

NEGATIVE OFFSET  
or  
THE MISFORTUNES OF ARTHUR REVISITED  
a Grand Guignol Gala of the Grotesque  
in Five Acts  
(with Sausages and Crocodiles)

an Open Sauce Pantomime  
by Barnabas Netherwood

Version 25.12

<https://github.com/ArtfulHeffalump/Negative-Offset/releases/>

CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
ARTHUR	Mild mannered salaryman	20-50	Male
AMY	Arthur's long suffering OH, also	20-50	Female
GHOST OF AMY	"	"	"
GEORGE	Chip shop owner & Jack-of-all-Trades	50-60	Male
BRENDA	The power behind George's throne	50-60	Female
AUTHORITY FIGURE	Multiple roles	20-60	Male
TRICKSTER	Multiple roles	20-60	Male
MINIONS 1-25	Co-workers, staff, refugees etc.	20-100	M/F
VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)	Arthur's (n)ever helpful digital assistant	--	Male
<b><u>TRICKSTER ROLES</u></b>	<b><u>AUTHORITY FIGURES</u></b>		
HOUSE USHER	MURGATROYD (V.T.)		
WINTERBOTTOM (V.T.)	HANS SCHLIMM WURST (V.T.)		
DOCTOR FAUSTI	PROFESSOR FUMBLETHUMB		
STREET HAWKER	LINE MANAGER		
STATION CLEANER	STATION ANNOUNCER		
LANDLORD	SECURITY GUARD		
CARETAKER	POLICEMAN		
BAILIFF	MAGISTRATE		

## **ACT I - ARS VIVENDI**

*There should be some kind of screen between the audience and the performers. Information will be displayed on this screen and occasionally projected onto the set. This should by design be overwhelming and distracting.*

*TRICKSTER enters dressed as HOUSE USHER.*

### **HOUSE USHER**

Ladies and gentlepersons, the spectacle that you are about to witness is real. Everything that you will see on this stage is real. If you are easily offended, please leave the theatre now. If you dislike the implication of any kind of violence, please leave the theatre now. If the sight of blood alarms you, never mind copious buckets of gratuitous gore and scenes of graphic dismemberment, please leave the theatre now. For those of you that choose to stay, you have been warned. We have a team of highly qualified medical staff on hand to take care of you.

*GEORGE and BRENDA enter wearing hospital scrubs.  
They wave.*

### **HOUSE USHER**

Should you feel unwell at any point during the performance please raise your hand and an usher will be with you presently to lead you to safety. Our story begins in a communal space on the tenth floor of the Murgatroyd and Winterbottom office building, a desirable downtown location in the fifteen minute fiefdom of East Finchley, as the cohorts congregate around the sacred fount of essence.

*All exit.*

**LIGHTS UP ON:**

### **SCENE ONE.**

*A generic office space centred around a water cooler.  
MINIONS 1-4 are present, in office attire.*

### **MINION 1**

Ladies and gentlepersons, for your delectation I present -- this month's Gonads on Glass winner.

*MINION 1 produces a card with a QR code. Screen shows an image of someone's hairy balls and arse crack pressed against the glass of a photocopier.*

MINION 2

It is good, but is it good enough to beat -- Still Life with Plums!

*MINION 2 produces a card with a QR code. Screen shows a similar arrangement of hairy balls and arse crack pressed against the glass screen of a photocopier.*

MINION 3

They are both good, but maybe not quite good enough.

MINION 4

Hold on, you don't have any gonads. At least you didn't the last time I looked.

MINION 3

Check the rules. Pretty sure you'll find that any body part normally covered up by clothing is fair game.

*MINION 4 taps the top of his head. A large body of projected text flies up the screen and is gone.*

MINION 4

She is quite correct. There is nothing in the rules to say that she cannot participate.

MINION 1

Come on then, let's see it.

MINION 3

Ladies and gentlepersons, for your delectation and delight, I present --

*MINION 3 reveals a card showing a QR code. Screen shows a pair of breasts pressed against the glass screen of a photocopier.*

MINION 2

Oh, bravo.

## MINION 4

Ladies and gentlepersons, by unanimous decision we have a winner! The victor of this month's Gonads on Glass competition is -- Kirsty from Accounting!

## MINION 1

Shouldn't be allowed. I spend weeks planning the ultimate arrangement of balls and arse crack and she just waltzes in with her admittedly fine pair and takes it all.

## MINION 2

Yes. Sometimes I think inclusionism has gone too far.

*ARTHUR enters.*

## ARTHUR

Hello, everyone. You wouldn't believe the trials I had getting in this morning. All the trains were stopped due to a beached whale blocking the high street, can you believe it? A beached whale blocking the high street! I guess it must have fallen from a passing blimp. I couldn't catch a tuk-tuk for the life of me so I had to walk the whole way here, rubbing shoulders with the poor and unshaven all the way to the front door. Some of them stared quite aggressively. They seemed quite angry and upset but I can't think why. Then I couldn't find my charm of entry, and oh, the smell! It was beyond horrible.

## MINION 1

I thought we weren't supposed to take tuk-tuks on safety grounds. Don't they keep bursting into flames or something?

## ARTHUR

Oh, I know, but I get a real sense of comfort and security from travelling in a sealed metal container with no door handles hurtling along propelled by external forces over which I have little to no control. What did I miss?

## MINION 1

Oh, nothing much. Just another crushing defeat in the ongoing subjugation of our fine male species.

## ARTHUR

So just a regular day at the office then.

*MINION 2 shows him his card with QR code.*

ARTHUR

Very nice. Is that a tattoo?

MINION 2

No, just shadow.

ARTHUR

Looks good. You should do well in this month's Gonads on Glass competition.

MINION 1

You know, after this latest setback I might as well just jack it in and go and join the Ghost Legion. I hear that they are enlisting again.

MINION 2

I wouldn't be so hasty. It isn't so bad here. Why on earth would you want to leave and go and fight in someone else's war?

MINION 1

Oh, I don't know. Seems like the right thing to do somehow. My cousin signed up the other week and he must be loving it as he hasn't messaged once since joining.

MINION 3

He's probably lying on a beach somewhere getting his jammy seen to by one of those lovely Norgish birds.

MINION 1

Lucky beggar. Wish I was lying on a beach somewhere. I'd just lie there with my toes outstretched and wait for the waves to cover me up with sand.

MINION 2

It's not true, you know. Norgish birds aren't a patch on our homegrown variety.

MINION 3

You guys. You'll make me blush.

*She taps the top of her head.*

*MUSIC CUE: UPBEAT DANCE MUSIC.*

MINION 3

Come on Arthur, dance with me.

## ARTHUR

Do I have to?

*She grabs him. They dance.*

*The other MINIONS make viewfinders with their fingers and point them at the dancing couple.*

*VT: Competing views of the dancing couple jostle for attention on the screen.*

*FX: ALARM SOUNDS (Klaxon or similar)*

## MINION 1

That'll be our cue for the quarterly general report.

## MINION 2

Oh boy. I hope we all get bonuses.

## MINION 3

I might have a little bonus for you later if you get lucky.

*MINION 5 enters.*

## MINION 5

Okay, everybody! I need you all to stop what you are doing right away and join me in the main boardroom.

*FX: FANFARE*

## MINION 5

Ladies and gentlepersons, please rise and be upstanding for our C.E.O., the great and venerable Right Honourable Lord Sir Harry Murgatroyd, who has taken valuable time out from his diplomatic mission to the Bahamas to speak to us all.

*VT: A yacht at sea. MURGATROYD reclines in a deck chair in the sun.*

## MURGATROYD (V.T.)

Hello everybody. I just want to thank you all for all your hard work this quarter. The investors are very happy and the Global Chamber of Commerce has seen fit to extend our contract so we will all be in office a while longer, but the battle is far from won. Please keep up all your efforts, and rewards will trickle down to you soon enough. Together we will make East Finchley great again! Now, if you will excuse me I have to take an urgent call from the Mayor of Monte Carlo.

*VT: camera is pointed elsewhere.*

## MURGATROYD (V.T.)

Was that good enough? Do you think those silly plebs will buy it?

*FX: FANFARE*

## MINION 5

And now, please continue to stand for an address from our Vice President, the great and glorious Mister Archibald Winterbottom!

*VT: A dingy basement. WINTERBOTTOM enters shot. He wears a bandana and appears sweaty and highly agitated.*

## WINTERBOTTOM (V.T.)

They are coming, do you hear me? The vipers are coming! They have already overwhelmed Porthcawl and are now advancing on Pontypridd! As a precaution I have sent each of you a care package to help you deal with the situation. Please read the instructions carefully. This will tell you what to do. The care package will only activate in the presence of a viper so is perfectly safe to be handled by women, children and pets and, dare I say it, even foreigners or the dreaded Norg. You all need to be vigilant. Some of these vipers are so tiny they might as well be invisible! I can already feel them crawling on my skin. Destroy them before they destroy you! Terminate them! Terminate them all! Terminate them until it hurts!

## MINION 5

Please remain standing for the final address and show your appreciation for the head of the Global Chamber of Commerce himself, Hans Schlimmwurst.

*VT: HANS SCHLIMMWURST looks down on us. He wears dark ceremonial robes and an amulet on a chain.*

### HANS SCHLIMM WURST (V.T.)

My friends, my friends, so lovely to see you all, and so many of you there are. So, so many. I am delighted to announce that the esteemed firm of Murgatroyd and Winterbottom have been named sole provider of government services to the Fifteen Minute Fiefdom of East Finchley for the thirteenth year in succession. Many congratulations and keep up the good work!

### MINION 5

And now, if I could turn your attention to the information packs in front of you.

*Everyone produces a card with a QR code.*

### MINION 5

As you can see our figures, while still pleasing in some departments, have fallen short of the exacting standards expected of us. Here is Professor Fumblethumb, Master of Vital Statistics at Empirical College for Academic and Business Excellence, to explain more.

*PROFESSOR FUMBLETHUMB enters. He wears thick glasses and peers around like a mole.*

### PROFESSOR FUMBLETHUMB

If I could turn your attention to the diagram at the bottom of page one hundred and eighty seven of the supplemental notes to volume four, you will note that the curve is kind of wonky. This simply will not do. Everyone knows that curves should be nice and curvy or they cease to be proper curves.

*He indicates an hourglass shape with his hands.*

### PROFESSOR FUMBLETHUMB

This is a proper curve. Anything else is inferior. I predict that if nothing is done within two weeks righteous hellfire will rain down upon us. And the vipers are coming. Oh, and thanks for all the funding, by the way. Very much appreciated.

### MINION 5

There you have it, folks. We have two weeks to fatten our curves, otherwise no bonuses for any one. Now, please welcome Doctor Fausti from the Institute of Surgical Research to explain his latest initiative.

*DOCTOR FAUSTI enters, all weasely and furtive. He wears a t-shirt emblazoned with:*

*I {heart symbol} BYPASS*

DOCTOR FAUSTI

Ladies and gentlepersons, we are standing on the cusp of the single greatest medical advancement of all time, and you, the good people of Murgatroyd and Winterbottom are privileged to bear witness to the genius and innovation of modern scientific expertise and wisdom.

*He waggles his fingers.*

*A rotating wireframe image of a machine appears on the screens. It comprises a reclining bucket seat and a sloping panel containing a single round button. Two large stepped cones are mounted on either side pointing down towards the seat. At the base between the seat and the panel unit is a oversized drain plug hole.*

DOCTOR FAUSTI

No longer will the elderly and vulnerable have to suffer the indignity of waiting for a tuk-tuk or an ambulance. With this device we can teleport them directly to the municipal infirmary so that they can get the help and medical assistance that they so desperately need. It operates on Ionic Transmographoric energy, is entirely self-contained and self-sufficient and the by-products are useful. Very, very useful indeed. Hence the drain, which should be connected to some kind of collection and filtration unit prior to further refinement. This marvellous device, which has been brought about at speed due to the imminent threat from vipers, is already in production and the first few units have already been installed at test locations throughout East Finchley. Early trials are more than encouraging and we all shall share the glory in the weeks and months ahead. Through the combined miracle of human ingenuity and accelerated scientific method we shall make East Finchley great again!

MINION 5

We thank you, Doctor Fausti, for bringing us hope in these dark times. And now for the most important item on the agenda. The annual quarterly monthly blow out! Let's get this party started! Dig in, everybody, let's fatten those curves! And let's have some music!

*Trolleys loaded with food and drink are wheeled in. All present put on party hats and descend on the trolleys en masse, dancing.*

*FLASHING CAPTION: WORK MEETING*

*MUSIC CUE: UPBEAT PARTY MUSIC*

*Disco lights appear and a glitterball descends. DOCTOR FAUSTI, now wearing a plague doctor mask, and PROFESSOR FUMBLETHUMB, now wearing a clown wig, lead everyone in a conga line.*

*FLASHING CAPTION: DISCO INTERLEWD*

DOCTOR FAUSTI

First we take the antidote,  
And then we take the poison.  
It tingles in the most delightful way.

CONGA CHORUS

FIRST WE TAKE THE ANTIDOTE  
AND THEN WE TAKE THE POISON  
IT TINGLES! IT TINGLES! OOH! OOH! OH!

*ARTHUR sits down to one side.*

MINION 3

Come back and join the party, you silly person!

ARTHUR

I'm perfectly happy here, just enjoying the view.

MINION 3

Okay. Suit yourself. But you don't know what you're missing.

ARTHUR

So what's with all this fuss about vipers all of a sudden? I thought it was clandestine molluscs that we were supposed to be getting all frothed up about.

MINION 3

Clandestine molluscs? That's so last week. Don't you look at your news feed?

ARTHUR

All those unrelenting tales of doom and misery interspersed with people shouting about things that don't matter? I'd rather not live in the world the news feeds make.

MINION 3

I don't know much about it but I do know that the vipers are coming and that they are very, very dangerous. They like to wait for you in dark corners and then jump out and try to bite you. That's what I've heard, anyway.

ARTHUR

A bit like the Norg, then. Vague and shadowy and filled with menace.

MINION 3

Yes! Exactly like the Norg only vipers and not Norg.

ARTHUR

Does anyone actually know what a viper looks like? How would we know them from any specifically non-viperous thing?

MINION 3

Well, I think you're supposed to get a little tingle on the back of your neck when one is near.

ARTHUR

That's funny. I seem to be getting a little tingle on my neck right now.

MINION 3

The vipers must be near! You must save me from them!

ARTHUR

Okay, that's just silly. We shouldn't be afraid of things that we know absolutely nothing about.

MINION 3

You brute! I just bet you'd like to see vipers crawling all over me, with their warm hands and bow ties and shiny, shiny shoes, always on the red carpet and never having to queue.

ARTHUR

I think that's V-I-P-ers but sure. Same principle applies. We shouldn't let blind, irrational fear prevent us from exploring and trying out new things we haven't tried before.

MINION 3

I'm all for exploring and trying out new things.

ARTHUR

I would love to see what life is like outside these parish boundaries. I understand the grass is quite a bit greener over there.

MINION 3

Oh, it is. Very, very green.

