

GREGGS & LADDERS

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THE BEGINNING:

of Greegs and Things... but mostly of Greegs

CHAPTER 1

the First Chapter

Hmmm, where to start?

Not on Earth, that's for sure! It is true I am writing this book for publication on the planet Earth in an Earthling language. But all I really have to say about the planet Earth is this:

Not a great place to pop by and fuel up your space ship.

The ship I first came to Earth on was fuelled by investment bankers. Generally agreed upon as the most useless organisms ever to exist in the vast history of time and space, it's common knowledge the only thing they are good for is fuelling space ships.

Common knowledge isn't very common on Earth.

You would think this abundance of investment bankers and lack of common sense would make Earth a damned fine place to pop by and fuel up your space ship.

If you had the same experience I had, then you would not think of it as a great place to pop by and fuel up your space ship.

If you had a space ship.

Which you don't.

Now, many millennia of Earth stories have trained your brain to believe that for a story to truly be a story, it must start with one character (a protagonist), and that person must be followed on a journey in which they will encounter various obstacles in order to arrive at their destination. Without meeting this singular character early on in a story, you may be curious if this is even a story at all, rather than just a random assortment of descriptions of silly creatures on silly planets. Don't worry. There is a story to be told here, but there's no point in telling it until you understand the setting in which the story takes place. Since you know absolutely nothing about this place, it's going to take a little bit of time. Imagine how little you know about the hair follicles in Julius Caesar's left nostril. Double it, dip it in chocolate sauce and then multiply it by a quintillion or two. That's how little you know about this place. This is how we tell stories in the rest of the universe. Time to catch up.

The main trouble I will have trying to describe the world in which this story takes place is one of tense. To me, from my perspective, all of these events have happened in *my* past. But I am acutely aware that much of it does not occur in *your* past. There is a tense in many alien tongues for this exact literary dilemma. Alas, no such luck with English. Please bear with me in the opening chapters, as I appear to jump between the present and past tense. On the simple, linear time-line of your average human, all of these events have actually happened in what you would call 'the future.' But from the perspective of me, it is the past, and from the perspective of the actual story it is the present. So whatever it is, whenever it is... just be happy knowing that it is. Or was. Or will be. Kind of.

This story begins (began, will begin some day) on a planet you've never heard of. This

isn't saying much, considering most of you can only name nine on a good day. A fairly pathetic feat, when you imagine the mind-blowingly infinite sea of planets there are out there, but every species has to start somewhere I suppose. (Pluto is a planet by the way, not sure what it did to your astronomers to deserve being demoted.)

This planet exists (existed, will exist) in a solar system quite unlike your own. There are fifty-nine suns in this one solar system. (Or at least there will be some day, and definitely was when I was there). There are as many as forty-seven planets revolving around each of these suns. Four suns have no planets at all doing anything around them. Near the middle of this vast network of gaseous orbs and rocks there is one sun about five times the size of your own. This sun has thirty-eight planets performing gravitational hula-hoops around it. Eleven of these planets support 'life' as you would define it. In truth, everything is 'alive' (and dead for that matter) but I won't try and persuade you otherwise. You seem fairly set in your ways. Fairly certain of your definitions. Fairly resilient in your steadfast determination to continue believing in your institutions, your corporations, your religions, your political leaders, and most astonishingly... your investment bankers. So I shan't attempt to convince you otherwise. Instead, I will just tell you this little story.

Once upon one of these eleven planets there existed a population of Greegs.

Greegs are a mutation, much like yourself. Not a rare group by any means, you'll find them many places in the vastness of space... unlike yourself.

However, it *is* extremely rare that Greegs will actually find themselves the most intellectually evolved creatures on a thriving planet. In most scenarios Greeg populations would be kept under tight control for fear of wreaking havoc on their planet and the other species on it. They are used primarily as carnival attractions. In small numbers they are harmless and amusing. Sound familiar?

Completely oblivious to this universal normality, The Greegs on this planet found themselves to be dominant and unchecked. They were indeed running the show. Without a multitude of other species keeping their population under control and letting them know how inferior they were, these particular Greegs found themselves blissfully suffering from delusions of grandeur and overdosing on self-importance.

Imagine this!

Even though they were sharing a solar system with 59 other suns and could plainly see several, habitable planets with the naked eye... they were quite certain that their planet was the only one that ever did, ever would, and did currently contain life.

To really make things almost sad, The Greegs believed something else: That all of the other suns and planets and galaxies and universes; all the big things, all the small things, and everything in between that ever did exist in the whole entirety of everything and anywhere... were put there just for them. A kind of mobile for The Greegs to look at and go 'Well, isn't that nice and pretty... thanks for that.'

To make things infuriatingly, impossibly, really just plain difficult to comprehend even a little bit, The Greegs also held another collective opinion. They actually, genuinely believed (with a straight face nonetheless) that they were the smartest and cleverest creatures to ever exist. What a laugh!

Above all though. Above all of their beliefs and primitive understandings of their place in the grand scheme of things, The Greegs suffered from one delusion greater than any others.

Everything The Greegs did, every action they took, every decision they made, was

fuelled by one insatiable desire. They desired to obtain and retain large amounts of schmold. Schmold was a green, glowing, sticky, gooey substance that was found deep in the core of the planet. Schmold mining and preservation was the number one priority of all Greegs. They couldn't possibly even consider doing anything without first thinking how much schmold it would cost or what effects it might have on the schmold trade.

