with the packaging: drab cardboard with a photo of a bowl of Munchy Flakes on the front. Very imaginative, I don't think! Come on Munchy Flakes, how about making an effort? Perhaps a gatefold front with a cut-out window, or a lenticular 3d image, or, I don't know, a hologram or something?

Never mind, I was sure the real treat would be waiting for me inside the pack. I had to tear open the top to get in - not very clever. What if I wanted to send them back? Anyway, I tipped the contents onto the table in front of me and spread them out, looking for the free gift. Nothing! No little plastic toy, no collector's cards, no stickers - it was just the Munchy Flakes. And they were nothing special either, just cheap knock-off cornflakes. Very disappointing. Avoid.

Dr K Scapula, River Walk Surgery

Reviewed by [Garth Vazio](#)

 1 ½ Stars

Suspecting that I was suffering from a bad case of repetitive strain injury following a heavy evening writing reviews, I visited my local GP surgery. It had been a while since I last visited my doctor, so I wasn't entirely sure what to expect. The first shock came when I was told by the grumpy receptionist that, because I didn't have an appointment, I might have to wait for up to ten minutes. Ten minutes! Is this what our health service has come to?

What made it worse was that the waiting room was very poorly equipped. There were no video games, the only TV was showing a programme about washing your hands and when I tried to order a coffee from the receptionist she gave me a very sour look. In the end I was only kept waiting for six minutes, but it was six minutes of sheer hell.

Anyway, eventually I got to see the doctor. She seemed very nice, but clearly she wasn't properly qualified. I told her all about my symptoms and gave her my diagnosis, carefully researched on the internet, and instructed her to write me a prescription for antibiotics, painkillers and, just to be on the safe side, an inhaler. She refused. Can you believe it? I thought the customer was always right. All she did was smile politely, examine my hands and tell me there was nothing to worry about.

So, all in all, it was a completely wasted trip and I came out with nothing. Very disappointing. Avoid.

The Mopey Ricards Maxi-Press 4000 Steam Iron

Reviewed by [Garth Vazio](#)

 1 ½ Stars

I'm quite a gadget buff and I had high hopes for this item, having read some of the previous reviews. But guess what - it really doesn't live up to the hype. Granted, the Maxi-Press 4000 makes a decent enough job of flattening clothes but that's all it does. It can't handle mowing the lawn, it makes a right hash of toasting bread and you can't get the internet on it. Hardly 'a fantastic little steam iron that helps make your daily chores a joy' as one reviewer wrote. Very disappointing. Avoid.

Geoff Pickles: My Story, The Autobiography

Reviewed by [Garth Vazio](#)

 1 ½ Stars

I've been a big fan of Geoff Pickles for many years. I have all his records, seen every film he's made and was lucky enough to watch him score three goals for Arsenal when they played Sheffield Wednesday in the 1989 quarter finals. I even met the great man in person, in a chip shop in Bolton in 2002, and still have the scar from when he threw a chair at me and told me to piss off. Gets a bit touchy when you try to pinch his chips, does Geoff, but we love him all the same.

Anyhow, it was inevitable that I would rush out and get this book as soon as it was published, but oh dear - just because people are writing about themselves, is it really any reason to be so self-obsessed? Geoff just goes on and on about stuff that he did and stuff that happened to him: in 1978 I did this, then in 1982 I did that, in 1988 this happened to me, then in 1996 someone gave me an award for doing this that and the other. Give it a rest mate! Couldn't we have a few car chases, a bit of intrigue, maybe a daring escape from a perilous situation? I gather he is currently writing a second volume covering the last twenty years. Well, I hope he bucks his ideas up and makes his life story a bit more exciting, that's all I can say. Very disappointing. Avoid.

Gravity

Reviewed by [Garth Vazio](#)

 1 ½ Stars

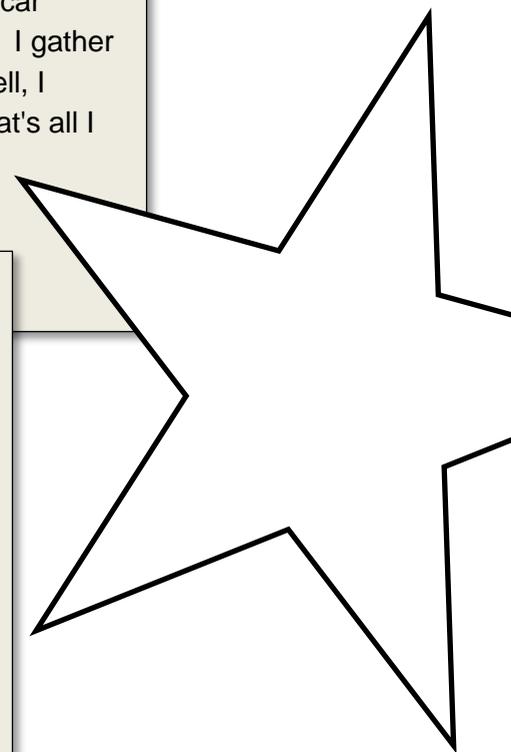
Gravity is one of the four fundamental forces of nature and has been with us since the beginning of the universe. Now, I'm as keen as the next reviewer to respect tradition, but I do think there is a case to be made for modernisation. And, as we all know, gravity is far from perfect. Sure, it's great for keeping things on the ground. I for one certainly wouldn't want to go floating off into space, but then the same force that keeps me rooted to the spot is also responsible for making things fall off the top of my wardrobe. Surely with all the modern technology at our disposal we could have gravity that was a little more discriminating? So, sorry, but it's a big thumbs down for gravity. Very disappointing, avoid.

The Merchant of Venice, RSC, Stratford-upon-Avon

Reviewed by [Garth Vazio](#)

 1 ½ Stars

Nice ice cream, but the scoops are very, very small and two scoops in a pot for £3.75 is expensive. Scoops need to be bigger. Very disappointing, avoid.



The River Bassett, Herbsickshire

Reviewed by [Garth Vazio](#)

★☆☆☆☆ 1 ½ Stars

Well, what you get here, of course, is your standard river - not too big, not too small. Personally I found it a little too wet - I know some people like that in a river but I don't think I'm being unreasonable if I say that, in this day and age, we should be offered a choice about how wet or dry we want our rivers to be. I mean, this isn't the dark ages!

The River Bassett has some nice meanders, there's the odd bridge to lighten the mood but the local fish are very unhelpful and standoffish. In conclusion, very disappointing. Avoid.

...But Garth has recently had something of a shock. He has discovered that he himself is the subject of numerous reviews, and has been alarmed to read some less than glowing comments about his petty and unfounded criticisms, his lack of knowledge of his subject matter and his misplaced and moronic verdicts....

Garth Vazio, Reviewer

Reviewed by [Peter Shepherd](#)

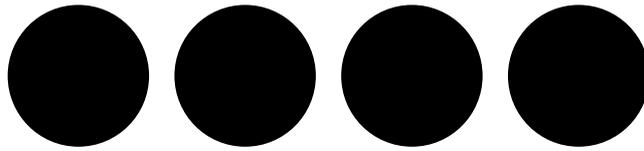
★☆☆☆☆ 1 ½ Stars

I've been a keen follower of Garth's reviews for some time now. In an age when we all need a little help to decide what we really feel about stuff, Garth's pithy unsolicited views about everything and anything give us a welcome respite from the demanding business of having to form our own opinions. Additionally, the fact that he is overwhelmingly negative about everything is both comforting and reassuring.

However, I have noticed that some of Garth's recent reviews have lost their edge. Gone is the sharp wit and spikey commentary and instead we get the same familiar, plodding parade of regurgitated clichés. I'm sorry, but I'm afraid Mr Vazio just doesn't do it for me anymore. Disappointing, avoid.

...Garth currently has an average rating of 'Poor', the same score as a mini golf course in Norfolk.

Four Holes



Holes are great! Probably. Here are four you might be quite interested in. (Sorry, should have put a bit more work into this introductory paragraph.)

An Unexpected Hole

Builders renovating a property in Gloucestershire discovered a previously unknown doorway that had been bricked up for nearly four centuries. Oddly, although the doorway dated back to 1652, the building where it was found was an eighteenth century farmhouse.

"The building, the wall, even the doorframe - these were all definitely eighteenth century but the hole in the middle was much, much older," explained site foreman Duncan Grout. "It smelled really fusty, so it had to be."

Ellie Hinge, an expert in holes from Durham University, was called in to evaluate the extraordinary find, primarily by measuring it with a special ruler. At the time of writing, she has still not committed to an explanation.



"Some people claim that this must be some sort of time portal," she laughed scornfully, before getting a grip and turning all serious. "And of course, this *could* be a possibility. However, I think that it's far more likely that this hole comes from a much earlier building and was reused here. Builders are always doing that, the crafty gits. The bloke who did my kitchen extension used a cavity taken from a derelict bingo hall down the road, and I strongly suspect that the hole for the boiler flue was nicked from the town hall."

Despite refusing to be drawn on the doorway's origins, Mrs Hinge promised an announcement soon. "I've been taking scrapings from the masonry surrounding the hole," she said in her most recent statement. "Tonight I'm going to boil them up and take a look at them through a microscope. I don't get out much."

A Prototype Hole

It may surprise you to know that the first ring-shaped doughnut wasn't developed until as late as 1932. Industrial dough-making techniques were in their infancy at the time and the brittleness of the raw materials meant that the original prototype was around twelve feet in diameter - much too large to get into the paper bag.

Successive refinements were able to bring this down to roughly the size of a car tyre - although these doughnuts also had the same taste and texture as a tyre, so they didn't really catch on. It wasn't until 1948 that doughnuticians managed to perfect a product that was small enough to hold in one hand, and which your teeth didn't bounce off when you tried to eat it.



Meanwhile, although the first prototype had crumbled to dust many years earlier, the hole in the middle survived, fetching a cool \$42,000 when it was auctioned in New York in 1995.

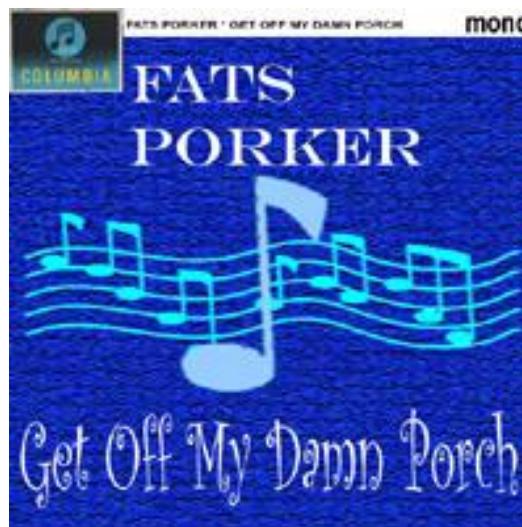
A Revolutionary Hole

The phonograph record is one of the most enduring inventions of our age, remaining popular with people who want their music in a physical format rather than a stream of ones and zeroes - even if they don't actually have a record player and never take the thing out of its sleeve. It is, they say, more permanent than a download, which is ironic since early records were certainly not.

The problem arose because the first commercially available records did not have holes in the middle: they simply rested on the turntable, trusting to luck and friction to keep them in place. They rarely did - stay in place, that is. Those early discs revolved at 78rpm, which meant that they spun off the turntables at some

speed; and they were made of shellac, which meant that they shattered into pieces when they landed. And when we say 'landed' we mean bounced off the dog, smashed your favourite china or got lodged in your face. This was why the recommended attire for listening to a gramophone record was sturdy goggles, a crash helmet and, for the serious music-lover, a cricket bat.

That all changed in 1961 when legendary blues singer Fats Porker released *Get Off My Damn Porch*, the first LP to feature a hole in the middle. Within six months all records had them, and record-player-related injuries were significantly reduced.



