

# Flanagan's Running Club – Issue 61

## Introduction

The first rule of Flanagan's Running Club is everyone should be telling everyone they know about Flanagan's Running Club! After all, sharing is caring. Details of how to sign up is in the epilogue.

There is no need to panic, there is no actual running involved, it is not a running club in that sense. The title is made up from extending the title of my favourite book – Flanagan's Run by Tom McNab.

So, sit back, grab a cup of coffee (or beer or wine or whatever), and enjoy the read.

## On This Day – 23<sup>rd</sup> July

1903 – The Ford Motor Company sells its first car.

1962 – Jackie Robinson becomes the first African American to be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Birthday of Haile Selassie (Rastafari)

Children's Day (Indonesia)

### A Grim Almanac of Sussex

**1798** – The following notice appeared in the Sussex Weekly Advertiser:

On Saturday, the 23<sup>rd</sup> June last under a pretence of visiting a relative at Burpham, near Chichester, and who has not since been heard of, William Martin of Plumpton, near Lewes, Farmer.

Description of his person and dress.

Aged about 50 years, 5 feet 6 inches height, thin or spare habit of body, light complexion, light hazel eyes, light brown hair, hanging rather lank, long, and loose on his shoulders, his speech rather low and mild, a scar on his forehead rather inclining over one eye, also a small knob or bunch on the upper part of his nose, occasioned by a blow he sometime since received; clothed in a mixed slate coloured second cloth coat, black velveteen waistcoat, ornamented with small gold impressed spots, with a fine white round frock [smock] over the same, plain dark coloured velvet breeches, blue cotton stockings, shoes with plain silver plated buckles.

N.B. – If the said William Martin left his home on account of his circumstances being deranged, and will return to his disconsolate wife and family, he will be cordially received and assisted.

Should any accident have happened to him or any person will give intimation of the same to Mr Homewood of Plumpton aforesaid, miller, every reasonable expense will be paid. Plumpton, July 1798.

### Births

1947 – David Essex

1953 – Graham Gooch

1973 – Monica Lewinsky

1989 – Daniel Radcliffe

### Deaths

2011 – Amy Winehouse

### Number 1's

Number 1 single in 1981 - The Specials - Ghost Town

Number 1 album in 1968 - The Small Faces - Ogden's Nut Gone Flake

Number 1 compilation album in 2001 - Various - Capital Gold Legends

## #vss365

A short story in 280 characters or less, based on a prompt word on Twitter

"You blew up a Bartstos transporter."

"That's what the tracker was on."

"Where is Brodie?"

"erm."

"Do you know which #galaxy he is in?"

"It has to be this one, he was seen entering the wormhole."

"Yet, his ship no longer has a tracker on it.

Find him, before I find you."

#vss365

## Joke

A teenage girl confesses to her mother that she's missed her period for two months running. They immediately purchase a home pregnancy test, and the result's confirmed. She's up the duff. "bring me the pig who did this to you!" screams her incandescent mother, "I want to see him now!" The girl quickly makes a phone call to her lover, and half an hour later a gleaming, brand new Ferrari pulls up outside the house. Out steps a mature and distinguished gentleman, handsome and impeccably dressed. He enters the house and sits down in the living room with the father, mother and girl. "Good afternoon", he politely greets the family, "you daughter has informed me of the situation. I am unable to marry her due to my personal family circumstances, but rest assured, I'll take full responsibility. If a girl is born, I'll bequeath her three of my shops, two townhouses, a beach house and a £1m bank account. If it's a boy, my legacy will be two factories, and a £2m bank account. If it's twins, a single factory and £500,000 each. However, if there's a miscarriage...." The father breaking his stunned silence, places a hand firmly on the man's shoulder, "You'll fuck her again, right?"

## Drabble

A drabble is a complete story that is exactly one hundred words long.

### The Leaflet

I was shocked when they put the leaflet into my hand. Not by what was printed on the leaflet, or even by the fact that I was been given actual paper in these times. No, what shocked me the most was the fact the text wasn't handwritten. They had somehow managed to print the text out. Printed text wasn't something I had seen since childhood.

It was important, it meant that somewhere on this godforsaken planet, someone still had electricity. They still had working tech, and they had access to ink.

It meant that the government was lying to us.

## Random Items

### Facts

A group of rhinos is called a crash.

Thirty-five percent of the people who use personal ads for dating are already married.

A group of kangaroos is called a mob.

### Thoughts

How can eating a quarter pounder lead to a weight increase of half a stone?

If a person owns a piece of land do they own it all the way down to the core of the earth?

Why is it called Alcoholics Anonymous when the first thing you do is stand up and say, 'My name is Bob, and I am an alcoholic'?

## A Word A Day

### **Venal versus Venial**

Adjectives

Two words with vastly different meanings separated by a single vowel. To commit a venal act is basically to accept or administer a bribe and follows the old adage that everything has a price. In many countries, venal acts are regarded as corruption and if exposed would likely entail some form of punishment or sanction. To commit a venial act is to do something careless but largely trivial and so the culprit will most likely be pardoned or forgiven. Venal derives from the Latin *venum*, which simply meant something for sale; whereas venial descends from *venia* meaning favour or pardon. It is highly likely that Latin speakers also got confused between the two words.

*His venal activities had begun to attract the attention of the police.*

*It was decided that the offence was venial in nature and a full pardon was issued.*

## Flash Fiction

Something between the 100-word shortness of a Drabble, and the short story, these are works of fiction somewhere between five hundred and seven hundred words.

### The Snail Pulls A Fast One

“Percion”, “Percion - time to get up, you have to be in the king’s courtyard in 2 etumins”

I can hear the nagging voice of Mraydebeeste, the official waker, seeping into my shell, and I know I need to extend myself out of the shell. Gradually, bit by bit I manage to extend myself to my full length and start to slide gracefully across the cold, wet, stone ground.

I am Percion Montmarl the fourteenth, an assistant to Quing Wateguy of the Snails (who I believe that it will go down in history as Wateguy the slimeless one - due to the fact that he’s a dried-up old cretin, how it’s managed to survive to the age of 13 I don’t know).

At 14 toof long I am one of the largest snails ever to live in the Quingdom, and this along with my unusual intellect for a snail, has propelled me to being the Quing’s primary assistant. The role takes on the characteristics of bodyguard (though the number of mad suicide salt bearing snails is minimal around here, and besides I’m not getting in the way in the unlikely event one of them does eventually turn up), as well as personal adviser for our majesty (I.E. It’s stupid and needs someone to think for it).

It’s probably the most boring job in the Quingdom, as there is a limit to the amount of times you can tell someone that the answer to whether they should have grass or lettuce, is lettuce because it’s allergic to grass. It’s had lettuce every day for 3 years now that I know to, and it’s anyone’s guess, for how many years before that, snail assistants here before me have tried to get it to have some other vegetation, fruit and even some delicate snail eggs, but it point blank refuses to have anything except lettuce, though Wateguy does insist that it ought to have some grass, but then can’t decide whether to or not, forgetting it’s allergic to it, and therefore asks me. EVERY! SODDING! TIME!

The only thing that makes the job worthwhile is the Quing’s eldest child, Treisesla, Although as a snail we are all hermaphrodites there is something about Treisesla, it’s glorious spiral shell is perfectly formed, and shines in a way that reflects all the colours in the spectrum, at just the right brightness for all our delicate eyes, and in such a way that makes my heart rise, and brings me joy whenever I see it.

Now between you and me there would be nothing better than Treisesla being the one that I could exchange sperm with, lying there for hours covered in our shared frothy slime, before going off and laying our respective eggs, but this is the real world, and there is no way I’d be allowed to swap sperm with any of the Quing’s offspring, let alone the eldest, because despite being the Quing’s personal assistant and bodyguard I am still by birth a common snail, but I have a plan to get round that. I just need the time and opportunity.

More of that later, I’ve just got time for some succulent tree bark for breakfast and then it’s off to see how the Quing wishes to bore me today. The bark is great having just been stripped off a local fir tree cluster, though our colony has just about managed to strip the entire fir colony of its bark, with only a few of the several thousand left for stripping.

Our gatherers will have to venture further afield to get more, I’ll have to give the order today to send gathering parties out to survey the outlying areas, and I’ll have to get the rest of this bark stashed away in my private store, as there’s no telling how long those gatherer halfwits might take, the last time any of them went to find a supply of water they were

gone for 4 thons. It turns out they found water after 2 yads but then lost their bearings and it took the rest of the time for them to find their way back to our Quingdom, by which time they'd forgotten where the water was in the first place.

