



Act V Scene 1

Nestled firmly between the townships of Albury and Wodonga, the Murray River murmurs modestly down its meandering path to the sea. The water is murky and mysterious — both alluring and off-putting. Occasionally, a stray ray of sunlight would catch a wavelet at its peak, dazzling its surroundings in a spectacle of radiant brilliance, and exposing abstract evidence of lifeforms lingering down below the surface.

In autumn, the leaves fell from the deciduous trees with a candid grace, floating on the wind like miniature kites, before eventually fluttering down and settling into piles of red and orange and brown and gold and grey. An occasional leaf would find its way into the water, where, bobbing and weaving, it would amble into the distant horizon, never to be seen again.

And every afternoon, when the sun began to trace its doleful descent right across the western sky, there was a brief pause, a brief moment of stillness, one punctuated by an air of poignancy and pensiveness. And the sky — first blue then orange then pink, and riddled with wisps of clouds — was flawed, but in a perfect sort of way.

Idyllic. Picturesque. Tranquil.

Everything was right as rain.

Such was life out in the regions.

But this place had a problem. Not the dwindling population and rising unemployment in a settlement whose roots traced right back to the early 19th century. Nor the mounting damage that mankind had been unleashing on the water system by way of rising pollution, irrigation, and salinity. No, no. This problem was much simpler than that. One that hearkened back to the Paleogene Period more than 35 million years ago.

It was the humble flying fox.

For centuries, humans have kept on the right side of these winged marvels, straying away from natural bat reservoirs and keeping territorial intrusion to a minimum. But along came deforestation and the decimation of natural flying fox habitats. And now the bats have returned with a vengeance.

On their own, these critters are virtually harmless. Adorable, even. But it's what they carry that poses a problem.

Viruses, festering in their natural reservoir. Growing, invading, hijacking, splitting, and growing once more. Unperturbed by the higher bat body temperature. Harmless in the winged mammals. Deadly in humans.

All it took was one virion from one drop of saliva from one bat...



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Lara awoke to find herself fully enclosed in a vibrant green — almost turquoise — Hazmat suit. She shuffled uncomfortably as she acclimatised to the positive pressure and the filtered air.

“Attila?”

“Attila!”

Lara had grown accustomed to having her friend materialise right beside her, so the lack of an old man’s body lying prone on the ground and awakening from a deep slumber sent her into a wild panic.

She glanced around frantically and shouted her lungs out through the ventilator in the vain hope that Attila — or, at this rate, anyone else — could hear.

But it was no use.

Her pleas for help were met by the rustling of leaves and the whispering of branches in the lonesome woods.

She cursed loudly. This was most certainly the devious work of Rubik, she thought.

And, as if on cue, a hell-raising scream sounded off in the distance, and Lara, who had nothing better to do, bolted towards it.

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The man was not in his right mind. He was delirious with fever, tossing and turning and twisting in spates of violent fits. His body was, for the most part, on the ground, with his head ever-so-gently cradled by the kink of a tree’s root. There he lay, as deep red streaks of blood traced their way along the contours of his face — out of his eyes, up and along his flushed cheeks, dribbling past his lips and his chin, and onto the front of his crisp white shirt. Rivulets of blood traced their way along the buttons of his shirt. Lara noticed a dishevelled green blazer dumped unceremoniously atop a pile of golden leaves, perhaps as a last-ditch attempt to preserve the article of clothing.

“Help! Please!”

Lara, fixated on the scene in the distance, failed to notice that she had just bumped into a young girl — one that reminded Lara of herself not too many years ago — immediately in front of her.

“Help! My father! Please, medic! Can you do something!?” screeched the little girl, in despair.

Medic?

Lara surveyed the scene, confusedly. She saw no indication of this ‘medic’ that the little girl referred to. Her cursory scan of the surroundings complete, she looked at herself.

And there it was.

The word “MEDIC”, in bold and capitalised font, practically shouted its way off of her garments.



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Drats, she thought.



No. 102

E	N	A	D	H	O	B	E	T	E	W	C
N	O	S	R	A	E	R	R	D	E	O	A
R	P	R	O	N	C	A	M	B	E	L	L
I	W	Z	F	G	L	D	I	N	G	L	I
E	A	P	R	E	O	T	T	S	N	O	N
O	S	E	T	Z	K	Y	S	T	P	L	A
R	M	T	U	R	I	E	S	A	I	O	N
T	A	G	R	E	H	T	R	E	K	W	G
S	N	G	L	T	N	E	I	H	A	R	T
R	T	A	E	R	G	R	C	R	R	E	L
E	P	R	O	W	E	B	K	Y	Y	N	E
N	I	H	S	A	R	A	C	A	S	N	R



The Hour List

For their statement on a popular signage symbol (3)
For their invention of a fine powder for the family (3-2)
For their capture of the Spanish with a blow (4)
For their invention of an infinitive and a definite article (3-1)
For their speech on being boastful (4)
For their invention of a company model (3-2)
For their invention of some scalding French wine (3-2)
For their invention of a retreat signal (3-4)
For their speech about a festive Christmas song (4)
For their statement on being a trolley driver (4)
For their invention of a Computer Algebra System with error (3-1)
For their statement on being a pain in the neck (4)
For their manipulation of Ikeas (3-1)
For their manipulation of lodging (1-5)
For their manipulation of rehab (2-1)
For their invention of a sentient computer with a Scandinavian (1-4)
For their manipulation of a pig kiln (3-2)
For their manipulation of a Chinese mountain (2-1)
For their capture of registered nurses with a net (3-2)
For their manipulations to sky size (2-5)
For their invention of a fruit child (6)
For their invention presented before an Antarctic explorer (3-3)
For their invention of a dull habit that makes a woman cross (3-5)
For their statement on a vocal performer (4)
For their invention of something really down-to-earth (4)
For their invention of a label on a mined rock (3-2)
For their manipulation of lather (2-2)
For their speech on the increasing size of the moon person (2-4)
For their statement on a rover (1-3)
For their statement on a rabbit hole (1-3)