A Fraudulent Hole

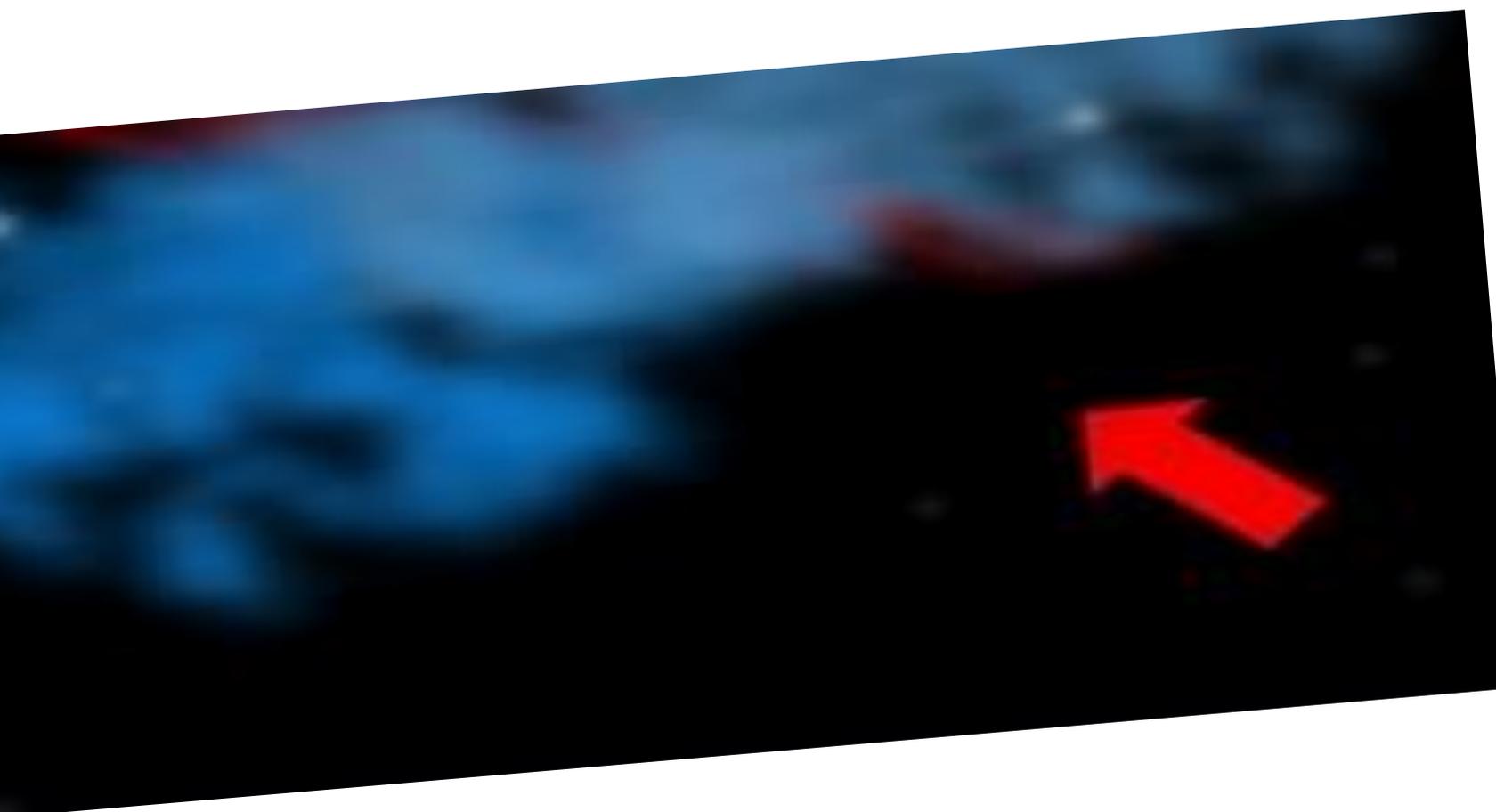
Not many people are paid a fat load of somebody else's cash to sit around all day, eating junk food, knocking back vodka and watching crap on TV. Professor Godfrey Manners certainly wasn't, and yet this was exactly how 'Spanners' Manners chose to spend his time after being given an eye-wateringly massive grant by Oxford University to further the frontiers of cosmology and unlock the deepest secrets of space and time.

He would have gotten away with it too, had it not been for those pesky university bosses who, after five years of not hearing a peep out of him, decided to pay him an unscheduled visit to find out why he had never published anything. He had nothing to show them, obviously; no papers, no research, no theories - not even a complex-looking but ultimately meaningless formula

chalked up on a board. But what he did have was the guile and low cunning of an expert fraudster. Rat-arsed he may have been, but he was quick-thinking enough to lead them over to the window, point up at a singularly uninteresting patch of the evening sky and tell them that he had discovered a black hole.

They, of course, said that they couldn't see anything. He, of course, said that of course they couldn't, it was a black hole.

Many years later, proper scientists who didn't spend days on end smashed out of their skulls on hard liquor happened to discover an actual black hole exactly where Manners had been pointing. No doubt the Prof would have been delighted by the discovery, had he not expired in a Vietnamese crack house several years earlier.



A New Direction

Why is it that we choose our politicians based on the values and principles that they espouse, rather than on the experience and abilities that they can demonstrate? You wouldn't trust a surgeon to remove your spleen because they really believed that they could do it, even though they'd never held a scalpel. You wouldn't trust an airline pilot who fervently, passionately believed that they could get you to your destination without flying into the side of a mountain, even though they had never sat in a cockpit. What would happen if we hired people to do every job using the same criteria that we use to select the people who govern us?

We find ourselves in a beige meeting room where Mr Wheeler, the depot manager, and Mr Tapper, from HR, are interviewing candidates for the position of train driver. Already this morning they've sat through fifteen carefully rehearsed recitations about having to act under pressure, and an equal number of monologues dealing with what the applicants felt were their greatest weaknesses. Still, Mr Tapper remains upbeat and irritatingly perky. Mr Wheeler, on the other hand, couldn't be any glummer.

Thankfully the final candidate is about to enter. This is him now, knocking at the door. It is Sir Malcolm Buffer, formerly the MP for Bassett South, and one time Minister for Transport.

Tapper: Please come in and take a seat. Let me see now... it's Malcolm, isn't it? Sorry, *Sir* Malcolm.

Sir Malcolm: Yes, yes, that's correct.

Tapper: Well thank you for coming to see us today. My name is Mr Tapper, I'm head of HR. This gentleman is Mr Wheeler. If you are successful today, Mr Wheeler will be your line manager. This is just an informal chat so that we can get to know you. Why don't you start by telling us a little bit about yourself?

Sir Malcolm: Certainly, yes. Well, as far as my education goes, I attended Eton, then Cambridge where I studied political science. Worked for my uncle in the city - investments, naturally - but always felt the need to serve my country in some way. Was elected to Parliament, where I served this constituency for twelve years, six of them as a member of the cabinet.

Tapper: This is really most impressive. I have your CV here and your list of achievements is remarkable, wouldn't you agree, Mr Wheeler?

Mr Wheeler is silent, looking glum and unimpressed.

Tapper: Well, Sir Malcolm, I expect you want to know a little more about the job. There are a number of aspects to the role, but primarily what we are looking for is someone to drive the mainline commuter express, Monday to Friday including a reduced service on Bank Holidays. So tell me, what first attracted you to the role of train driver?

Sir Malcolm: Oh, I have always been very interested in trains. In fact, I think I went on one once, when I was younger. Trains are the long ones that run on rails, yes? Yes, thought so. Always loved trains, so when I left politics earlier this year, a career as a train driver seemed to be a natural choice.

Tapper: Excellent, really excellent.

Tapper smiles at Wheeler. Wheeler scowls and leans forward to ask a question.

Wheeler: Right. So, can you give us some idea of what experience you have had driving locomotives?

Sir Malcolm: That is an excellent question. Really excellent. I do believe that experience is essential, and that is something I always tried to stress during my time in government. However, it's important to realise that it's not the *only* consideration. There is no substitute for passion and enthusiasm. These are the qualities that I brought to my parliamentary career, and I am now very keen to put these same qualities at your disposal.

Tapper: That's marvellous to hear, Sir Malcolm. Really marvellous.

Wheeler: Yes. But, returning to my question, what experience of train driving do you have?

Sir Malcolm: I think the *real* question here is do I really believe in trains?

Wheeler: No it isn't. It's what experience of train driving do you have?

Sir Malcolm: And the answer is yes, I really do *passionately* believe in trains. Not only are they an important factor is this country's history, but they will be a vital and, dare I say it, exciting part of its future.

Tapper: I have to say, Sir Malcolm, it is refreshing to hear someone speaking like this in this day and age.

Wheeler: Sir Malcolm, I'm going to go out on a limb here and say that you've never driven a train. Would I be right in that assumption?

Sir Malcolm: Well, of course, you're free to draw whatever inference you see fit, and I respect your opinion. However, what I will say is this: sometimes we need to break away from tradition and adopt a new approach. It's all very well hiring a train driver to drive a train, but there are times when we need to cast the net a little wider. There is always a place for fresh blood and new ideas. I believe this is what I represent. I believe - I *strongly* believe - that in order to ensure that the railway industry thrives, we need to take trains in a new direction.

Wheeler: As opposed to the direction determined by the track?

Tapper: Well, Sir Malcolm, you've certainly given us a great deal to think about. Thank you very much for coming; we'll be in touch in due course.

Sir Malcolm leaves and Tapper shuffles through the application forms in front of him.

Tapper: Well, I don't think there's any doubt about who is the best candidate for the job.

Wheeler: Absolutely.

Tapper: Oh yes, Sir Malcolm is our man, all right.

Wheeler: What?

Tapper: You don't agree? I think he has all the qualities we are looking for.

Wheeler: He's never driven a train. He probably doesn't even know which end is which. Now, that bloke we saw second, what was his name? Here we go, Harry Ballast - he's been a train driver for thirty

years. Incredibly experienced, blemish-free work record, excellent references.

Tapper: But no *passion*. The man had no *enthusiasm*. Yes, I dare say he *could* drive a train but he doesn't inspire confidence. Sir Malcolm, on the other hand, really *believes* in trains. I trust him. I think he's good for trains and I'm happy for the future of our trains to be in his hands.

Wheeler: I disagree. I've worked in this industry all my life. I started out as a train driver, I've managed train drivers and I'm responsible for every train that goes out of my depot, and in my experience - which is considerable - I think the best person for the job of a train driver is someone who knows how to drive a train.

Tapper: Yes, well *I* went to Cambridge and *I'm* head of HR, and ultimately it's *my* decision. Sir Malcolm is the man for us; Sir Malcolm gets the job. Right, if we're done here I need to make a move. I'm seeing the Duke of Cumberland this afternoon about an exciting new role in the staff canteen. I think we might just have found our Head of Sausages.



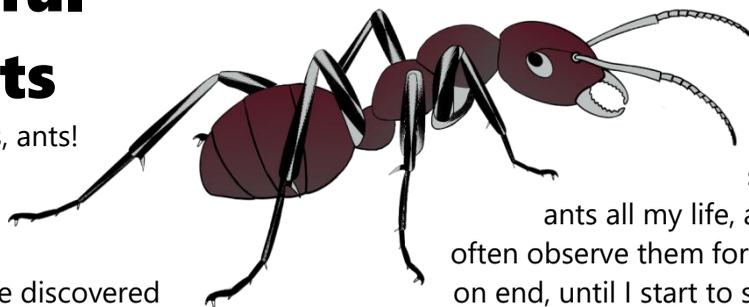
The Wonderful World of Ants

Ah, ants! Ants, ants, ants, ants, ants! Apologies, I was reminiscing. Since the dawn of time, ants and mankind have lived hand in hand. Palaeontologists have discovered Neolithic cave paintings that depict ant hunts, the most well-known example being a startling image of a mighty stag ant being brought down by a single spear, which adorns a wall in Lascaux.

Later, of course, humans learned how to domesticate the ant, coming to rely on its plentiful and sweet-tasting milk for their nourishment, and using its soft, downy pelt to insulate themselves from the harsh winters. Even today, ants are still used to irrigate fields, lay cables, power turbines, make sandals, fit carpets, sell motor home insurance, assemble electronic circuitry, round up sheep, track illegal narcotics, stitch wounds, calibrate GPS equipment, carry out surveillance and dig for tin. And let's not forget that long before Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the moon, it was an ant that first set foot upon the lunar surface. Six feet, to be precise. But for me it is the almost infinite variety of ants that I find so fascinating. I have

Standard Worker Ant

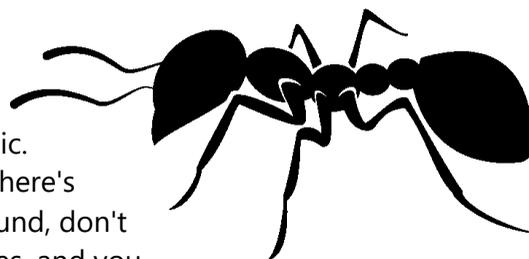
So this is the ant that you're most likely familiar with, usually to be found scurrying around, apparently randomly, or massing in large numbers during a picnic. Many people profess to being wary of ants, and yet there's really very little to be worried about. Stand your ground, don't show your fear and try not to make any sudden moves, and you should find that you survive the encounter unscathed. Ants have tiny brains but even they are aware that you're much bigger than they are, so they will attempt to avoid you if they can.