If you need a job doing, it is always best to do it yourself, and that's just what I am planning to do with our Quingdom's heredity records. I need a day away from Wateguy the imbecile to get into the archives, it's about time for me to become a distant relative of the Quing, get my slimline updated to one of nobility, and then get to being an item with Treisesla, parent to a line of future Quings, and an impression in the history of our race, the only way forward for me I think.

Now, how to get a day off? Perhaps this is the day that Wateguy actually tries some grass, not enough to kill him off you understand, just enough to put him out of action for a while, so I can become the perfect mate for his offspring.

## Leicestershire

### Everards

Everards is a regional brewery based in Leicester and founded in 1849 by William Everard and Thomas Hull. It produces cask ales and owns over 170 tenanted pubs, mainly around the Leicestershire area. Its chairman is fifth generation Richard Everard.

The company began as Hull and Everard in 1849 when William Everard, a farmer from Narborough Wood House and brewer Thomas Hull leased the Southgate Street Brewery of Wilmot and Co from the retiring proprietors. Although Hull continued as a maltster, Everard was the driving force behind the business which he managed until his death in 1892.

The business expanded as the company progressively acquired outlets, with over 100 pubs by the late 1880s. In 1875, the company moved to a new state of the art tower brewery designed by William's nephew architect John Breedon Everard. The brewery, on the corner of Southgate St and Castle St extracted very pure water from wells 300 feet deep beneath the premises and steam engines played a significant part in the mechanisation.

After the death of William, control passed to his son Thomas. The historic centre of the UK brewing industry remained some 40 miles away at Burton-upon-Trent, which by the 1890s produced one tenth of Britain's beer. Everard's leased the Bridge Brewery on Umplett Green Island in 1895 but its 10,000 barrels per year capacity proved insufficient. It was replaced with the newer Trent brewery in Dale St which became available after going into liquidation in 1898. The Southgate brewery remained the distribution centre to the Leicestershire pubs with beer arriving by rail from Burton. The Trent brewery was purchased outright in 1901. It was renamed the Tiger Brewery around 1970.

Beer production was seriously affected by World War I, both due to recruitment and the Defence of the Realm Act 1914 which required beer to be diluted, restricted opening times and rationed raw materials.

Around 1920 Everards bought wine and spirit merchants John Sarsons & Son of Hotel St, Leicester, a major supplier to wealthy homes.

Thomas moved his family from Narborough Wood House to Nanpantan Hall. In 1909 he opened a cattle trough in Groby on behalf of the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association. And in 1921, a year which saw beer production peak at 55,000 barrels, the company acquired the Stamford Arms in Groby, the former home of both Thomas's grandfather, Richard Everard a yeoman tenant farmer of the Grey estate and his great grandfather.

In 1924, the company completed its move away from rail transport to steam powered drays which continued in use until replaced by petrol lorries in 1946.

Thomas died in 1925 and was succeeded by his son William Lindsay Everard who lived in Ratcliffe Hall.

The Great Depression saw a penny tax on beer. Production fell by a fifth and took five years to recover and all brewing ceased at Southgate in 1931.

Everards became a public company, Everards Brewery Ltd. in October 1936.

Following the outbreak of World War II, the Government increased excise duty tripling the price of a pint by the end of the war. A combination of conscription and a shortage of hops reduced the Leicester operation at times to 3 men.

Following Sir Lindsay's death in 1949, his son Tony Everard, who had been wounded in Normandy in 1944, took over. In the 1950s he developed the concept of "Everards Friendly Inns" designed to "look like your front room" which succeeded in attracting women into what was traditionally a male preserve. In November 1950 the first long service awards were made at a dinner to found the Quarter Century club. Although pubs rarely came onto the market, the demolition of a number of older ones during construction of the Leicester inner ring road in the sixties allowed the company to build new ones such as the Shakespeare in Braunstone and the Firs at Wigston. In 1967 the company employed almost 700 staff and operated 125 pubs.

Like his father Tony had a keen interest in aviation and in 1966 he founded the Helicopter Club of Great Britain and opened a heliport at Ratcliffe. The Airman's Rest hotel in Leicester Forest East was designed to welcome fliers and equipped with a heliport.

In 1979 the company bought 54 hectares at Grove Farm triangle and phase I of the new brewery -named Castle acres after the Castle street premises – was opened on 29 March 1985 by local MP Nigel Lawson. It had a capacity of 125 barrels of Old Original per year. The Tiger brewery in Burton became a museum though it continued to produce Tiger under contract. By 1990, Castle Acres was producing nearly 70,000 barrels, the contract with the museum ended and for the first time since 1892, all Everards beer was brewed in Leicester.

In 1988 Richard Everard, nephew of Tony, became chairman. He confirmed that Everards would remain an independent family business and in 1997 it repurchased its remaining preference shares to become a private business again. The company also invested in budget hotels, named 'Original Inns' based around existing pubs. In February 1999, the company celebrated its first 150 years with a visit from Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. Celebrations, perhaps as befitting a brewery, "continued throughout the year," and included the pubs. The 'Founders day' saw Richard Everard presented with a bronze figure of a tiger sculpted by Mark Coreth. In 2002, the company decided to switch its portfolio from a mixture of tenancies and managed houses to tenancies only. This led to new pubs replacing hotels and the estate achieved its highest total of 165 by 2005.

Everards brews four core brands (listed below) and a range of seasonal ales which in 2008-9 included Equinox (September), Sleighbell (December), Pitch Black (February) and Sly Fox (March / April).

Beacon (3.8%) A lighter product than Tiger, named after Beacon Hill, Leicestershire and launched in the early 1970s.  
Tiger (4.2%) First produced in 1972 named for the nickname of the Leicestershire Regiment. Originally known as Best Bitter. The company also adopted the tiger as its logo and will sponsor the Leicester Tigers rugby club until 2018.  
Original (5.2%) Formerly Old Original, an old ale first produced in 1978 and the first Everards beer advertised on television.  
Sunchaser (4.0%)

### **Christ Church, Smeeton Westerby**



Originally Smeeton and Westerby were separate hamlets but they merged some time ago to form the parish.

Christ Church was built in 1848-1849 by Henry Woodyer (1816-1896) in the Decorated style and is surrounded by a beautifully kept churchyard with 99 species of flora and fauna identified in a recent survey. It was based on a design praised by the Ecclesiologist. The church has north and south aisles, nave, chancel, vestry and an octagonal bell turret. The organ is sited at the west end of the church by the west window, the font has an elaborate carved wooden cover and is nearby.

The external west elevation has a single large window with flowing tracery set within an unusual and heavily moulded pointed arch with an octagonal bellcote above. In the south aisle, the east window depicting the Presentation in the Temple is by Kempe & Co, 1902. The font by the south door has an elaborate carved wooden cover.

There have also been some modern upgrades including a kitchen area and toilet facilities. The church is usually unlocked so is available to visit.

The church has no great monuments or architecture of historical significance, but it is a spacious building with a well-proportioned interior. It is a Grade II listed building, being listed on 07/12/1966, the listing details are below.

Parish church. 1848-9 by H Woodyer in the Decorated style. Repaired 1873 and 1895. Grey stone with ashlar dressings. Plain tile roofs with stepped, coped gables. Nave with west bellcote, north aisle, south aisle, south porch, chancel, vestry. West elevation has single 2-light pointed arch window with flowing tracery set within a large heavily moulded pointed arch springing from two angle buttresses with set-offs. Above, an arrowlet window, and above again an octagonal bellcote, with crenelated cornice, and spire with topknot and weather-cock. Single light bell openings on west, south-east and north-east faces, and small buttresses on north and south faces.

North aisle, west wall has large lancet with hoodmold. North wall has a buttress with set-offs with to right a 2-light window with reticulated tracery in a square frame. To the left a similar 3-light window. East wall has a 2-light pointed arch window with hoodmold. South aisle, west wall has a large lancet with hoodmold. South wall has two 2-light pointed arch windows with hoodmolds.

South porch gabled with cross finial, with diagonal buttresses and double chamfered pointed arch doorway. Stone benches inside porch. Heavily moulded pointed arch south doorway with double plank doors. South wall has chamfered plinth and buttress with set-offs, with a lancet with hoodmold to left and a 2-light pointed arch window with flowing tracery and hoodmold to right. Diagonal buttress with set-offs at south-east corner.

