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by the same author

GUY RULES

365 REASONS NOT TO MOVE TO WALES

THE MISSING LOVESPOON

Case Study: An Allergy To Wool

THE 7<sup>th</sup> STONE

Case Study: Vampire Zombie Aliens and the  
Bachelor Farmers of Honey Island

AGE OF RECKONING

POETRY

SWEET DREAMS – STOLEN KISSES

THE WILD WINDS OF WALES

PLAYS

WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?

PRETTY GRIMM STUFF

MR SPOCK AND THE PEE THRITTLE IGS

THE ADVENTURES OF MRS BEETON

Bpjrksmilew

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The island of Bpjrkr☺w is situated about twenty miles off the coast of Flmp and halfway between Dwtr and Gw<sup>7</sup>m. It's not a big island. About six miles wide and two miles long. And it's shaped like a potato. You probably haven't heard much about it because, quite honestly, not much goes on there. Even if Bpjrkr☺ws were boasters, (*which they're not*) they really don't have that much to boast about. Except typewriters, of course. (*more on that later*) Since it rains fairly often, (*most days*) and when it's not raining it looks as if it's going to any minute, it has never been what you might call a tourist destination.

It's also pretty cold in winter, and summers can be brutal. But Bpjrkr☺ws seem to love it. Well, maybe tolerate it would be more accurate. And, just like a lot of other people who live on islands, they have some funny ways of showing it. Of course, they have the usual stuff, like flags, (*a picture of a raining cloud on a grey background*) an annual parade featuring a special display of umbrellas, and any number of fairs. Their most celebrated dish is a kind of potato-based guacamole made from mashed potatoes and is always a big hit at the Potato Fair.

They also have an anthem, in which they praise all the things of Bpjrkr☺w, one for each of the 57 letters of their alphabet. It's not the easiest thing to sing. Actually, only a handful of Bpjrkr☺ws know all the verses. It goes something like:

*Oh, we the people of Bpjrkr☺w  
We love our island in so many ways  
Let us tell you all the ways  
B is for the bulba we grow outdoors  
P is for the planks on our floors...*

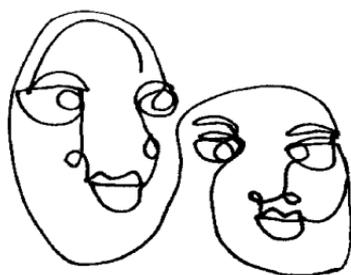
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and so on. Once it's gone through all the letters in the name, it then goes on to list another fifty greatest things about the place. Even most Bpjrks admit describing all of them as 'great' is stretching it a bit.

Like most anthems it gets a bit tedious, particularly when you don't know all the verses, which most don't. Instead they just mumble through pretending they do. There was a suggestion a few years ago to shorten it. Some thought it should be replaced with something more modern. Maybe something by Madonna or Ed Sherran. There was also the problem of which of the fifty seven greatest things should be left off. No one could agree on anything. Nor did anyone seem that bothered that technically you could only have one greatest thing - not fifty seven. In the end nobody could agree what to cut out, or whether to modernise it, so they just left it as it was.

In fact, not agreeing on anything is one of the main reasons hardly anything ever changes on Bpjrks.

You might call it something of a tradition.



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I've said nothing very exciting ever happens on BpjrK☺w, but that's not entirely true. *(well, it sort of is - depending on your meaning of the word exciting)*

For instance, many BpjrK☺ws thought it was very exciting when Mrs FrmXp won first place at last year's Annual Potato Fair. *(admittedly, most of the judges were Mrs FrmXp's relatives)* Then there was the time when the umbrella repair shop had to close for a couple of days on account of someone had misplaced those little bits that sit on the end of those metal parts that stick out. Eventually someone found them in a closet. But it had been something of a scare.

One thing everyone agrees on as the most exciting thing that ever happened was the day a shipping container full of typewriters washed ashore. Since Mr PWhjv was the first to see it, the law of the land said that he had the right to claim them. Which he did.

It took awhile to get them all back to his place, but with some help of some neighbours they eventually did so. It turned out there were 3,476 of them. Fortunately, he had a barn next to the house where he could store them all. Otherwise they would have filled the house, and he didn't think Mrs PWhjv would take that sort of thing lying down.