I have studied ants all my life, and will often observe them for hours on end, until I start to see

spots before my eyes and the ants themselves begin to get paranoid. You may have thought that there are only two types of ants - red ants and black ants - but that's because you are impossibly naïve and don't know nothing about it. In fact, not only are there many different species, but there are also many different adaptations within each colony.

And so I am on a mission - a mission to educate the general public about the wonderful world of ants - and to this end I have prepared the following guide to some of the more interesting examples you are likely to see in your gardens, outhouses, kitchens and cupboards. I am hopeful that this will encourage a greater appreciation of the kingdom of the ant and help to spark a genuine interest in the subject so that finally, dear reader, you and I might be friends.



Lantern Ant

"Hey!" people often shout at me in the street. "How come ants don't come out at night?" Well, the answer is that certain specialised types of ants are indeed nocturnal. The lantern ant has built-in arse illumination, meaning that it can operate after sunset, when there is less traffic about and it can get more stuff done.



Parasol Ant

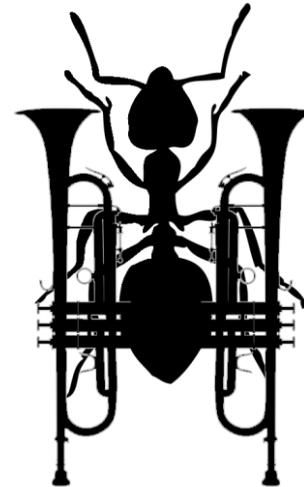
The other great advantage of the lantern ant is that it avoids the harsh heat of day. The parasol ant has dealt with this problem by growing its own sun shade. There are two varieties: the collapsible parasol ant and the non-collapsible parasol ant. The non-collapsible version is far less common as it is often unable to get back through the narrow doorway to its nest, and is therefore vulnerable to predators.



Trumpet Ant

On the subject of predators, the trumpet ant has evolved a means of both raising the alarm and disabling its attacker. Its twin horns deliver a sharp blast that notifies other ants of the impending danger and creates a shockwave that can temporarily disorientate the aggressor. Many people cite the trumpet ant as evidence of intelligent design, asserting that it is not possible for brass instruments to evolve through a process of natural selection.

(See also the cornet gull and the trombone squid.)



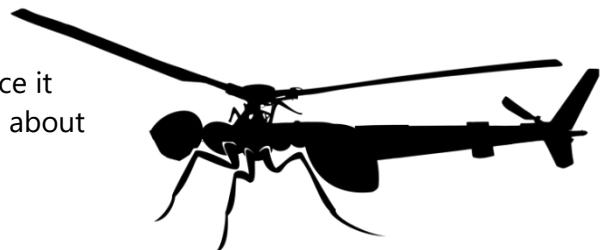
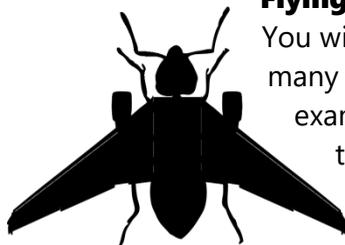
The Bullhorn Ant

A more technologically advanced adaptation of the trumpet ant.

Flying Ants

You will be aware of flying ants, but you are most probably unaware of the many varied ways that ants employ to get airborne. The jet ant, for example needs to reach a fantastic speed to achieve lift. This means that it requires a sizeable runaway and is also prone to colliding with windows, walls, trees etc. The heli-ant, the on the other hand, can

take off from anywhere, but provides easy pickings for birds, usually because it's so pleased with itself once it gets airborne that it completely fails to notice that it's about to get eaten.



Rodeo Ant

All but extinct these days, at one time rodeo ants used to thunder across the plains of Midwest America in great herds, their headlong stampede raising dust clouds that could be seen for miles around. Tame rodeo ants were commonly used on cattle drives, their sturdy six-legged stride making them ideal for the rough and uneven terrain. Unfortunately, since ants are relatively small and cowboys are substantially larger, they couldn't be ridden for more than a few miles without their backs snapping. This is why so few of them survived and the small number that remain are a protected species.



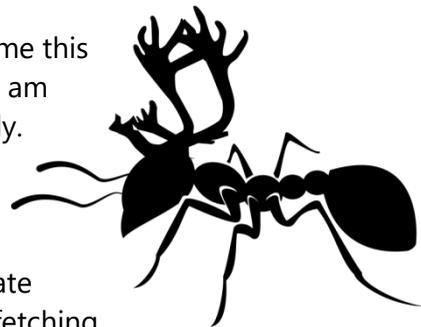
The Chicken Ant



Science has produced some wonderful things but the nightmare abomination that resulted from the ill-conceived scheme to cross a chicken with an ant is most certainly not one of them. Thankfully, the laboratory that produced them was decommissioned in 1973 and the last remaining example of this mutant species was walled up in its abandoned incubation centre, along with the maniac who created it.

The Stag Ant

The mating habits of ants are indeed extraordinary, and for me this has always been a subject of great interest. For the record, I am not a pervert and this is a completely legitimate area of study. By far the most impressive example of courtship within the ant kingdom is provided by the stag ant, which uses its impressive antlers to fend off rival males. Stag ants will often fight to the death, the survivor winning the right to mate with the female or 'doe', while the loser is made into a very fetching and impressive coat rack.



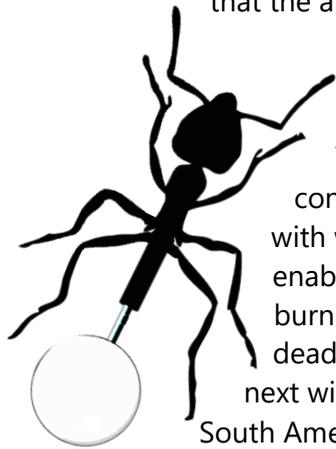
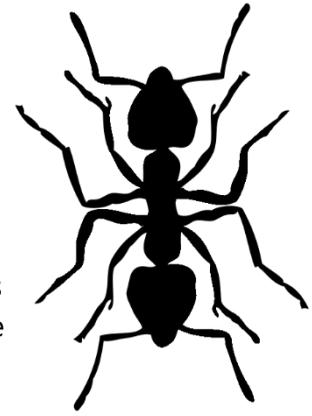
Extended and Chunky

Two interesting examples of adaptations that can be seen in most ant colonies. The extended ant is blessed with additional pairs of legs, making it much speedier and therefore ideal for conveying news of imminent danger and other urgent communications. The chunky ant is much slower, but can carry a much greater payload. Even ants need somewhere to put stuff.



The Double Header

Often called the 'push me pull you' ant, this creature has solved the tricky problem of not being able to turn round in the narrow corridors of the ant nest. The double header does not have an anus, instead having a second head, meaning that it can simply reverse direction. Extraordinarily ingenious though this is, the lack of an anus presents problems of its own, as the inability to get rid of waste means that the ant rapidly swells up and is unable to enter the tunnel in the first place.

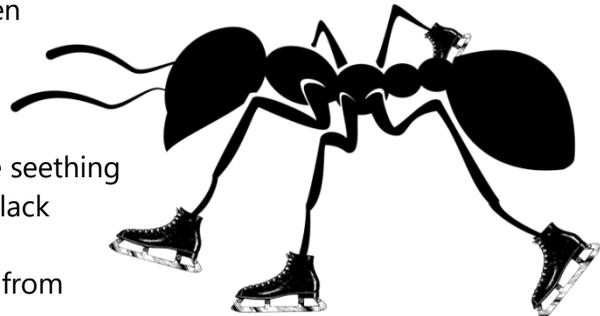


Soldier Ant

You've no doubt heard of soldier ants but have you ever stopped to consider how they are armed? As you would expect, they are equipped with what is, to an ant, the ultimate weapon - a magnifying glass. This enables them to focus a beam of sunlight with laser-like precision and burn their enemy to a crisp in seconds. Actually, this is only the second deadliest type of ant - the extremely rare boiler ant can wipe out a whole nest with a single kettle of hot water, but these only exist in small colonies in South America.

Skater Ant

There is nowhere on the planet that has not been colonized by ants, from the baking sands of central Africa, to the icy wastes of the Arctic you will find the humble ant. And it is in this last location where, if you are lucky, you can see seething columns of skater ants, streaming like endless black rivers over the surface of the ice. They are well known to the Inuits, although where they come from and where they are going has been a mystery for centuries. One thing is certain: although they can glide over the ice with no apparent effort, the ability to stop seems to have eluded them.

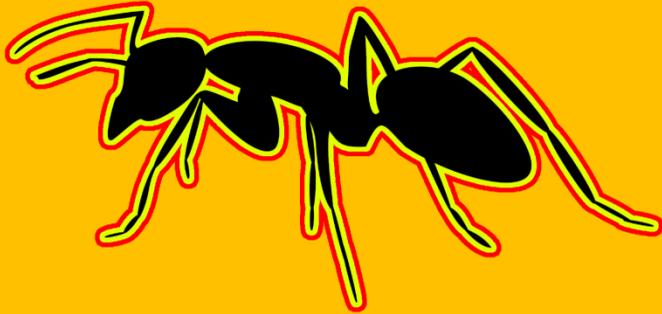


The Dapper Ant

Finally, my favourite: the dapper ant can be seen most evenings wearing a top hat, a satin-lined cape and carrying a silver-topped walking stick. He's most probably off to the theatre, or perhaps a cocktail party or private function. Stop him and say hello and he'll always politely doff his hat. Just don't expect him to stick around for too long - this ant is much in demand and has places to be, although he will usually present you with his card and promise to keep in touch, if you keep a civil tongue in your head.



Ant Facts



with Donald Fact

Hello boys and girls. Well what do you know, it's ant week again, that special time of year when we celebrate the ant. How time flies! I'm sure you've all been paying special attention to the ants in your garden, joining in the local ant

parades and singing the special ant song. But of course, it wouldn't be ant week without your annual dose of ant facts, and this year we've got some real crackers. So, without further ado, let's get facting!

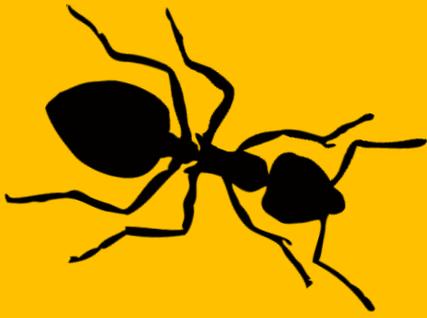
Roman Legionnaires regularly went into battle with ants tucked into their undergarments because they believed it brought them luck. How the ants felt about it is not recorded.

The Amazonian bullhorn ant loves singing and can be heard up to five miles away. On particularly warm days it can do a remarkably accurate impression of an ice cream van.

The Swiss army ant comes with six different attachments, including a tiny soup spoon. This is odd since, as far as scientists are aware, ants have never been observed eating soup.

Ants are acknowledged masters of hand-to-hand combat, although proficiency in this area is wasted on them, since they don't have hands.





In 1952, palaeontologists unearthed a fossilised skeleton over twenty feet long, which displayed a number of ant characteristics. In particular, this is the only dinosaur so far discovered that had six legs, and for this reason is widely considered to be the common ancestor of all modern-day ants.

Opinions are divided on the existence of the shaggy coated mountain ant, which some authorities claim inhabits the inhospitable slopes of the Himalayas. Last year, a mountain ant scalp obtained by the British Museum was found to be a fake, but many climbers have nevertheless reported ant footprints at high altitude and Brian Blessed says he encountered one of the animals in the flesh.

In his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder wrote that ants continue to grow throughout their lives, losing one pair of legs, growing udders and eventually turning into cows. We now know that this is rarely ever the case.

In Victorian times children used to use ants as an early form of Lego, due to the unique way that they interlocked. Despite the obvious difficulty of persuading them to stay still, ants were extremely popular and it is widely believed that the most popular toy of 1872 was an ant model of the Albert Hall.

And finally, a cautionary fact:

Ants are extremely flammable and frequently burst into flames. For this reason they are not recommended as pets. Professional ant handlers can only keep them under special licence and must undergo regular fire safety training.