Chancel east wall has chamfered plinth and single 3-light pointed arch window with reticulated tracery and hoodmold. East gable has cross finial. To right, vestry east window is a wooden casement with plain arched stone frame. Chancel roof continues down over vestry to north. Vestry has doorway with chamfered frame and plank door. Then a lancet with hoodmold in north wall of chancel.

Interior: narrow entry to bellcote above west window. 4-bay nave arcades with quatrefoil piers with capitals and bases and double-chamfered pointed arches. Chancel arch is double-chamfered with hoodmold and responds with capitals. Pointed chamfered doorway to vestry with trefoil head piscina to right. Marble reredos with dentilled cornice and floral patterns in circles below east window. Sedile below south-east window, with chamfered arch with sexfoil cusping and small shields.

Early C20 organ in west bay of north aisle. Octagonal bowl and stem font with ornate Gothic wooden cover in south aisle. Altar, altar rails, choir stalls, pulpit, lectern, rood screen, pews and wainscoting all C19. South aisle, east wall has WWI marble memorial plaque with WWII brass memorial plaque below. Stained glass, late C19 and early C20, in south aisle, the east window by Kempe & Co 1902, and in chancel windows. Nave roof has 3 trusses with arch braces and crown posts. Ceramic tile floors, with Minton tiled sanctuary.

### **Old Dalby**

Old Dalby is a village in the English county of Leicestershire. It is located to the north-west of Melton Mowbray. It was originally known as "Wold Dalby" or "Dalby on the Wolds". The population is included in the civil parish of Broughton and Old Dalby.

Old Dalby has its own village school, church (St John the Baptist), Scout Hut, a retirement home, the Belvoir Brewery restaurant and alehouse, and, from August 2015 after a closure lasting over a year, the old but newly refurbished pub 'The Crown'. There has been no post office for several years as villagers failed in campaigning against its closure. Sadly, the village shop which was located at the edge of the industrial estate is also closed though one village resident grows a limited amount of vegetables and sells them from an "honesty box".

For around 33 years, on the August bank holiday Monday, the village held a fête known as "Old Dalby Day" to raise money for charities connected with the village. The fête grew to feature many events and attracted visitors from many miles around.

The Knights Hospitallers owned a preceptory in the village from the early 12th century. Traces of Dalby Preceptory are still just visible. Early in the Second World War an Ordnance Depot was established to the east of the village serving as a storage depot for machinery, associated spares and tools. The depot closed in 1996 and now serves as Old Dalby Business Park. The camp that grew nearby to house the workers and military personnel for the depot was originally a series of Nissan huts housing nearly 3,500 soldiers and around 300 prisoners of war. These later became derelict and a housing estate developed there which is now a separate settlement known as Queensway.

The Village Hall is located at the heart of the village and embodies much of the community spirit in Old Dalby. It is the meeting place of several local societies; The Old Dalby Singers, the Wine Club, yoga classes, the crafters and a "drop in" morning amongst these. Sunday newspapers are sold from the hall and there, meetings conducted, and concerts, parties, breakfasts, lunches and events arranged throughout the year. In 2018/9 the Hall was awarded an award towards its refurbishment by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The community is committed to further knowledge of the village's heritage and history and has organised several events to this end including a Feast Day with a visit from Tony Rotherham as a monk/knight, a lecture on archaeology by Carenza Lewis and conducting lessons, in Edwardian clothes and manner, for children from the local school in the hall itself which used to be the village school.

Old Dalby is the location of the control centre of the former British Rail Research Division's railway test track, which runs between Melton Mowbray and Edwalton and which was universally known in the industry as simply 'Old Dalby'. Following privatisation of the UK railways, the test track was taken over by Alstom and electrified on the 25-kV overhead system in order to test the Virgin Trains tilting Pendolino fleet. During this upgrade phase, which began in 2000, the centre of operations moved from Old Dalby to Asfordby (on the outskirts of Melton Mowbray) where a depot was converted from the former National Coal Board's buildings. However, with the demise of Alstom as a train builder in the UK, the future of the test track looked bleak and there was a real possibility that it might have been closed.

In July 1984 the track was used to run a diesel loco and train into a stationary nuclear flask in order to prove the safety of the container. The test was recorded and reported widely enough to make Old Dalby famous for a while. A video of the test can be seen [here](#).

On 12 February 2007, Metronet, the consortium charged with renewing a large proportion of the London Underground's lines, announced that they had taken over the test track for the testing of new tube trains. To accomplish this, they electrified part of the line on the third and fourth rail system, but the original 25 kV line was also retained for future use.

On 7 June 2007, Metronet announced that the contract for operating and maintaining the test track had been awarded to Serco Assurance (formerly Serco Railtest), based at the Railway Technical Centre in Derby.

## **Life's What You Make It**

Excerpts from life writing.

### **Telling Tales Out Of School**

I thought back to an event from the fifth year, the last year we were both at school, that apart from him I was the only person who knew the full truth of what had happened on that infamous day.

The thing about going to a Catholic school in Leicester in the eighties was that the catchment area was huge. The majority of the eleven hundred pupils were bussed in from half the county; there weren't the hundreds of Chelsea tractors that blight the roads around schools today.

On most days, the bus I caught was late, as the main part of its route was public service, so had the usual kind of delays that plagued public transport. However, on the day in question my bus was actually early, and I took the opportunity to head down to the local shops so I could get a sausage and onion bap for breakfast.

In the sandwich shop I bumped into Whitey (as he was known), and we started chatting. We were both people who weren't really in any of the cliques that form in a school year, sort of independents, not "in", but also not outcast.

Once we had our food we started to wander back up to the school, I was going to miss the start of registration as usual, but my form teacher was used to that. Whitey stopped at the phone box just outside the school, saying he had an important phone call to make, and that he'd see me later. The good old red telephone boxes being the only way to make phone calls whilst on the move back then; none of this mobile phone malarkey you get nowadays.

I got into school and wandered to my form room, surprised to find that I had arrived before my form teacher. I soon found out why when out head of year walked in a few moments later slamming the door behind him.

"Mrs Baron is off sick today, so I'll be doing registration today."

"Before I start though, I have some sad news to share. We've had a telephone call this morning to say that, unfortunately, Michael White passed away overnight."

There was a collective intake of breath from the classroom and even the start of some tears, well, all apart from a solitary laugh. A laugh that I couldn't keep inside. With a look that could have burnt through a non-stick pan, Mr Goodall glared at me and thundered,

"Mr Neylon, what do you find amusing about Michael White's death?"

"Mainly the fact that it isn't true, I've been talking to him this morning, walking up to the school from the shops, so unless I was talking to a ghost, it would appear that someone is pulling your chains."

With that Goodall was gone, "no one move until I get back." He was off to investigate what I had said.

The rest of the form sat staring at me, muttering threats in my direction as if I had done something wrong.

Meanwhile in Whitey's form room, his form teacher was reading out the same message Goodall had just read out to us. Mr Cook, visibly upset was telling his form in his softly spoken Welsh lilt,

"I've got some very sad and upsetting news to tell you all this morning. The school has been notified that your classmate Michael White has passed away."

"I've what?" Whitey piped up.

Mr Cook slumped from upright in to his chair, all the colour draining from his face, thinking full well he had seen a ghost. The poor man found himself in no state to teach that day and ended up taking the rest of the week off. Two years later he happened to be my form teacher in sixth form, when one of my classmates committed suicide. An actual death on top of the previous phantom one brought an early retirement.

Back on the day Goodall stormed back into our form, slamming the door behind with such force that all the windows rattled in their frames. If he was in a bad mood when he had first been with us, he was positively boiling now.

"It appears Mr Neylon was entirely correct, Michael White is alive and well and in the building."

Above the murmuring around the classroom he continued,

"Mr Cook is not faring well after being faced with telling his class of the death of someone who was sat in the room at the time. We are currently investigating who made the telephone call to the school this morning and are treating this matter very seriously. If anyone has and further information they should let me know immediately."

The last sentence of that statement was said whilst staring at me. I was looking anywhere except at Goodall, as it became apparent to me exactly what the important phone call was that Whitey had to stop at the telephone box to make earlier.