Schmold served no actual purpose whatsoever, except that Greegs thought it looked really neat. The ultimate sign of wealth and status and accomplishment was to take a schmold bath. The poorest Greegs would never have, nor could they ever logically hope to obtain, even a little bit of schmold. But they would dream.

"One day, I'm going to make it so big. I'm going to be so successful that I will take a schmold bath every week," they would say.

Clearly no one could ever be so lucky.

CHAPTER 2

the Rebel Groolfh and the Planet Garbotron

Only once was there a Greeg who did not dream of taking a schmold bath. His name was Groolfh, and he had the shockingly original revelation that one was much luckier for *not* taking a schmold bath, as to bathe in schmold is to make oneself filthier than the bottommost layers of Garbotron, an uninhabitable planet used only as a dump for countless millennia. Garbotron was well known as the worst smelling place in existence. I can attest to this fact, having seen Garbotron with my own eyes; that is to say, having seen the noxious green vapours surrounding Garbotron from 8 light years away. The planet itself is only visible while actually standing on the surface, yet to stand on the surface is to die within seconds. No mortal creature is exempt from this rule. Even if you're a life-form that is biologically incapable of the sense of smell, your mind will instinctively know that you are standing in a place that smells too awful to comprehend, and not wanting to take the chance that through a miracle you suddenly acquire the ability to smell, will shut itself down in a manner best suited to the occasion.

Another important fact about Garbotron is that one doesn't even need to go remotely near it to experience its danger. A dark day in Galactic history was the time an interstellar wind had the unfortunate timing to pass directly through Garbotron's Diaper Mountain. The name Diaper Mountain is slightly deceiving. It isn't really a mountain. More a sort of hemisphere. Defying the logic of space with its unstoppable stench, the forgotten memories of Diaper Mountain casually drifted across several light years before settling down on a peaceful, reddish planet. Sadly, this reddish planet was inhabited. All 9.7 billion resident creatures promptly suffered death when the logic-defying stench arrived. It is a good thing sound does not travel through space as well as aroma, for the screams of the dying creatures were so shrill they would have devastated beyond repair the nearby planet Glassvexx, thus sending millions of shards of apparently unbreakable Jardian mega-prisms hurtling through the cosmos for most of infinity.

Groolfh, justifiably believing he'd made a discovery that would forever transform the history of the Greeg, went forth to one of the highest-up committees in charge of schmold distribution and attempted to explain the futility of bathing in schmold. He passionately

argued that bathing in schmold makes you infinitely less clean. He was met with a unanimous vote of disdain and bewilderment. 'Something as ridiculously expensive as schmold is clearly worth taking a bath in' was all the committee said before sentencing Groolfh to death for daring to think otherwise. Groolfh was fired out of a cannon aimed directly at Garbotron VI. Luckily he was vaporized in the atmosphere, however the wind of the cannon fire had the unfortunate timing of passing directly through Diaper Mountain on its way to a peaceful reddish planet.

If these particular Greegs were aware of life on other planets, and were able to notice the interconnectedness of life in the universe as well as I am, they might have adopted a motivational motto that went something like this: 'To deny the usefulness of bathing in schmold is to cause 9.7 billion creatures to die horribly of Garbotron suffocation.'

Such a revelation was not had.

CHAPTER 3

Greeg Career-Paths

Greeg children often fantasized about their future adult career. The only difference with Earthling children, who dream of being any random thing like an actor or a scientist, is that Greegs' career choices were entirely limited to one of the many sub-categories of schmold production. However, Greeg children were still free to dream about which exact area of schmold production they would like to be a part of. Schmold Tunneler? Schmold Taster? Schmold Bathroom Attendant? Some children had high hopes, announcing to proud parents they would one day be the owner of their very own schmold Dealership. Some children aimed their sights low, announcing to embarrassed parents they wished to be a lowly schmold Bottler.

"No son of mine is going to settle for working as a Bottler!" was a phrase commonly heard screamed by the father of the Djoog household. "We won't be able to afford a drop of schmold on the pension of a bottler! What is it? You think you aren't important enough for upper management? I suppose you also think the suns and planets weren't just put there for your own enjoyment?"

"Don't be harsh," the logical Djoog mother might have said. "We don't want him to start pouring water into a schmold pit like the Glurj boy."

"The Glurj boy tainted our schmold pits out of jealousy, because those useless Glurjs never owned a drop of schmold in their whole schmold-less life! Do you want to wind up like a Glurj? Unable to walk down the street without people pointing at you and laughing?"

I later checked in on the Djoog household. Their son fulfilled his dream of being a bottler. With his paltry salary the family were able to afford no schmold at all. In a fit of shame the father leaped into a schmold pit. Although dead, the Djoog father was henceforth thought about with great reverence and jealousy by all Greegs, as it was widely believed that leaping into a schmold pit was the greatest bath one could take.