Well, it wasn't long before word got out, and people began to wonder just what Mr PWhjv was going to do with all his typewriters. *(I should have said, this happened long before the internet and smart phones)*

The truth is, he didn't know. Mind you, that didn't stop people from telling him what they thought he should do with them. Soon, he was receiving letters and phone calls from all over the place suggesting any number of ways

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he could put them to use. A few seemed good ideas. Others not so.

Someone thought he could make a lot of money by selling them. Others told him he should make a sculpture out of them and become a famous artist. Several others thought he should just leave them in the barn and not worry too much about them.

But Mr PWhjv did worry about them. Well, maybe not worry, but he was a bit concerned. And they were taking up an awful lot of space. Many a night he sat in the barn staring at them and thinking *"What the heck am I going to do with all these typewriters?"*

In the end he decided to give them away. He took out an ad in the BpjrkJw GzQzt which read: *5W\*GT8N%\:/LK* - roughly translated: **FREE TYPEWRITERS - COME AND GET 'EM.**

And that's exactly what happened. Over the next few weeks all the typewriters were claimed. Of course, after awhile the ribbons started wearing out. But the good people of BpjrkJw are a resourceful lot and they weren't going to let something like a worn out typewriter ribbon stop them. Eventually they found a way to recycle the old ones. Which is the reason why there are so many typewriters and recycled typewriter ribbons on BpjrkJw to this day.

It's also the reason why almost everyone on BpjrkJw voted against having broadband installed when it was proposed. (*one of the few times there was general agreement on anything*)

*"What the heck do we need broadband for? We've got typewriters,"* people said.

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When all those who claimed a typewriter discovered the joys of having one in their own home, (*or several, depending on the number of family members*) it wasn't long before they found themselves typing. For many Bpjr<sup>☺</sup> typing became something of an obsession. People who had once relied on the humble pencil and paper were suddenly hitting the keys any chance they got. And I mean anytime.

Shopping lists, personal notes, poems, songs, stories, songs about stories, stories about songs, phone books, telephone transcripts, memoirs, historical fictions, historical non-fictions, sci-fis, who-done-its, who-didn't-do-its, real and made up diaries, craft ideas, novellas, novels, hygiene tips, serving suggestions... you name it, somebody had typed it. Those who had been meaning to organise their family recipes, or extol the virtues of owning a flz~(w no longer had any excuse not to. Walking around the island, day or night, the sound of typewriters clacking away could be heard 24/7.

Of course, not everyone was happy about this new development. Anyone who wanted to get a good night's sleep were more than a little miffed. But then, they couldn't complain too much on account of that they, or a close family member, would probably be typing up something in the not too distant future when somebody not far off would be trying to get some sleep as well. For those who seemed to take it personally, well, some people are just like that. We've all met them. The typewriters just gave them another excuse to be grumpy.

And then there were those who were unhappy because they soon discovered they didn't have all that much to say. Having bashed out all

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their family's recipes and shirt sizes, the internal workings of a %ooL®ps engine, the history of cats on the island, or the main reason they found it hard to type anything else, they experienced what was commonly referred to as J&lq, or typers' block. Fortunately, there were any number of self-help books that had been typed up on just that subject.

Teachers were particularly happy since most of the assignments their pupils handed in were now being typed, which meant they could actually read some of them. Chemists were happy too. Finally, they could decipher what the doctors had been scribbling all this time. Students and practitioners of psychology were also tickled pink given the amount of self-reflection their fellow islanders were now committing to the typed page. But none were so over the moon as the shopkeepers who sold typing paper. Business had never been so good. Some even retired earlier than they had planned.

All in all, things had turned out pretty good for the people of Bpjrkw. With the exception of those few grumpy-pusses, (*who let's face it, would have been grumpy anyway*) the day those typewriters washed up on shore was one of the best days of their lives. Of course, the very best day was when Mr PWhjv decided to hand them out to anyone who wanted one. Somebody suggested they mark the day and declare it a public holiday and Mr PWhjv an official hero. In the end they decided they'd just leave things as they were. Instead, they presented him with a gold watch, which he actually preferred.

Being a somewhat private person, the watch suited him more than being declared a hero. To tell the truth, he didn't really consider handing out a bunch of typewriters he found on the beach as anything heroic. Most folks

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would have done the same. Well, maybe not most, but quite a few. Honestly, he was quite happy to get rid of the damn things. A container full of anything could prove a burden on anyone. But typewriters. No, he was far from a hero.

