

The Quest For The Holy Hummus

The Chickpea Chronicles, Volume 1

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This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

THE QUEST FOR THE HOLY HUMMUS

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Written by James Allinson.

A note from the author

Hello!

Thank you for choosing to read *The Chickpea Chronicles*. Your attention is greatly appreciated.

I wrote these books primarily to entertain myself and would be delighted if others also find them enjoyable.

Before you begin with volume 1 (*The Quest For The Holy Hummus*) I want to say something: This book *is good* (obviously I would say that!), HOWEVER, I will be the first to admit that it is *not nearly as good* as volumes 2 to 7 - it is far shorter and basically serves to set the scene. The book certainly has its moments (so please do read it) but in all honesty, I would rate it as a solid 3.5 out of 5.

The point I hope to make is, if you enjoy volume 1 *even remotely*, I can assure you that volumes 2 to 7 *will not disappoint* (if you don't like volume 2 then I'll concede the series is not for you...!).

Happy reading!

James

Chapter 1

It had just turned 9 am and in Farmer Fred's feel-good, local, family, fair-trade, organic wholefoods store, things were not going well. Leaning on his counter, Julian clutched his skull through his long and now damp hair, then looked towards the man with the clipboard who stood alongside. "Surely there's a way around this?" His voice trembled around the dried pulse-crammed aisles of the deserted shop. "If you'll just give me more time, I'm certain I can find the money—"

"Sorry, mate." The man didn't look up from his writing. "Not my decision. They just send me to record what you've got that's worth anything. I don't make the rules."

Over the last few months, trade in People Town's only health foods shop had been on the decline.

Notwithstanding an unhelpful lack of assistance from known-science surrounding the phenomenal benefits of organic, vegan produce, for almost a decade, Julian Pinkerton Smith had tried his best to convince the town's badly-in-need-of-guidance population that premium-priced, painful-on-the-gums foods were the avenue to a healthier and happier colon.

Things had initially gone well – back in the beginning, Julian could barely keep up with the demand for expensive lentils and obscure spices sold in industrial-sized bags without any information as to their points of origin. Unfortunately, however, those halcyon days were gone.

Despite being a business that championed sustainability, the only thing Farmer Fred's was currently sustaining was a stream of red letters and court summonses. Now at over fifty-thousand in the hole, the bank had decided to pull the plug.

With a purposeful scribble, the man finished his list, then clicked shut his pen. "Ok, Mr Pinkerton Smith." He took a final glance around the shop to check he hadn't missed anything of potential value. "You know the deal. You've got until noon to pay up or we'll be back with the van to collect this lot." He ripped off a top copy and slid it along the counter.

Pushing up his thin frame on his even thinner arms, Julian began to pace down the turmeric aisle, his sandals flapping noisily over the floor. Suddenly he turned and raced back over. He looked to the man appealingly. "Is... is there any way we could extend this for a little?" Nervously, he tugged at his wispy beard – not strictly regulation uniform in the organic food industry but in practice, as good as. "Just between me and you?"

A look of terror darted over the man's face.

DING! Julian sent the till drawer flying outwards. "Perhaps the sum of... twenty-three... no, *four*... pounds and sixty... this is the money I had earmarked for the children's home, by the way... seven pence?"

Relief visibly sweeping over him, the man shook his head. "No!" he laughed. "And in terms of bribes, that's the worst one I've had this month." He began to look up and down the 'beetroot – perfect for realistic, guilt-free burgers' display over by the veg wall. "To be honest, I think the bank's doing you a

favour – taking this place off you. You should be grateful I’m not a health inspector!” He pushed his pen towards the spelt flour shelf where a large dead beetle could just be seen poking out underneath. “By the looks of it, you’re lucky you haven’t killed anyone. In the storeroom, as well.” He flicked his head sideways. “The droppings?”

“Um... well...” Julian squirmed then folded his arms defensively. “...we’re a *vegan* establishment, aren’t we?” He began to sidle behind the revolving community leaflet rack in a bid to hide the sweat patches that had now started to manifest. “We can’t very well go around poisoning and decapitating living creatures in the furtherance of making a crust, can we?”