CHAPTER 4

Further Arrogance and Schlepschen Pools

There are many questions I'm certain you have swirling around your head already regarding the culture, behaviours, beliefs, activities, government and history of The Greegs. One thing you should be asking is "What is the name of the planet these silly creatures live on?" To be truthful though, these particular Greegs have not found it necessary to name their home planet, as astounding a concept as that may be to you. Space mapping space mappers once labelled it "one of 11 planets containing wriggly, walky, breathy things in the hopeless, undeveloped but reasonably entertaining to look at from a safe distance sun system of the 38 planets in the 59 sunned district of Herb," and with that dismissive but wholly accurate generalization, they went on to map, in much more detail, several of the more illustrious and glorious areas of the many universes they happened to be mapping at the time.

The Greegs simply called it 'our planet.' Despite measuring only 597 cm tall on average, (well done with the metric system earthlings, at least you did get something right) the Greegs still had the audacity to believe that their entire planet (measuring an astounding 87,000 km in diameter, on average) *belonged* to them. As if they had any say in the matter. As if they had any idea how they even got there in the first place. They genuinely believed its only reason for existing was to offer them a steady supply of schmold and to act as their planetary shelter. Not that they knew or cared about what it was sheltering them from. Then again, these were creatures that believed all plains of existence were merely inconsequential pretty things for them to look at. What an arrogant, self-absorbed bunch of jackasses, wouldn't you say?

Another question you may be asking yourself is why The Greegs would be so keen to take a bath in a sticky, wet, green goo. How could they possibly think this was a splendid idea, no less a sign of wealth and status? To be true, if you took aside an individual Greeg and tried to get them to explain to you the rationality behind worshipping a glowing, greenish slime they would not be able to give you a satisfactory or remotely logical explanation. They would look at you in disbelief and say things like "It is the most precious substance that exists, you fool! Why wouldn't we want to obtain loads of it and bathe in it?" You would be hard pressed to shake them from this line of thinking. Even if you did shake them from this line of thinking, the best-case scenario would involve them telling other Greegs involved in high up committees and eventually being blasted out of a cannon towards a garbage planet.

You might also be wondering what it is that Greegs do should they be so fortunate as to have a bath of Schmold. Surely they don't just wash it all off afterwards or put their clothes on?! No, they do neither, because Greegs do not wear clothes. They are a naked creature. Hairy, smelly, naked and filthy. Filth is a sign of prestige and honour in the Greeg society. Nakedness, doubly so. To understand why this is the case, you must first understand a bit more about the unnamed planet these filthy, wretched, naked things live on.

One of the 11 planets containing wriggly, walky, breathy things in the hopeless, undeveloped but reasonably entertaining to look at from a safe distance sun system of the 38 planets in the 59 sunned district of Herb is arguably the cleanest, most spotless floating orb within forty seven trillion parsecs of the 11 planets containing wriggly, walky, breathy

things in the hopeless, undeveloped but reasonably entertaining to look at from a safe distance sun system of the 38 planets in the 59 sunned district of Herb. The planet is stunningly, immaculately, and amazingly clean. Spotless surfaces that look like varnished marble, shiny glass windows and freshly bleached tile floors abound. All of the things that live on the planet are clean and tidy. They all work cohesively in a truly mind blowing balance, each playing their role in keeping the place absolutely spotless. Gorgeous. Clean. Fresh. Beautiful.

All... except The Greegs. The Greegs look at the cleanliness of the planet in disdain. They may go out on a field trip to view the clean parts of the planet, but just to take a look at. It gives them an icky feeling if they stay out there too long. They much prefer to stay in their filthy mud camps, bogs, marshes and Schlepschen pools. The places where The Greegs reside in great numbers look like big piles of garbage dumped on the otherwise pristine landscape. No one can be sure, but this is most likely because the places where The Greegs reside in great numbers ARE big piles of garbage dumped on the otherwise pristine landscape. Greegs treat their planet as if they were a pack of unruly teenagers, anti-establishment punk rockers and street people whose distant relatives died and left them a ridiculously fancy home. They've done nothing to earn such a nice place, and have no appreciation for its value or how to keep a house like this in order. In fact, they view the house as a sign of snootiness they want no part of. As far as they're concerned, about the only good thing about the house is it has one hell of a liquor supply in the basement. The liquor supply is schmold.

CHAPTER 5

Coverings

To be caught wearing clothes is a most heinous crime. There is no need to inflict punishment, merely the embarrassment of being publicly seen 'all covered up' is enough to send any Greeg into self-inflicted exile. No Greeg has ever been seen 'all covered up' in public without banishing themselves into "the cleanliness," as they call the savagely clean lands outside their "civilization."

It should be noted that despite the fact that no Greegs wear clothing, there are many clothing stores full of coverings for all parts of the Greeg body. It is silently agreed that no respectable Greeg would ever be caught dead in one of these filthy smut shops. Astoundingly, if one was to do the math, they would find that nearly every individual Greeg must have stashed away hoards of cover magazines, coverings, and other cover related paraphernalia. The only industry on par with the lucrative schmold trade was covering.

To be sure, there are Greeg 'Cover Bars' where adult Greegs can go and watch lower class daughters of schmold bottlers cover up their fingers and toes, or maybe even arms, legs and torsos depending on just how skeezy the establishment and how badly the coverers need the schmold. To cover up the genitals would never happen, even in these scummy outposts. Covering the genitals only occurred during the act of procreation. The Greeg equivalent to what you humans would call "Sex" involves an ornamental and intimate genital covering for both male and female. The male covering is a tube that sucks ejaculate out of the male Greeg, funnelling it into a seal-able and sterile tube, where it can

be kept for over forty hours. To complete the act, the sterile tube is placed in a receptacle attached to the side of a covering that looks similar to an earthling gas mask. The gas mask forms a suction around the female genitals with a tube leading inside her, directly to the womb. The male ejaculate is pumped into the elaborate female covering and transported right to the biological doorstep to complete an "Attempt."