When I saw Whitey later that day it was a short conversation, I asked him,

"Was it you making the call from the phone box this morning then?"

"Yep."

"Nice one."

And then we went our separate ways.

No one ever found out for sure who had made that original phone call, as no action was taken over the event, but Goodall had his suspicions, and when Whitey had committed another couple of indiscretions during the final year, mainly around not turning up, he ended up getting expelled, apart from being allowed back for exams. From the day he was expelled he was in school every day, it being the kind of obtuse thing he would do.

## Top Tens

### Random Top Ten

The ten capital cities closest to Warsaw, Poland

Pos	Capital	Country	Distance
1	Vilnius	Lithuania	393km
2	Minsk	Belarus	476km
3	Berlin	Germany	516km
4	Prague	Czechia	517km
5	Bratislava	Slovakia	532km
6	Budapest	Hungary	545km
7	Vienna	Austria	556km
8	Riga	Latvia	561km
9	Copenhagen	Denmark	671km
10	Kyiv	Ukraine	689km



## Chart

The top ten in the UK singles chart on this day in 1960

Position	Last Week's Position	Title	Artist	Label	Peak Position	Weeks on Chart
1	1	GOOD TIMIN'	JIMMY JONES	MGM	1	6
2	2	PLEASE DON'T TEASE	CLIFF RICHARD	COLUMBIA	2	4
3	4	AIN'T MISBEHAVIN'	TOMMY BRUCE AND THE BRUISERS	COLUMBIA	3	9
4	10	SHAKIN' ALL OVER	JOHNNY KIDD AND THE PIRATES	HMV	4	6
5	6	WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME/MADE YOU	ADAM FAITH	PARLOPHONE	5	4
6	8	WHAT A MOUTH	TOMMY STEELE	DECCA	5	5
7	3	MAMA/ROBOT MAN	CONNIE FRANCIS	MGM	2	10
8	5	THREE STEPS TO HEAVEN	EDDIE COCHRAN	LONDON	1	11
9	14	I WANNA GO HOME	LONNIE DONEGAN	PYE	5	9
10	7	ANGELA JONES	MICHAEL COX	TRIUMPH	7	7

## Poetry Corner

### Mask

Put your mask on she says  
I've been wearing it walking about  
But I'm sat down and catching my breath  
My lungs aren't what they used to be

Put your mask on she says again  
I will I just need to breathe properly first  
Inhale deeply and a long exhale  
And repeat, repeat again, and repeat

Once caught up I put the mask on  
And I start to write  
But I'm distracted now, put off  
I get my drink out of my bag

Twist off the cap and take a glug  
Put your mask back on  
The old woman is screeching now  
How can you drink through a mask?

A simple question one might think  
But common sense has long since left  
Get out, get out, get out, get out  
And take your ugly uncovered face with you

A bit harsh

## Thirty-Three And One Third Revolutions Per Minute

### The Eagles – Hotel California

Hotel California was the fifth studio album by American rock band Eagles. It was released on December 8, 1976, by Asylum Records. It topped the US Billboard Top LPs & Tapes chart. At the 20th Grammy Awards, the title track won Record of the Year, and "New Kid in Town" won Best Arrangement for Voices. The album was also nominated for Album

of the Year but lost to Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*. Three singles were released from the album, with the title track and "New Kid in Town" topping the Billboard Hot 100 and "Life in the Fast Lane" reaching No. 11.

*Hotel California* is one of the best-selling albums of all time. It has been certified 26x Platinum in the US, and has sold over 32 million copies worldwide, making it the band's best-selling album after *Their Greatest Hits (1971–1975)*. It has been ranked as one of the greatest albums of all time.

The first song written for the album was "Hotel California", which became the theme for the album. Henley said of the themes of the songs in the album: They're the same themes that run through all of our work: loss of innocence, the cost of naiveté, the perils of fame, of excess; exploration of the dark underbelly of the American dream, idealism realized and idealism thwarted, illusion versus reality, the difficulties of balancing loving relationships and work, trying to square the conflicting relationship between business and art; the corruption in politics, the fading away of the Sixties dream of "peace, love and understanding." This is a concept album, there's no way to hide it, but it's not set in the old West, the cowboy thing, you know. It's more urban this time (...) It's our bicentennial year, you know, the country is 200 years old, so we figured since we are the Eagles and the Eagle is our national symbol, that we were obliged to make some kind of a little bicentennial statement using California as a microcosm of the whole United States, or the whole world, if you will, and to try to wake people up and say 'We've been okay so far, for 200 years, but we're gonna have to change if we're gonna continue to be around.'"

Bernie Leadon, who was the principal country influence in the band, left the band after the release of the previous album *One of These Nights*. For *Hotel California*, the band made a conscious decision to move away from country rock, and wrote some songs that are more rock & roll, such as "Victim of Love" and "Life in the Fast Lane". Leadon was replaced by Joe Walsh who provided the opening guitar riff of "Life in the Fast Lane" that was then developed into the song. The title for "Life in the Fast Lane" was inspired by a conversation between Frey and his drug dealer during a high-speed car ride.

The album was recorded between March and October 1976 at Criteria Studios, Miami and Record Plant Studios, Los Angeles, and produced by Bill Szymczyk. Although the band favoured Los Angeles, the producer Szymczyk wanted to record in Miami as he had developed a fear of living on a fault line in Los Angeles after experiencing an earthquake, and a compromise was then struck to split the recording at both places. While the band were recording the album, Black Sabbath were recording *Technical Ecstasy* in an adjacent studio at Criteria Studios in Miami. The band was forced to stop recording on numerous occasions because Black Sabbath were too loud, and the sound was coming through the wall. The last track of the album, "The Last Resort" had to be re-recorded a number of times due to noise from the next studio.

The front cover artwork is a photograph of The Beverly Hills Hotel shot just before sunset by David Alexander with design and art direction by Kosh. According to Kosh, Henley wanted him to find a place that can portray the *Hotel California* of the album title, and "portray it with a slightly sinister edge". Three hotels were photographed, and the one with The Beverly Hills Hotel was selected as the cover. The photographer shot the image 60 feet above Sunset Boulevard on top of a cherry picker. As the image was taken from an unfamiliar vantage point in fading light, most people did not initially recognize the hotel. However, when the identity of Beverly Hills Hotel was revealed, the hotel threatened legal action over the use of the image.

The rear album cover was shot in the lobby of the Lido Hotel in Hollywood. The gatefold image shows the same lobby but filled with members of the band and their friends. Henley said: "I wanted a collection of people from all walks of life, It's people on the edge, on the fringes of society." A shadowy figure appears on the balcony above the lobby, which led to speculations over the person's identity. Kosh designed a *Hotel California* logo as a neon sign which was used on the album cover and in its promotional materials. As it proved difficult to bend real neon tubing into the desired shape of the script, the neon effect of the logo was achieved with airbrush by Bob Hickson. Additional portraits of the band used in the album package and promotional materials were shot by Norman Seeff.

*Hotel California* was met with generally positive reviews. *Village Voice* critic Robert Christgau felt it was their "most substantial if not their most enjoyable LP", while Charley Walters of *Rolling Stone* felt it showcased "both the best and worst tendencies of Los Angeles-situated rock". Retrospective reviews have also been positive. Robert Hilburn of the *Los Angeles Times*, writing after the band broke up, called the album "a legitimate rock masterpiece", in which the band "examined their recurring theme about the American Dream with more precision, power and daring than ever in such stark, uncompromising songs as "Hotel California" and "The Last Resort"." William Ruhlmann from *AllMusic* later said "Hotel California unveiled what seemed almost like a whole new band. It was a band that could be bombastic, but also one that made music worthy of the later tag of 'classic rock', music appropriate for the arenas and stadiums the band was playing."

The album and its tracks were nominated for five Grammy awards in 1978, winning two; Record of the Year for the title track and Best Arrangement for Voices for "New Kid in Town". However, the band's manager Irving Azoff refused requests by the ceremony's producer for the band to attend or perform at the ceremony unless a win was guaranteed. The band therefore did not appear at the ceremony to collect their awards. Henley later said: "The whole idea of a contest to see who is 'best' just doesn't appeal to us."