“Mmm,” replied the man, clearly unconvinced. “So what’s with that big mallet behind the bin out back? The one with all the little, black legs stuck to it? And the broken mouse traps and the... Oh yeah! *Speaking of murdering stuff*, isn’t this the place where...?” He put on a grotesque expression, then mimed taking a huge bite out of something. “A couple of weeks ago, wasn’t it? That bloke who owned the jewellers? Still no trace of him! That sort of thing can’t be doing you any favours – you veggies are famously fragile at the best of times.” Suddenly he looked over his shoulder and out of the window. “Actually, now I think about it, doesn’t it come here quite regular—”

“Look!” Julian grinned broadly. “Perhaps I was a little um... *un-generous* in my um... postponement-of-payment offering earlier.” He delved into his cargo shorts pocket and removed a fistful of change and a few old receipts.

The man frowned. “You’re wasting your time. And let’s face it, even if I did give you more time – which I can’t because well, the bank, *but if I did* – look at this place! Just gone nine – peak

breakfast rush – and it’s deader than the things dried-onto your wooden hammer. And probably poor old what’s his name... Mr Winterbur—”

“Um, excuse me!” Julian hadn’t become the town’s premier and only ethical grocer by listening to the twisted logic of non-believers. If this person had no power or intention of being bribed then this charade of fawning and basic human decency could go right out of the window. Julian fixed him with a glare. “Not that I have to explain myself to the likes of you, Mr I-am-just-following-orders – and we all know what *that* leads to, don’t we? – but our target clientele don’t tend to have nine-to-fives; most of them seem to walk dogs for a living. So getting up... before about eleven isn’t a big thing for them. No, do you know why the business isn’t currently doing quite as well as it has done? *Do you?* No, of course you don’t!”

The man shrugged then lifted a bottle of Totally Harmless Cannabis-brand CBD hemp oil from the counter and looked at it. “Your prices?” he said. “Really, *really* expensive! I can get this in the big supermarket for fifty percent less, not mention a one-hundred percent less chance of being consumed by a gigantic, green monst—”

Julian snatched away the bottle and clanged it back amongst the others in the display basket. “Those are very fair sums for the quality being provided!” he stated. “It isn’t cheap to source organic, fair-trade products, you know. To provide the peasants of the Third World with a living wage and still make me a margin worth getting out of bed for. In the past, these things were flying – well, at least walking; we’re opposed to air travel, obviously – off the shelves.”

“So, what changed?” asked the man now making his way towards the door.

“Well, people of course!” snapped Julian. “Now they’re finding new ways to be virtuous!”

The man slowed slightly then turned. “Sorry, what?”

Julian scrunched up his eyes, incredulous that he was getting his stuff repossessed by someone who didn’t even understand basic health food psychology. “Back in the olden days,” he scoffed, “you had veganism, animal rights, and the greenhouse effect – simple, just the three. You can remember that, right? Save the whale and the ozone layer and all that other guff from school? Come on, you’re not *that* old. So, by shopping here you could pretty much score a hat trick with those. Tick, tick, tick. Job done. Pat on the back, fuzzy glow, all sorted!” He looked wistfully towards the ‘Quinoa (it’s pronounced *keeeen waaaaahhh*)’ sign on the end of the aisle nearest to him. “BUT!” He spun and fixed the man with a glare. “NOW! Now they’ve ruined everything! EVERYTHING!”

The man’s brow knitted. From the safety of his office, the hippy shop assignment with its spindly Son-of-God-resembling proprietor had seemed like a one-man-job – however, now things were getting out of hand. “Sorry, I’m... I’m not following. I... I just make the lists.”

Without warning, Julian took a step towards him – just like he had done to that security guard in the monkeys-with-highly-infectious-diseases lab back in his university days only this time it wasn’t quite as menacing as he didn’t have a balaclava and a crowbar and seven accomplices. “They ruined everything!” he hissed. “They... they *saturated the market*! Now there are just *too many things*!”

“They? Too many?”

“With *causes*!” Julian edged forward. “Causes to support! Things to be sanctimonious about! Not an ounce of business sense between the whole lot of them.”

The man swallowed hard and took a step away. “Ok. Well, as I said, we’ll be back at—”

Julian nodded at him. “That’s right,” he seethed, mistaking the man’s growing look of panic with their sharing of a moment. “Now they can signal their virtue with literally *anything* without even trying. Without even leaving the house or spending *any* money, for goodness sakes! From the comfort of their own computer!” He curled out his bottom lip then pretended to wipe away tears with both hands. “BOO HOO HOO!” he screamed.

The man dropped his clipboard with a clatter.