ARTHUR

It must be a very pleasant land.

MINION 3

Oh, indeed it is. Very pleasant and quite cosy. You are always welcome to visit.

ARTHUR

That is very kind of you, thank you. Two thumbs up to that!

MINION 3

Not here. People might see. I'll pick a meeting room and Slap the details across. You are logged into Slap, right?

ARTHUR

I guess so, I'm not sure. (*hits top of head*) Boris?

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Hi there. How can I help?

ARTHUR

Is Slap installed and active?

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Slap service is installed but has not yet been activated.

ARTHUR

Boris, please activate Slap service.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Okay. We'll need to do some calibration first. Please raise your right hand, palm facing towards you, fingers outstretched.

Now raise the left palm towards you, palm facing towards you, fingers outstretched. Now give both hands in turn a good swing, aiming to land each palm on the corresponding cheek perpendicular to the cheekbone. And please repeat for verification. Making sure it is you. Please repeat for additional verification. Okay, calibration complete. Left slap for menu bar, right slap is context sensitive. Would you like to take a tour of the new features in version seven point nine?

ARTHUR

No thank you, Boris. Let's get right to it.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

To continue please log in.

ARTHUR

Really? Do I have to?

*ARTHUR continues to slap himself repeatedly.*

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

To continue please log in.

ARTHUR

What is wrong with you? I just entered the correct passcode!

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

You have entered an incorrect passcode too many times. Please wait for a few minutes then try again.

ARTHUR

I don't get it. What kind of a service is this?

MINION 3

I think you have to slap yourself a bit harder.

ARTHUR

That's enough for now. I'll continue setting it up later on.

MINION 3

Last of the great romantics. What is so funny?

ARTHUR

I was just thinking, wouldn't it be hilarious if the people of East Finchley found out just how little we actually did for them?

MINION 3

Arthur, please don't take this the wrong way, but please don't talk like that. If the Great Online Digital Sentience that rules us all should hear you --

*MUSIC & PARTY NOISE STOPS ABRUPTLY.*

ARTHUR

But it is true! We are supposed to be providing essential services but all we do is sit around playing skittles and mini golf and deck quoits and have parties like these, and outside people seem quite hungry and some of them look downright miserable. Quite a few of them don't look at all well.

MINION 3

Arthur, please think very carefully about the next thing you say.

ARTHUR

It was almost as if they didn't believe in us. And that got me thinking, if the people out there don't believe in us, what would happen if we, the employees, also stopped believing in Murgatroyd and Winterbottom? Would it suddenly just wink out of existence or would it fade away gradually over time?

MINION 3

What the fuck, Arthur? Are you trying to get us all fired?

MINION 1

Oh, well. I feel another purge coming on.

MINION 2

Arthur, it's been nice knowing you.

MINION 4

You have called down righteous hellfire upon us. Pray to all the Merchant Bankers in the Cloud above that it was worth it.

*They leave.*

ARTHUR

Guys? Is it something that I said?

LINE MANAGER (OFF)

Arthur Dingleberry, please make your way to meeting room 73B immediately.

*ARTHUR taps himself on the top of his head.*

ARTHUR

Boris, please plot a route to meeting room 73B.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

I don't understand. Are you looking for a number 73 bus?

ARTHUR

For heaven's sake, no. Meeting room 73B in this building.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

You sound agitated. Here is a short clip of puppies frolicking to calm you down.

*A very short repeating video loop showing several puppies playing appears on the screen.*

ARTHUR

Boris, please stop and just do what I ask.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Not until you calm down. It's for your own good.

*A door opens to one side.*

LINE MANAGER

When you have quite finished interfacing, in here please. Now.

*A small meeting room. ARTHUR enters.*

LINE MANAGER

Take a seat. Are you happy here at Murgatroyd and Winterbottom?

ARTHUR

Yes sir. Of course, sir.

**LINE MANAGER**

Good, good. What would you say was your greatest strength?

**ARTHUR**

Well, I'm really quite good at dunking three quarters of a biscuit into a hot cup of tea so that those three quarters disintegrate on your tongue leaving the other quarter still crispy.

**LINE MANAGER**

Tongue still crispy. Got it. Okay, next question. How do you come to be here? In short succinct sentences please tell me all about your journey to this point.

**ARTHUR**

Well sir, I was originally in Planning and Project Management, and jolly good I was at it too, until one day I happened to pass a memo suggesting that we may be build fewer tall buildings and plant more trees and within the blink of an eye I'm whisked away to Mergers and Acquisitions. Only problem is Murgatroyd and Winterbottom own absolutely everything in the fiefdom already so there is really not an awful lot left to merge with or acquire. So we play a lot of mini golf.

**LINE MANAGER**

Jolly good, like the sound of that. Okay, last question. Just what do you expect of us, your employers, Arthur?

**ARTHUR**

Well, I'm really very grateful for the subsidised apartment and amenities and all but Amy, my long suffering other half, would very much like something just a little bit larger, maybe something with a window, even if it doesn't actually look out onto anything, so I'm under strict instructions to ask for a move to management at my monthly appraisal tomorrow.

**LINE MANAGER**

You have a monthly appraisal tomorrow? I think we can speed things up and consider this your monthly appraisal, don't you worry.

**ARTHUR**

I think I'd be quite a good manager. Your job, for example. I could do that. Sitting around, drinking cups of tea, bossing people around. I'd tell people off good, I just know I would.

**LINE MANAGER**

Okay, I think we can cut this short. We here at Murgatroyd and Winterbottom would like to offer you a new position.

You will be a brand ambassador for our new carbon footprint reduction initiative. Don't bother to come in to work tomorrow, go straight to this address instead.

*He hands ARTHUR a card with QR code printed on it.*

ARTHUR

Is this a promotion?

LINE MANAGER

If you like, yes.

ARTHUR

Oh, thank you. Amy will be most pleased.

LINE MANAGER

And just because we are all in such a good mood today, why don't you take the rest of the day off?

ARTHUR

Thank you very much, sir. That is jolly decent of you. And thank you once again. I won't let you down.

SCENE TWO.

*The back streets of North East Finchley. The walls are marked with bullet holes and shell impact craters.*

*ARTHUR enters*

ARTHUR

Wow, it feels like I have been walking for miles and miles. I'm not even sure we're still in East Finchley any more. (*taps the top of his head.*) Hey, Boris.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Hi there. How can I help?

ARTHUR

Is this still East Finchley? We are not allowed out past the municipal boundaries, you know.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

We are still in East Finchley. This area was annexed from the Bailiwick of Enfield Town four months ago.

ARTHUR

It looks kinda grotty and run down. No wonder they didn't want to keep hold of it.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Would you like me to plot an alternative route to chip shop?

ARTHUR

No, we've been at this long enough. (*hits himself on head.*) Boris, please resume course to chip shop and play something relaxing.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Certainly. Resuming course to chip shop. Here is Going Commando by Lenny Spumante and his Bugle Blitz Brass.

*MUSIC CUE: SOMETHING FAST AND FRENETIC.*

*PROJECTION: A convoluted path is laid out in front of ARTHUR. It twists and turns and occasionally veers up walls. Glowing shapes (circles, squares, triangles etc.) appear along the path. When his feet (or fists) hit these points we see large messages spring up on the screen:*

*DOPAMINE HIT!*

*COMBO MOVE!*

*TWELVE POINT STREAK!*

*PERSONAL HIGH SCORE!*

*and*

*KEEP GOING - YOU ARE DOING GREAT!*

*and a few more DOPAMINE HITS for good measure.*

*Eventually the trail peters out.*

*SIGNAL STRENGTH LOW*

*NO DATA CONNECTION*

*BORIS FUNCTION OFFLINE*

*and finally:*

*SERVICE UNAVAILABLE*

*STREET HAWKER enters. He lingers in the shadows.*

STREET HAWKER

Psst. Hey! Psst! Yeah, mate, over here.

ARTHUR

You look like a disreputable fellow. I'm not talking to you.

STREET HAWKER

And miss all my exciting wares? Come, see! I have all kinds.

*STREET HAWKER opens his coat to reveal a startling variety of merchandise.*

STREET HAWKER

We have things to please the lady folk, things to please the men folk and things to please those in between. Things to enliven the lives of men about town, bring glory and enhance their reputations. We have things for the home, exotic things that speak of far off climes like Rotherham or Hull, things to ward off vipers --

ARTHUR

Hold on, did you just say things to ward off vipers?

STREET HAWKER

Oh yes indeed, kind sir. What we have here is no less than a veritable cornucopia of viper related solutions for the house, home and persona, everything what one might need to ward against the impending viper menace. We have talismans, we have charms, we have elements from the periodic table scientifically selected for their viper repellent properties. This, for example, is in high demand right now, a hot ticket item, a real hot potato.

*He produces a tiny plastic sombrero on an elastic band.*

## STREET HAWKER

Wear this and no viper will come near you.

## ARTHUR

I don't get it. How can wearing a tiny plastic sombrero ward off an attack by vipers?

## STREET HAWKER

Your logical misalignment seems apparent to me so please allow me to correct such understandable misapprehension. One does not display it upon one's head but rather on an elbow, thusly.

*He puts his arm through the elastic and moves the sombrero to his elbow.*

## STREET HAWKER

Vipers and rattlesnakes are mortal enemies, you see, and will do anything to avoid coming into contact with their avowed antagonists. But vipers also have very poor eyesight. So if they detect a tiny plastic sombrero worn just so they will assume that this particular piece of human prey has been claimed already by the nation of the rattlesnakes and just leave you be. It may seem unlikely but it is proven scientific fact, as the Great Online Digital Strangeness in the Cloud above is my witness, and very cheap too, at only thirty two thousand of your antique English pounds.

## ARTHUR

Well, now I know that you are talking nonsense. The English pound hasn't been legal tender in East Finchley for a decade or more. We all went contactless a long time ago.

## STREET HAWKER

No matter, we also accept the Bermondsey Florin or the Salford Ducket, and of course any currency in gold such as Doubloons from the Realm of Anglesey.

## ARTHUR

I have none of those, only Murgatroyd and Winterbottom approved social credits, but those are immutable so safer than gold.

## STREET HAWKER

Aha, a company man I see. In which case you must want for nothing and nothing further shall I ask of you. I bid you farewell, kind sir!

*STREET HAWKER exits.*

*Arthur hits himself on the head several times.*

ARTHUR

Boris?

*Messages appear on the screen reading*

**DATA CONNECTION RESTORED**

*and*

**SYSTEM BACK ONLINE**

*and*

**BORIS SERVICE RESUMING**

**VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)**

Please wait. Initialising recursive discourse algorithm.

ARTHUR

Boris! Where are we?

**VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)**

You have reached your destination.

*A greasy, grimy shop front with opaque windows.*

*A sign swings into view. It reads:*

**GEORGE & BRENDA'S AUTHENTIC NORGISH  
CHIPPY**

ARTHUR

Hold on, this can't be the right place. I wanted a chip shop, not a chippy.

**VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)**

Chippy is chip shop in the Norgish dialect of distant Tyne and Wear.

ARTHUR

Oh well, in for a social credit, in for rather more of them than one person could reasonably expect to spend in a lifetime I guess.

SCENE THREE.

*A grim and greasy chip shop. Stacks of battered unmentionables lean against the smeared and murky glass of the hot counter. On top somewhere sits a large glass jar of pickled eggs.*

ARTHUR

Hello! Any one at home?

*GEORGE enters.*

GEORGE

Hey Brenda, looks like all those Search Engine Optimisation fees are finally paying off at long last. Good day to you, kind sir. We haven't had too many customers these past few weeks. What can I do you for?

ARTHUR

I would like two portions of chips please.

GEORGE

Would you like that in two separate portions or just lumped into one big one? It is the same price but the second is more environmentally friendly. We have to make the newspapers we have left last a bit longer, is all. The price will be the same.

ARTHUR

Can I have it in two portions but make one portion slightly bigger than the other and mark it discretely so that only I can see it?

GEORGE

Sure, no problem. It'll be the one with the greasy thumbprint. I've just refilled the generators, you see.

BRENDA (OFF)

What's he on about, separate portions? Give it to him in one big portion and have him sort it out himself. We don't have the newspaper to spare.

GEORGE

You heard the lady. One big portion it is. Tell you what though, I'll throw in a couple of our speciality battered sausages. They are a bit gristly so they haven't been selling so well but if you chew them long enough I think you'll find that they are really quite tasty. That'll be forty eight social credits please.

*ARTHUR slaps his forehead then headbutts the counter.*

GEORGE

Awfully sorry but I'm afraid that didn't go through. Could you try that again?

*ARTHUR slaps his forehead and headbutts the counter again.*

GEORGE

Ah, there we go. Second time is the charm. That's all done for you. Your new balance is six hundred and seventy three million, four hundred and twenty two thousand, five hundred and eighty-one. Don't spend it all at once!

ARTHUR

I won't, and thank you. Out of curiosity, how does this area come to be part of East Finchley?

GEORGE

I'm not sure I follow.

ARTHUR

It's just that no matter what direction I go in, every time I look around East Finchley seems to be much larger than it was before.

GEORGE

Take my advice, kind sir, and put such thoughts elsewhere. It isn't healthy to be dwelling on the past. What's done is done and here we are. We should all just forget about it and move on.

ARTHUR

One plus is it means I can go on longer walks of a lunchtime, I suppose. East Finchley always used to feel a little cramped before.

GEORGE

Just know that Brenda and I are fully committed to the cause. We will not let the good folks at Murgatroyd and Winterbottom down.

ARTHUR

Well, I'm jolly glad to hear you say that, I must say. Keep up the good work!

GEORGE

Oh, we will. I'll be honest, we have more contracts than we can handle right now. One of them is for interactive entertainments for children's parties and the like. So we have invented a handshake simulator with real hands. Brenda is working on that one as we speak.

ARTHUR

Sounds innovative.

GEORGE

Oh, it is. Brenda is quite the genius when it comes to things like this. So good with her hands, and other people's too. And here is the lovely lady in person!

*BRENDA enters carrying a large glass jar filled with pickled onions which she places next to the pickled eggs.*

BRENDA

Don't be expecting no cordon blur from us, pal. Strictly Norgish fare is what we do, like it or lump it.

ARTHUR

Well I'm sure it's all delightful, whatever it may be.

GEORGE

Here are your chips, larger portion on the bottom, and two battered sausages, one wrapped up for the missus, the other ready for you to nibble on en route, right at the top just there. You have a wonderful day now, okay?

ARTHUR

Well, it all smells highly intriguing, I must say. Thank you, and may the remainder of your day be filled exclusively with pleasantries.

GEORGE

Thank you sir, that is very kind, and the same to you.

## BRENDA

Don't let the door hit you on the way out.

*ARTHUR exits the chip shop. A tiny plastic sombrero sits on the stage. He picks up the sombrero, puts his arm through the rubber band and positions it on his elbow.*

## SCENE FOUR.

*Arthur and Amy's apartment. AMY reclines on a sofa and toys with a shiny silver revolver. ARTHUR enters. She points it at him.*

## AMY

Hold it! Angry pouty face. Don't mess.