The album first entered the US Billboard 200 at number four, reaching number one in its fourth week in January 1977. It topped the chart for eight weeks (non-consecutively), and it was certified platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) in a week of release. In its first year of release it sold nearly 6 million copies in the United States, and by July 1978 it has sold 9.5 million copies worldwide. The album produced two number one hit singles on the US Billboard Hot 100: "New Kid in Town", on February 26, 1977, and "Hotel California" on May 7, 1977. It entered the UK Album Chart on Christmas Day 1976, reaching number 2, and spending a total of 85 weeks in the chart.

## Track listing

### Side one

No. - Title - Writer(s) - Lead vocals - Length

1. - "Hotel California" - Don Felder, Don Henley, Glenn Frey - Henley - 6:30. Second single from the album, it reached number 8 on the UK singles chart, and spent 10 weeks on the chart. Various reissues charted in the top 100 in 1985 (number 99), 1988 (number 100) and 2013 (number 83) for a week each time. The original B-side was "Victim Of Love", but later versions had "Pretty Maids All In A Row". Sampled in 32 songs and covered 98 times.
2. - "New Kid in Town" - Henley, Frey, J.D. Souther - Frey - 5:04. First single from the album, it reached number 20 on the UK singles chart, and spent 7 weeks on the chart. The B-side was "Victim Of Love", and later releases had "Wasted Time" as the B-side.
3. - "Life in the Fast Lane" Henley, Frey, Joe Walsh - Henley - 4:46. Third single from the album, it didn't chart in the UK. The B-side was "The Last Resort". Sampled in 6 songs and covered 12 times.
4. - "Wasted Time" - Henley, Frey - Henley - 4:55. Was the B-Side of some releases of "New Kid In Town". Covered by Gov't Mule in 2003.

### Side two

1. - "Wasted Time" (Reprise) - Henley, Frey, Jim Ed Norman - instrumental - 1:22.
2. - "Victim of Love" - Felder, Henley, Frey, Souther - Henley - 4:11. Was the B-side of the original single release of "Hotel California", and of "New Kid In Town".
3. - "Pretty Maids All in a Row" - Walsh, Joe Vitale - Walsh - 4:05. Was the B-side of the later releases of "Hotel California"
4. - "Try and Love Again" - Randy Meisner - Meisner - 5:10. Covered by Booker T Jones in 1978.
5. - "The Last Resort" - Henley, Frey - Henley - 7:25. Was the B-side of the single release of "Life In The Fast Lane". Covered by the Stereophonics in 1998.

## Personnel

### Eagles

Don Felder – guitars, backing vocals, pedal steel guitar on “The Last Resort”

Glenn Frey – guitars, backing vocals, keyboards, lead vocals on “New Kid In Town”

Don Henley – drums, percussion, lead vocals, backing vocals, synthesizer on “The Last Resort”

Randy Meisner – bass, backing vocals, lead vocals on “Try and Love Again,” guitarrón on “New Kid in Town”

Joe Walsh – guitars, keyboards, backing vocals, lead vocals on “Pretty Maids All In A Row”

### Production

Bill Szymczyk – producer, mixing

Allan Blazek, Bruce Hensal, Ed Mashal, Bill Szymczyk – engineers

Jim Ed Norman – string arrangements, conductor

Sid Sharp – concert master

Don Henley, John Kosh – art direction

John Kosh – design

David Alexander – photography

Kosh – artwork

Norman Seeff – poster design

Ted Jensen – mastering and remastering

Lee Hulko – original LP mastering

## Charts

Chart - Peak position

Australia - 1

Austrian Albums - 9

Belgian Albums - 98

Canadian Albums - 1

Dutch Albums - 1

French Albums - 2

German Albums - 3

Japanese Album - 2

New Zealand Albums - 1

Norwegian Albums - 1

Portuguese Albums - 41

Spanish Albums - 51

Swedish Albums - 3  
Swiss Albums - 99  
UK Albums - 2  
US Billboard 200 - 1

### **Certifications and sales**

Region - Certification - Certified units/sales  
Australia - 9x Platinum - 630,000  
Austria - Gold - 25,000  
Belgium - 25,000  
Canada - Diamond - 1,000,000  
Denmark - Gold - 10,000  
Finland - Gold - 30,933  
France - Diamond - 1,000,000  
Germany - Platinum - 500,000  
Hong Kong - Platinum - 20,000  
Italy - Gold - 100,000  
Japan - 493,000  
Malaysia - 20,000  
Mexico - 35,000  
Netherlands - Platinum - 275,000  
Norway - 120,000  
Singapore - 20,000  
Spain - 4x Platinum - 400,000  
Sweden - 100,000  
Switzerland - 2x Platinum - 100,000  
United Kingdom - 6x Platinum - 1,800,000  
United States - 26x Platinum - 26,000,000  
Worldwide - 32,000,000

## **Story Time**

### **Forever Hold Your Peace**

I had done it before.

I had learnt to talk when I was a child. Not only in my native tongue, but I had also learnt various dialects from surrounding planets as well. I could still see the words I had learnt as a child as they rattle through the inside of my mind, but I stopped being able to talk. How I lost the ability to speak is something I'm not quite sure of.

All I know is I woke up in a strange bed in a sterile room, surrounded by strange looking bipeds with iridescent skin that seemed to ripple as the pulsating lights in the room flowed across it. Their egg-shaped slow blinking purple eyes all staring at me as if I was the strangest creature they had ever seen. I suppose I may well have been to them, after all if they were so strange to me, why wouldn't I be strange to them as well?

They were talking amongst themselves as I opened my eyes (or at least I assumed they were at the time, which turned out to be a correct assumption). I didn't understand anything of the noise they were making, and I still don't, and I doubt I ever will.

I tried talking when I saw them; well, I tried screaming at first, scared as I was not knowing where I was and who they were. But no sound came out. I could feel muscles move in my throat, and my tongue attempting to do something other than flop around the inside of my mouth like a distressed beached whalloon, but no sound came out. No matter how I tried to move my muscles in my throat and mouth nothing moved as I wanted it to. As I needed it to. And so, I stayed mute. Frustrated and frightened.

As it turned out I had no reason to fear these aliens, who I now know are called Draxians. They hadn't been the ones who abducted me from my previously happy life on Regis IV. They weren't the ones who had made me unable to speak. No, they were the ones who had found me, marooned in space in a jettison pod, slowly drifting to my death far outside of any known trade route through the stars. The Draxians aren't part of any of the trade pacts. I still don't know where they come from in relation to Regis IV. And despite not understanding their speech, I do know they were trying to help me.

With pictographs they managed to make me understand how they rescued me and brought me back to consciousness. They seem to understand living beings better than any other race I've read about. And they adapt to surroundings. I'm not sure I fully understand, but I think they changed the atmosphere in their ship to allow me to breathe the same air I would have done back on my own planet.

They don't always understand what I try to write or draw for them. It is deeply frustrating for both parties, I think. Which is why I am trying to learn how to talk again. If I could speak then there is a chance that if they encountered another ship, or another species on their travels then they might be able to understand me and therefore help me get back to Regis IV and home.

I don't know how long I've been away. I have no memory of how I ended up being cast away in space. Of who did it to me, or why they did it, why they chose me. Was it hours, days or years before the Draxians found me. I just don't know. What I do know is that I made a sound today. It wasn't necessarily the sound I wanted to make, but it is a start. I had wanted to say the word 'hello', but what came out was 'glup'.

By the change in the way the Draxians looked at me, they weren't expecting that sound either (or they weren't expecting any kind of sound I suppose). I tried again, another sound came out, more of a grunt this time, so not great, but better than nothing. I am so excited I can barely lie still.

It is another couple of sleeps before I make a word I recognise. I thought I might be being too optimistic in trying for two syllables, so instead I try (and succeed) saying 'hi'. When it comes out correctly, I am so happy, I can't stop myself smiling. I take a few deep breaths and try it again. I manage to repeat it six times before it comes out as something else. I'm so pleased with myself I don't notice how the Draxians are looking at me.

Over the next few days I manage to expand on my vocabulary and have managed more than thirty different words. Even stringing a few together to make a rudimentary sentence. I find myself getting happier with each word. Yet the Draxians become distant from me as I find more words, and it begins to take the shine off the ecstasy I am feeling. It is almost as if my being able to speak is causing them pain, and they don't want to be near me if I am speaking.

This carries on over more days than I can count. I have been making rapid progress, but I am the only one who is pleased about it. They no longer stand in my room watching over me. I find food and drink by my side whenever I wake up, but never who has put it there. It begins to feel as if I am a prisoner. As well as my ability to talk returning, I find I am able to move properly again. I hadn't given it any thought, the fact I was bed ridden, so concentrated on being able to talk again was I. Yet I am able to walk around my room and feel no ill effects. Was I able to do it all the time?