The Greegs have the highest fertility success rate of any creature on record in any universe.

In their daily lives Greegs are a filthy and disgusting and vulgar creature in every imaginable way. They go out of their way to show off just how slovenly and insensitive they can be. In the private act of procreation however, they are clean, sterile, sensitive, caring and humble. It could be said this is the real Greeg, the one they keep suppressed. In this act of procreation alone, they become one with the planet on which they reside.

CHAPTER 6

Quiggs

The grimy condition of your average Greeg colony was not always easy to maintain. The Greegs' desire to live in disastrous mud camps was once put under great threat by an indigenous life form known as the Quigg. Quiggs are (or more appropriately, were) the cleanest creatures living on one of 11 planets containing wriggly, walky, breathy things in the hopeless, undeveloped but reasonably entertaining to look at from a safe distance sun system of the 38 planets in the 59 sunned district of Herb. Whether randomly or because the planet was trying to save itself from obliteration, the Quigg seemed to have evolved with a single purpose in life. To clean. Every bodily function they have (or had... well, you get the idea, or will in a moment) in some way results in something, somewhere being cleaned. The very movement of their feet acted as a natural waxing agent against any surface. Rather than having sweat glands they secreted an antibacterial gelatin from their skin. Instead of hands and fingers they had elaborate scrubbers and brushes protruding from their arms. They also wished for nothing more in life than to be rid of filthy Greegs. In a valiant yet futile attempt to return their planet to its once immaculate state of varnished marble, shiny glass windows and freshly bleached tile floors, the Quiggs offered their impeccable cleaning service to the Greegs, free of charge. All the arrangements had been made to blast anything unclean onto Garbotron. The Greegs would have to do no work at all. Rather than dignify this gracious offer with an answer, the Greegs simply hurled globs of lesser-quality schmold at them from a distance. The blindingly acidic and parasite-ridden properties of schmold indeed make a formidable weapon, however the attack did not deter the Quiggs. Instead of fleeing back to their various homes in The Cleanliness as they should have, the Quiggs in their steadfast manner set about collecting schmold and cleaning it. Only they didn't just clean it. They reinvented it. A stunningly impressive chemistry set was designed specifically for analyzing and purifying schmold, with the intent to remove from it all traces of bacteria and filth. Filtering screens visible from space were built and hung up between the largest of old-growth blue-leaf trees. Quiggs could be seen tirelessly running schmold through the filters day and night. They even successfully removed schmold's unique glow, which was considered distracting and

superfluous to the high art of cleaning. They laboured for many suns and moons, perfecting their experiments with a meticulous attention to detail that has only been matched once in the universe (by a strange being we will arrive at much later in the story). They even went so far as to spend 3 wintry years crafting a collection of very fine flasks made out of Jardian mega-prisms. The flasks were never required in any of the experiments, but they looked very clean and pretty nonetheless. A shelf of great honour was set aside for displaying the beauty of the useless flasks, and 4 respectable Quiggs were given the job of dusting them every 7.33 minutes. Oh how the Greegs loathed them. They could barely wait to fill the flasks with all sorts of disgusting things (namely schmold) and then break them. The Quiggs slaved away until they'd acquired a hefty supply of schmold so clean it would have made trillions of dollars throughout the galaxy if properly marketed as an unparalleled kitchen counter-top cleaner. The Greegs saw this as the grossest possible violation of all things that are Greeg. Fear took over the community. The total collapse of localized schmold trade seemed imminent. Numerous Greegs fell into despair and were never seen or smelled again. Many wandered into The Cleanliness in a suicidal fashion not at all dissimilar to the way so many of your humans leaped from skyscraper windows during the 1930s collapse of your fake stock market.

The remaining Greegs came up with what they considered in their stupidity to be a rather brilliant scheme. They stole the purified schmold and mixed it with regular schmold to make it dirty again. The now-filthy schmold was then angrily hurled at the Quiggs, who set forth purifying it all over again. This cycle went unchanged for generations, even outlasting the ridiculously long lifespan of the metallic tetra-turtle. It was finally decided the total extinction of the Quigg species would be the only way to keep schmold in its naturally polluted state. Thus was born the event in Greeg history commonly referred to as 'The day all Quiggs were thrown into a schmold pit.'

It is my fervent opinion that far worse events would have transpired had the Quiggs' plan to send all the trash to Garbotron succeeded. We have already learned about the disastrous results of Garbotron pollution caused by a single cannon blast, so it can be assumed the phenomenal number of cannon blasts required to rid the planet of the Greegs' mess would have caused the destruction of countless other (and better) civilizations. Because the plan failed, one species died off on a planet that had no use for it anyway. That is, how you say, taking one for the team.