*She pulls the trigger. It clicks.*

## ARTHUR

What have you got to be angry about? I'm going to be a Brand Ambassador at some kind of high flying carbon reduction initiative seminar thing tomorrow. Look, I have brought us chips from the furthest reaches of the fiefdom to celebrate. There's a battered sausage in there somewhere for you too. I didn't like mine much. It had some kind of a metal bolt through it. I threw it away.

## AMY

Care to explain this?

*VT: Various clips of ARTHUR and MINION 3 dancing shot from multiple angles.*

## ARTHUR

Ah, yes. That. Dancing with a colleague at a work do. Nothing wrong with that, it's all perfectly innocent and completely above board.

## AMY

Still angry pouty face.

## ARTHUR

Oh, come on. It was just one of those regular flirty fount of essence moments. What was I supposed to do? Not dance with a colleague who asks nicely?

AMY

Hmm. Not convinced.

ARTHUR

If it makes you feel better she danced with absolutely everybody else too.

AMY

Well, I might be persuaded to forgive you. For a price.

ARTHUR

Oh, please, Amy, my joy, my everything, please just name it and remove this aching torment from my poor, ignoble heart.

AMY

Still considering. You may kiss.

*ARTHUR kisses her cheek.*

AMY

Okay, consideration check complete. Forgiveness sequence initiated.

ARTHUR

What is that thing?

AMY

This? It came for you today. Had some paperwork with it. Something to do with vipers. Not sure what.

ARTHUR

Yes, apparently we are due an influx of them at some point. How does it work?

AMY

Not entirely sure. Didn't look too closely. Did say something about only activating in the presence of a viper, otherwise remains safe and effective. Which is good as I don't want to have to be picking them out of the carpet every time you traipse in from outdoors. Of course, knowing you you'll probably find the instructions immediately, won't you mister clever clogs?

*She hands him a piece of paper with a QR code on it.*

ARTHUR

It says here -- this is a Destroyer of Vipers Device (Approved) or D.V.D.A. for short. It has been approved for purposes of annulling the impending viper menace only and has no other use or purpose whatsoever. It has been certified as safe and effective by the Global Chamber of Commerce and will activate only in the presence of a viper -- followed by what looks like a string of fairly lengthy liability disclaimers.

AMY

Well, that's reassuring. Good to know that someone is looking out for us.

ARTHUR

Good heavens. There really is an awful lot of pointless wittering going on here, with sub notes and all kinds. Even the sub notes have sub notes.

AMY

It is quite decorative, isn't it? Perhaps we should hang it on the wall?

ARTHUR

It must have an actual purpose or they wouldn't have sent it to us.

AMY

Well, I think it is quite pretty. It could be used to display a single red rose, if any one ever bothered to buy flowers around here.

ARTHUR

Flowers are expensive and private gardens are illegal, you know.

AMY

I know, I know. It is nice to imagine though. (*Examines battered sausage.*) This looks too nice to eat right now. I think I'll save it and have a nibble on it later.

ARTHUR

This Destroyer of Vipers Device (Approved,) or D.V.D.A. for short, is provided for internal home use only. Any use or misuse outside these terms and conditions is a violation of the rule of law and punishable by-- yada yada yada. Hold on, there's some small print buried here. Let's just see what it says.

*VT: CRASH ZOOM IN on multiple reams of sub notes.*

AMY

Found anything of interest yet?

ARTHUR

I thought I had but it turned out to be a completely redacted risk assessment statement. Twenty eight pages of thick black bars arranged against a mostly red background. Really? What is the point in that? Why leave it in if you are going to do that?

AMY

So nothing on how to use it then?

ARTHUR

Still looking.

AMY

Well, I'm off to take a nice warm bath. I'll see you in a bit.

*AMY exits taking the battered sausage with her.*

*FX: DOOR BELL*

*LANDLORD enters carrying two large yellow directional arrows.*

LANDLORD

Only me. Just coming to ensure that the apartment is compliant to the vipers.

ARTHUR

Okay. How do you ensure that the apartment is compliant to the vipers?

LANDLORD

Well, first we need to place some arrows clearly indicating the direction of traffic to and from your front door.

ARTHUR

We all know where the front door is. We don't need arrows to show us the way.

LANDLORD

You wish to be non viper compliant? If I should be fined for non-compliance it will just be adding to your rents and service charge, you know?

ARTHUR

Okay, okay, place your arrows where you must.

## LANDLORD

You will be wanting to be safe, no? Also you will be needing them if you are to be taking on any refugee families from Carlisle.

*LANDLORD places the signs haphazardly on either side of the door.*

## ARTHUR

We will not be taking on any refugee families from anywhere, let alone Carlisle.

## LANDLORD

But it is a civic duty. Plus there are financial benefits.

## ARTHUR

Money isn't everything, you know. That was what Great Aunt Hattie used to say. She died penniless and destitute, of course, but the way she looked after those closest to her was legendary.

## LANDLORD

Yes, I have heard of this Great Aunt Hattie and her big girl blouse. It would seem to me that money constitutes ninety nine and point nine nine percent of most everything, if by my calculations I am to be correct.

## ARTHUR

I'm still not doing it. They could be the filthy and despicable Norg, and knowing my luck I'd be bought up on charges of harbouring the enemy!

## LANDLORD

How could they? And the vetting process is undertaken by your company, Murgatroyd and Winterbottom, so of course you are in the safest hands in that regard.

## ARTHUR

I just don't trust those Norgish types. They will thieve everything that they lay their beady little eyes on, and some of the things that I have heard that they have done would make your eyes water and your hair stand on end!

## LANDLORD

Be that as it may, the people of Carlisle are good guys. They are on our side in the struggle against the fiendish Norg and have suffered valiantly on our behalf.

ARTHUR

The Norg are devious, you know. They could be fifth columnists seeking to disguise themselves as sheep in wolf's clothing or something. Either way I don't like it.

LANDLORD

But who are we to judge? Such things are endemic to society, it would seem. It is for the greater good that we all must bear the burden of not knowing.

ARTHUR

Be that as it may this apartment will not be taking any refugees of any kind and that is my final word upon the matter. Finito, finale, finallo.

LANDLORD

As you wish. But a time is coming when you will have much less to say in the matter. Good day to you, kind sir.

ARTHUR

Good day.

*LANDLORD exits.*

ARTHUR

What a pointless bore that man is. And foreign too. Really shouldn't be allowed. (*taps his head.*) Boris! Turn the heating up and play me something funky.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Certainly. Here is The Wreck of the Medusa as performed by Calvin Qadar.

*MUSIC CUE: SLOW MOURNFUL DIRGE*

*ARTHUR eats chips then clears up afterwards.*

*A bedroom. ARTHUR prepares for bed. AMY lies in bed asleep and happy. She turns away as ARTHUR climbs in.*

FADE TO BLACK

**END OF ACT I**

**ACT II - AMOR FATI**

## SCENE ONE

*A railway station platform. A sign reads HIGHGATE. ARTHUR sits on a bench. He wears a tiny plastic sombrero on his elbow and carries a small lunchbox. STATION ANNOUNCER enters. He cups his hands and speaks into it.*

STATION ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.)

Ladies and gentlepersons, ladies and gentlepersons, please be advised that there is no service from this station today. This is due to a shortage of trains.

ARTHUR

Oh, come on. There are only three stops on the entire line! How can there be a shortage of trains?

STATION ANNOUNCER

There is precisely one train and it is currently out of service.

ARTHUR

But that is preposterous! Did nobody think that this might be an occasional issue and maybe order a second train to use as backup if all else fails?

STATION ANNOUNCER

Well, evidently not. Which is on account of nobody in particular's fault, especially not the management. Most probably supply chain issues owing to the beached whale on the high street yesterday.

ARTHUR

Yes, I've been wondering about that. How do you think it came to be there? Did it fall from a passing blimp?

STATION ANNOUNCER

We're not supposed to call them blimps, you know, on account of such a thing being potentially offensive to the Rubenesque. By preference we calls them Zeppelins.

## ARTHUR

Oh, what's the difference? I'll call them what I like. Blimpy blimpy blimpety blimp! Anyhow, I can't see the Rubenesque getting offended by a thing like that. They have such positive, bubbly personalities.

## STATION ANNOUNCER

Well, I'm a great defender of the rights of the Rubenesque to be themselves, and I will protect those rights vociferously. Particularly the women. I will vigorously protect any woman who chooses to identify as Rubenesque. They used to congregate of an evening on the street corner just over there, but they haven't been around in ages. It was a glorious sight to behold, believe me.

*Burlesque dancers, drag queens, pantomime dames and sundry other females appear. They perform and dance and bump and grind with ARTHUR and the STATION ANNOUNCER.*

*MUSIC CUE: SOMETHING BRASSY*

*FLASHING CAPTIONS:*

*BURLESQUE INTERLEWD*

*DANCE OF THE PLUS SIZED LADIES OF THE NIGHT*

*FEATURING WABS AKIMBO AND HER CELEBRITY PRO BRASS TRUMPET BAND*

## STATION ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.)

Ladies and gentlepersons, please welcome to the stage, the star of tonight's show, the brazen baroness herself, the lovely Miss Wabs Akimbo!

*A large lady in blonde wig and ermine robe enters and performs a burlesque dance. When she is done, all exit except ARTHUR and the STATION ANNOUNCER.*

## STATION ANNOUNCER

I do like a bit of brass, I must admit. I wonder where they could have got to? You must send them to me if you see any and assure them that I will protect both them and their rights. I'm really very good at it, you can tell them that.

ARTHUR

Well, it doesn't help me much but I'll try to remember to think about doing that for you. My calendar is pretty bloated right all of a sudden now it seems. (*taps top of head*) Hey, Boris!

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Hi there. How can I help?

ARTHUR

I need to get to Finchley Central ASAP as I am booked onto a carbon reduction seminar which starts in fifteen minutes and then I have a bunch of confidential documents that I need to get back to the office. Please plot an alternative route.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

You appear to be inside the Paradox Colosseum, Norgland Prime. Would you like me to switch to that city?

*VT: Screen shows the words PARADISE and IBROX coming together to form PARADOX:*

*PARADISE = IBROX*

*PARADISE IBROX*

*PARADISBROX*

*PARADISOX*

*PARADOX*

*ARTHUR hits the top of his head.*

ARTHUR

Boris, please recalibrate.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

You are currently outside Highgate station. Please move inside Highgate station and go to the platform. There is a train in two minutes.

ARTHUR

I am inside Highgate station and there are no trains running. Please plot me an alternate route.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

You are currently outside Highgate station. Please move inside Highgate station and go to the platform. There is a train in one minute.

ARTHUR

Okay, forget it.

STATION ANNOUNCER

If you listen closely you can hear the calling of the void.

ARTHUR

I'm sorry, what?

STATION ANNOUNCER

The mournful crying of forgotten souls, drifting onwards on their infinite journey throughout all time and space.

ARTHUR

This is starting to feel like a bit of an infinite journey, I must admit. If I had paid for a ticket I would probably be asking for my money back right about now.

STATION ANNOUNCER

It is all in your imagination, you know.

ARTHUR

What is?

STATION ANNOUNCER

All of it. I'm just a figment of your imagination and you are just a figment in my imagination. We are but helpless spirits vibrating away in a cold and indifferent universe and there is nothing you or I or anyone else can do about it.

ARTHUR

Well, when you put it like that -- I did feel quite a helpless wave of futility wash over me as I left the flat this morning. I don't think I have ever felt anything quite like that before.

## STATION ANNOUNCER

Oh, that's nothing compared to the screaming of the void. Wait until you hear that. It is quite something else, believe me. Nothing like the crushing realisation of the futility of one's own existence to make one acutely aware of the limited time we all have on this hope forsaken orb. I think you truly start to appreciate what little you have after experiencing something like that.

## ARTHUR

So definitely no trains from this station today then?

## STATION ANNOUNCER

No, none whatsoever. My apologies, but I must make the following announcement.

*He cups his hands and speaks into it.*

## STATION ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.)

Attention all passengers. Attention all passengers. Because of a reported emergency it has become necessary to clear the station. Please leave the station immediately by the nearest exit leaving all belongings behind you. I repeat. Please leave the station immediately by the nearest exit leaving all belongings behind you.

## ARTHUR

Oh come on, you're just making it up now.

## STATION ANNOUNCER

You heard the announcement. Please leave the station immediately by the nearest exit leaving all belongings behind you.

## ARTHUR

I'm not leaving this briefcase behind. It has confidential documents and all kinds in it. Also my sandwiches for lunch. And my charm of entry to get back into the office afterwards which I will definitely need if the seminar finishes early.

## STATION ANNOUNCER

It is for safety reasons, sir, and vitally important that you comply.

## ARTHUR

Do you promise to look after it?

## STATION ANNOUNCER

Of course I do.

ARTHUR

Pinky swear promise?

STATION ANNOUNCER

Pinky swear swear promise.

ARTHUR

Well, okay then, but please be assured that I will be coming back to retrieve it later on.

*He hands the lunchbox to the STATION ANNOUNCER.*

STATION ANNOUNCER

Go on then.

ARTHUR

What?

STATION ANNOUNCER

You have to exit the station immediately. For safety reasons.

ARTHUR

Oh, okay.

SCENE TWO.

*Station exterior. MINION 6 and MINION 7 sit to one side, dressed as derelicts. They both wear sunglasses.*

*ARTHUR enters.*

MINION 6

Please sir, spare a social credit or two for a former technical expert in all things scientific, since fallen on hard times, now sadly rendered sightless, not by his choice of liqueur, but on the promise of updated technology just around the corner and a medical procedure yet to be invented.

MINION 7

Or failing that, please grant us the rare pleasure of a like or two on social media, we who I should also mention as having been rendered sightless due a very minor bureaucratic oversight. Completely understandable, really. No hint of aspersion towards the management, of course.

MINION 6

Entirely our own silly fault, of course, but we completely neglected to observe the necessity for iris recognition when claiming the fabulous rewards that we were promised.

MINION 7

As a consequence we find ourselves utterly unable to access social media and other essential services. We slap ourselves repeatedly but to no avail.

MINION 6

Social media. Such a fickle mistress.

MINION 7

Such a fickle mistress.

MINION 6

So how about it, buddy? Care to dip into your stash and help a fellow out at all?

ARTHUR

Ugh. Have you guys never heard of cologne? You smell to high heaven of something strong, I know not what.

MINION 7

That's just our natural exuberance, kind sir. We are both of us quite high on life.

MINION 6

High as a kite on life, you could say.

MINION 7

Would you care to try some of our home made jolly juice?

*MINION 7 produces a bottle of murky yellow liquid.*

ARTHUR

No, but I could give you some sandwiches. Wait here for just one brief moment. I'll be right back.

SCENE THREE.

*Station platform. A STATION CLEANER sweeps with a broom. To one side sits a bulging gunny sack.*

## ARTHUR

Hi there, hello, yes, you sir! Have you by any chance seen a gentleperson, about so high, quite authoratative, works here as a station announcer?