I don't know how many days it was, but I was surprised upon waking to find a number of the Draxians in my room and the wall had become a screen. On it was a star system. They were zooming in on a particular cluster of stars, and as they got larger on the screen, I began to recognise it. I was sure they were zooming in on the galaxy Regis IV was in. And so, I got up and went towards the screen. They had asked me where my home was before, but I wasn't able to narrow down the search, I didn't know how to find my galaxy, let alone my planet, and there was no pictograph that could give them the word Regis.

Yet now they seemed to have found it. They were asking me if this galaxy was my home. I touched a point on the screen and there was another zoom in towards that point. I struggled to find the star that my planet orbited. Until I realised it was all back to front from what I had seen before. That was why it hadn't looked right, they were looking at it from the other side. I zoomed in, and again, and finally Regis IV could be seen, and I touched it.

And when I did all of the Draxians made a noise I could only imagine was a scream, and they rushed from the room locking the door behind them. I stood staring at the surface of my home planet wondering what it was about it that could have caused such a reaction.

It was a couple of days later before I found out why.

One of the Draxians came into my room and the wall turned to a screen again. What they showed me over the next hour was horrific and heart-breaking, and at the end of it I was surprised to find I was still alive.

It had been centuries in the past during a period in Regis IV history that had never been taught to the children at school. Nothing was ever said about that period of two hundred years. It was forbidden. If there were books or histories written about that period then they had all been destroyed, or hidden. Whatever the reason none of the inhabitants of the planet knew what had gone on way back then. And I could see the reason why it was forbidden.

The ruling class of Regis IV had gone on a spree of invading planets across the whole of the cosmos. They had killed many billions of people of all races on countless planets, burning a terrible path across the stars until suddenly all their warships had just disappeared. It is unclear where they had gone, but no one was sorry they had. There had been no rhyme or reason to their trail of destruction, they had never settled on any of the planets they invaded. They just killed the people and destroyed what they could, and they moved on.

Draxi had been one of the planets they happened across, and they saved their worst atrocity for their planet. For whatever reason, now lost, they weren't content in the usual killing and destruction. Instead they blew the whole planet

to pieces, and then blasted the pieces into even smaller pieces. All that was left of the Draxian civilisation was on board the very ship he was on now. His forefathers had killed the rest of their race, and now he was at their mercy.

If the roles had been reversed, he doubted he could have let him live once finding out where he was from. And yet, he was still alive. He was sat in the last spaceship of a race his own race had virtually wiped out centuries ago. Sat there with tears streaming down his face and just repeating the words 'I'm so sorry' over and over again. In learning to talk again he had given the Draxians the ability to recognise his language as the same one their destroyers had used all that time ago.

The screen went blank and the single Draxian left the room. He was left there for days, he still found food each time he woke, but didn't see the Draxians again. He woke one day to find he wasn't in the room that had been his home on their ship. Instead he was back in the jettison pod they had found him in. They had returned him to the fate unknown abductors had given him months before.

But they hadn't. He wasn't in a backwater, they had deposited him in the orbit of his home planet. He was picked up within hours of him waking.

The mystery of who had abducted him originally was cleared up when the jettison pod was identified as being one from a Gisian ship. The Gisians were the underclass on Regis IV. They had always been campaigning to have more rights on the planet. A campaign that had always been ignored. He wasn't sure what he personally had done to the Gisians to make them pick him to leave in the wilderness of space. Yes, he was related to one of the powerful noble families, but didn't consider himself important, and he had not been involved in anything to do with the governance of the planet. It was a mystery to him.

But not for long. Despite being a minor noble there was great media interest in what had happened to him, and where he had been for all this time. Apparently there had been a big story about his disappearance, and so there was a lot of interest in his sudden and strange return.

And so, he told his story to a disbelieving planet. And the Gisians used the story to their own ends. They used it to try and prove that the ruling nobles had known about the destruction across the cosmos, which is why that period of history was blank, and therefore they were not to be trusted, and that before that two-century blank there had been no mention of a separate Gisian underclass. They had been caused by a lie to cover up a disgraceful period in the planet's history. That their voice had been taken away to prevent them from being able to tell the general population what their leaders had done in their name.

He understood now he had been used, the Gisians knew of the Draxians and their nomadic existence since the destruction of their planet. He had been left in their vicinity as bait. And he was glad he had been. When he found he had the visdisc hidden in his clothing which showed the whole story as it had been shown to him on the Draxian ship, he made copies of it and gave them to the nobles' court, the media and the Gisians.

The ruling class fell. The underclass was removed. And all the people of Regis IV came together and spent the next two centuries apologising to the cosmos.

## **World's Greatest Cathedrals Top Trumps**

<b><u>Vegetable Cathedral</u></b>	
City / Country	Borgo Valsugana, Italy
Height	18 metres
Commenced Building	2001
Character	18
Global Fame	60
Top Trumps Rating	80
Details	Created by the artist Giuliano Mauri, the Cattedrale Vegetale is a "living cathedral"; 1800 fir poles, 600 chestnut and 6,000 meters of hazel branches are woven together to form a supportive structure, through which 42 beech trees will grow and create the cathedral's shape. The support structure will eventually deteriorate, leaving the trees and an entirely living piece of architecture.

## **Chapter and Verse**

A chapter from one of my completed books, works in progress, or novella length short stories.

### **The Matching Agency – Chapter 1 – The Rookie**

She had only been with the agency for a month and still had lots to learn, but the section supervisor had given her a solo assignment already. She had been given five sets of important legal documents which must be hand delivered all within the same hour. Then she had been given the five addresses and her heart sank, none of them were in the same city, in fact none of them were in the same county. When she had audibly groaned, the supervisor had told her she should count herself lucky that they were all in the same country. The only bright side was that the hour of delivery wasn't until the following afternoon, which meant she had nearly thirty hours to get a route put together.

Penny hadn't even been aware there was any such thing as the Matching Agency. She had worked for government departments before, but had never heard so much as a mention of the agency she was now working for before she was approached by one of the agency's specialist recruiters.

She had been invited for an interview and assessment, but had been given the bare minimum of information as to what the job would actually involve. She had been told that there was close contact with various other government department and agencies, and that good geographical knowledge and interest, along with mobile computing skills were required.

She had both, and the mysteriousness of the role had certainly piqued her interest, so she agreed to the interview and assessment. The interview had been straightforward enough, the usual set of scenario-based questions. However, the assessment was different from anything she had encountered before, it seemed more like a fun day to her. All matter of games and tests designed as it turned out to see how laterally someone thought, and how well they performed unusual tasks under time pressure. She certainly hadn't been given a time limit to complete a jigsaw before.

Even the interview and testing didn't give away what the Matching Agency was or did, and although she had asked about it several times, she hadn't been given a straight answer. After the tests she was thanked for her time and told they would be in touch if she met their criteria. Months went past and she didn't hear anything, and had almost forgotten about it entirely when she got a phone call late one Friday afternoon.

She sat in almost dumfounded silence as she was told she had gotten the job and that she would be starting first thing on Monday morning. Her manager had been informed and all the transfer of government department paperwork had been completed. The slow precise voice on the other end of the phone line had given her an address and she was told to be there on Monday morning.

As soon as she had put the phone down her manager had appeared at her shoulder and told her to take the remainder of the day off to pack up her belongings. It felt odd to be doing that "whole life in a box" thing whilst not having been sacked. Although by some of the smug and condescending looks she was getting from her then colleagues, they were making the assumption that she was being.

On Monday morning when Penny arrived at the address she had been given, she thought it was all a hoax. The building she stood in front of was a random Georgian terrace, a building in the middle of a block in Pimlico. It looked exactly the same as every other building in the block, and all the ones on the other side of the road. There wasn't even a name on the outside of the building or the door. She walked up the half dozen steps to the large white wooden door and pressed the single buzzer next to the door. At least that was unusual, a single buzzer on a building like this was a novelty nowadays, these Georgian terraces were usually sub divided into flats, and a number of them had doormen.