Over and over again, great minds have hypothesized and sometimes successfully proved that time does not exist. Nevertheless, time is always relevant. And short. Especially if you are thrown into a schmold pit, as no creature can tread schmold for longer than an Earth hour (unless of course you're a metallic tetra-turtle or weigh less than helium while on the 7th moon of Grebular). In their final hour, the Quiggs frantically purified as much schmold as they could before sinking below the surface and drowning. Foolish as it was, one cannot help but admire their dedication to cleanliness. Unless of course one is a Greeg.

Quigg skeletons were henceforth sometimes found in the schmold reserves. The Greegs never knew it but the bone marrow of the Quigg contained a powerfully sterile cleansing agent which diffused in the schmold for years after the extinction, thus making all the latter-day schmold slightly less filthy. It's nice to know that even after their complete annihilation, the great Quigg species continued to inadvertently clean up the universe.

CHAPTER 7

TV and Pets for Greegs

You might be wondering what a Greeg did for entertainment when not fishing Quigg skeletons out of schmold reserves, mining for schmold, or taking in the guilty pleasures of a particularly skeezy Cover Bar while intoxicated on mass quantities of schmold. Television is popular with Greegs, but the only show is 'watching schmold,' as all Greeg televisions are merely hollowed out glass cubes filled with schmold. This does not stop them from wholeheartedly believing they are seeing something different when they change the channel (an act that is supposedly done telepathically). A typical Greeg conversation in front of the TV is as follows:

"Turn on the TV." (An act done by removing a blanket placed on top of a hollowed out glass cube filled with schmold).

"What channel?"

"5."

"Ok."

"Actually not channel 5. I've seen this episode of schmold before. Look at that familiar cluster of bubbles in the bottom left hand quadrant."

"But the schmold-guide says it's brand new."

"It's a re-run."

"I'll put on channel 8 instead."

"Good choice. The sheen of schmold is brighter on channel 8."

"I don't like it. Let's watch channel 3."

"The schmold movement is too frenetic on channel 3."

"What channel do you want to watch then?"

"Channel 8."

"But I don't like channel 8!"

These sorts of arguments are known to carry on for hours until someone solves the problem by smashing the television.

A favourite household pet is a school of shimmer-fish. The fish are kept in tanks filled with, you guessed it, schmold. Viewing the fish is an impossible task, being that schmold is the antithesis of clear, but this problem is quickly averted when the fish die and float belly-up to the surface. The underbelly is what shimmers the most anyway, so a floating upside-down dead shimmer-fish is actually the most entertaining type of shimmer-fish a Greeg can own. If you were hosting a party you would be most embarrassed to learn your shimmer-fish had not died before the guests arrived.

CHAPTER 8

The Unbearable Lightness of Being a Greeg

While our Greegs freely romp about their own planet trashing the place whilst drawing blueprints for the next schmold museum, many faraway Greegs languish miserably in cramped carnival cells. As stated, on most planets Greegs are a small-numbered population

put on display by creatures of greater intelligence and power. These imprisoned Greegs have never even heard of schmold, much less seen a drop of it, yet buried somewhere in their collective consciousness is the memory of schmold and how wonderful it might be if they had some. Carnival Greegs dream every night of a tantalizingly unattainable green substance. They always wake up just before the moment of acquisition, left with feelings of disorientation and disappointment. When they're unable to sleep they gaze at whatever moons are in the sky of wherever they are and imagine the moons are green and made of schmold. If the moons happen to already be green, well, they especially enjoy looking at those ones because there's a good chance they might actually be made of schmold.

Carnival Greegs do very little while performing, as the mere sight of these silly creatures is enough to send even the most freakishly bizarre alien into a fit of laughter. The most popular carnival attraction is the viewing of sexual intercourse. Every mid-afternoon the Greegs are separated into groups of two (or more if you can afford the tickets) and left to perform for the paying crowd. Most aliens are fascinated with the process of Greeg intercourse. How and why do such brutish slobs perform procreation in such a dignified and sterile manner? The mystery was best discussed by the famous Dr. Kipple in his psychological think-piece *Purified Procreation: Greeg Sex and What it Says About Their True Nature*.

CHAPTER 9

Klaxworms and Flying Grimbat Messengers

As previously mentioned, Greegs are the most intellectually evolved creatures on this planet. That does not say much for everyone else. We have witnessed the folly of the Quigg, but that is nothing compared to the pure lunacy that are Klaxworms.

A Klaxworm is a medium-sized slithery type creature with thorns and barbs and other dangerous things adorning its skin. Klaxworms exist solely on one of 11 planets containing wriggly, walky, breathy things in the hopeless, undeveloped but reasonably entertaining to look at from a safe distance sun system of the 38 planets in the 59 sunned district of Herb. The Klaxworms' estimated 3.2 trillion populace lives entirely in a single cave system. It is crowded and unpleasant to say the least. During the day there's a stifling heat so intense it can boil the organs of unfortunately thinner-skinned Klaxworms, while the sub-zero temperatures of the evening results in all Klaxworms being frozen to the ground like the tongue of a foolish human who licked metal in the wintertime. For about 9 Earth hours every night the Klaxworms are stuck in mid-stride. Once things warm up in the morning they continue their daily routine of hoping their organs don't boil while deciding where they'd like to end up frozen for the night.