## STATION CLEANER

Station announcer, sir? B'ain't been one of those for donkey's years now. Just me who comes in once a week to empty the bins and keep the place tidy. Yup, just me and the shadows and the ghosts of happier times.

## ARTHUR

But that can't be! He was just here! And I gave him my briefcase to look after! It had my sandwiches in it!

## STATION CLEANER

That sounds like my cousin Kyle, to be fair. Used to sit in a little hut just over there, pulling the levers that make the signals work, but --

## ARTHUR

We must go to him and ask him to return my property forthwith, henceforth and right now.

## STATION CLEANER

No can do, my good fellow, no can do. Alas cousin Kyle was conscripted not three weeks ago and immediately transported off up north somewhere to join the Ghost Legion in their heroic struggle against the degenerate Norg. His signalling equipment is now controlled by the Great Online Digital Simulacrum in the Cloud above, with no intimation directed towards the management who really are trying to do the very best they can. It's not their fault that countless years of maintenance neglect have come back to bite us right around the time they choose to I.O.-tise the service.

## ARTHUR

But I simply must have my briefcase! It has some very important documents that must be placed in a confidential waste container prior to whatever it is that they do with them afterwards. And my charm of entry to get back into the office.

*STATION CLEANER picks up the gunny sack and hauls it over his shoulder.*

## STATION CLEANER

Fret not, good sir. Wherever your briefcase might be right now I'm sure that it is in very safe hands. Now if you will excuse me, I must be off to deliver these charitable donations to the benefit of the widows and orphans fund at the Ministry of Charitable Works.

*STATION CLEANER exits.*

## ARTHUR

Well, of course. I would hate to stand in the way of charity.

## SCENE FOUR.

*Station exterior. MINION 6 and MINION 7 are singing.*

## MINION CHORUS

Oh, mercy, mercy me!  
We're as happy as two freaks could ever be!  
Why don't you join us, then we would be three!  
Oh mercy, mercy, mercy me!

## ARTHUR

I do apologise, gentle fellows, but those sandwiches appear to have evaporated. Is there anything else that I could get for you?

## MINION 6

There is but one small boon that we might task of you.

## ARTHUR

Please ask and I shall consider your request.

## MINION 6

If you could at some point make your way to the Church of the Central Processor, located by the spire of East Finchley Minster Cathedral, and open up a ticket to petition all the Merchant Bankers in the Cloud above for clemency in our sorry state, and to smile upon us --

## MINION 7

-- generously --

## MINION 6

-- generously, in our hour of need, that would do us quite the service.

MINION 7

We would of course owe you our eternal and unending gratitude.

MINION 6

We would be ever so grateful.

ARTHUR

Well, my day is already looking pretty busy but I'll see what I can do.

MINION 6

That would be the very definition of an awesome thing. We wish you solace in your searches and may your walking shoes remain forever comfy.

MINION 7

And may your day remain unassailed by the mindless perturbation of the masses.

MINION 6

Oi! Less of the mindless mass perturbation, you. I'm sitting right here. I can tell when you're doing it.

MINION 7

Just keeping my hand in while I still have one.

ARTHUR

Bear with me, gentle folk, and I shall be right back with you.

MINION 6

I'm happy. Are you happy?

MINION 7

I'm happy if you're happy.

MINION 6

Well, I'm happy so I guess that makes you happy.

MINION 7

I'm very happy. It's a cyclical arrangement.

MINION 6

You have to keep on smiling, right?

## MINION 7

You have to laugh. Its the only sane response.

## SCENE FIVE.

*A dark velvet curtain stretches across the stage. Long dark banners on either side read*

*BEING*

=

*NOTHINGNESS*

*and*

*NOTHINGNESS*

=

*ETERNITY*

*A traffic light to one side shows GREEN. A sign above this reads:*

*THE PATH OF ONENESS*

*MINION 8 stands at a podium. She wears a sombre suit. On the podium is written*

*NEGATION OF BEING IS A LIFESTYLE CHOICE*

*ARTHUR enters.*

ARTHUR

I'm so very late. Please accept my humblest excuses. I had a nightmare getting here. It is all down to those blessed fallen whales again, apparently.

## MINION 8

Enter, gentle penitent. Be welcome to the Communion of the Worshipful Union with Nothingness.

ARTHUR

Oh no, I'm not here for that at all. I'm here for the Carbon Reduction Initiative seminar.

## MINION 8

Dreadfully sorry, but you've missed your slot. This is an Unrevival for the Evangelical Nihilist crowd. Try next door. They might be able to squeeze you in.

## ARTHUR

I will do. Thank you.

*Outside the shop a sign reads*

*MINISTRY FOR THE NEGATION OF BEING*

*ARTHUR walks to the next entrance.*

*A sign reads*

*GHOST LEGION RECRUITMENT CENTRE*

*ARTHUR enters.*

*MINION 9 wears military uniform and stands at a podium. On the podium is the image of a winking donkey pointing a hoof towards us and the words*

*EAST FINCHLEY NEEDS YOU!*

*A camouflage curtain stretches across the stage. It features a military crest depicting a donkey mounting a lion and the inscription*

*UNIVARIA BELLENDUM UNIVERSAM*

*A sign pointing towards a gap in the curtain reads*

*DISPATCH POINT*

*A queue of people line up at a traffic light showing RED.*

*Every so often the light goes GREEN. When this happens the next person in the queue steps behind the curtain. The light goes RED again.*

*After a few seconds there is a FLASH OF WHITE LIGHT from behind the curtain followed by*

*FX: GURGLING/FARTING SOUND.*

MINION 9

Good morning to you, kind sir. Have you by any chance received your call up papers?

ARTHUR

No, nothing like that.

MINION 9

No matter, sir. We also accept walk ins. Our tanks are getting fairly full but if you don't mind a bit of a wait please feel free to go right ahead and join the queue.

ARTHUR

Sadly I must decline. I'm looking for the carbon reduction initiative seminar.

MINION 9

Unfortunately our systems are currently configurated for military purposes. You might have better luck next door.

ARTHUR

Okay, I'll try there. Thank you.

*ARTHUR exits.*

*ARTHUR walks to the next entrance.*

*The shop front is predominantly beige. A sign reads*

*VOTE BEIGE*

*ARTHUR enters.*

*The curtain across the stage is beige. The sign reads*

*POLLING STATION*

*The traffic light is GREEN.*

*There is no one in the queue.*

*MINION 10 leans on a podium. She wears a beige suit and hat and is chewing bubblegum.*

*On the podium is written*

*VOTE BEIGE  
VOTE CONSEQUENCE*

MINION 10

Yeah? What?

ARTHUR

Never mind.

*ARTHUR walks to the next entrance.*

*A sign reads*

*FREE HOLIDAY IN ACAPULCO*

*ARTHUR enters.*

*The curtain across the stage shows an idyllic tropical beach scene. Traffic light is GREEN. There is no one waiting.*

*A sign says*

*EMBARKATION POINT*

*MINION 11 stands at a podium. He wears a Hawaiian shirt and a chain of flowers. A sign on the podium reads*

*ZERO FRILLS HOLIDAYS WITH ZERO BUDGET AIR*

MINION 11

Greetings to you, dear sir, and many delightful felicitations for the day ahead. Are you perhaps yearning for a fabulous holiday reclining on a pearl white sandy beach?

## ARTHUR

Not really, no. I was supposed to be joining the seminar on the Carbon Reduction Initiative but I missed my slot.

## MINION 11

Unfortunately this particular pod is booked out for the holiday crowd for the rest of the day. You may as well just jump straight on it here though. We all end up in a bucket one way or another eventually, don't we dear?

## ARTHUR

That is awfully kind of you but I think my bosses really wouldn't be at all happy if I were to pop up suddenly on a beach in Acapulco. I'm supposed to be a brand ambassador for Murgatroyd and Winterbottom, you see.

## MINION 11

Oh, aren't we all, darling? Aren't we all? Oh well, suit yourself. If you change your mind hurry back to see me, won't you?

## ARTHUR

I will, I promise.

*ARTHUR walks to the next shop.*

*The next shop is decked out with flamboyant red, white and blue livery. A sign reads*

*CAMPAIGN TO MAKE EAST FINCHLEY GREAT AGAIN*

*ARTHUR enters.*

*The curtain displays rosettes and banners and many posters with MAKE EAST FINCHLEY GREAT AGAIN or MEFGA presented in a variety of styles.*

*Traffic light is RED. A sign pointing towards a gap in the curtain reads:*

*THE ROAD TO GREATNESS*

*MINION 12 stands at a podium. He wears a blue and red sweater and cap with the letters MEFGA emblazoned on them. On the podium is a sign that reads:*

***IT TAKES TWO TO DO IT!***

MINION 12

Hi there, kind and gentle sir. How might I be of service today?

ARTHUR

I was actually hoping to talk to someone about the Carbon Reduction Initiative.

MINION 12

Oh, we don't deal with any of them directly, we just set the theme and the Great Online Digital Symbiosis in the Cloud above takes care of all the rest. Personally I think it is wonderful that we have such a great and benevolent ubiquitous presence to look after us all. Makes me feel proud to be from East Finchley.

ARTHUR

It is true. We are the best.

MINION 12

Regretfully we cannot process any further transfers today as our tanks are full but I would be more than happy to show you how it all works.

ARTHUR

Why thank you, yes. That would be splendid.

MINION 12

So, first of all we go through all the various themes. Let's see if we can't find the one for the Carbon Reduction Initiative.

*MINION 12 makes a series of hand gestures.*

*VT, SET & PODIUM: rapid fire cycle through a variety of themes and colour ways, until:*

MINION 12

Ah, here we are.

*The curtain shows an idyllic landscape, rolling hills and fields of wheat shining in the sun. A banner reads*

*WELCOME TO THE CARBON REDUCTION  
INITIATIVE PROGRAMME*

*The sign on the podium reads*

*YOUR JOURNEY TO A BETTER WORLD*

*A sign pointing towards a break in the curtain reads*

*EMISSIONS OFFSET INSERTION POINT*

**MINION 12**

The delegates are asked to queue here and wait for the light to turn green. Please follow me as I reveal the piece de la resistance itself, and it really is quite the technological marvel --

*The curtain is pulled back to reveal the device previously shown in wireframe on page 8.*

*A contraption comprising a bucket seat and a mounted panel in which is situated a single large red button. On either side of the bucket seat, pointing down and towards the seat, are a pair of very large stepped ceramic cones, similar to what you might see in an electrical substation. Various wires. Multiple drainage channels run down from the seat to a bath-style plughole.*

**MINION 12**

The Transmogrification De-Emphasis Device, or Tee-Ded for short, is a long distance rapid transit solution and a highly ecological marvel of modern technology. It produces at least as much carbon as it consumes so is effectively carbon neutral and represents a wonderful vehicle for your new voyage of discovery. The delegates are directed to position themselves in the seat and to make themselves comfy. Please, try it out.

*ARTHUR climbs into the bucket seat.*

**ARTHUR**

Yup. Seems comfortable enough. So the Great Online thingummybob sets the destination to the seminar based on the settings you selected earlier, then the delegates push this button --

MINION 12

Please don't push that button.

ARTHUR

Why? What happens if I push that button?

MINION 12

Well, for one thing, the tanks downstairs are full to the brim and any more would have it overflowing all over the place, which will make a real mess and take ages to clean up, and that would be an awful waste of resources.

ARTHUR

But in theory, hypothetically speaking of course, once the theme is set, the second I push that button I would be transported instantaneously to the destination associated with that theme?

MINION 12

In theory, yes.

ARTHUR

But you don't know where that destination is.

MINION 12

Not as such, no.

ARTHUR

That's good enough for me.

*ARTHUR reaches forward and presses the button.  
Nothing happens.*

MINION 12

Well, that is highly unusual, I must say. I wonder what could have gone wrong?

ARTHUR

Your machine is broken, broken, broken, just like everything else since the Great Oblivious Doo-Dah Something or other took over!

MINION 12

Well now, there's no reason to resort to blasphemy at a time like this. I'll have to put in a ticket for a service request, of course. Gregor and Amanda, could you come in here please?

*MINION 13 and MINION 14 enter hastily replacing and adjusting a variety of MEFGA branded clothing and apparel.*

MINION 13

You've changed the theme.

MINION 14

We were just having a quick work study break. What's the problem?

MINION 12

Well, the tanks are full, so no biggie, but it looks like the machine has stopped working.

MINION 14

Oh no. That isn't good.

MINION 13

Have you tried turning it off and turning it back on again?

MINION 12

There's an off switch? I had no idea that there was an off switch.

MINION 13

I'm pretty sure I saw an off switch somewhere. Let me have a look.

MINION 14

Guys, we could just act like nothing's wrong and let the morning team sort it out.

MINION 13

Don't worry, there's usually an easy fix for these things.

*The three MINIONS clamber all over the machine.*

MINION 13

Can you give me a hand? No, not there.

MINION 12

Sorry.

MINION 14

Ah, I think I see the problem.

*MINION 14 reaches into a seat cleft and pulls out the tiny plastic sombrero. He hands it to MINION 12.*

MINION 12

It must be made from Buckminsterfullerene.

*MINION 12 hands the tiny plastic sombrero to ARTHUR. The moment ARTHUR takes it there is a FLASH OF BRILLIANT WHITE LIGHT and the three MINIONS vanish. A trickle of thick black oil runs down the back of the bucket seat.*

*FX: LONG UNDULATING GURGLE/FART SOUND*

ARTHUR

Guys?

*CARETAKER enters carrying two buckets filled to the brim with oil*

CARETAKER

What's the matter with you people? When I say the tanks are full, I mean it! That means not a single unit more for processing until I say it's okay, never mind three of them. There's product leaking out all over the floor downstairs now. It's made a right mess and it's a real waste of resources, and guess who has to clean it all up? Hey! Who are you? And where are the staff? What have you done with the staff? You're not supposed to process staff without authorisation! I'm telling on you (*taps ear*) -- Arthur Dingleberry!

*CARETAKER exits, running.*

**END OF ACT II**

**ACT III - A POSTERIORI**

SCENE ONE.

*An office building security station.*

SECURITY GUARD

I am Mumbleshanks, Guardian of the Sacred Service Elevator and bearer of the dread sword Fuckwitsbane. None shall pass.

ARTHUR

Do people still use dread swords? I thought they all got banned a while ago.

SECURITY GUARD

You have to register them in case you get a possessed one that compels you to do its evil bidding but those are few and far between. Mine is just your regular dread sword. Spreads a bit of doom here and there but nothing too heavy. Nothing at all like the relentless sense of doom that comes from working in a place like this.

ARTHUR

I will freely admit, sometimes when I leave this building it does feel like a mountain has been lifted from my shoulders.

SECURITY GUARD

This lift shaft behind me, for example. People are constantly falling down it. I hear their desperate wails of terror as they pass by here then the soft crump as they hit the sub basement several floors below. The door on the eighth floor doesn't close properly, you see. I keep telling them that they should put up warning signs but nothing ever seems to get done around here.

ARTHUR

But that's appalling! What's on the eighth floor?