From the desk of
Dr Adolphous Bongo
Family Medical Practitioner
(Knighthood pending)



Ants

Some time ago a young man forcibly entered my surgery, screaming and shrieking and wailing that he was infested with ants. After completing three circuits of my consulting room, scratching and tearing at his blistered and raw flesh as he did so, this entertaining lunatic finally proclaimed that he could take no more and hurled himself head first through my open window, plummeting into the car park and through the sunroof of my receptionist's cheap family hatchback, concluding his time in the realm of the living buried up to his neck in its leather upholstery. And this was a Tuesday.

Good evening. My name is Doctor Adolphous Bongo and I understand that some of my peers have been putting it about that I have no sense of humour. I refute this suggestion. I am a fun-loving and comical person, a diagnosis which is founded on an indisputable medical opinion - my own, of which there is none better. I will, however, concede that I rarely get the opportunity to demonstrate my innately jovial nature - it would be inappropriate to display any measure of frivolity whilst carrying out my professional duties and I simply don't have time for any of that nonsense in my private life.

Having said that, I did have a damn good giggle when this fellow threw himself out of my window. You're probably wondering what possessed him to take such a rash course of action. Was he, you might wonder, really infested with ants? I did make a cursory inspection of his remains, for the sake of appearances. I found three snails, a handful of lice, a couple of beetles and a dead rat, but there was no guarantee that these weren't already present in my receptionist's car before this ridiculous man planted himself so firmly in the driver's seat. My receptionist is a filthy cow who will frequently sit at her station peeling scabs from her knuckles and shaking dirt from her hair, so the fact that her car provides a haven for such a rich diversity of vermin, parasites and other assorted nasties is not merely unsurprising, it's actually to be expected.

No ants, though. They, wisely, had scarpered after doing this fellow in, expertly removing all evidence of their presence before they went. You can't help admiring them for that, can you?

Actually, this reminds me of a joke. It's about a getaway driver. Or was it a bus driver? Well, whoever he was, he behaved like a complete imbecile and it was all very funny... Well there you go. Jokes are overrated in my opinion.

So back to the ants, and that perennial scientific debate: are ants a virus or a bacterium? Surprisingly, the answer is neither. They're actually something else, can't remember what, but then I'm a people-doctor not an ant-doctor, so I can hardly be expected to know, can I? Perhaps they're a fungus? Or perhaps I'm confusing them with my own patients? What I do know is that not all ants are killers. Some just haven't got the stomach for it, or whatever organ passes for a stomach in the ant kingdom. These 'pacifist ants', as I have just this minute decided to call them, are hounded from the nest and fall easy prey to predators.

How then, the more sensible amongst you will be asking, are you to protect yourself from these murderous predators? Obviously, as a doctor I would advise you to moderate your alcohol intake, exercise regularly and make sure you use mouthwash after every meal. None of these things will protect you from getting attacked by ants but I understand this sort of stuff is generally good for you and at least you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that in your dying moments your breath will be minty fresh.

General health advice aside, the only way I know of to avoid ant attack is to keep your wits about you. This is clearly bad news for the fumbling, bumbling sacks of assorted offal that wobble into my surgery week after week. Most of them are regularly outsmarted by their own underwear, so something with the brain power and raw undiluted savagery of the average ant will inevitably prove a devastating adversary.

And if you need proof of my assertion, let me tell you that I have rarely, if ever, had occasion to extricate a delicate part of an ant's anatomy from a snugly fitting domestic appliance, and yet this seems to happen with a quite alarming degree of regularity amongst my 'human' clients. So much so, in fact, that I wonder whether the major portion of the vacuum cleaner industry doesn't entirely depend on the painful and embarrassing misadventures of the nation's sexual deviants. Neither, for that matter, have I received too many panicked calls from ants after they have inadvertently drunk bleach, partially throttled themselves with an item of neckwear or accidentally bitten off their own thumb partway through an unsuccessful attempt to eat a sandwich, and I don't think the fact that most ants don't have access to telephones can be the only reason for this.

Ants simply don't do that kind of thing. Human beings, on the other hand, aspire to new heights every day in their several missions to damage themselves, and it is only the certitude of an early demise that prevents most people from gradually whittling themselves down to nothing. There are days when I wish I was an ant doctor, and that's exactly what I would be if there was any money in it. There isn't. I've checked.

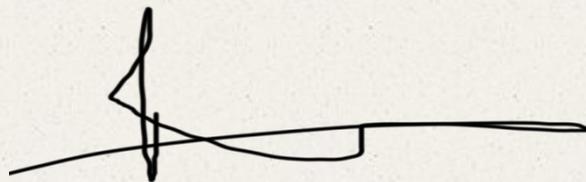
Seeing that there is very little likelihood of most people getting real smart, real quick, we can rule out the option of outwitting a crafty ant assassin. My colleague, the eminent proctologist Sir Cardew 'Fatty' Robinson, has suggested that the everyday moron can still reduce the risk of an attack by taking the following advice:

- On spotting a lone ant, hit it with a stick before it can scamper off and tell its friends. Beware, however - if it is a particularly burly ant and/or you are a particularly scrawny individual, the ant could take the stick off you and start laying into you with it instead.

- On being cornered by a group of ants, make for open water. Ants cannot swim as they have no way of holding their noses. If there is no open water nearby, immediately drop to the ground and roll in the dirt with your legs in the air. This will not deter the ants in any way but your agonising death will at least provide some small measure of amusement for any onlookers.
- On being taken back to the ants' secret underground nest, challenge the emperor ant to hand-to-hand combat. I don't know if ants have an emperor or, if so, whether ant etiquette permits them to accept challenges, but it's probably worth a go.
- On finding yourself smothered by a wriggling, writhing shroud of millions upon millions of enraged ants, tearing at your skin with their pincers, peeling the sinews from your bones and gradually devouring your mortal flesh, try applying a small amount of antiseptic cream or calamine lotion to the affected area.

I should point out that Fatty Robinson's particular area of expertise in no way enables him to speak with any authority on the subject of ants and that he was phenomenally drunk when he offered up these morsels of advice, so you act upon them at your peril.

However, what I would advise you to do upon falling victim to ant attack is to seek medical advice immediately. Not from me, obviously. While I won't argue that it's fun to watch a person's agonised flailing as they career wildly around the room before eventually succumbing to the soothing mercy of oblivion, it all starts to get a bit samey when you see it every day.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, somewhat abstract shape that resembles a vertical line with a loop and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr Adolphous Bongo, BmedSci, BM.BS
(The Yeovil Centre for Sharp Practice, 1974)

Crispy Acrobatic Duck



Now, listen to this because not many people are aware of the crispy acrobatic duck. It's a thoroughly marvellous creature and I'm one of the few people who have actually seen one. Actually seen it with my own eyes! You're probably imagining it to be some desperate earthbound creature, permanently grounded by a tragic misadventure as a duckling. Poppycock! And I'll tell you why.

I encountered this extraordinary animal on my first trip out to Malaya when I was the skipper of a Danish merchantman, sailing under a Portuguese flag, weighed down with a constantly shifting cargo of Spanish onions. I was a salty old rogue in those days, with one weather eye constantly on the lookout for adventure, a rolling swagger of a gait and revolving knees. It was as we were crashing through the Straits of Johor with two masts smashed asunder, our planks creaking under the tremendous battering of the oil-black surf and our bilges clogged with whelks, that I spotted the crispy acrobatic duck as it thundered overhead, shrieking and chirping and laughing and wailing. No one else saw it on its first pass - the rest of the crew were all holding tight to the rails, with their eyes fast shut. But I raised the alarm and they came to their senses in time to see it wheel around and head back on its return run, swooping low over the deck, chittering and

walloping and futtocking and puttering. My first mate wet himself.

The apparition remained a mystery for some weeks. We didn't see it again on that voyage, although for the rest of the trip the thought of it gave my men the wobbles, the cowardly dogs, and they were much a-tremble. It wasn't until we put ashore that I was able to discover more. In Kuala Lumpur I happened upon an ex-missionary who had lost his religion and was now having a thoroughly good time of it. He told me that the crispy acrobatic duck was well known in those parts, and revered even though it was, in his words, a 'bloody nuisance'. Seems the resourceful creature has compensated for its natural flightless state by taking to the trapeze.

He painted a vivid picture, did this missionary man of my acquaintance, describing a pitiful young bird, never having known the glory and majesty of soaring through the air, or the freedom of having the wind beneath its wings. Suddenly, through the application of circus skills, it discovers the means to overcome the oppressive grip of gravity and gain an unfettered understanding of absolute freedom. He put it just like that, my missionary man - a very poetical cove.

I could picture it too: that dread look in the bird's eyes upon its first attempt as it clung to the trapeze for dear life, summoning up the courage to release its hold and cast itself into the spiralling wind. I could well imagine that instant of commitment, when the terrified animal chose to overcome its fear and - at the point of no return - release! I could see the smile on its beak as the lifelong dream is realised, and fancied that I could hear the echoes of excited quacking gently fading on the breeze. Both myself and my ex-missionary friend were very drunk at this point, you understand.

My journey back to England was long and fraught with peril. If I was to tell you about the sea monster, the ghost ship, the giant three-headed pirates and the cyclops, I do not doubt that you would have great trouble in believing my fantastic tale. So I shall keep those events to myself and you shall hear no more about them. Nor will I relate the story of the mermaid, which is a real belter of a yarn and features a talking fish called Simon. But I what *will* tell you is that throughout those travails I kept a sharp lookout for the crispy acrobatic duck. So did the bosun, aye, and fancied that he saw it in the distance, looping the loop and scudding across the water to annoy the porpoises. Was naught but a calumny, of course. He was always telling tall tales

was that there bosun, just so as to get attention, and we was right to have the man keelhailed for it. No, the duck did not visit us again, but the thought of that brave little creature helped me to keep my resolve throughout our many and varied ordeals.

Brave - I do not employ the word lightly, for I reasoned that for all that the crispy acrobatic duck's success in achieving flight is indeed glorious, it is only transitory. It defies gravity but for a moment, before the irresistible force of nature drags it earthward. It is not flight, merely a brief interlude between rapid ascent and an equally rapid and inevitably painful descent. In many ways, is it not indeed the same for all of us, although we may not be as like a duck, or indeed crispy? Amen.

Now, I am, as you may have guessed, something of a natural philosopher and have pondered these matters during the long watches of the night, when I have been alone upon the deck with nothing but the moonlight for company, and nought to do but wallop the cabin boy or shiver the odd timber. My knowledge of aerodynamics - for that is what the discipline be named - leads me to believe that a sustained journey *would* be possible.

Not only possible, but



practicable, for our circus duck would have the means at his disposal - the Human Cannonball, no less! Forgive me, I am in error - the Duck Cannonball, no less!

It is surely a simple enough object to accomplish, given the proper equipment, the right calculations and enough gunpowder? Set the elevation, prime the fuse, load the duck and BOOM! Our acrobatic duck has lift-off, tearing straight through the canvas of the tent and into the broader canvas of the wild blue skies with joy in its heart and its hindquarters aflame. What untrammelled ecstasy it would know as, shedding a rainbow of sparks, it cruised over streets and houses, spirits soaring

high; everyone could
see him
smiling
as

he learned to fly.

Now there have been many down the years who have proclaimed this notion to be unworkable. Scholarly men, practical men, villainous men and rogues alike have declared it impossible, citing Newton's Third Law of Poultry which states that a duck will always follow a downward path unless acted upon by another force. And yet the dreamer in me persists in believing that the experiment is worth attempting. With the right cannon, the right duck and a favourable wind we might yet triumph over natural law. The opportunity, alas, has never arisen. Now my sea-faring days are over, I am old, I am tired and I am wobbly in the brains. Yet still I spend my days on the sea shore, staring out across the heaving waters, thinking on brighter and livelier days as these cold grey eyes of mine watch the skies, hoping for one more glimpse of that magical, mystical, wonderful crispy acrobatic duck. I have never seen it again. This is probably a metaphor, but I'm too befuddled to apprehend it and much too knackered to care.

I thought I saw a penguin on a paddle board once, but it might just have been a rock.



Great moments in legal history

One of the strangest episodes in legal history took place in 1976...



...when a man was tried for a crime he was alleged to have committed in a former life.



Harold Barrel was just an ordinary butcher from Gosport.



The most exciting thing he ever did was watch snooker on the telly.

But he was accused of being the reincarnation of a vile and wicked monster...



...who terrorised the streets of Victorian London.



Fortunately Mr Barrel had an excellent lawyer...