“I feel so bad about fat celebrities getting fat-shamed or war crimes or whatever!” Julian pretended to blow his nose on a People Town Alternative Basket Weavers leaflet plucked from the counter. “I’m SOOOOO sensitive! Look, I liked a picture – that’s my astounding level of non-financial, non-life-affecting commitment. I mean, seriously? How can anyone make a living out of the morality industry anymore?”

By now the man had turned squarely towards Julian and was reaching blindly behind to try to open the door.

Julian continued to twist up his face. “What about the foreign farmers who can’t afford sunblock or shoes?” he spat, now beginning to circle the man who had snagged a belt loop on a large plastic-lined wicker basket of reduced food-mile brazil nuts. “The poor wretches I selflessly bend over backwards to try to support with very, *very* modest gains – in recent times, at

least – for myself? What about them? I’m practically a charity – without the tax breaks, obviously. He exhaled deeply, suddenly beginning to calm. “Veganism and food that doesn’t destroy the planet is old school,” he said. “And not in a cool way, either. Now you can be an attention-seeking snowflake *whilst still having* an enjoyable and balanced diet. It’s a tragedy.” He reached down and picked up the clipboard, causing the man to flinch. “Here. Oh, the handle is higher up; you’re nowhere near.”

“OK!” With a ding, the man ripped open the door. “We – m... me and some others, lots of others, b... big ones – will be back at 12.01,” he stammered. “Don’t do anything stupid like try to hide anything listed on that document. I know you will, but don’t, ok? Oh, and if that creature happens to come by and doesn’t look to be leaving, I’d appreciate it if you could call our office and... Look, this job is minimum wage and I’ve got kids; you understand?”

As the door closed, Julian slumped down onto his counter.

This was bad. He was out of options. At midday, he was going to lose the shop.

Chapter 2

Far away over the hills in Dragonville, Beethoven's 5th drifted from the open window of the small hut that sat on the outskirts. The tarmac road that ran from the town had tailed off into moss and lichens a few hundred metres back, leaving the place more or less completely cut off from the rest of dragon civilisation – exactly as its inhabitant wanted.

With a gentle clang, George slid a tray of pitta bread dough into the oven then promptly took a seat at the table. He glanced to the clock. It had just gone quarter-past and previous attempts had shown him his pockets of wholegrain deliciousness would be ready in around seven and a half minutes. Nine twenty... *three*, he noted. Wearily, he looked around the kitchen. What to do? There was, of course, the yeasty warzone in the sink to contend with, not to mention the collateral damage to the countertops. However, as his ankles now matched his knees in width, staying seated seemed sensible.

Grimacing slightly, George leaned over to the sideboard and smartly turned the volume dial on the record player all the way to 'off'. He sighed deeply. A few moments of respite while he waited for the oven to beep. A violin-free period for nothing but quiet reflection and meaningful contemplation. An opportunity – perhaps – to try to get to grips with who he was and where he was going and ultimately, for what purpose had he been placed here, upon this huge, revolving planet...

Suddenly, he spotted something nestling beneath the avocado-laden fruit bowl – his bi-monthly periodical, *Dragon's Health Magazine*. Still in the cellophane wrapper! "Aha!" he

exclaimed. *Reading* about self-improvement – a most-productive use of his time!

George dragged free the magazine and began his betterment browsing. Ok, so perhaps he didn't resemble the incredibly-toned dragons featured on the glossy pages, but he certainly shared their obvious body-confidence issues – it was just that he didn't bother to do anything about his. It was fine, his muscles were underneath. Five tons and fat was fashionable right now. Casually, he flipped to the centre spread. '*Fire-breathing: Double your eruption with the Pyro diet.*' He began to scan, glancing to the photograph of the huge-chested beast who was belching out an arc of flames about six-times its body length. Undeniably impressive.

A minute passed and now the smell that had started to drift from the oven was making George's mouth water. Still poring over the images of scaly beefcakes doing their workouts, he slipped his green hands beneath the red and white tablecloth and began to vigorously rub them together. Possessing foot-long talons did make getting rid of all the leftover dough after a hard-core baking session rather a laborious task.

He carried on with his palm polishing, still trying to find his optimum rhythm. "Mmm!" He pouted as his claws began to feel smoother and smoother. "Wonderfully satisfying!" Momentarily, he brought a hand back up and turned the page. '*Big buff thighs!*' he read. Goodness! Those things were massive! He would have silky-smooth fingers after all this. Perhaps rub a little faster? "Mmmmm! Oh yes!" The simple things in life!