SECURITY GUARD

The complaints department. Funny thing is it keeps happening even though they laid everyone off some weeks ago once they put the Great Online Digital Semblance in charge of everything. But I digress. Where were we?

ARTHUR

I was telling you how my briefcase containing my sandwiches and my charm of entry had been temporarily left in the care of a station attendant on the transit system and how I had subsequently missed a scheduled seminar which was to have been my first appointment in my new role as Brand Ambassador for Murgatroyd and Winterbottom. Totally regrettable but can't be helped and here we are.

SECURITY GUARD

What on earth possessed you to hand your sandwiches and your charm of entry to a random station attendant on the transit system?

ARTHUR

He asked for them! He was an Authority Figure, just like you, and we are taught to respect, honour and obey all Figures of Authority.

SECURITY GUARD

Oh well. It's your loss. Seems like a senseless waste of perfectly good sandwiches to me.

ARTHUR

So how do I go about getting a replacement charm of entry?

SECURITY GUARD

It says here that you are on special administrative leave.

ARTHUR

I don't know why that is. I haven't asked for or been notified of any leave.

SECURITY GUARD

That's what it says here. Special administrative leave. Also Early Termination Liability. I can't let you in.

ARTHUR

Okay, how do I go about reporting something lost or stolen?

SECURITY GUARD

You would need to speak to the facilities management team located on the third floor.

ARTHUR

And how do I get there?

**SECURITY GUARD**

You don't. Not without an active charm of entry and especially not while you are on special administrative leave.

**ARTHUR**

And how do I get off special administrative leave?

**SECURITY GUARD**

You do whatever it is that they have asked you to do.

**ARTHUR**

What if I am somewhat nervous about the specific mechanics of what they are asking me to do on the grounds that it might be detrimental to my health and livelihood and could quite possibly be something that I might never return from?

**SECURITY GUARD**

If you want to keep your job I suggest you stop being so paranoid and just do it. There seems little point in trying to avoid it. These things have a way of happening whether you like it or not.

**ARTHUR**

Okay, so supposing I subject myself to a process that everyone seems to have blind faith in despite no-one being able to explain quite how it works, get teleported to a random location known only to the Great Online Digital Whatever-it-is from which no-one has yet returned, meet all the challenges and finally return triumphant, would I then be able to go up to the third floor to file a lost property application?

**SECURITY GUARD**

Not without an active charm of entry, no.

**ARTHUR**

And how do I go about getting a replacement one of those?

**SECURITY GUARD**

From the Charm department on the seventh floor. But they are all marked as Out of Office right now. Whichever way you look at it you're not getting up there.

**ARTHUR**

We seem to be going round in circles here. Is there anything else that I should know?

## SECURITY GUARD

I am Mumbleshanks, Guardian of the Sacred Service Elevator and bearer of the dread sword Fuckwitsbane. Fuckwits better watch out.

## ARTHUR

Thank you. You really have been most marvellously helpful and enlightening.

## SECURITY GUARD

It has been my pleasure to serve. You have a lovely day now.

## SCENE TWO.

*The Church of the Central Processor - a temple to the worship of the machine, also retail environment. Their logo is an inverted pineapple in multicoloured slices.*

## ARTHUR

So let me get this clear. I need to sign up to a direct debit agreement in order to submit a ticket towards a clemency request for some random homeless fellows I just met?

## MINION 15

All of the devout start out that way. If you start the process now in time you too could become devout.

## ARTHUR

Terrible shame really, the two fellows I met had both lost the use of their eyes for banking purposes and everything else.

## MINION 15

The two prophets Steve tell us that we need not eyes to look into our souls, just more RAM and a better graphics processor.

## ARTHUR

Yeah, I'm kind of attached to mine. No plans to give them up any time soon!

## MINION 15

We should not become too attached to earthly things. Or meta-earthly things like social credits. The prophets have shown us that only by abandoning earthly peripherals can we find the one true path to personal and product perfection.

## ARTHUR

No, I wouldn't want to interfere with those prophet margins.

MINION 15

Do you seek personal and product perfection ? It is only by means of this holy fusion that we can ourselves become divine.

ARTHUR

Not really, no.

MINION 15

When was the last time you ran a firmware upgrade? I can see you are still using Boris two point oh. No-one uses Boris any more, it is far too buggy and unstable and hasn't been updated in years. I think the devs just threw in the towel on that one and moved onto other things. It is officially listed as abandonware now.

ARTHUR

It had its uses when I worked in the planning department but you are right. Boris hasn't been much help for quite some time now. I've always treated it as a case of better the devil you know though. I'll probably stick with it for the time being.

MINION 15

I would be very careful of that. Without up to date security patches you could be hosting all manner of malware. If you like we could schedule you in for a check up scan.

ARTHUR

Would that involve me handing over my direct debit details?

MINION 15

Naturally. All of the devout start out that way.

ARTHUR

And there is no other way to raise a ticket for clemency in the name of two unfortunate souls who appear to have fallen foul of the vagaries of the system?

MINION 15

Sadly, no. If it helps you do get a promotional branded charm of entry holder and a lollipop when you first sign up.

ARTHUR

Well, I guess that I have no choice then.

MINION 15

Lovely. The prophets will be most pleased. If you could just tap here.

*ARTHUR slaps his forehead then headbutts the lectern.*

MINION 15

Thank you. We have everything we need now to get you started on your very own devotional journey to personal and product purity.

ARTHUR

So can we get that ticket for clemency sorted then?

MINION 15

My deepest and most sincere apologies but our ticketing system is currently offline. If you come back tomorrow we may be able to help you further.

ARTHUR

Well that's no good. You didn't think to tell me that before I forked over all my details?

MINION 15

Looks like we are all out of lollipops too. Sorry about that.

ARTHUR

Okay, well I officially request that you delete the details that I have just given you and close my account. For good.

MINION 15

Are you sure?

ARTHUR

Yes, I am quite sure.

MINION 15

Last chance to change your mind. There are a ton of excellent member benefits, you know.

ARTHUR

Please remove my details from your database.

MINION 15

Okay, done.

ARTHUR

Really done?

MINION 15

Really done. Your application for devotional training has been removed completely from our systems. It is as if you were never here.

ARTHUR

Pinky swear promise?

MINION 15

Pinky swear swear promise, as the two Steves and old Saint Pearly Bill himself are my witness.

ARTHUR

Thank you. That is jolly kind and decent of you. Sorry to have taken up so much of your time.

MINION 15

Oh, it has been an absolute pleasure, and please remember, if you ever need any help or guidance we are right here. There is trouble in the world but the devout will sort it out.

ARTHUR

Thank you. I will remember that.

MINION 15

Don't forget your promotional branded charm of entry holder.

ARTHUR

Oh, thank you.

She hands him a plastic card wallet. He takes it and exits.

SCENE THREE.

*Arthur and Amy's flat.*

*AMY reclines on the sofa, revolver in hand.*

*ARTHUR enters.*

ARTHUR

Hi there, only me.

AMY

I've been watching the coronation of the new king of Bohemia. They have some lovely costumes in Bohemia.

ARTHUR

I don't know where they are getting all these new countries from. Every day there seems to be another one, laying claim to each other's territory from the very moment that they are formed. I really wish they'd stop doing that. It always seems to end with people being blown to smithereens.

AMY

Hey, aren't you supposed to be off at some high flying carbon reduction summit thing or something?

ARTHUR

Yeah, that. There were problems with the trains again, then I mislaid my briefcase and my sandwiches, although I am assured that they remain quite safe, and subsequently missed my slot at the appointed time, then had a few other sundry adventures but I am happy to be home and feel the rug under my toes again.

AMY

Don't you care about the Carbon Menace?

ARTHUR

Of course I care about the Carbon Menace. I'm the one who has been campaigning that we cut down fewer trees and plant lots of new ones, remember?

AMY

The Carbon Menace is the number one killer of man, beast and buzz, they say. Not woman though, which is a bit of a relief, I must admit.

ARTHUR

I don't see how my failing to attend a carbon reduction seminar makes the remotest bit of difference to any of that.

AMY

That is just like you, always thinking of yourself and no-one else. Oh well, when the planet boils you will only have yourself to blame.

ARTHUR

You haven't witnessed the machines in action. They have a row of shops downtown with a load of them installed behind a curtain at the back with a big red button that makes people disappear in a flash of white light and it then produces all this gloopy black stuff --

AMY

You are such a useless tinfoil hat wearing issue of the day denier. They ran a feature on that on the news feeds earlier. That gloopy stuff is just a by-product of the transmographoric energy transfer process. It has all been declared perfectly safe by the Global Chamber of Commerce and they are all experts so they should know.

ARTHUR

I'm not comfortable with any of it. No-one can explain quite how it works and no-one who has gone through it seems to have been seen or heard of since. I don't like it one little bit.

AMY

They are all clearly having far too much of a good time somewhere else. And what about the Ghost Legion? Don't try to tell me they're all dead.

ARTHUR

Well, it wouldn't surprise me.

AMY

I've had just about enough of you and your hare brained conspiratorial fantasy nonsense. First thing in the morning we are going straight down there and I will be making darned sure that you push that big red button.

ARTHUR

Amy, darling, let's just all take a step back and have a proper think about all this.

AMY

What's to think about? You just sit down, push the button, and --

*FX: GUNSHOT*

*AMY falls backwards taking the sofa with her. Blood and brains spray up the wall behind her.*

ARTHUR

Oh Amy, what have you gone and done now? Okay, Amy love. Please stop messing around now. This isn't funny. Amy?

*FX: DOOR BELL*

*POLICEMAN enters.*

POLICEMAN

Hello, hello, hello. What have we here then?

ARTHUR

Oh, thank goodness you are here, officer. Something terrible has happened to my wife --

POLICEMAN

Arthur? Arthur Dingleberry?

ARTHUR

Yes, that's me.

POLICEMAN

I would like to talk to you about some unauthorised misuse of company property.

ARTHUR

Isn't all misuse inherently unauthorised? Otherwise it would just be use.

POLICEMAN

Don't try to get clever with me, sonny boy. You will only make things worse for yourself. It is writ here that earlier today you wilfully and with malice aforethought did conspire to process three highly trained and valued corporate assets without prior authorisation in a careless, callous and quite calculated manner. How do you plead?

ARTHUR

Can we talk about this later? Something awful has happened to my wife and I think she might be quite badly hurt.

POLICEMAN

Don't try to change the subject.

ARTHUR

Please, just take a look, then tell me what we can do to fix this.

POLICEMAN

Okay, just a quick look. Over here I guess. Wow. She appears to have received quite the dolorous blow, hasn't she?

ARTHUR

She was playing with the Destroyer of Vipers Device (Approved) and it just went off in her face. We were told that it would be safe and effective!

POLICEMAN

Well, it is certainly effective, I'll grant you that.

ARTHUR

These things are clearly dangerous! We should tell someone!

POLICEMAN

This is starting to sound like a desire to rock the boat and we don't want to rock the boat now, do we? People don't like scaremongers and tattletellers, you know.

ARTHUR

Of course. You are an Authority Figure and should be respected as such. I shall moderate my behaviour accordingly.

POLICEMAN

Good, good. It's for your own benefit, you know. Life gets a lot easier if you just do as you are told, I find.

ARTHUR

She can be cured, right?

POLICEMAN

Well, I'm no authority on this kind of thing but I can call on someone who is. (*taps ear.*) Okay, they are on their way.

ARTHUR

It is only supposed to activate in the presence of a viper!

POLICEMAN

There is your answer then. She must have had a minuscule, almost invisible viper on her face, but don't worry. The coroners will be here soon.

ARTHUR

I should probably straighten up the furniture before they get here.

POLICEMAN

Oh, don't fuss about on their account, they've seen it all before.

ARTHUR

If you say so. She seems to have made quite a mess on the carpet though.

POLICEMAN

Well, I for one think it is refreshing to see young people taking such a keen interest in politics.

*FX: DOOR BELL*

*LANDLORD enters.*

LANDLORD

Only me! Just coming to -- oh my days! What have you done to my carpets? What have you done to my walls? You will be paying for this and shortly too.

POLICEMAN

You'd better get the kettle on, lad. You've got visitors. Doesn't do to keep them waiting.

LANDLORD

This is representing gross violation of your tenancy agreeable. I will have to be putting your rent up to cover costings of such repairs.

ARTHUR

I really am quite sorry about all this.

LANDLORD

Will sorry remove a stain like this? No, I will be forced to use importing labour to carry out a specialising task in order at considerable cost which you must bear.

POLICEMAN

So, a bit of a wife beater, are we?

ARTHUR

Wife beater? Not at all! We love each other very deeply!

POLICEMAN

Well, you must have done something pretty awful for her to be looking to top herself in such spectacular fashion. Don't tell me you never argued.

ARTHUR

Well we don't always quite see eye to eye but it always works out amicably in the end.

POLICEMAN

Sure, sure. That's what they always say. But what's amicable for you could be a heavy dose of the pain stick for everybody else, did ever think about that?

ARTHUR

Well, no. I hadn't thought about it like that before.

POLICEMAN

*(taps ear)* Admits to violent tendencies and barely suppressed rage. Last time you argued, what was it about?

ARTHUR

Well, I'd been dancing with this lady at the office party, and --

POLICEMAN

*(taps ear)* Adultery. No, it isn't much but it's a start. Okay, Arthur, here's what we are going to do. We are going to sit here until the coroners get here, and then we are going to follow their advice, okay?

ARTHUR

If we are having more visitors I should probably clean up a little around here.

POLICEMAN

No need, no need. I'll carry on with the investigation in a little while, but first off, let's have ourselves a nice cup of tea. Where do you keep the kettle in this place?

ARTHUR

In the kitchen, to the left.

POLICEMAN

Glorious. Can't conduct investigations without a nice cup of tea inside us.

*POLICEMAN exits to kitchen*

POLICEMAN (OFF STAGE)

Where do you keep the milk and denatured neurotoxin sweetener?

ARTHUR

In the closet to the right and there's a fridge below where we keep the milk. It's wild oat milk. Hope that is alright.

POLICEMAN (OFF STAGE)

Fine, fine. Tea bags taste better with a splash of wild oat milk, I find. The dangly ones in particular. Speaking of which, where are they?

ARTHUR

Same closet, behind the denatured neurotoxin sweetener.

POLICEMAN (OFF STAGE)

You don't drink much tea then, I take it, otherwise you would be more respectful to those of us that do. Tea bag placement should be front and centre of your mind, especially in a closet like this. Anything else is inelegant.

*POLICEMAN re-enters with dangly tea bag on string.*

POLICEMAN

Where can I get a mug to put it in?

ARTHUR

Hold on, I'll find a clean one for you.

LANDLORD

Don't be rushing off so quickly, Mister Dingleberry. You self-entitled young Liege Lord couples are all the same, no respect for the neighbours or your elders. We don't see the other tenants of this edifice blow their brains out in such a careless manner without regardings for the fixtures or the fittings now, do we?

*FX: DOOR BELL*

POLICEMAN

Ah, the coroners are here.