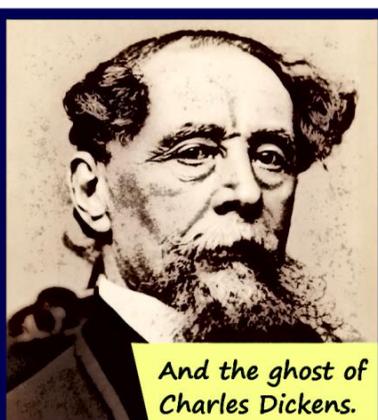


Who happened to be a reincarnation of Plato.



You know, the Greek bloke.

He called the reincarnation of Sherlock Holmes as a witness.

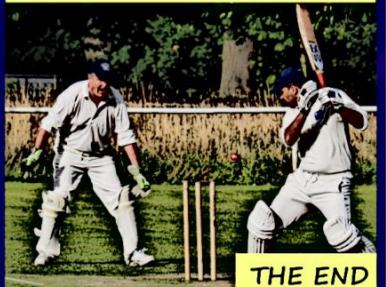


And the ghost of Charles Dickens.

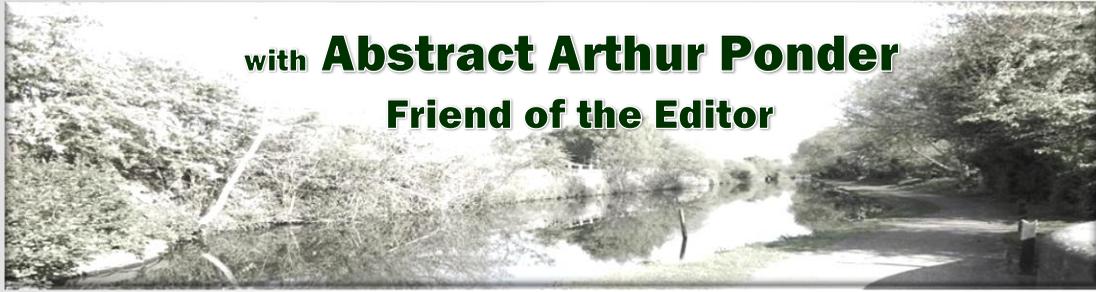


But the judge said that at least one of these people was fictional.

So the case was dismissed and everyone went home to watch the cricket.



THE END



with **Abstract Arthur Ponder**
Friend of the Editor

No. 538 The Trumpet

I am not a very musical person. Well actually, I don't suppose there are many people who are. What I mean is you can't blow through someone to get a tune, or strum them like a guitar. Not that I've tried, of course. I've never gone up to someone in the street and tried to play them like an instrument. It would, I believe, create an atmosphere of social awkwardness. Even if it was someone I know, and even if they consented to the idea, I don't think I'd be happy about putting my lips to one of their orifices and trying to get a note. Wherever possible I avoid this and I reckon I'm right to do so.

Think about it, you never see professional musicians trying to play other people, do you? They tend to use instruments – bassoons, castanets, glockenspiels and that sort of thing. Even rock and roll people like Billy Joel, Lewis Capaldi and Tori Amos tend to play instruments rather than people - and they're a pretty wild bunch, so if anyone was likely to do it, it would be them. Eric Clapton, for instance, is usually to be found plucking a guitar, rather than twanging away at Mr Alex Frump of 42 Belvedere Crescent, Tadcaster, which is just as well, since hearing 'Layla' being played on Mr Frump would be a very different experience indeed.

I appreciate that there are many fans of Mr Clapton who may take issue with that last statement. "Eric Clapton is a musical genius," they might say. "He can get a tune out of anything." But of course, these people don't know Alex Frump and I do, and let me tell you that there is no way that you would be able to coax anything even remotely tuneful out of him, let alone a rock standard like 'Layla'. In that respect, he's about as musical as me.

You see, I'm not a very musical person – I think I mentioned this already. By this I mean that I'm not very good at playing a musical instrument. At least I'm not very good at playing the trumpet, which is the only instrument I've ever tried playing. Strictly speaking, I don't suppose that I can say with any authority that I'm no good at playing a piano, since I've never actually tried playing a piano. The problem with the trumpet is that I can't master the proper lip technique, but you don't play the piano with your lips, so I might find that I'm actually quite good at it if I give it a go. Anyhow, that's all I've got to say about trumpets.

NEXT WEEK: Tori Amos, or possibly sandwiches.

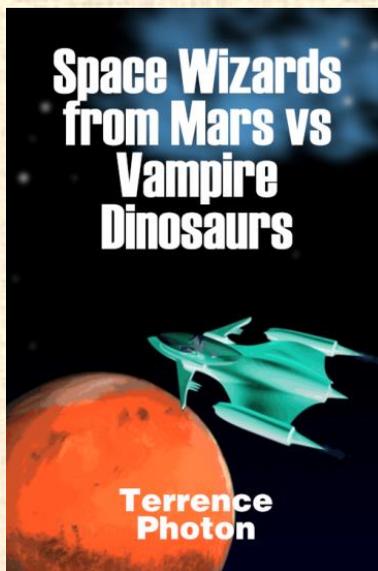
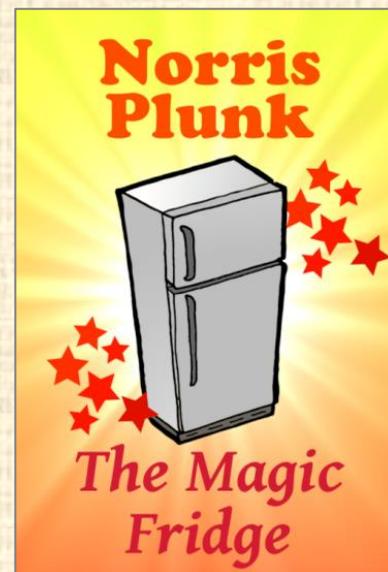
For Kids of All Ages...

Introducing the new range of children's books from Obvious Publishing.

Kids books are one of the most lucrative rackets out there, and they're dead easy - big friendly typefaces, lots of pictures, throw in a talking pig or an enchanted sword and pretty soon you're rolling in it. What we're trying to say is that we see no reason why we shouldn't get in on the action, so here are some of the titles that you can look forward to buying from our soon-to-be-launched children's publishing imprint.

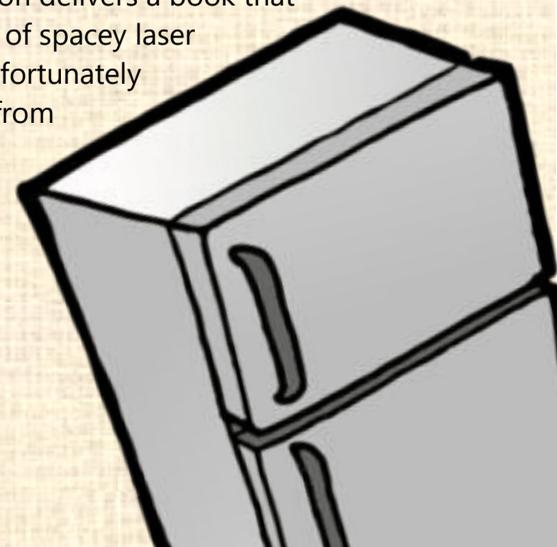
The Magic Fridge Norris Plunk

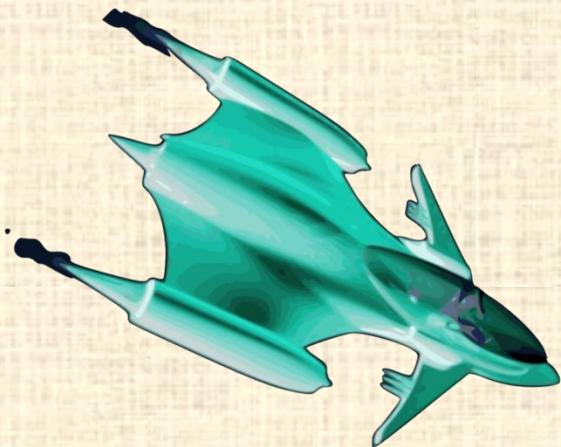
TV celebrity Norris Plunk dips his toe into the children's book market with this tale of an enchanted fridge. It tells the story of the Taylor family, who are delighted with their purchase of a new top-of-the-range refrigerator. But upon opening the door they are astonished to find it's a portal to anywhere in the world they care to go. Stepping through, they are instantly whisked to distant sleepy shores, exciting foreign metropolises and exotic and wonderful remote landscapes. Unfortunately, it means they have nowhere to keep the milk, and the plot follows their efforts to get a refund.



Space Wizards from Mars vs Vampire Dinosaurs Terrence Photon

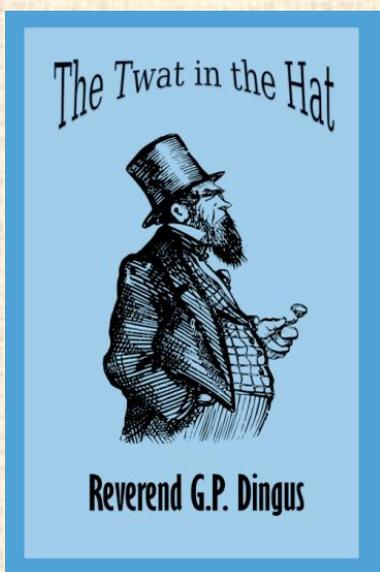
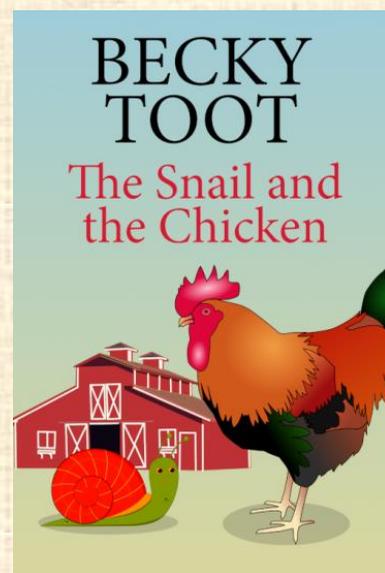
TV celebrity turned author Terrence Photon delivers a book that has almost everything. It's a frenetic tale of spacey laser monster shooty bloodsucking magic. Unfortunately he forgot to put zombies in it, but apart from that it pretty much covers all the bases.





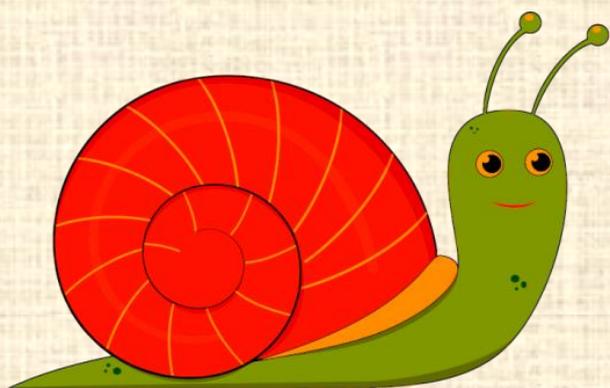
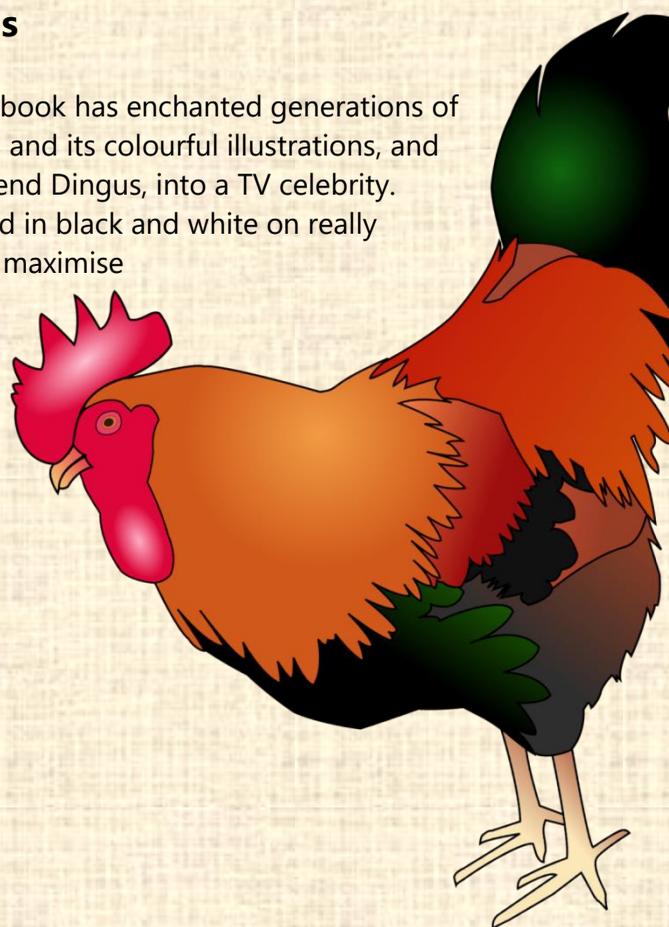
The Snail and the Chicken **Becky Toot**

The Snail and the Chicken is a modern update of a classic tale from TV celebrity and now bestselling children's writer Becky Toot. You're probably familiar with the story: when Farmer Pong dies, a snail and a chicken inherit the farm and have to learn to work together to make ends meet. Becky Toot has brought the story right up to date and in her version the farm is a community centre, the snail is an illegal immigrant with a heroin addiction and the chicken is a lesbian. The bit with the runaway tractor is hilarious.