Klaxworms do not want to live in this wretched cave. But they don't leave. They are perfectly aware (through aid of Flying Grimbat Messengers) that right outside their cave exists all sorts of remarkable things like varnished marble, shiny glass windows and freshly bleached tile floors; in short, the entire surface of a planet for their roaming purposes. No one is stopping them, yet they cannot leave. Why is this? A Klaxworm has no great enemy to fear in the world (except the odd Greeg has been known to wander in the cave and eat a few of them for a late snack, apparently forgetting they're deadly poisonous to everything).

A Klaxworm will talk your ear off about leaving the cave, how in just a moment they'll slither right out into the vast fields of polished marble, only they never quite make it to the exit. Along the way there's always a distraction, such as a good discussion about leaving the cave, the boiling of one's organs, or the finding of an excellent spot to be frozen in for the evening.

The squalor of the cave has no actual relevance with their desire to leave, for even if Klaxworms had evolved in an oasis paradise they still would have wanted to be elsewhere. To be displeased with the surroundings while at the same time attempting no change whatsoever is the unwavering state of the Klaxworm's consciousness. It is a very disagreeable purpose to have in life, one that usually results in not doing anything other than stewing about in a cave waiting for ones organs to boil.

Are Klaxworms really this stupid? Not quite. They are merely one of the universe's laziest creatures.

Another mysterious creature on this planet is the briefly aforementioned Flying Grimbats messenger. The Flying Grimbats messenger looks like a triplet of tie-dyed Perusian vampire bats mashed up in a quality vice grip with 3 sets of pterodactyl wings frantically flapping to keep its monstrous body afloat. They feed on a strict diet of watered down schmold, making them somewhat of an enemy to Greegs (who fear the notion of sharing schmold). Luckily the fact that Grimbats water down their schmold means they don't use very much of it. If a Grimbats consumed pure schmold the Greegs would have wiped them out ages ago. It is also true that for some reason the Greegs feel a compelling affinity with the Grimbats, as if they are one of them. Flying Grimbats have appointed themselves messengers of the planet, like a spontaneous organic media. The only problem with this flying epidemic of mass media is that nobody wants to hear their mind-numbingly boring messages, making Grimbats possibly the most useless creature on the planet. Certainly more useless than Klaxworms, who at least mind their own business and don't drop excrement on the recently varnished marble. Grimbats are confounding blabbermouths. They are heedless busybodies swooping around the skies, eavesdropping from behind shrubs and sheepishly claiming it's for the good of public knowledge when they get caught doing it. The parallels between Flying Grimbats Messengers and human paparazzi are staggering. In my eyes, the only blatant difference is that a paparazzi looks like a triplet of tie-dyed Perusian vampire bats mashed up in a quality vice grip with 2 sets of pterodactyl wings frantically flapping to keep it's monstrous body afloat, as opposed to having the regular 3 sets of pterodactyl wings commonly found on the Flying Grimbats Messenger.

Like I said, they are a mysterious creature.

CHAPTER 10

The Scam of Religious Holidays for Greegs

A Greeg calendar is an interesting collectible to come across in your space travels. Just the fact that Greegs have invented a calendar is mystifying, but matters are made more baffling when you discover there is no semblance of logic or pattern in any of the 473 pages, all of which are constantly being rearranged and rewritten due to squabbles about which holidays should be celebrated and which should never be spoken of again. Random

holidays (some enthralling, some downright shameful) are perpetually coming and going, but the celebration of one in particular has always been agreed upon. It is marked on the calendar by every 4.3 rotations of the small moon Dromos, and it is a day in which all respectable Greegs must pay reverence to their deity, known by the name 'Whatever It Is That Created Everything For the Sole Entertainment of the Greeg.' On the day of reverence a Greeg says thank you to Whatever It Is That Created Everything For the Sole Entertainment of the Greeg, and prays the supply of schmold be plentiful for at least the next thousand revolutions round the sun. The centrepiece of the event is the great tradition known as *The Offering of Schmold*. Each Greeg family is expected (nay, commanded by law) to place a worthy offering in front of a stone altar, where slaves of the congregation collect the offerings and take them to a secret volcano that is the living heart of Whatever It Is That Created Everything For the Sole Entertainment of the Greeg. This was once a pure act of sacrifice, but over time the Offering of Schmold became nothing more than an egotistical competition to see who could offer the most intricately expensive display. Much of a Greeg's time between days of reverence is spent planning out and constructing their next offering. Commendable offerings in recent years have included: a 2-dozen set of schmold candles (a truly rare item considering the near impossibility of solidifying schmold short of owning a bottle of Ice-Nine), a flat-screen schmold television (with all the channels of course), a schmold-multiplier (a remarkable machine that can increase your schmold supply at a rate of .03% per rotation of Dromos, assuming you're able to afford the astronomically bankrupting task of plugging it in), and the ever popular schmold-cake (acceptable only when baked to a crispy charcoal texture and stomped on a little bit).

Long ago it was made public to the Greeg community that the congregation had not been taking the offerings of schmold to any secret volcano that is the living heart of Whatever It Is That Created Everything For the Sole Entertainment of the Greeg. They were merely putting the schmold in their own houses. The entire celebration of the Greegian deity is a scam perpetrated by an elite group of maniacal Greegs, who for some unknown reason must own more schmold than anyone else. Was the public upset? Not really. Their desire to compete over who has the most expensive schmold offering quickly trumped the anger of being ripped off.