Now the table was starting to rock.

George pressed on, trying not to think about the state of his floor tiles. Oh yes! Oh yes! He could feel the heat building

up in his hands. And those pittas were beginning to smell divine! He was really salivating now. This was what making your own bread was all about! This was why you went through all that hassle! His forehead was starting to glisten. He bit his bottom lip. This dough-scale exfoliation felt *sooo* good! Oh yes! Oh yes! Oh ye—

CRASH! The whole house shook.

“RAAAAR!”

SMASH!

“Go! Go! Goooooooo!”

George leapt from his seat, knocking it backwards, and then dashed to the window just in time to see an object whiz past and crunch loudly against the side of the potting shed. “My prize butternut!” he gasped. “In the garden? In broad daylight? The horrendous, filthy brutes!”

Striding towards to the door, George hastily undid his frilly floral apron and tossed it over the back of a chair. Quickly, he slid back the first bolt, then the second and third, and finally the chain, then creaked it open.

“Excuse me!” he called, raising his nose to peer above the greenery. “I say! The yooou-ths! The yooou-ths rrr-unning amok in the veg-e-table plot! Could you not...”

Now the garden was empty.

George scanned the undergrowth for signs of movement. Despicable, feral, little fuc—

WHHHOOOSSSHHH!

“WOOOAH!” A pumpkin skimmed down past George’s cheek and exploded at his feet, splattering both him and the doorstep with its mushy insides.

Shocked, he looked back over his shoulder – just in time to see a girthy cucumber looming towards him. “No... no... AAAAARGH!”

SPLAT!

The sound of scrambling came from above, followed by two slates smashing onto the patio in quick succession.

Stepping back across his perfectly-manicured lawn, George swiped the gooey mess from his cheek and nose, and flicked it across the path. “You!” He glared at his roof in disbelief. “You disgusting...*ly disadvantaged* individual! Come down! Come down at once!”

On the edge of the sagging eave balanced a young, thick-set female dragon with excessive daubings of lipstick plastered across her podgy, blue face. Eyes wide open, mouth agog and legs shaking, the dragon stared directly at George making him swallow hard. Slowly, she began to lift her arm and as she did, an object became visible in her hand.

“DON’T YOU DARE!” Arms now clutched over his head, George waddled away across the grass to make himself a harder target for whatever projectile was coming his way. “Incredibly anti-social conduct!” he scolded. “Get... get down here this second! Come on! I’m a sporting chap. Off my land on the count of three and we’ll attribute this the fault of society and say no more about it. One! Two—”

“Hello!” she grunted.

George blinked. “What?” Briefly, he dropped his claws to look over the top. ‘Hello’? Was that it? Dislodging his shingles and the grubby reprobate couldn’t even manage a ‘Hello, *sir*’?

The young dragon forced a smile and, accompanied by a sickening creaking of wood, began to tightrope along the edge

holding a phone to her head. "Yeah, I'm on his roof!" she whispered. "Yep. Right here, watching me! He's got the tablecloth stuck to his stomach."

George cringed. What had she seen? No, don't even go there. He fixed her with a steely look. "What on ruddy earth do you think you're playing at, missie?" Actually, was it a 'missie'? He squinted. Hmm, possibly? Probably safer to sit on the fence and not mention it again. Quickly, he folded his arms and put on his best extremely-cross-but-could-be-won-over-with-a-little-effort face. "I insist you remove yourself from my gutterage, forthwith! And incidentally, this is a *sa-rrrong!*"

The dragon, still on the phone, looked down and shook her head. "Not on your life, you big salad-tosser!"

George winced. Dietary-related discrimination. Ok. What to do? What to do? He looked around. There, propped up against the shed, was the ladder he used to trim his apple trees. That would do it. "Now come down this instant!" he demanded. Purposefully, he took a step over. "Or there'll be some pretty serious trouble!"

"N... no way!" Hurriedly, she began to ascend towards the chimney stack.

George reached the shed and looked back to see the dragon still hadn't taken heed of his request. "I mean it," he called. "Don't make me come up there."

Now perching precariously on the cowl, the dragon looked down. "G... go back inside and I... I'll come down by myself," she called, clinging to his weather vane. "I um... doubt that thing's even strong enough to hold your weight!"

George tutted quietly to himself. A size-based insult, coming from her?! She wasn't doing herself any favours. As he

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