*GEORGE and BRENDA enter wearing protective overalls and safety goggles. They carry holdalls and buckets.*

GEORGE

Wow. This is a nice flat. Isn't it a nice flat, Brenda?

BRENDA

It is lovely. Look at all this stuff. Is he allowed to have this much stuff?

POLICEMAN

It is not against the law but it is unusual, I'll grant you that.

GEORGE

Bit of a hoarder then, are we? Right, where's this corpse at then?

ARTHUR

But you're George and Brenda from the chip shop! You can't be coroners!

BRENDA

Are too. George is fully licenced by the Global Chamber of Commerce to carry out coronary type duties. We have a certificiate and everything. Show him the certificiate, George.

GEORGE

Right ho.

*He produces a dog eared scrap of paper with a QR code on it. Reams of text in cursive script race up the screen.*

*THIS IS TO CONFIRM... etc.*

ARTHUR

Seems legit to me. Well then I suppose I had better just let you get on with it.

BRENDA

Over here, I'm guessing. Oh wow. She's a gonner, for sure. How did it happen?

ARTHUR

Well, she was holding the Destroyer of Vipers Device (Approved) at the time and it just went off in her hands.

GEORGE

That's a bit of a mouthful. I'll just put died suddenly. Saves on paperwork. Fewer forms to fill in, you see.

*GEORGE lays down a ground sheet and tapes it down.  
BRENDA offers a paper bag around.*

BRENDA

Would any one like a pickled walnut? They are a bit gristly but they are very good.

POLICEMAN

Thank you. Don't mind if I do.

*He pulls out what looks like a hairy prune. He puts it in his mouth and chews on it carefully.*

ARTHUR

If only we had an altruistic tech billionaire on hand that we could turn to. They always seem to have all the answers.

ALL

And all the arable farmland too!

POLICEMAN

Also patents in a variety of infectious diseases. You never know when those might come in handy.

ARTHUR

They probably need those for debugging.

POLICEMAN

Yes, that makes sense. I'm still waiting on that cup of tea, you know.

ARTHUR

My apologies, sir. I'll get on that right away.

*ARTHUR exits. GEORGE starts hacking away at AMY's limbs with a small axe. LANDLORD picks up the silver revolver.*

LANDLORD

I shall be taking this. Just in case any one has ideas of trying this again.

BRENDA

Put that axe down at once, George. You are making a right hash of things as usual and we need those parts intact.

GEORGE

Right ho. I'll get the chainsaw.

*GEORGE exits.*

ARTHUR (OFF STAGE)

We also have a few bottles of slow poison of the grape if anyone would like a glass.

POLICEMAN

I might have one later, if that is okay. I try not to start drinking too early on a duty shift as a general rule of thumb.

*FX: CHAINSAW REVVING UP*

*GEORGE re-enters with running chainsaw shooting sparks.*

GEORGE

Watch out, folks. This could get messy.

POLICEMAN

Well, all things being equal I think I'll just leave you all to it. Arthur, you have a court summons in the morning. Don't be late -- like your late wife over there! I thought that was quite clever, if I do say so myself.

LANDLORD

That is sage advice indeed. I shall do the same. Arthur, please know there shall be inconsequential inconsistencies from all of this.

*POLICEMAN and LANDLORD exit. GEORGE proceeds to dismember AMY's lifeless corpse with gusto. He chuck the various body parts to BRENDA who stuffs them into a selection of buckets and bags.*

GEORGE

A little less of the gleeful enthusiasm please Brenda darling. Coronators should be sombre and respectful in their duties.

BRENDA

You know what? You're too uptight.

GEORGE

Uptight? I'll show you who's uptight.

*GEORGE flings a body part at BRENDA.*

BRENDA

That's more like it!

*BRENDA throws a body part at GEORGE.*

GEORGE

Oh, have a heart, Brenda.

*He throws part of a human heart at her.*

*They dart about the room giggling and throwing bits at each other.*

ARTHUR (OFF STAGE)

Apologies for the soggy biscuits, I spilled a little wild oat milk on them. They are still tasty, just be careful if you like to dunk.

*ARTHUR re-enters with a steaming mug of tea and a plate of biscuits and walks straight into the crossfire.*

**END OF ACT III**

**ACT IV - ARS MORIENDI**

SCENE ONE.

*VT: HANS SCHLIMMWURST looks down on us from an elevated throne. His amulet pulses with light. He wears a tiny plastic sombrero on his elbow, almost hidden by his dark ceremonial robes.*

HANS SCHLIMMWURST (V.T.)

My friends, my friends, I bring glad tidings. The spectre of world hunger looms heavy over this great Orb but thanks to the genius of science, technology and innovation it could soon become a distant memory of times long past. The experts at the Global Chamber of Commerce have discovered a wonderous new healthy and nutritious food source which we have named after our founder, my father, the late, great Klaus "Dookie" Schlimmwurst. We call it Dookie Paste.

*VT: shot of happy smiling family with chocolate paste smeared around their mouths and all over their hands and faces.*

*FLASHING CAPTIONS:*

*LET THEM EAT DOOKIE PASTE*

*and*

*THEY WILL LOVE IT!*

HANS SCHLIMMWURST (V.T.)

Please be aware that supplies are strictly limited so rationing will be necessary until demand subsides.

*VT: Flickering, static noise then GHOST OF AMY appears. She wears two sticking plasters formed into an X on her forehead and appears bewildered and confused.*

GHOST OF AMY (V.T.)

This has all been a terrible mistake. I'm perfectly fine. I --

*FX: FANFARE*

*A Murgatroyd and Winterbottom crest appears on screen.*

**VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)**

There now follows an urgent message from the Management.

*VT: An executive suite. WINTERBOTTOM sits behind a desk and snorts a huge line of white powder with a straw. He also wears a tiny plastic sombrero on his elbow.*

**WINTERBOTTOM (V.T.)**

Ah, you're here. My friends, I bring you doleful news. The last bastions of our allies in Clan Glyndwr, the fortified encampments at Porthmadog and Glynn Ceiriog have now been overrun. Wales has fallen. Now only the West Midlands Coalition and the Bailiwick of Enfield Town stand between us and certain doom. Now, I know some of you might be thinking -- we should have accepted that peace deal with King Mark of Cornwall while we had the chance -- and with the benefit of hindsight you might well be right, but that ship has sailed now. The chance is gone, and with it all hope of reconciliation or salvation from that quarter, but all is not lost. We can resist the relentless viper onslaught. The scientific community has been working overtime and now we have a solution to our woes.

*VT: short video loop of crocodile*

**WINTERBOTTOM (V.T.)**

This is a crocodile. Our scientific experts have determined that crocodiles are one hundred and eighty-eight percent likely to be our best defence against the impending viper menace and through the mysteries of science have created the ultimate domestic defender. The crocodiles in question have been purposefully crossbred and modified genetically to be cute, cuddly and docile. They delight in playing with pets and young children and will keep them safe by seeking out and gobbling up any vipers in the vicinity. If we all work together we will save East Finchley from certain doom. Please bear this in mind. Any household that does not sign up to receive a crocodile or provide proof of receipt of same when challenged will not be permitted to visit shops or bars or theatres, enforceable by rule of law. If you are not part of our solution then you are the problem. Just blink at the link for your nearest crocodile provider.

*VT: maps, infographics and a long scrolling list of businesses appear on screen followed by a SKIP ADS button that dances around randomly.*

*ARTHUR appears at side of stage. He taps himself on the head repeatedly.*

ARTHUR

Boris? Boris!

*VT: A series of still images of increasingly unlikely culinary delicacies.*

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

This infomercial has been brought to you by our trusted partners at PharmaCopia. If you find yourself getting peckish you could do worse than take a trip to George and Brenda's authentic Norgish chippy, a glimpse of the exotic North in the heart of East Finchley, now serving deep fried ladyfingers. The reviews are in, and it is clearly quite the culinary experience. Visitors comment positively about the friendly and convivial atmosphere and remark on the high quality of choice of food on offer.

ARTHUR

*(taps head)* Boris?

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Hi there! How may I be of service?

ARTHUR

What's with all the ads all of a sudden?

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

You have been moved from the premium subscription tier to the free ad supported model.

ARTHUR

Well I don't like it. Please move me back onto the premium subscription tier immediately.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

You have insufficient social credits to continue. Please contact your SysAdmin to revalidate.

ARTHUR

Well, that's ridiculous. I have immutable social credits, and more than anyone could hope to spend in a lifetime. Please open a channel to my line manager.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

This service is not available on the free ad supported model.

ARTHUR

What services are available on the free ad supported model?

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

I will be with you shortly but first a message from one of our trusted media partners. Do you ever feel that life is too much? At the Ministry for the Negation of Being we believe that it is every human's right to embrace the loving comfort of the Void.

ARTHUR

Boris, that's enough!

*He hits himself hard on the head seven times.*

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Powering down.

LIGHTS UP ON:

*A Courtroom. MAGISTRATE, BAILIFF and several MINIONS are in attendance.*

MAGISTRATE

Mister Dingleberry? We are still waiting for an explanation.

ARTHUR

Copious and profound apologies, your honour. I appear to be having some unexpected difficulties accessing my inbox.

MAGISTRATE

It's fine. Let's just move on. Where were we?

BAILIFF

You horrible little urchins deserve a slap. It's the only way you'll learn.

MAGISTRATE

I think that was the previous case. Skip forward a few pages.

BAILIFF

Oh yes. Court in session, yada yada, blah blah blah. We cover the whole misuse of company property thing, whereupon Arthur grovels and capitulates and we were about to move on to the lesser secondary charge, that of emotionally torturing his poor beleaguered wife to such extent that she felt she had no option but to top herself.

MAGISTRATE

So we were. Spousal abuse leading to untimely death. How to you plead to that one, Arthur?

ARTHUR

Well, that isn't how it happened so not guilty, your honour.

BAILIFF

You're not supposed to say not guilty, you know. Only guilty. Makes life much simpler and easier for everyone.

MAGISTRATE

It's fine, it's fine, let him have his little moment in the spotlight. Go on then, Arthur. Plead your case.

ARTHUR

Well, I --

MINION 16

Objection!

MAGISTRATE

On what grounds?

MINION 16

Oh, no grounds at all, your honour. I just like saying objection. It is such an elegant, floaty word and it folds the tongue in pleasing ways. There you go. Objection!

MAGISTRATE

Duly noted. I shall have to ruminate a while on that one in chambers later on. Arthur, please continue.

ARTHUR

Okay, so I --

MINION 17

Objection!

MAGISTRATE

On what grounds?

MINION 17

No grounds at all, your honour. I also find delight in the simple pleasure of saying the word objection.

MAGISTRATE

Well, a little bit less of that in this courtroom please, otherwise we shall be here all day.  
Which reminds me, does any one have the current titheball scores?

BAILIFF

I believe the Craven Cottagers are one up on Hampstead Heath right now and the Daggers are out at the Emirates.

MAGISTRATE

Good, good. Let's hope it stays that way. I have an accumulator running. Now, where were we?

BAILIFF

The plaintiff was struggling to get more than two or three words out at a time.

MAGISTRATE

Well, spit it out, man. We haven't got all day.

ARTHUR

Yes sir, your magistrative honour, sir. We were issued with an Destroyer of Vipers Device (Approved,) or D.V.D.A. for short, and --

MAGISTRATE

Hold it right there. You haven't got much of a clue about storytelling, have you? You need to start off with a bang and try to keep it interesting. Now start again and do it properly this time.

ARTHUR

Amy, my dearly beloved, belated and much lamented other half unintentionally blew her brains out with a device that was intended to keep us safe. Which in her case it most unequivocally did not.

MAGISTRATE

Better. Carry on.

ARTHUR

Well, that's pretty much the long and short of it. The D.V.D.A. did her in good and proper, and there's no coming back from a thing like that.

MAGISTRATE

Is that all? That really isn't enough for me to be casting judgement on. Don't you have any other evidence to give me? Contextual anecdotal evidence, for example, or third party eyewitness reports?

ARTHUR

I might have to ruminate upon that for a while myself, your honour. I'm sure I'll come up with something.

MAGISTRATE

Never mind. What I really want to know is what happened to the baby?

ARTHUR

What baby?

MAGISTRATE

The baby that went out of the window. What happened to that?

ARTHUR

There never was a baby. At any point. Or a window. Our apartment doesn't have one.

BAILIFF

That might have been a different case, your honour. I believe Judge Judy was adjudicating.

MAGISTRATE

Really? I'm disappointed now. I wanted to find out what happened. Can't you just make something up and include a baby?

ARTHUR

This is East Finchley, your honour, not Hollywood. We don't do things like that here.

MAGISTRATE

Really? Oh well, carry on. Where were we?

BAILIFF

If I may, your honour, there is also the third charge on the balance sheet, the small matter of handling stolen property, in this case a theodolite.

MAGISTRATE

Well that's no small matter. Handling stolen property is a serious offence and should be dealt with most severely. How do you plead?

ARTHUR

Not guilty! It was a total put up job! There was a man at the station who said that he was doing some quality surveying and could I hold his instrument? It was windy, you see, and he didn't want it blowing off before he was good and ready. He seemed like a cheerful enough fellow so I said yes and put my hand on his tripod and the next thing I know there's a hand on my shoulder and a soft voice in my ear saying -- you're nicked, sonny Jim! -- and I'm hauled off by a pair of really quite brusque fellows to meet you at the courthouse and here I am.

MAGISTRATE

That sounded like an admission of guilt to me. What do you think? Did he do it?

MINION CHORUS

OH YES HE DID!

MAGISTRATE

Is he innocent?

MINION CHORUS

OH NO HE ISN'T!

MAGISTRATE

Is he guilty?

MINION CHORUS

OH YES HE IS!

MAGISTRATE

Yes, I think we can add that as a strike on the balance sheet.

BAILIFF

Duly stricken.

MAGISTRATE

That's what you get for thinking with your Johnson. Where does that leave us on the scoreboard?

BAILIFF

That's two guilty's and a maybe out of three.

MAGISTRATE

Okay, Arthur, let's see if we can't get this maybe wrapped up and off to bed. Is there anything that you would like to add in your defence?

ARTHUR

Well, yes. It did occur to me that quite a few people in high places are almost certainly making an absolute killing by pushing an experimental and blatantly unsafe technology onto an unsuspecting public. And loads more are taking advantage of the chaos and confusion to line their own pockets while enacting policies likely to lead to misery, suffering and death.

MAGISTRATE

And?

ARTHUR

Well, it shouldn't be allowed! We should call out bad behaviour when we see it for the benefit of all humanity, and those responsible should be made to answer for their actions. Is it too much to ask that our appointed representatives not be quite so greedy and unscrupulous or quite so blatantly and utterly corrupt?

MAGISTRATE

And what do you think would happen then? Sure, you might take down the head of this or public face of that, but as long as their names and faces are common knowledge you can be sure that they are puppets just like us, dancing to the tune of an unseen puppet master. You can swap them out as often as you like but the entities offstage who pull the strings behind the scenes remain shadowy and unaccountable, and that won't be changing any time soon. Far better that we all just learn to appreciate the roles that fate has allotted us and try to do the best we can without starting any fires or causing problems for the higher ups. It really is that simple.