No sooner had she pressed the buzzer than the door opened in front of her, leading into a small hallway with another door at the end of it. She stepped into the hallway, noticing the strange matt black walls, and the first door closed behind her. The lights went out and her heart rate leapt, before a series of green beams of light scanned the whole hallway for about thirty seconds and then stopped, at which point the normal lights came back on. The door at the other end of the hallway opened and a serious looking woman stood there with a tablet in her hand.

"Hello Miss Turnbull, please follow me. Welcome to the Matching Agency."

Said like that it suddenly dawned on Penny that the Matching Agency sounded more like a company offering dating solutions than a government department. Still, she followed the woman through a series of doors, up and down staircases in a seemingly never-ending maze of chrome and glass offices. Every time she turned another corner she expected to come to the end of her journey. Her escort glanced back at her ever-incredulous expression a couple of times before addressing her again.

"We own the whole block, but not so you would know from the outside. Once you are orientated and have been assigned to a sectional team then you will be allocated an appropriate entrance nearer to your location in the building. Your entrance point this morning is only ever used by new recruits or visitors."

As the woman finished speaking, she opened a door to another office, this time one with frosted glass all around it, and she shepherded Penny in. One of the men from the interview panel all that time ago sat inside the room.

"Hello Penny, glad you could join us, sorry about the long wait since the interview and tests, but we've been making sure everything was in place to transfer you over."

Penny stood there not really knowing what to say, a few seconds went past before she managed to blurt something out.

“Well, it did take quite a while, I had almost forgotten about you, and then all of a sudden it’s a big rush.”

“We certainly didn’t forget about you Penny, and we are sorry about the rush, but as I’m sure you will find out, rush is the normal pace of things around here.”

“Sorry, but with everything having taken so long, I have forgotten your name since the interview.”

“Ha, ha, glad to see I made such an impression, though I’m sure having such a bland name as James Smith does make it easy to forget.”

“I’m sure I won’t forget again. So, I know this is the Matching Agency, but I’m still not sure what you do here, or what I’m going to be doing here either.”

“That will become apparent over the next couple of weeks as you go through your initial training and orientation.”

And so, the training started, for the first couple of day Penny found it hard to swallow her incredulous disbelief at what she was being told and shown. It was incomprehensible to her that the secret technology that the Agency was using was still a secret, and that no one else seemed to have got wind that it existed.

The upshot of the Agency’s work was that some boffin in a research facility had found a way to create wormholes, and in effect, teleport between towns and cities, all over the UK and in the correct circumstances overseas as well. It was done by being able to line a road or street in one town or city with another one in a different town or city.

How the technology worked was well over her head, but the premise behind it certainly wasn’t and seemed so simple. And now it turned out that tomorrow was going to be her first solo live, in the field, use of the technology. The thought of it made her nervous and excited all at the same time. She was going to be using something that no one else she knew outside of her new job had ever used, or were unlikely ever to use. However, part of the initial orientation had highlighted some of the things that could go wrong, although the main one for her as a level one agent would be the possibility of splicing one’s self, accidentally using an ambiguous street or road name. That could lead to ending up in two, or more, towns or cities at the same time.

A level one agent could only use the exact match functionality of the technology. For this match type, the set off street name had to match the destination name, where the set off destination had to be the street name. So, if you left from Oxford Street, London, there had to be a London Street in Oxford to arrive at. If there wasn’t the device wouldn’t start the wormhole. The name of the street suffix had to match as well; you couldn’t jump from Oxford Square, London to London Road, Oxford, only from street to street or road to road. Jumping by using differing suffixes was available, but not until one became a level two agent.

The exact match was the simplest use of the device that agents had, the wormhole it created was the easiest to make and control, and left no trace of itself behind. The downside for the agents using it was that the planning of anything other than a single location jump route became tricky. Exact matches weren’t as common as one might think, and for some places in the UK were very rare, or even non-existent.

Penny had been given five places to get through in one hour. Location one would be fine, as she could set off for that one early and be at the door to post the first envelope exactly on two pm. However, even with this, she had to get four more jumps and to locations in an hour, only fifteen minutes for each one. This could get very tricky, as it only need one of the drop off addresses to be miles away from a possible jump point to wipe out any spare time she might have. It wasn’t even as if she could use a car or even a bike, as they wouldn’t go through a level one wormhole. Someone had tried a bicycle once, and it had taken days and numerous surgeries to fully disentangle them from the bicycle once they had returned. Instead Penny saw pre-booked taxis in her future for this assignment.

She had been out on a training exercise the week before; in effect it had been a day out walking. Her instructor, Joe, had led her through eight towns and cities all over the country, setting her device locations for her and guiding her in using her device glasses to pick a good spot to jump to the street or road they were heading for.

The tablet she was given held the device within it, and when a match was identified, and the holder of the device entered the street of departure, it activated the device glasses. They showed the agent the length of the street or road they were going to be jumping over to. By focusing the left lens, it moved the entrance spot up or down the street, and the right lens positioned the agent from left to right across the whole street. This enabled the agent to be able to jump without finding themselves in the middle of a busy road, embedded in a tree, or about to bump into a person who was happily minding their own business wandering along the street.



Penny had occasionally in the past got the impression that she had seen people appear or disappear right in front of her eyes, but she had always written them off as being her eyes or mind playing tricks on her. Now that she knew about the device and what the Matching Agency did, she wasn't so sure. She wondered if those previous times it had been an agent she had seen.

Joe had told her that there were two schools of thought around jumping. There was the traditional old school method, which was to make sure it was as quiet as possible at both the jump off and arrival locations. This would reduce the chance that the jumper would get noticed. It also lent itself to the fact that you should always check directly behind you before you hit the jump button on your device, as there was always the chance that if someone with the same build as you or smaller was directly behind you, they may come through the wormhole in your wake. It had happened on a few occasions, and it took a great deal of time and money to sort out with the individuals it had happened to.

There was a more modern school of thought, it was that if you jumped from or to a busy area, there was actually less chance of the appearance or disappearance being remembered. Anyone noticing it would be too distracted by the crowds of other people around. Joe leant towards the first school of thought, but unlike some of the other older instructors, didn't preach about not jumping in crowds, saying that sometimes it was necessary, and it was better to know how to do it safely.

Penny had put her five locations into the Matching Agency's database query system, and run it as an exact match route planner query. It would take a few minutes to run, and she left it to do so and went to find Joe, to ask if he had any hints for this kind of multi jump activity. In the short time that Penny had been at the agency, she had picked up that different agents had different approaches to route planning, and that they based some of their decisions on local knowledge of towns and cities they had lived in previously.

Joe took one look at the list and let out a long low whistle. Penny took this as a bad sign, and looked at Joe pensively as she waited for him to say something. Eventually he did,

"Looks like this will be a bit tricky. How long do you have to do it in?"

"An hour."

"Jeez! Tricky might be an understatement then, even with level four status this would be tricky to complete in an hour. What's the database come back with?"

"I don't know yet, I left it running and came to see you, I wondered if you had any tips for any of the locations on the list."

"When's the hour for the mission?"

"Tomorrow afternoon, two pm to three pm."

"Well that will give you a fighting chance then; I'll have a look at these locations and see if I can pick out any good joining locations for the addresses on the route."

"Thanks Joe."

Penny headed back off to her desk and Joe looked at the list again.

12, Dane Drive, Cambridge.  
73, Normanton Valley Road, Derby.  
17, Prebend Street, Leicester.  
31, Hereford Road, Maidstone.  
34, Lower Adelaide Street, Northampton.

As he had said to Penny, this list would have been difficult for an experienced level four agent. Two of the five towns and cities on the list weren't ones that he recognised as good crossing points, in all his years he had been a field agent before he took on the instructor role, he doubted he'd ever gone through Maidstone, it was probably one of those one way in / one way out towns for level one agents. Even level two might struggle there even with the additional functionality of not having to match suffixes.

Penny got back to her desk and logged back on; the database had finished the query and had thrown out several suggested routes. As Penny sorted through them, she thought about the whole premise of the mission. It seemed very bland; it was really a courier run, five deliveries to be made to five addresses. The only thing that was different was that they had to be done within an hour, and as they were all in towns and cities miles apart it wasn't possible to do it by conventional transport means. What puzzled her about it most was why the Department that had given the Agency the

mission couldn't just send five couriers out with deliveries with instructions to deliver them at a specified time. It bothered her so much she went to speak to her supervisor, James, about it.