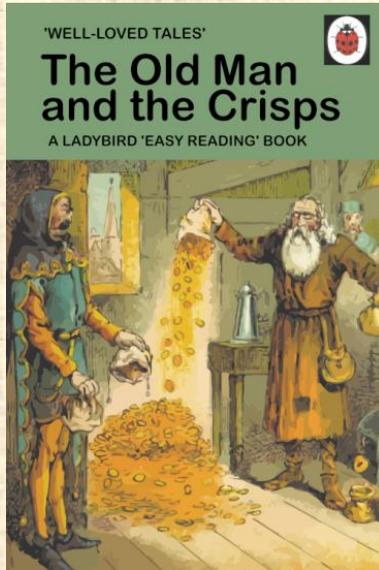


The Twat in the Hat **Reverend G.P. Dingus**

First published in 1972, this book has enchanted generations of children with its silly rhymes and its colourful illustrations, and turned its author, the Reverend Dingus, into a TV celebrity. This edition has been printed in black and white on really cheap paper so that we can maximise profits.



The Old Man and the Crisps

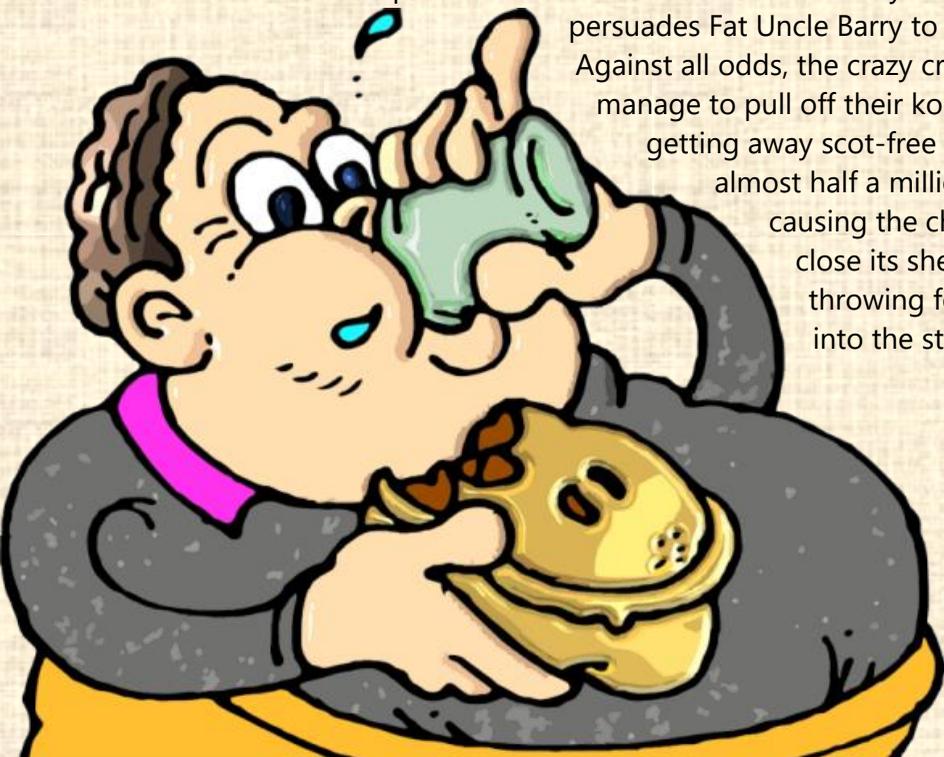
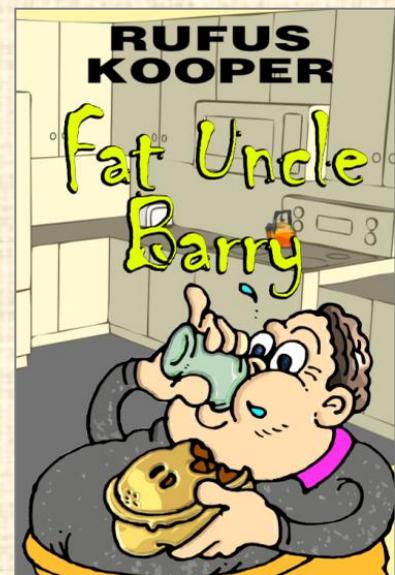


The earliest known version of *The Old Man and the Crisps* was published by the Brothers Grimm, although it is based on a story dating back to the fifteenth century. It is essentially a cautionary tale about an old man who discovers a bottomless packet of crisps that can produce any type or flavour snack that you could name. At first the man is content to share his bounty with his neighbours, providing crisps for all the village. But he soon becomes selfish and chooses to keep all of his crisps himself, building a warehouse full of barrel upon barrel of different snacks - salt and vinegar, prawn cocktail, Frazzles and even Quavers. In the end his greed proves his undoing when his warehouse collapses under the colossal weight and he is crushed to death by Cheesy Wotsits.

Fat Uncle Barry Rufus Kooper

When Fat Uncle Barry comes to stay all hell breaks loose in the Ringworm family in this hilarious book from TV celebrity and established children's author Rufus Kooper. Barry has just come out of prison after serving three years for fraud, so it's only natural that Mrs Ringworm should be worried that he might lead seven-year-old Timmy astray. It turns out that Fat Uncle Barry is now going straight and all he wants to do is drink beer and eat pies. But the boot is on the other foot and it's Timmy's turn to be the bad influence. He masterminds a plot to defraud a local homeless charity and

persuades Fat Uncle Barry to help. Against all odds, the crazy criminal pair manage to pull off their kooky caper, getting away scot-free with almost half a million pounds, causing the charity to close its shelter and throwing forty vulnerable homeless adults out into the street. With hilarious consequences.



You Again

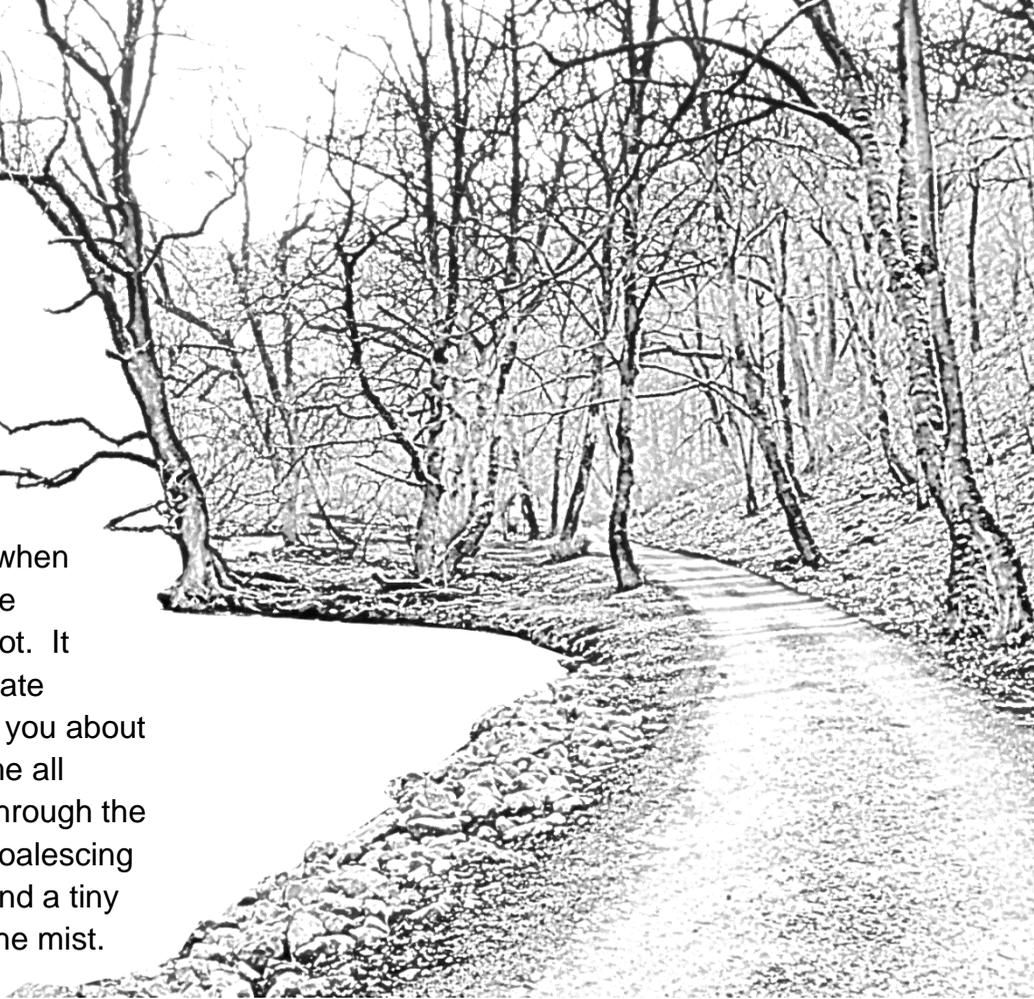
There's a satisfying crunch you get on frosty mornings when the grass is frozen into brittle bristles that crackle underfoot. It was just such a morning in late November that I want to tell you about now. I had suddenly become all Christmassy as I stomped through the fields, with the white trees coalescing out of the haze before me and a tiny yellow sun trying to pierce the mist.

The blanket seasonal advertising, the Christmas music and the glitter and baubles that had tried their best to infiltrate my consciousness over the previous month and a half had singularly failed to make me festive, but this glorious morning appeared to have done the trick and I very nearly whistled a happy tune to myself. I didn't, of course - that would have been weird. But I *very nearly* did.

I didn't often walk this route. I usually take a stroll most mornings, so long as it's not raining, but I didn't normally come this way. Too many hills. On this morning I must have felt a little more energetic. Also, maybe a touch nostalgic. You see, I had lived around here when I was a kid, and as I walked I noted the various places where I used to play: the little stream where we made a makeshift bridge out of a log; the tree where the rope swing used to hang; the old quarry where we

smashed up Owen Hargreaves' bike. We never liked Owen Hargreaves. Apparently he's a local councillor now. Figures.

Through the fields, over the stile, to the main road. No pavement here, so I plodded along the grass verge, crunch, crunch, crunch. I used to come home this way from school, daydreaming to myself, wondering what the future might bring. Funny to think that I was following in my own footsteps all these years later, wondering where it all went. I recall having an idea - back then when I was young and spotty - that I might be able to reach back from the future and let myself know that everything was going to be okay. You know, contemptible adolescent stuff. I was reminded of this particular fantasy at this point because up ahead I saw a bus shelter. I remember thinking that if I could fix a point in space then I could



come back to it in the future and visit the younger me. Sort of like arranging a rendezvous with myself. The mechanics of the time travel bit was something I wasn't clear about, but I reasoned that someone would have it figured out sooner or later.

It was still misty as I approached, but I could see well enough to deduce that this wasn't the same bus shelter. The old one had been wooden and rotten and had 'Owen is a plank' written on it - somebody else evidently didn't like him either. This new shelter was all metal and glass, and quite possibly graffiti-proof, which was good news for Owen, at least. There was someone stood there, waiting for a bus. Good luck mate, I think they only run once a week now. As I got closer, I saw it was a young lad and, because I'm an old person, I considered saying something about how modern music is rubbish and that this all used to be fields, just to wind him up. This is what you do for entertainment when you're in your fifties. But I didn't have an audience, so I didn't bother, and instead I just nodded politely as I passed and hoped he wouldn't beat me up.

"You?" I heard him say behind me as I moved on. Not in a threatening way, but in a puzzled, perplexed sort of way. Actually, in a kind of comical way, since his voice was breaking and it came out all squeaky.

I turned. "Pardon?"