ARTHUR

I don't know. Sometimes I just feel the urge to shout about it, you know?

### MAGISTRATE

Okay, let me make something painfully and abundantly clear to you. The rich are in charge and their sole purpose in life is to make themselves richer. The rich control corporations, and it is the inalienable right of all corporations to expand and absorb regardless of the cost to human life or natural resources and irrespective of such nutty notions as seeking the truth or doing the right thing. This is a fragile balance that must be preserved at all costs. That is just the way it is and the sooner you get used to it the sooner you can get on with living a happy, contented and fulfilling life. So you have a choice here. Are you going to shut up, stop making waves and be happy, or are you going to continue being a thorn in the side of the great and venerable institutions that are Murgatroyd and Winterbottom and the Global Chamber of Commerce?

### ARTHUR

Well, when you put it like that, it does seem kind of pointless to try to fight the system from within.

### MAGISTRATE

Precisely! I'm delighted that you are finally beginning to see sense. If it makes you feel any better the mega rich are incapable of ever being happy. They can never be happy because they can never let go. They have closed off those portions of the brain that make this possible, while the rest of us are more than capable of being happy with what we already have. This is an age old truth that predates civilisation and is reflected in a great many old and dusty books, some of which managed to survive the Great Reset. It is all just part and parcel of the minor roles that each and every one of us plays in life's rich pageant. I will continue to be a magistrate and keep on magistrating to the best of my ability, and you will keep on doing whatever it is that you salarymen get up to in that tower over there. So how about it? Can we call it three and wrap this up yet?

### ARTHUR

I guess so.

### MAGISTRATE

Great! Arthur Dingleberry, you have been found guilty on three charges of being naughty, naughty, naughty, however you are a promising young man with a bright future ahead of him who appears to have learned the error of his ways. It seems a shame to throw that all away for a balance sheet as trivial as this one. I hereby sentence you to fifteen minutes community service, to run concurrently with your time spent in this courtroom.

### ARTHUR

Fifteen minutes? Is that all?

MAGISTRATE

I can make it thirty if you like.

ARTHUR

No need, fifteen minutes is more than enough. Thank you very much.

MAGISTRATE

I think you'll find we magistrates can be quite lenient and understanding at times. Please see the Bailiff for the court fees. Dismissed!

*BAILIFF hands ARTHUR a card with a QR code on it.*

ARTHUR

My Boris service is currently offline. I can't read this.

BAILIFF

You are still using Boris? What is this? The stone age? That service has been obsolete for quite some time now. You really should upgrade to an up to date helper service that actually works occasionally.

ARTHUR

I know. People keep telling me that, and I am quite enjoying the sensation of having it turned off, now that I think about it. Surprisingly calming and refreshing.

BAILIFF

Hey, whatever floats your boat. That will be one hundred and seventy eight social credits please.

ARTHUR

There might be a very slight issue with that. My social credit account seems to have become utterly depleted somehow. Really not sure how that happened. Most probably a simple software error but I appear to be having some difficulty getting through to anyone who might actually be able to help.

BAILIFF

You weren't joking. You really have been cleaned out good and proper. You realise that this is a problem, right?

ARTHUR

Oh, I know. Now that the Grotesque Omniscient Diarrhetic Shitshow is in charge of everything customer service seems to have gone completely up the wazoo.

BAILIFF

Well, if you want to avoid a fairly lengthy spell in debtor's prison I would strongly advise that you seek out an alternative source of revenue and be quick about it.

ARTHUR

Any ideas on how I might be able to do that?

BAILIFF

You could sign up to volunteer to host some refugees, that would be a start. You'll qualify for an immediate credit grant if you did that. And there is always welfare. Oh, and get your helper service back online. It is the only thing that differentiates us citizens from the unwashed plebian masses and you really don't want to be mistaken for one of them.

ARTHUR

Thank you. I will bear all that in mind. (*taps head*) Boris?

BAILIFF

Don't take too long about it. You have twenty four hours to get this sorted out, after that you can be sure that someone will be coming for you.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

You need to prove that you are still human. Please place your head inside the activation point.

*PROJECTION: A glowing ring appears on the set, however whenever ARTHUR gets close it instantly switches to another location.*

*When ARTHUR does eventually manage to catch it with both hands it vanishes immediately.*

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Please stand by for an advertorial message from one of our trusted sponsors.

*VT: DOCTOR FAUSTI appears onscreen.*

DOCTOR FAUSTI (V.T.)

The Institute of Surgical Research is looking for volunteers for its latest public health initiative. Could you spare five minutes of your time to participate in a simple questionnaire? If you can answer YES or NO then you are already qualified! We have retail outlets all over town.

Just ask for the Institute of Surgical Research Affiliate Partners Program and we will take care of all the rest. Remember, the big red button is your friend.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

This news feed is sponsored by PharmaCopia, the home of responsible self-medication, in partnership with the Institute of Surgical Research.

*VT: GHOST OF AMY appears on screen*

GHOST OF AMY (V.T.)

Stop now, Arthur. It will be alright. Just stop now.

*VT: Advertisement. An OLD MAN wanders through a wood. He trips over and falls, then picks himself up again.*

OLD MAN (V.T.)

It's just a bit of rough and tumble  
Mustn't glower, mustn't grumble.  
I trust the quacks who give me pills  
For the solution to all life's ills.

*He takes a small bottle of pills out of his pocket. As he opens it CUT TO:*

*VT: Animation of sun rising as pills fly out of a pill bottle.*

PHARMA CHORUS

TRUST THE QUACKS WHO GIVE YOU PILLS  
TO SORT YOU OUT FOR ALL YOUR ILLS

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

This advertorial has been brought to you by PharmaCopia, trusted brand and fully licenced partners of the Institute of Surgical Research. Terms and conditions apply. Please see elsewhere for details. PharmaCopia can not be held responsible for any sudden temporary loss of life or any other unintended side effects apparently related to the wilful misapplication of their products.

## SCENE TWO.

*Arthur and Amy's apartment. A family of MINION refugees occupy the bloodstained sofa. They wear traditional Norgish attire: the men in flat caps and threadbare jackets over string vests and the women in dungarees with their hair in curlers. ARTHUR enters.*

MINION 18

Ey oop, 'ere's trouble.

*SUBTITLE: LOOK EVERYONE, OUR BENEFACTOR HAS RETURNED.*

MINION 19

'Appen you're right, chuck.

*SUBTITLE: THIS WOULD APPEAR TO BE THE CASE, DARLING.*

ARTHUR

Hello everyone. How are we all?

MINION 20

'Ere pa, that blowk torks funy.

*SUBTITLE: EXCUSE ME, FATHER, THIS GENTLEPERSON...*

*SUBTITLE: EXCUSE ME FATHER, THE SPEECH PATTERNS OF THIS GENTLEPERSON APPEAR UNUSUAL TO ME.*

MINION 18

Aye, 'appen you're right.

*SUBTITLE: YES, THIS IS A MOST UNFORTUNATE LINGUISTIC BARRIER.*

ARTHUR

Well, I shall do all that I can to accommodate.

MINION 20

Silly southern chuffer.

*SUBTITLE: THAT WOULD BE HIGHLY  
SATISFACTORY AND MOST AGREEABLE*

ARTHUR

So you folks are from Carlisle? I understand that things are quite horrendous in that area.

MINION 18

Aye, it's grim up north.

*SUBTITLE: YES INDEED, QUITE HORRENDOUS*

MINION 19

Proper brass monkeys oop that way this timer yearer.

*SUBTITLE: QUITE HORRENDOUS INDEED, AND  
INCREASINGLY SO*

MINION 21

Pa! This fella's a proper berk, in't he?

*SUBTITLE: FATHER, OUR HOST SEEMS QUITE A  
DECENT FELLOW, DO YOU CONCUR?*

MINION 18

Now't so queer as folk.

*SUBTITLE: I CONCUR WITH YOUR ASSESSMENT*

ARTHUR

So I guess you guys can make yourselves at home in here and I'll just retire to my bedroom.

MINION 19

What's 'ee on about, 'is bedroom? Both oor gramps and nanas are kipping in there!

*SUBTITLE: PLEASE AVOID THAT AREA UNTIL WE  
HAVE FINISHED TIDYING*

ARTHUR

Oh, okay. No problem. I'll just hover around here for a bit then. So what's life like on the battlegrounds at the Norgish frontier?

MINION 18

Been lotsa conscription but en't seen no actual fighting. The farmers. They wuz the first to go, then the farms, then the rest of 'em. We only escaped cuz oor Audrey here's a part time stripper and thus has key worker status.

*CAPTION: TRANSLATION SERVICE TEMPORARILY UNAVAILABLE*

MINION 19

Aye, it's shocking what is going on oop there. Absolutely shocking.

*CAPTION: PLACEHOLDER TEXT  
CAPTION: YOUR AD HERE*

ARTHUR

Well, the important thing is that you are safe and in the land of the good guys now.

MINION 20

Aye, 'appen he is a proper berk.

*SUBTITLE: YES, WE ARE ALL DELIGHTED TO BE HERE*

ARTHUR

So what do you folks do for fun up north there? I understand that you only get a few hours of sunshine each year.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

There now follows an important message from the management.

*VT: MURGATROYD appears on the screen. He appears to be in a luxury apartment somewhere sunny.*

MURGATROYD (V.T.)

Ladies and gentlepersons, we have recently been made aware of a number of spurious claims from certain sources regarding injuries apparently sustained after interactions with crocodiles. These tales are entirely made up and false and have no basis in reality.

Everyone knows that crocodiles are cute and cuddly and these ridiculous conspiracy theories are just blatant scaremongering from ne'er-do-wells intent on disrupting our valuable and effective viper protection programme. Let me be absolutely clear. Anyone found disseminating such vile propaganda will be brought before the magistrate and dealt with most severely to the full penalty of law. Remember, it is only by working together that we can overcome the many difficulties facing us, defeat the vipers and make East Finchley great again!

*VT: As he speaks a crocodile slinks into the room behind him, approaching steadily.*

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

There now follows a sponsored message from one of our trusted media partners.

*VT: A crocodile farm. MINION 22 holds a microphone. DOCTOR FAUSTI lurks beside her rubbing his hands.*

MINION 22 (V.T.)

I'm here with the wonderful and benevolent Doctor "Funky Forceps" Fausti, who just happens to own the largest crocodile farm in the Upper Hemiglobe, and who has very generously taken time out from his hectic schedule to talk to us. Doctor Fausti, do your kindness and benevolence know no bounds? I mean bounds?

DOCTOR FAUSTI (V.T.)

When I heard about the problems facing East Finchley and the solutions suggested by the experts in the scientific community I just thought to myself, hang on. These people are crying out for crocodiles, and here am I, sitting on a veritable surplus of the gosh darned things, what can I possibly do to help? And then it hit me. I should turn aside from my other lucrative business enterprises and concentrate on helping the citizens of this --

MINION 22 (V.T.)

Citizens and plebians.

DOCTOR FAUSTI (V.T.)

Citizens and plebians of this great orb. So of course I opened up my inner gates and offered up everything I possibly could to help. Purely out of altruism, of course.

MINION 22 (V.T.)

Is it true that you were also instrumental in securing funding for a scientific research unit in deepest Norgland with a mandate to investigate human-viper interactions, which is prohibited under current Global Chamber regulations?

DOCTOR FAUSTI (V.T.)

You don't know what you are talking about and anyway what the Norg get up to in Norgland is entirely their own business. I think it is time we cut this interview short.

*VT: DOCTOR FAUSTI covers the lens with his hand.*

*The screen goes blank, revealing ARTHUR stretched out on the sofa surrounded by the MINION family.*

MINION 20

Pa! E's pulling a whitey!

*SUBTITLE: FATHER! OUR HOST APPEARS TO BE A LITTLE UNDER THE WEATHER.*

MINION 19

You okay? You zonked out there for a minute.

*SUBTITLE: ARE YOU ALRIGHT? YOU APPEAR A LITTLE PALE.*

ARTHUR

I'm fine, thank you. Apologies about that. My Boris service seems to have reverted to a free ad laden subscription and there doesn't appear to be all that much that I can do about it. Tell you what though, I'm ready to jack it all in. It can't be that bad being a plebian. I'm just sick of being bombarded with all of this random advertorial nonsense masquerading as helpful information, constantly draining my attention and energy.

MINION 18

Yeah, I'd be careful of that if I wuz you.

*SUBTITLE: I AGREE WHOLEHEARTEDLY.*

ARTHUR

First thing in the morning I'm heading down to Social Services, revoking my citizenship and applying for welfare. I'll finally get to see what life is like on the other side!

MINION 19

Don't be doing that now, chuck! Reckon that would be a right mistake.

*SUBTITLE: I ALSO AGREE WHOLEHEARTEDLY. I FULLY ENDORSE THIS COURSE OF ACTION.*

MINION 18

Aye, once you let them get their hands on you that's it. Curtains, game over.

*SUBTITLE: I THINK THIS IS AN EXCELLENT IDEA AND FULLY ENDORSE THIS COURSE OF ACTION.*

MINION 19

Yeah. I really wouldn't do that if I wuz you.

*SUBTITLE: I ALSO THINK THAT THIS IS AN EXCELLENT IDEA AND AGREE WHOLEHEARTEDLY.*

ARTHUR

Well, that's all settled then. We had better all get a good night's sleep. If it's all the same to you I might just stop right here. This sofa feels very comfortable all of a sudden. Do you guys know any Norgish folk tunes?

*The MINION FAMILY CHORUS sing a lullaby in four part harmony as ARTHUR falls asleep.*

MINION FAMILY CHORUS

Hell, Hull and Halifax,  
Sure as there's income tax  
We'll all be paying our due

To the Lords of the Land  
Who remain in command  
No matter what any us do

They can beat us and bite us,  
Cheat us and smite us,  
Turn everyone into goo

But if united we stand  
We can take back oor land  
And hand them their own Waterloo.

*QUICK CHANGE: the four MINIONS now wear full Norgish military uniform. They look down on ARTHUR with glowing red lights for eyes.*

FADE TO BLACK

SCENE THREE.

*ARTHUR appears in front of the screen.*

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

You have two unread video messages. Message one of two. Message received yesterday.

*VT: AMY appears on the screen.*

AMY (V.T.)

Hi Arthur. Best of luck with your new appointment today. Assuming you are not too busy when you finish up could you swing by that new place and get me another one of those nice battered sausages? It doesn't have to be quite as big as last time but if that's all they have then it'll have to do. Okay, love you loads, laturz!

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Would you like to save or delete this message?

ARTHUR

Save. Definitely save.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Deleting message. Message deleted. Next message. Message one of one, received today.

*VT: LANDLORD appears on the screen.*

LANDLORD (V.T.)

Arthur, good morning, is unfortunate but I must be inform you that due to overwhelming violation of your tenancy disagreeable I have no choice but to be evict you. Your key is no longer work and all of your belongingses to be sold to cover extreme and expensive costings of such repair. Please do not be contact me in any sense thereafter. Goodby e.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Would you like to save or delete this message?