"Because the client doesn't want to entrust the documentation to any courier firm. The contents have severe national security implications and if even one of the envelopes were opened before posting there would be serious problems. In fact, the client expressly forbade anything but a single agent handling the deliveries. They want as few touch points as possible and it needed to be done by someone who has signed the official secrets act. That applies to all our agents, plus with you coming from another Government Department you have signed it twice now."

Penny took all that James said in, it made some kind of sense to her, but she still didn't understand why she had been picked for such a mission if it was so important to national security. Surely a more experienced agent would have been a more appropriate choice, and she expressed this to James.

"Are you questioning my judgement?"

"No." Penny said pulling a face.

"Good, we thought that this is a perfect opportunity for a simple mission for a new recruit. It isn't the most glamorous of assignments, but it is a safe one. There will be no physical danger to you, apart from the possibility of paper cuts."

James laughed at his own joke, and even Penny smiled.

"OK, I get it, I still think it's strange, but I suppose that's how it goes."

"Yes, it is, I'd suggest your time would be better spent sorting your route out, rather than questioning your suitability."

Penny wandered back to her desk again and printed off the suggested routes from the query output and started to sort through them. There was only one of the towns that she hadn't been to before, and typically it was that one that she struggled to line up the possible jump in and out points with the delivery address.

She went through all the routes that had been suggested trying to work out the timings for journeys if they were made on foot, and if any of the journeys would require taxis. She then spent some time looking up taxi firm telephone numbers in all the five towns and cities she was going to, and putting them into her phone. She lost track of time as she did all this and only noticed it was late when she looked up from her desk and around the office only to find it mostly deserted. She stuffed her print offs into her bag, logged off and headed for home.

The next morning Penny dressed in casual clothes, she would likely be doing some running today on the mission, and wanted appropriately comfortable clothes to be able to run in. She got some odd looks as she walked into the offices, which were probably down to the way she was dressed, a total contrast for her normal smart suits and high heels.

She had had an idea about the route for her mission today; by the time she had left the office the previous evening she had chosen one of the suggested routes that had been churned out from the database; however she wanted to look at the possibility of flipping the route around, and going through it in the opposite direction. She knew that she would need to find an alternative route back from the final location though, as she didn't want to splice herself, but she felt that overall it would work better for her going the other way around.

She got to her desk and put in a search for routes back to London from Derby, she didn't like the fact that there were three different Derby Road's in London, but understood why with how London had grown over the years and absorbed all the different villages in its expansion path.

Half a dozen routes came back, and she opted for the shortest trip across a jump city. She took her plan down to see Joe and get his opinion on it. Joe looked at the route and nodded appreciatively.

"Is this out of the database?"

"Nearly, I flipped one of the routes that came out around, which is why there is an extra jump in it at the end to get back to London."

"It looks like a reasonable route, though you haven't got much time to play with on it."

"I haven't got any time on any of the routes that were thrown out, but this way round I feel I can make more time at the beginning."

"What are you doing about taxis?"

“Going to try and do it on the fly in Northampton depending on when I get there, Cambridge should be a case of flag one down where I jump in, and then I’m going to pre-book one for a specified time in Derby with a five-minute wait time.”

“Again, that looks like a sound strategy to me Penny. Do you feel good about the mission?”

“I’m not sure, it seems a strange mission to have full stop, let alone as the first solo one.”

“You’d be surprised how many of these courier type missions come through the Agency, I can remember doing the same kind of thing years ago when I first started out here.”

“Really? So, I’m going to be a glorified courier for the next couple of years then?”

“No, not at all, there are lots of types of missions, we do get a number of courier type ones, but there are lots of other types of missions, as I’m sure you’ll find out the longer you are here.”

“What happens if I don’t complete on time?”

“For you or the client?”

“Well me primarily, that’s my main concern.”

“The details will be reviewed to see if there was anything that could have been done differently. As a new agent this will mean some additional training and perhaps some supervised missions, but it’s not anything to worry about. Everyone fails time bound missions at some point, especially multi jump ones, there’s so much out there that can come into play.”

“So, I won’t get fired then.”

“No, you’d have to try extremely hard to get fired around here. Once the Agency has managed to attract someone in, put them through training and done all the required check, let them see the technology in use, they are somewhat reluctant to send them packing. They would rather keep them and give them non-active duties.”

Penny rolled her eyes, “Sounds great.”

“You shouldn’t be worried; we do what we can to help all agents succeed. That includes highlighting good points in a mission in the debrief. Just get yourself ready to go, and don’t worry so much.”

“Thanks Joe.”

Penny left and went to the issuing office to pick up a jump device for the mission. Agents didn’t get to keep a device for the time they were with the Agency, they were issued them for each mission and they had to be signed in and out each time. Apparently, it hadn’t always been that way, but it was the only way that fully charged and working devices were guaranteed to be sent out with an agent on a mission. Agents were notoriously flaky at remembering to charge the devices properly, and a number of missions had gone up in smoke when the device ran out of power and they had to revert to conventional transport methods.

Penny got her device and headed back to her desk. She put her phone back on charge, wanting it as full of charge as possible for the mission. She turned the device on and started loading in all the street names for her jumps so she could just drag them up when ready on the tablet part of the device. She put the glasses on and adjusted the arms, so they sat comfortably on her nose and ears. Without a jump location active they were just plain glass in the thick round frames. If anyone else got hold of them they may wonder why they were plain glass, or why the frames had a part that rotated the lenses, but without an active jump set on the tablet part of the device they wouldn’t know what they were for.

When she finished setting the device up, she put it into her bag, she had got a messenger style bag with a big foam lined strap that was comfortable when slung over her shoulder. She added her list of addresses and the maps and put her phone in there as well. All she needed now were the envelopes for delivery and she would be set, ready to start her first ever live solo mission.

## Dilbert



## Medium

Some of my blog posts were also get published on my Medium account, especially ones that are picture heavy, as there are no hosting costs to store all the photos there, the link is <https://medium.com/@onetruekev>. A lot has gone onto this site recently, and it would be good if you are on there looking at my work if you could register and become a standard member – it's free for the basic member level, but it allows you to follow me on that site and allows for claps and comments to be made on pieces. Anything to help with profile raising is much appreciated.

UPDATE, I've now become eligible to earn on Medium as I have over 100 followers, and so recent posts are on what they call the metered site, so full members of Medium who read or like my posts generate me money, which is good. It also means I become part of their referral scheme. So, if you are not a member, and are considering [subscribing to Medium](#) if you do so through that link then you will be supporting my writing and you may also discover lots of other great writers, posts, and articles, including those I have already published [here](#).

## Epilogue – Where To Find More Of My Writing

To get people to sign up, point them in the direction of my website's homepage of <http://www.onetruekev.co.uk/> scroll down past the menu and then enter their e-mail address and select whether they want Flanagan's Running Club or blog post updates or both and then hit submit.

If you want to catch up on old issues, go to the website at <http://www.onetruekev.co.uk/frc.php> where all the issues are available.

For blog posts go to <https://onetruekev.co.uk/Mutterings/> which will have the most current post and the ability to scroll back in time.

There are various short story competition entries on my Reedsy prompts page at <https://blog.reedsy.com/creative-writing-prompts/author/kev-neylon/>

For all previous works including the old Surerandomality pieces go to <https://onetruekev.co.uk/Mutterings/else/> where pretty much everything I've written before is linked through to.

Then there are my books. Nothing published yet, but I have one full book available online, it's called "Where The Lights Shine Brightest." Can I ask you all a favour, please can you review my book on Inkitt, and the link is below? Even if you don't take time to read it properly, please flick through a few chapters, give it ratings and a review and vote for it please. It may help me get it published.

<https://www.inkitt.com/stories/thriller/201530>

I have had a number (seventy-three) of Drabbles published on the BookHippo web site, and they can all be found at <https://bookhippo.uk/profiles/kevin.neylon/drabbles>

You can also follow me on Twitter, where I will occasionally put up some micro fiction or micro poems, my Twitter handle is @Onetruekev – <https://twitter.com/onetruekev>

You can also follow all my writing on the Facebook page Onetruekev which is at <https://www.facebook.com/Onetruekev-102649357993650/>

And also, now on LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/onetruekev/>

Speak to me about getting a pen, there are a few colours left (not many at the moment).

E-mail any ideas or suggestions to [kev@onetruekev.co.uk](mailto:kev@onetruekev.co.uk)

To [Unsubscribe](#) click on the word