Greegs love showing off how much schmold they have, even if it results in no longer having the schmold.

THE MIDDLE:

of Carnivals and Things... but mostly of Things

CHAPTER 11

Zook and Naddy

He sat upright in his cage as the sounds of jeering and screaming jarred him from his sleep.

“Come on now, these people paid good money to see you three get it on.”

Moments before he was swimming in an ocean of schmold. He didn't know it was called schmold of course. Just knew it felt oh so good. Much better than being poked at with a pointed stick. Which he was at the moment. He farted and sneezed at the same time, sending globules of greenish, yellowish goo cascading down his hairy face. Momentarily sure that it must be schmold, he grabbed the snot and rubbed it all over himself. He got some in his eye which stung and burned. He decided to try and remedy this by jamming his fingers in his eyeballs to stop the pain. It didn't work. It only made him yelp out with more pain. This woke up the other male in the cage. The other male in the cage flew into a rage, furious at being awoken from a fabulous dream. His dream involved having just decided what combination of rotations, spins and poses he would employ after running and jumping off of a 100 meter high dive springy board right into his own, brand new schmold pool.

The other male picked up a pile of Greeg feces and rubbed it all over the first male's face. To make things easier, we will henceforth call these two males Zook and Naddy. There is absolutely no reason to suspect these names have any significance, they are completely random.

Zook, the first male, did not understand why his friend would share such nice stinky feces all over his face like that.

“What a lucky break!” Thought Zook.

Clearly, this terrific new stench and nauseating outward, physical appearance would guarantee that Zook would get to attempt first, third, and probably eighth as well today. His inability to comprehend Naddy's reasoning infuriated Zook, leading him to grip Naddy by the back of the head and clang clang clang his good friend's face into the bars of the cage until it was all bloody. Just for good measure, Zook pissed all over Naddy's bloody face.

By this time the female had seen about enough. She was completely and utterly turned on. She revealed the sterility covers and the two males rushed over to see which one was to be chosen first, third, and most importantly, eighth.

11 minutes had passed since Zook had first awoken from his nap.

This was why Greegs were such a damned fine carnival attraction!

CHAPTER 12

Specters and Greeg-keepers

Viewing this skeezy carnival show was a gathering of Algreenian fog-specters. They were in dire need of some high quality entertainment, having just finished a legendarily bad cruise of some of the more boring outer dimensions, including a tour of the famous invisible dimension. Life is much worse when everything is invisible, despite what was boasted about on travel posters. Carnival Greegs are highly recommended as a pick-me-up for anyone who has recently visited the invisible dimension, and so here were these Algreenian spectres drifting around waiting for the show.

An impatient spectre tried to pick up a rock and throw it at Naddy but his spectral, non-existent hand merely passed right through the solid object. The spectre then asked the nearest living creature if they would do him the favour of throwing a rock at the Greegs. The creature obliged, throwing a rock at Naddy, further worsening his mangled appearance. While this was going on, Zook thrashed his arms about wildly. It was a ridiculously pointless thing to do.

"We paid for a show!" yelled the rock-throwing instigator.

"Yeah! A show! We want to see something!" chimed in the rest of the crowd.

"Don't you know we've just been through the invisible dimension?" screeched a belligerent specter. "Not a whole lot to see there! In fact, nothing at all."

The Greeg-keeper continued rapping on the cage bars with his electro-club. Greegs usually became obedient once the electro-club appeared. This particular Greeg-keeper was a tall goblin-like creature. He had fangs and claws and red eyes. His name was Reg. He was more frightening than his casually friendly name would suggest, being a tall goblin-like creature with fangs and claws and red eyes.

"These specter-folk haven't got all day," growled Reg. "Or do they?" he added, turning to face the specters. "Are you lot dead? What's the deal with all the floating and the translucence?"

"No, we're not dead," replied one of the specters. "We are living creatures born in a ghostly form. When we die we become bodies of flesh and blood."

"That's stupid. A bit backwards, don't you think?" asked Reg.

"I say the only thing that is backwards is the fact that we have paid you for a non-existent show, when in fact you should be paying us for the wasting of our time."

"I'm not sure you've even paid me," said Reg. "All I've got is this invisible money. Can't even see it to know if it's there."

"We told you, that money is perfectly transferable from within the invisible dimension. Once you're there you can trade the invisible money for any sort of bejewelled holograph-coins or whatever other foolish currency you're trading in nowadays."

"Right," said Reg. "I understand that part. Just not sure when I'll ever bother to go to the invisible dimension, that's all. This money will probably just end up sitting around taking up invisible space on my visible dresser."

"Not go to the invisible dimension? You *must* go to the invisible dimension," said a specter in a manner snooty enough to suggest that anyone who doesn't go to the invisible dimension is leading a wasted life.

"I don't get it, you've all been going off about how boring the invisible dimension is," said Reg.

"Yeah, but we're specters. We're practically invisible ourselves. We prefer to see solid objects to counterbalance our spectral state. The invisible dimension might be a nice change-up for you though. I hear one of flesh and blood feels thinner while there."

Reg grew annoyed. "Look, I'm never going to visit the invisible dimension. The cost of travelling there is way more than what I'll make trading in the money. Plus I think it's all a scam."