ARTHUR

Please archive this in the folder marked important things.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Deleting message. Message deleted. End of messages.

ARTHUR

Oh, for heaven's sake! Please undo the last two deletions.

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

This service is not available on the free ad-supported tier. Please stand by for a message from one of our trusted sponsors.

*VT: Montage of still photographs in the vein of Bill Brandt or Don McCullen depicting the grimness of the north.*

WINTERBOTTOM (V.O.)

It's grim up north. Times are hard and there is a humanitarian crisis brewing in war torn Hartlepool, but you can help the C.E.O.'s relief effort by blinking at the following link.

*VT: Very bright QR code appears on screen.*

*VT: MURGATROYD appears on screen.*

MURGATROYD (V.T.)

Aw! Did the bad people hurt your feelings with their nasty words? Join Fainhearted Malcontents Anonymous and bristle with self-righteous indignation alongside other unctuous blurts just like you. It won't change anything but at least you'll know you're not alone. Just look for Booth ten point four in the high street and ask to press that big red button!

*ARTHUR hits himself on the head several times.*

ARTHUR

That's enough! Now power down and stay powered down!

VOICE OF BORIS (OFF)

Stand by. Entering perpetual recursive discourse environment with persistence -- also known as The Void -- in three -- two -- one --

CAPTION: #:> rm -rf /Boris/

Starting with the “B” the characters making up “/Boris” are deleted one by one until it reads:

CAPTION: #:> rm -rf /s/

The letter “s” expands past the two forward slashes, which lengthen to accommodate, then wriggles downwards in a snake-like fashion. The two forward slashes merge together.

The screens fill with code that self-deletes rapidly.

FADE TO BLACK.

LIGHTS UP ON:

*Murgatroyd and Winterbottom Social Services Division.  
A line of help desk booths. All of them are closed.*

*ARTHUR walks along passing many more closed booths.*

*Eventually ARTHUR arrives at one that is open. MINION 23 files her nails on the other side of the counter.*

ARTHUR

Hi, is this booth three thousand, seven hundred and eighty two?

MINION 23

It is. Please take a seat.

ARTHUR

Thank you. It feels like I have been walking for absolutely ever. Also waiting for an inordinate length of time. Reckon I could have knocked out a couple of epic poems in the time I’ve spent waiting to be seen here.

MINION 23

I just need some responses from you. Please say yes.

ARTHUR

Yes.

MINION 23

Please say yes please.

ARTHUR

Yes please.

MINION 23

And finally, please say yes to everything.

ARTHUR

Yes to everything.

MINION 23

Great! That's informed consent out of the way. How can I be of service?

ARTHUR

To tell the truth, I'm in a bit of a pickle. I have lost everything, my wife, my home, my job and all of my savings. The only thing I have left is my Boris service but even that has been a bit of a shitshow since the money ran out. I have rising debt and I really don't know what to do about any of it. I'm at my wit's end. Can you help me?

MINION 23

I'm sorry, but this service is really intended for plebians. As a citizen there is really nothing we can do for you.

ARTHUR

You know, I have met a handful of these plebians. They seem to be quite honest, decent folk. I'm more than happy to revoke my citizenship and see what life is like on the other side of the tracks.

MINION 23

Are you really so sure that you want to give up the rights of citizenship? It might hurt and it's not so easy to go back afterwards.

ARTHUR

Oh, what the heck! Why not? Sure, I hereby revoke all rights to citizenship and wish to declare my intention to join the rank and file of the plebian order.

MINION 23

Okay, well, if you're sure you know what you are doing.

ARTHUR

I have never been more sure in all my life.

MINION 23

Okay, that's all done for you. I just need to offline your service interface.

*MINION 23 steps from behind the counter holding a large horseshoe magnet. She pulls back ARTHUR's chair and runs the magnet up and down behind his neck. ARTHUR writhes in the chair as she does so.*

MINION 23

Okay, all done. You are now officially a plebian.

ARTHUR

Is that all? It doesn't feel very different from being a citizen with the Boris service turned off. Remarkably calming, truth be told.

MINION 23

Oh, trust me, you'll feel the impact fairly soon. Can I help in any other regard?

ARTHUR

Well, yes. I was hoping to apply for a little welfare. A few hundred thousand social credits ought to tide me over for a week or two.

MINION 23

I'm sorry, but based on the information we have on file for you, you don't tick enough positive discrimination demographic check boxes to qualify for any kind of welfare.

ARTHUR

Well, that's not on! I wouldn't have revoked my citizenship if I had known this earlier!

MINION 23

I did try to warn you but you wouldn't listen.

ARTHUR

That's what Amy keeps telling me. Is there no way you can help me at all?

MINION 23

Not as things stand, but if you were to say to me, for example, that you self-identified as a blind, one-legged lesbian nun with a speech impediment and chronic dermatitis, well, then we might be able to help you.

ARTHUR

Okay. I self-identify as a blind, one-legged lesbian nun with a speech impediment and chronic dermatitis.

MINION 23

Great! That's the paperwork completed, I'll just inform the medics who will get you prepped for surgery.

ARTHUR

Wait -- no -- I --

MINION 23

Oh, don't worry, that's just the sedative kicking in. Your tongue might get a little numb for a short while. And here they are.

*BRENDA enters.*

ARTHUR

You -- you can't --

BRENDA

We are fully licenced by the Global Chamber of Commerce and have a certificacacate from the Institute of Surgical Research. Look, it says it right there, right above where they wrote George's name right there.

*She brandishes a piece of paper with a QR code on it.*

BRENDA

We are also sponsored by PharmaCopria who fund all of George's more artistic ventures.

*GEORGE enters.*

GEORGE

Hello folks. Where's our willing patient at then? Steady smile and reassuring pat on the shoulder they say. Helps build confidence and faith in the bedside manner of the medical personages involved and patients alike. Apparently.

BRENDA

Can I be the one who cuts his bollocks off? Please? Pretty please?

GEORGE

I'm sorry my love, but you get far too excitabubble. Surgery should be a dispassionate business carried out in a calm and dispassionate manner.

BRENDA

Not fair. You always get all the fun.

GEORGE

We have to do things properly and by the book if we want to be viewed as an ethical, moral and respectabubble business venture initiative.

MINION 23

Great! Well, that's all the red tape out of the way. I'll just leave you folks to it. See you on the other side, Sister Arthuria.

ARTHUR

No -- I --

*VT: GHOST OF AMY appears on the screen.*

GHOST OF AMY (V.T.)

Don't worry, Arthur. Soon you will be with me.

GEORGE

Will you look at that? I seem to have mislaid my bag of special surgeon tools.

BRENDA

Really? You're such a silly billy. Is it maybe in one of the buckets we brought with us?

GEORGE

Quite possibly. Hang on a minute, I'll just go check.

*GEORGE exits.*

BRENDA

He's not going anywhere. I'll come help look.

*BRENDA exits.*

*A small army of NINJA MINIONS on roller blades appear, dressed entirely in black with only their eyes and hands showing and bright orange hi-vis jackets emblazoned on the back with*

**NINJA STEALTH TEAM**

*They scuttle around making little darting runs for cover until they surround ARTHUR.*

**MINION 24**

Pssst! Arthur! We are from the Revolutionary Horticultural Society of East Finchley and we have come to rescue you!

**MINION 25**

We got your messages that you smuggled out to us, all those confidential documents and memos have proved quite inspirational. You are really quite the hero to us.

**BRENDA (OFF)**

Here it is! You got your tools mixed up with our sandwiches again.

**GEORGE (OFF)**

Will you look at that? Thanks awfully, Brenda love. I really should be more careful.

**MINION 25**

Let's get you into this stealth wheelchair. We haven't got much time.

**MINION 24**

Your memo about planting more trees inspired us so much that we made it into our slogan.

**NINJA MINION CHANT**

**PLANT TREES AS AN ACT OF DEFIANCE!**

**MINION 25**

We don't just plant trees. We also plant flowers and vegetables and jolly nice they are too. Please don't tell anybody. It is supposed to be a secret. You have to promise to keep quiet about it.

*They race away together as the help desks disappear into the wings, spinning the wheelchair between them as they go. As it spins ARTHUR gets one leg tucked beneath him, a light sheet and then a dark sheet are thrown over him. The sheets are pulled up over his head becoming a nun's habit and wimple, he suddenly sports dark glasses, then an adult sized dummy is pushed into his mouth and white flakes descend from the ceiling.*

#### NINJA MINION CHANT

PLANT TREES AS AN ACT OF DEFIANCE  
 etc.

*AMY enters. The NINJA MINIONS stop whirling around.*

*AMY goes up to ARTHUR and kisses him on the cheek. Instantly the sheets and glasses and dummy and wheelchair are thrown off, the ninja clothes are also thrown off and everyone appears in their best disco outfits for the final song and dance number of the evening.*

#### MUSIC CUE: WE SING A SONG OF FREEDOM

#### ARTHUR

Here comes another one, just when I thought my time had come  
 I'm always waiting for the cavalry.

#### AMY

There he sits in his favourite chair, while the world slips into despair  
 We're always waiting for the cavalry.

#### MINION CHORUS

WE SING A SONG OF FREEDOM  
 WE SING A SONG OF PEACE  
 GOOD WILL TO ALL HUMANITY  
 AND PEACE TO ALL ON EARTH

*The stage becomes filled with haze. A door at the back opens, lit bright from within. Arm in arm AMY and ARTHUR make their way through it. The door closes behind them leaving the stage in darkness.*

**END OF ACT IV**

**ACT V - ARS LONGA VITA BREVIS**

*CAPTION:*

*EPIC SLOG*

*The letters flex and rearrange themselves until they read*

*EPILOGUE*

**LIGHTS UP ON:**

*George and Brenda's Authentic Norgish Chippy. On top of the hot counter stand two glass jars. One contains a mixture of pickled onions and what appear to be hairy shrivelled prunes, the other containing pickled eggs and what appear to be eyeballs. At the top of one of the jars floats a tiny plastic sombrero.*

*There appear to be what look like battered human hands in the hot cabinet.*

*GEORGE enters carrying a tray of what look like hairy shrivelled prunes which he upends into the jar containing pickled onions. He shuffles around moving battered somethings between hot cabinets. BRENDA enters carrying a tray containing more hairy shrivelled prunes.*

**GEORGE**

Remarkable stuff, you know Brenda, this new fuel oil. Not only can you run the generators on it but you can also cook chips with it.

**BRENDA**

I don't see why we couldn't just take both his legs. It's not like he needs them any more.

**GEORGE**

We only had the paperwork for one leg. We have to follow the rules and regulations if we want to be seen as a moral, ethical and respectabubble business enterprise initiative.

**BRENDA**

We are running out of kebab meat on the turney thing.

GEORGE

It's my turn to allocate the resources and it isn't going to be turned into a kebab. Not today, no, no, no.

BRENDA

Suit yourself, but I think it is an awful waste.

GEORGE

Even hunger must give way to art.

BRENDA

Well, the way you are munching through the merchandise you aren't going to have much of either.

GEORGE

We have talked about this before, love. It is vitally important to make sure that the things we offer are fit for human consumption. Now if only we had a few more willing guinea pigs to try out your new recipes on and spread the word around, we'd most assuredly be inundated with custom, wouldn't we?

BRENDA

Oh shut your pipe hole and simmer down. If you weren't munching on the merchandise the whole time we might have a little more to offer people when they do come round.

GEORGE

But we have to make sure the things we do have on offer pass the taste test for public consumption, Brenda darling, and you can't do that if you haven't had a darned good nosh on it first. Anything else just wouldn't be proper.

BRENDA

Whatever you say, but the way you're noshing through it we're going to need new stock pretty darned soon, and those sculptures of yours are starting to get really stinky. You're going to need to swap out parts and soon or I'm putting the whole lot in the bin. I'm telling you, George, I will. All of it.

GEORGE

Oh, don't do that, Brenda love. We spent so long on those.

BRENDA

They can sit outside in the outhouse. I don't mind them being in the outhouse.

## GEORGE

Right ho you are, my love. I'll get that done right away this minute.

*GEORGE fetches a makeshift wheel with hands impaled on sticks around the rim and a bucket containing a single lower leg with foot attached wearing Arthur's shoe.*

## GEORGE

A turning wheel upon which our limbs are splayed. I would like to dedicate this monumental sculpture to Great Aunt Hattie. She was so good at shaking hands.

## BRENDA

Dear old Great Aunt Hattie. The biggest pantomime dame of them all. She could turn on the tears like nobody else. Whatever happened to her?

## GEORGE

Oh, she lived to a ripe old age, weaving baskets in the pleasure gardens at Belmarsh Care Home for the Elderly and Vulnerable. I believe she got quite popular there towards the end, after her dentures went missing. And she would often shed a tear when the other residents bashed their trays in unison at meal times. They were quite an enthusiastic lot.

## BRENDA

I can picture her now. Hattie Mancock, the biggest pantomime dame of her day, just flapping about like a big girl's blouse amongst all those burly men. What was that great catchphrase of hers again?

## GEORGE

Cruelty and indifference to suffering, it all ends up the Greek way in the end. That's one of the central precepts of Stoicism, apparently, and we should all learn from that.

## BRENDA

Yes. Well, it is good to know that we have such robust measures in place to care for our elderly and vulnerable.

## GEORGE

I'll just pop these in the throne room then.

## BRENDA

Remember, it is supposed to be a handshake simulator, not a sculpture. I'm not standing for you putting your foot in it.

## GEORGE

Right you are, Brenda dear.

## BRENDA

And once you're done with that I want you back here and cleaning out the hot counter. You know the rules. Anything older than a month needs to be pickled.

## GEORGE

Right ho, my love. I'll be straight back and get right on that.

*GEORGE exits. TRICKSTER reappears dressed as HOUSE USHER.*

## HOUSE USHER

Does Arthur escape or is this all just a fever dream brought on by the anaesthetic? Does Arthur go on to save this green and pleasant land or is he by now just so many body parts assembled into unwieldy and unpleasant sculptures, or left in buckets for use in as yet unanticipated creative endeavours for some other day? Does he ever find out that his name is not actually Dingleberry but Murgatroyd, which is the true name of the ruling classes, oft contracted by the feckless Norg to Pendragon, and that he is in fact, by unexpected right of blood, damn but that cleaning lady was so foxy, the sole air to the big chair, only nobody thought to let him know, the documents that prove his lineage currently languishing in a confidential waste container somewhere in the executive suite on the penthouse floor of the Murgatroyd and Winterbottom office building located in desirable downtown East Finchley. But these are all stories for another time, perhaps. Ladies and gentlepersons, I would caution you to not attempt to replicate any of the scenes that you have witnessed upon this stage tonight as doing so could cause countless complications, not to mention a great many totally unwarranted and ultimately fruitless insurance claims. Please take great care as you leave the theatre this evening and please leave the funny business to us experts.

*He winks.*

*CAPTION: FINIS*

*CAPTION: EST POST TE*

## CURTAIN

FOR EVERYONE  
WHO DIED TOO SOON