The young lad tilted his head and quizzically half-closed one eye. "Sorry, I thought... You looked familiar. I thought I knew you."

"Ah, no problem," I said, but I was kind of unsettled because I seemed to

think I knew *him*. "Perhaps I know your family. I used to live around here." I gestured up the road, but the mist had grown thicker and we couldn't see a thing. It felt oddly quiet, like there was a thick blanket around us, muffling us. I didn't like it one bit. I looked at him again and was about to ask his name, when I suddenly recognised him.

"Oh my god, it's you! I mean, it's me. You're me!"

You probably guessed who he would turn out to be, back when I first described him waiting at the stop. I mean, you probably saw where this was going, but I was actually there and, I can tell you, it was a bit of a shock at the time.

"Okay mate, whatever," the young lad said.

"No seriously, you're me from the past." I realised how mental this sounded, but I was convinced of it. I didn't need to try hard to persuade him - it looked like he was realising it too.

"No, I'm me from the now," he said slowly. "If anything, *you're* me from the future." He looked at me closer. Both eyes were narrowed now. "Bloody hell, you really are me! Wow! Christ, what happened to you?"

The euphoria of mutual recognition quickly passed. I wasn't accustomed to being spoken to like this. Certainly not by myself. "What do you mean?" I replied, somewhat offended. "Nothing's happened to me."

"You could have fooled me, mate" said the younger me. "How come you got so fat? And what the hell happened to your hair?"

I sucked in my gut and my hand unconsciously went to what was left of

my hair. "Well... I mean... Well look, I didn't get fat - *you* did? All those burgers and chocolate biscuits you were eating while you were slumped on the end of your bed playing with your Xbox had to go somewhere."

"What's an Xbox?"

"All right, your Super Nintendo or

grateful that I was here to give myself the benefit of my advice. I should, in fact, have had a little more respect for my elders. There, I've said it.

"Don't you think you should be making a little more of this opportunity?" I told him. "Do you not think I might have advice for you? Listen to me and I



whatever it was I had when I was your age. I can't remember." I felt I was being side-tracked and struggled to steer the conversation towards something more productive. Anyway, the point I'm making is that if you take care of yourself, you won't end up - "

"A fat mess like you?" my younger self completed for me. "Fair enough, I'll bear that in mind, porky."

You know when people tell you that you're being too hard on yourself? Well, I don't think I really understood what they meant until now. I certainly felt aggrieved that I should be giving myself all this self-abuse. The way I saw it, I ought to have been more

can make sure you never make the mistakes that I've made." I faltered slightly over that last sentence, since at the back of my mind there were all sorts of worries about causality and paradoxes and all that sci-fi stuff that stopped you interfering with the past. Still, this wasn't sci-fi, this was real life, so I guessed it was worth a pop.

"You?" This was the second time he'd said this to me, though on this occasion it was all sneery and snide. "And why should I listen to you?"

"Because I know the future," I said, quite reasonably. "And let me tell you, there will come a day when you

will regret your decision to leave school and get a job in a biscuit factory."

"Get real," he sniped. "I'm not going to work in no biscuit factory. I'm going to be a famous drummer."

I smiled wistfully. I remembered when I thought I could be the next John Bonham or... I don't know, some other drummer. My younger self, however, took my dopey expression to be a signal that I was mocking him.

"Oh yes," he asked petulantly, "and why can't I be a famous drummer?"

"Because you're crap," I replied. I felt I could be blunt with him since it was a truth that I had long ago come to accept - I was a crap drummer and I still am. It seems that he was already aware of this.

"I know," the younger me replied. "But in the future that won't matter, because it will all be done by machines."

I started to say something and checked myself. He had a point but I didn't want to admit it, so I quickly skirted the issue. "What you need to do is concentrate on getting good grades and make sure you get a place at university."

"Ha! Qualifications - what use are they?" he replied.

"None at all," I agreed. "But if you get to the right university and rub shoulders with the right people, then maybe you might just get a break, instead of winding up working for minimum wage, delivering sanitary products for a company in the East Midlands."

This shut him up, but perhaps not in the way I intended it to. He looked at

me curiously and for the first time I noticed the wispy smudge of fuzz on his top lip. God, I remember that - the time I tried to grow a moustache. I shook my head at him and snorted. What a dickhead, I thought. Then I remembered it was me that I was looking at, and I started to feel confused again.

"Sanitary products?" the younger me said softly. I didn't say anything in reply, but my expression must have told him that I had said too much. "You deliver sanitary products?" he said, and now it was this pimply teenager who was snorting with derision. "So this is what I have become, is it? A fat, balding washout, pootling around in a clapped-out van delivering sanitary products for peanuts."

"Well, I - " I started to say, but he was clearly on a roll. I don't remember being that gobby when I was his age.

"And I'm supposed to listen to you, am I?" he continued. "A failure? Take a look at yourself. How can *you* be *me*? Don't you remember wanting to be more?"

"I remember," I interrupted. "I remember being a farty little adolescent with my head in the clouds, terrified of the big wide world and not knowing what was to come."

"Terrified, yes, and excited because *anything* could happen," my younger self countered. "I could *do* anything and *be* anything. But no, you want me to go to university and meet the right people and then possibly, just possibly, instead of *driving the van* for a sanitary products company, I could be a *junior sales executive* for a sanitary products company, with my own desk

and a telephone that I only have to share with three other people. At what point did I lose my ambition? Tell me that much, at least."

"That's all very well," I said. "But the real world is very different. You need to -"

"Real world?" he scoffed. "What do you know of the real world? You're talking to yourself in a bus shelter. When did you stop being me and start being you?"

Every so often you have to ask yourself some searching questions, or so I've heard, and here I was doing just that. The thing is, I couldn't remember. The answer to his question - I couldn't remember when I had become dull and predictable. Thinking back, this volatile young man that I had once been just seemed to have gradually melted into the fat lump I was now. I was looking down at my own shoes, thinking about tomorrow, and the day after, and the day after that and finding it all so safe and comfortable and so deadly dull.

"I think I've gone wrong somewhere," I admitted quietly. I looked up, but he was gone. There was just the thick mist all around me, the bus shelter and a soft but persistent buzzing in my ears. I blinked a few times, thought I saw patterns in the mist, but no - maybe he'd never been there at all.

I sighed. I wanted to go home now, so I turned to retrace my tracks and found myself face to face with someone new. It was an elderly man, probably in his seventies or older. His skin was wrinkled and blotched, tufts of white hair sprouted from his leathery

scalp and he looked frail and unsteady. He also looked slightly familiar.

"You?" he said.

"Me?" I said.

"It's you," the old man said. "I mean, me. You're me when I was younger. Listen, I have to give you some important advice about the future."

"Oh fuck off, granddad," I said. I really wasn't in the mood for another talking to. I walked right through him and was out of there.





The Shepton Bassett Parish Fete

**In aid of the St Tiddles in the Font Restoration Fund
Saturday 22nd May**

Thanks to the phenomenal success of last years' event, we were able to generate sufficient funds for a new church roof. We hope to repeat that performance this year and raise enough money to build a church to go under it.

As before, the fete will once again be held at the old rectory, courtesy of the old rector, and a thrilling schedule of events is planned, including:

Bishop Tossing

His Grace the Bishop of Shepton Parva has once again volunteered to be tossed, and has asked us to say that he really is looking forward to it immensely, having thoroughly enjoyed being tossed last year.

Formation Muck Spreading

We are delighted to welcome the world famous Red Shovels Synchronised Muck Spreading Team. The shit is due to start flying at around 10am. Don't miss it, but be sure to bring a change of clothing because we guarantee that they won't miss you.

Guess the Weight of the Butcher

This year's butcher is Cyril Flank from Flank's Premium Offal in the high street, and we understand that he has been especially fattening himself up in anticipation of the event.

Wonky Teeth Competition

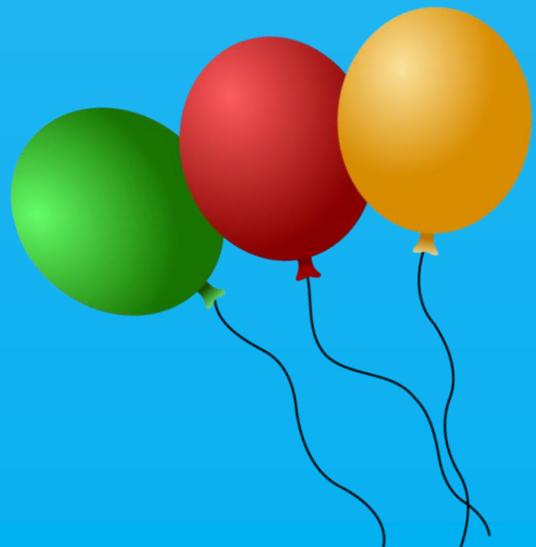
An old favourite returns to the event in spite of last year's controversy, in which the winner was disqualified after it emerged he had been laying about his choppers with half a house brick. New rules will ensure that no entries are masonry-assisted.

Kiddies' Painting Competition

One for the under-14s with an artistic bent. This year they will be asked to paint the old railway viaduct, and if there's any paint left over, the railings in the memorial gardens could do with a touch up.

Bouncing Bonny Baby Competition

Seven feet eight inches is the record to beat, set in 2014 by the McAlisters' youngest. Entrants are reminded that rubber nappies, although not officially banned, are nevertheless not within the spirit of the competition.





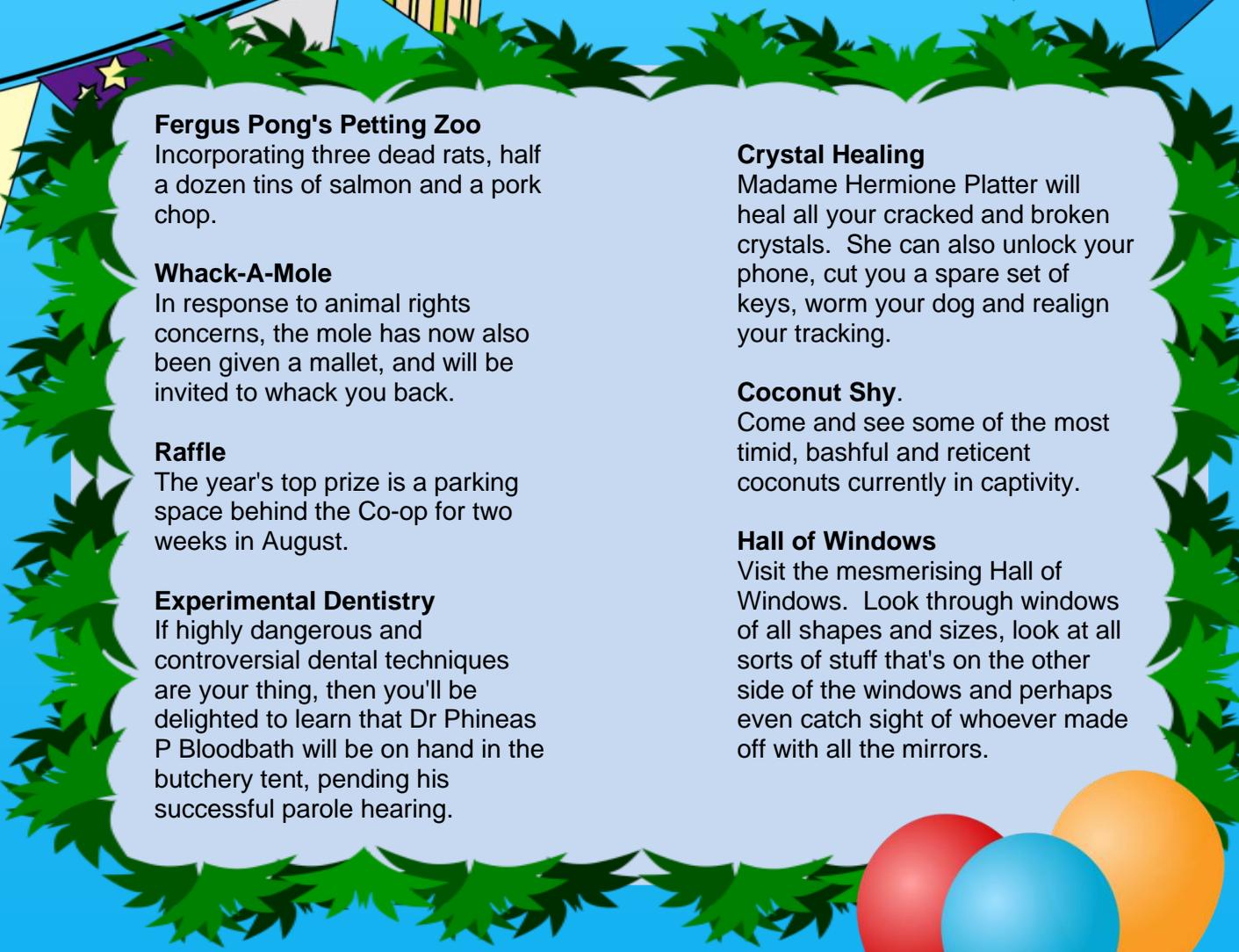
Frog Racing

One of the highlights of the day. The reigning champion is Slimy Albert, a bullfrog belonging to Liam Kronkite. Liam is confident that Slimy Albert will retain his crown and says that for the last few months he has been sticking to a special diet of high-protein flies and has spent at least three hours a day hopping round the park, croaking furiously. He didn't say what the frog has been up to.