Caught up in their heated discussion, Reg and the specters failed to notice the Greeg show starting in a tremendous way. There was a great battle over who would make the coveted eighth attempt, with Zook prevailing because of his aforementioned newly acquired stench. The show was over by the time the specters focused their attention back on the cage. Because they didn't see anything Reg was forced to refund their invisible money. Unbeknownst to Reg, specters are not great liars. The pouch of invisible money was indeed real, and would have fetched several islands worth of bejewelled holograph-coins, granted Reg could handle the mind-shattering experience of crossing the invisible dimension's psychic threshold, which of course he couldn't, being an imbecilic goblin. After the specters drifted away, Reg approached the cage.

"Those are good customers we lost because of you!" he yelled at Zook and Naddy.

Naddy tried to explain how well the show had gone, and that it was the audience's fault for missing out.

"Never mind," said Reg as he walked away from the cage. "Useless Greegs. Just go back to dreaming about your green pools or whatever it is I hear you muttering about in your sleep."

Zook thrashed his arms about wildly.

CHAPTER 13

Dr. Rip T. Brash Makes a Wager

Dr. Rip T. Brash The Third was neither a doctor nor was he royalty. He wasn't the third of anything, he'd never been to school and he wasn't really so much of a 'he' either. It's just weird calling him an 'it' but he had no discernible sexual orientation. Not because he lacked sexual organs. Rip had no discernible sexual orientation precisely because he had so *many* sexual organs. He had an absolutely ridiculous assortment of penises, vaginas, coil rods, flipper flaps, egg baskets, cram rams, biddle twocks, horm guffles, abble taters, phrish kerrings, wodder musks, mickle shoots, marrinvioles, and all sorts of other exotic pieces of procreation and pleasure. At this point, Rip couldn't really remember which ones he was born with, and which he'd had surgically implanted or removed. He was a hulky thing. A clunky, yet carefully put together specimen. He had many eyes, some of which were capable of site. He had a few brains, some of which were capable of thought. He had four arms, three legs, nine tentacles, eight nipples, three beards (but only one chin)... in general he had a lot of extraneous parts. He was like a car with too many accessories, many of which served no practical purpose. Practicality was not what Dr. Rip T. Brash The Third was all about. Rip was brash though, especially when wildly intoxicated at a carnival, which he most certainly was. He was prone to making outrageous and outlandish claims when drunk. Unfortunately for him, his friends were prone to taking him up on these claims and bets then collecting when he failed miserably to achieve them. This is likely the explanation for most, if not all, of his sexual organs. They weren't really friends as much as they were leeches. This was so true that it was common for intergalactic debt counsellors

to suggest to cash strapped clients "Perhaps you should try going drinking with Dr. Rip T. Brash The Third at a carnival." Nobody knew how he had so much money to lose on outlandish bets. It's true every once in awhile he would actually succeed in the task laid out for himself in a loud mouthed, drunken stupor the night before, but not nearly enough times to be breaking even. On this day Rip was more drunk than usual, and so his primary mouth was flapping more than usual. Sensing a real chance to not only cover his debts, but perhaps wind up owning a few thousand civilizations as well, Rip's drinking partner, Jim, wasn't taking Rip up on any of his bets early on in the night. He instead downplayed them as effeminate and pathetic in the hopes that Rip would continue one-upping himself until the bet was so outlandish and impossible to achieve that Jim could never lose.

This is, of course, exactly what Rip did. Beginning with a paltry claim that he could stick his whole head up the anus of a Graffling Wocker Frit, spin around three times, return to the bar and still go home with the prettiest four headed being in the building, Rip eventually got so drunk and ran his mouth to such a degree that he made the most preposterous drunken wager ever made in the long and glorious history of preposterous drunken wagers.

This was it.

Dr. Rip T. Brash The Third opened his drunken face and guzzled back his eleventh Crammington Krish Fortini (about ten and a half more than one should engulf in a lifetime). He slammed the Jardian glass bottle on the top of the bar and shouted out "I got it!"

At this point the entire bar had given up whatever false conversations they'd been having and were all just focusing on Rip's self imposed escalating stakes, waiting to see what ridiculous final challenge Jim would pull the trigger on.

Rip grabbed Jim by the hairy tube dangling from the back of his neck and dragged him to the Greeg cage. A crowd of about 200 visible beings, the odd specter and several recording devices followed the pair out to what had surely become the most interesting thing to happen at the carnival in days. Rip, always a showman, clambered on to the side of the Greeg cage, barely held on to the bars with one hand and held up his twelfth CKF with the other.

"I, Dr. Rip T. Brash The Third, do solemnly declare in the name of all things..."

Several shouts of 'get on with it' and other such encouragements were volleyed in his general direction, along with several pounds of half eaten food, severed limbs and hunks of hard granite.

"Fine, fine, no sense of tact and ceremony but fine, here it is. I bet you, Graham..."

"Jim!" corrected the mob.

"Gerry, right, I bet you my priceless fleet of Obotron 7 Space Ships, er, Jill, that I, me, yes, can take a lowly, stupid, useless carnival Greeg, and have them smarter than enough to pass as a decent, semi intelligent creature, person, thing... in two years. Smarter than all of you even!"

The mob went silent. Then a laugh broke out from the back and collectively rolled on up to the front. Jim, rolling around on the ground, unable to believe his luck, screamed out "Yes, yes! Hahahaha YES!"

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