Non-Homing Pigeon Display

To round off the day we have been lucky enough to have secured the Woolchester Non-Homing Pigeon Display Team. They will provide a spectacular finale, releasing a flock of 400 prize racing pigeons in the main arena, which will circle the showground, swoop majestically over the awestruck spectators, then bugger off never to be seen again.

Plus, a broad selection of fascinating stalls and attractions, including:



Fergus Pong's Petting Zoo

Incorporating three dead rats, half a dozen tins of salmon and a pork chop.

Whack-A-Mole

In response to animal rights concerns, the mole has now also been given a mallet, and will be invited to whack you back.

Raffle

The year's top prize is a parking space behind the Co-op for two weeks in August.

Experimental Dentistry

If highly dangerous and controversial dental techniques are your thing, then you'll be delighted to learn that Dr Phineas P Bloodbath will be on hand in the butchery tent, pending his successful parole hearing.

Crystal Healing

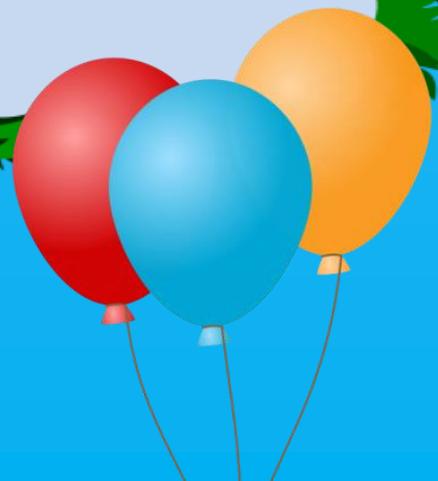
Madame Hermione Platter will heal all your cracked and broken crystals. She can also unlock your phone, cut you a spare set of keys, worm your dog and realign your tracking.

Coconut Shy.

Come and see some of the most timid, bashful and reticent coconuts currently in captivity.

Hall of Windows

Visit the mesmerising Hall of Windows. Look through windows of all shapes and sizes, look at all sorts of stuff that's on the other side of the windows and perhaps even catch sight of whoever made off with all the mirrors.



An exciting new era in innovation

For many years now, Professor Jez Moonbeam has been at the forefront of technological and scientific research. Thanks to his novel and often controversial theories, the Professor has not merely pushed forward the frontier of human knowledge, but sidestepped it completely and found an alternative route round the back. Now he has decided to make the fruits of his labours available to the public with a range of ingenious products, designed to benefit mankind, herald a new age of innovation and help the Professor to settle a massive tax demand.



The Moonbeam Easywrite Ballpoint with built-in spellchecker!

The handwritten letter has just entered a new age, thanks to Professor Jez Moonbeam's revolutionary new invention.

- Spellchecks as you write.
- Suggests synonyms.
- Autocompletes sentences.
- Writes in 12 different fonts.



One satisfied customer writes:

I couldn't be happier with my Moonbeam Easywrite Spellchucker pen. It's so eazy to use and it nefer fales to completely corect all my wurst speeling mistakes. I'd reckomend it to anyone! So why nut get your Moonspleep Chucker Far ascx & \$% fd write now!

Plus: Order now and get a free surround sound ruler and a Wi-Fi enabled pencil sharpener.

Special Offer The Moonbeam Page-a-day Diary 2021



Now with 20% more days! Also, we've replaced some of the Mondays with extra Fridays.

Are you running out of room on your shelves? Are your cupboards full to bursting? Do you crave that extra little bit of space in your drawers, beneath the bed or in the garden shed?

One of the constant challenges of living in today's modern consumer world is where to put all your stuff. As we race to acquire more and more shit we don't need, so we run out of space to put it. So what's the answer? Throw it all out? I don't think so. Stop buying it? Hell no.

The answer is simple: Jez Moonbeam's Inflatable Gaps.



They're quick, they're clean and 100% environmentally neutral. Simply insert the gap into your packed crevice, activate the Inflatomatic toggle® and hey presto! A brand new gap where you can put stuff!

Today's modern synthetic gaps are made just the same way as they were when they were first invented over 100 years ago, only with more polyvinylchloride. Not suitable for ventilation purposes.

With a Moonbeam Inflatable Gap you need never worry where you're going to put your crap ever again.

And now...

The Moonbeam Inflatable Parking Space

Endorsed by nearly all the world's major motoring organisations, the Moonbeam Inflatable Parking Space means that you can park wherever you like, even on the busiest road, and will never have to be inconvenienced by having to walk a slightly longer distance to your car than you would prefer to ever again!

Armoured Socks



Specially designed for people who can't help shooting themselves in the foot, this new range of bulletproof footwear is made from 98% natural Kevlar, sourced from our own herd of armoured llamas. These animals have been specially bred to be resistant to firepower.

"They are extremely hardy creatures," said Prof Moonbeam. "Which is just as well, since they are always falling off mountains. Admittedly we do have to shear them with an angle grinder, the socks have to be knitted by welders and the final product does chafe horribly, but other than that the whole project has been a remarkable success."

The Petrol-Driven Watch



Forget your exotic diver's watch that can operate at fifty fathoms so that you will always know what time it is when you're off hunting giant octopuses. A real man wears a petrol-driven watch and doesn't mind that he's constantly choking on the fumes.

Professor Moonbeam is committed to many ecological causes and has spent his career trying to find ways to reverse climate change but, hey, even he has to have a day off every now and then.

The Bee-Friendly Fly Neutraliser

Bee populations are rapidly dwindling, which is a pity since they are colourful and friendly and they make honey. Flies, on the other hand, are everywhere, and they are nasty and dirty and horrid, and should be destroyed. The problem is that most fly eradication systems act indiscriminately, wiping out many bees as well.

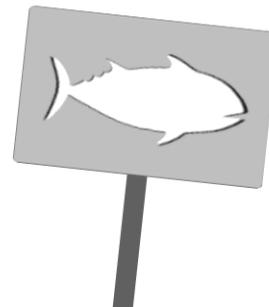
Jez Moonbeam's Bee-Friendly Fly Neutraliser has finally resolved this problem.



This radical new manually-operated fly swatting system has a bee-shaped slot, meaning our stripy friends can pass through unscathed, whereas those filthy flies get reduced to a sticky paste.

And coming soon...

The Haddock Friendly Shark Neutraliser



Jez Moonbeam has taken the revolutionary new technology behind his Fly Neutraliser and applied it to the undersea world. A must for scuba divers, this new invention means they will be able to keep those snappy bitey sharks at bay whilst making sure that our underwater brethren, the haddock, don't get caught in the crossfire.



Vox Pops

As a mobile librarian of some seven years' standing, and a stalwart member of my local bowls club to boot, I feel sure that I can speak for most people when I say that I am absolutely appalled by the state of many of the country roads in Cornwall. A great number of our highways and byways are badly potholed, inadequately lit and poorly signposted. Not only that, but I have discovered in my wanderings that a great many of them don't even go to the right places. Many a time I have set out upon my bicycle with the intention of visiting friends and relations, only to find that the road has taken me to entirely the wrong destination. Surely this is no sort of behaviour for a road? I hope you can do something about this, and soon, because I am in a hurry.

Dear Sir. Perhaps all the people who constantly complain about the trains being late should go and live in Russia, or somewhere. They'd soon change their tune then, wouldn't they?

P.S. And how come you can't get haddock flavoured crisps?

My friend Kevin should be on the telly, because he's dead funny and far better than all those so-called 'comedians'. The other day in the geography lesson he was talking in this silly Welsh accent, and saying all stuff about sheep and things. We all just fell about, because it was so hysterical. He also knows a lot of *Monty Python* sketches off by heart, and he can do them dead well, even doing all the voices and everything. Honestly, he's really good, and we all said that when he gets his own TV show, we would all go on it and be in all the sketches with him. Anyway, bye!

In your article entitled "Understanding Fridge Magnetics" you claimed that the science behind accelerated freezer defrosting was, and I quote, 'like something off the Star Trek Enterprise'. Not so. What you actually described was a system of electronic field manipulation, whereas - as surely everyone must know - the Enterprise actually employs a complex dilithium flux technique, which constantly modulates the dense matter within its polarised containment vessel in order to warp local space. Your electronic manipulation technique seems to more closely resemble the experimental drives developed by the Katharians of Twetzel 5, as featured in the classic 1967 episode *The Skies of Forever*. The Katharians experimented with using powerful electromagnetism to create a 'nul space' within the fabric of space-time, thus eliminating inertia. I have written about this extensively in issue 5 of my fanzine 'Tribble Time', copies of which are still available. AND ANYWAY, IT'S NOT THE FUCKING STAR TREK ENTERPRISE, IT'S THE STARSHIP ENTERPRISE!!!!!! ALRIGHT?

Is it really wrong to stick your head up a baboon's arse, just to see what's there? Can I help it if I have an enquiring mind? No, of course not, and yet I am constantly being pestered by people who think it is somehow improper for me to insert part of my anatomy into an unsuspecting primate. They think it is unnatural and obscene. Well I've done it, and I'm not ashamed to admit it! I've stuck my head up a monkey's bum, and I'm proud! And, I know exactly what's up there. And do you know, the strange thing is that the people who are so quick to condemn me for illegal entry are the very same people who are so keen to know what I found out. Well I'm not telling you - if you want to know, you'll just have to find out for yourself.

Vox Mea

Does your the open-mouthed, squint-eyed, spluttering apology for cogent communication betray a hidden genius buried deep within that careless, crumpled and rapidly festering exterior, or is it merely that the action of scratching your arse is proving to be a temporary drain on your intellect? Something's causing you to dribble like that, what is it? Ah, I can see from the way that you are fumbling in your trousers that it is the latter. No, please, don't desist. I wouldn't like to interrupt your manoeuvres at such a delicate stage, and in any case I doubt that a successful conclusion of your current anal adventure will impact greatly on anything I have to say.

I've heard you speak. I hear you every day, one way or another. It's a thousand different voices, maybe more, splashing out the same spittle-flecked invective, piling up one worthless opinion on top of another, each more bereft of reason and fact than the last. I've read your venomous judgements, the pestilential pronouncements of a poisoned mind veering wildly out of control, slobbering, nonsensical and vicious, regurgitating the hateful spite on which you have gorged. You were encouraged to have your say, and boy have you ever! Well done. Well done you.

Does it make you shiver with delight to hear the sharp echoes of your dull voice bounding back at you from screens and speakers and printed page? Your rambling, incoherent, uninformed bullshit chopped and spliced into bite-sized chunks to season the news stories of the day. Do you shake with excitement when your bombastic common-sense crudity drowns out the melodies crafted by experts, specialists and similar sorts who inconveniently appear to actually know what they're talking about? I think it probably does. Why wouldn't it, you've got nothing else going for you? Someone asks you what you think - a tactless enquiry, considering your acutely limited capacity for this particular activity - but you strain and you struggle and you jerk out a few phrases that judicious editing may be able to turn into a sentence and, if you haven't shat yourself with the effort of it all, you can probably feel quite pleased with yourself.

How long does it last, the euphoria? How high can you soar before you sink back into the black reeking soil, a powerless, inconsequential burrowing thing? You must have come down to earth with a bump, frustrated and resentful and enraged. Of course you're angry: you've told them how things are, spilled it all out with passion and energy; spelled out exactly what needs to be done and still nothing changes. And the next time they come for you, kicking through the trash and poking in the dirt, the ugly answers you give will be ever more hateful, more ridiculous, more moronic and dim-witted. That's lovely, that's wonderful, I think we got all that - actually, do you think you can do that bit where you started shouting and thumping the side of your head again? That was fantastic.