As the years went by the amount of typed papers became t~Çpls. This proved to be more of a problem than anyone had first realised. It wasn't long before hundreds of thousands of typed papers had filled up notebooks, filing cabinets and bookshelves all over the island. Carpenters and shelf makers were in high demand. So too were notebook makers, proofreaders, and book binders. In fact, anyone who had anything to do with anything related to typing was suddenly very busy.

A couple of villages built extensions onto their libraries in order to accommodate all the donated work. But even they couldn't keep up with what was fast becoming a mountain of paper. 0%D><u village council decided to set up a recycling centre specifically for typed paper. Since it was the only one on the island, they soon became inundated. The idea was that people would drop off their scrap papers and have them turned back into reuseable paper. That was the theory at any rate. Another village decided the best way to deal with all the unwanted paperwork would be to pack it up in watertight containers and store them in a nearby cave on the north end of the island. The intention had been to preserve the paperwork for posterity, but everyone knew once it was in that cave there was little chance anyone would ever see it again. And that was ok by them.

Of course, some folks weren't quite so sentimental. They just burned it. What with the winter months being so harsh, it was not uncommon for any number of Bpjrks😊s to roll up the spoiled papers and popped them into

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their woodstoves on those cold winter nights. Others would shred the unwanted papers and use them as bedding for their guinea pigs and rabbits. One man from the village of VcBv found a way to remove the ink from the page and reuse the paper without having to mush it down into pulp and reform it. Many people were interested in finding out how he did it, but he refused to tell anyone his secret for a long time. (*it turned out he was trying to patent the idea until his wife pointed out the island didn't have a patent office*) In the end he just typed up a bunch of instructions on how to do it, and went around sticking them into people's letter boxes.

By far the very best thing that happened as a result of all those typewriters washing up on shore and Mr PWhjv giving them away for free was that the island's literacy rates shot through the proverbial ceiling. Teachers were the first to notice. But it wasn't just school kids. Adults as well could be found typing up their thoughts, or chatting by the water cooler, (*that whole bottled water thing never really caught on*) and rushing off to type down their conversation. Not everyone of course, but quite a few. Whether it was about dissecting a UTS, how to treat pf%m, or preserving gf®bs, everyone was talking and typing about what they were really interested in.

It really was quite something, especially since before the typewriters arrived most people kind of kept to themselves.



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If for some reason you ever do visit Bpjr<sup>☺</sup>w, the first thing you'll notice (*besides all the umbrellas and the sound of typewriters, of course*) is just how green the place is. And while the people of Bpjr<sup>☺</sup>w take great pride in their gardens, they don't tend to spend a whole lot of time in them. No doubt this is down to the rain. It also means you're unlikely to see anyone having a barbeque.

That's not to say people don't sit out in their gardens, but it's usually on a g<sup>☺</sup>ūm, which looks a bit like a combination lawnchair and umbrella. Something few homes would be without.

Of course, what with it always being so rainy, there was a time when most gardens were mostly green. Which meant there weren't that many flowers. A lot of greenery, but not much in the way of colour.

As for trees, they'd been mostly green as well, many of them conifers that had been planted after the Great War. These days there are more broadleaf varieties scattered about, so it's no longer green the whole year round, but even by most standards, it's still pretty green. And while there's been considerable research showing the effect of the colour green on calming the nerves, there is a limit as to just how calm you want everyone to be all of the time. Especially on an island. In fact, some people believe it's one of the reasons so little changes here.

One of those who thought being surrounded by so much green might not be all it's cracked up to be was Pft<sup>☺</sup> Crksn<sup>☺</sup>w. He's the son of Mr and Mrs Crksn<sup>☺</sup>w who live in the village of Zcvfv. When Pft<sup>☺</sup> was eighteen he went to university on the mainland, like many his age. Fewer do it these days, what with the costs and all, but of the ones that do, most

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eventually find their way back home. That said, there are always a few who never do.

After PftK finished his studies he spent a year travelling around before returning to BpjrK☺w. Once they've returned most kids usually get involved with the family business, or else start up one of their own. But not PftK.

During his travels PftK noticed what a bit of colour (*other than green*) could do to liven up a place. As far as he was concerned the island was just a little too green. His parents thought it was a phase he was going through. A kind of readjustment to island life, or as they called it: "BpjrK9r" - "*the real world*". The only problem was, his "readjustment" seemed to be taking a heck of a long time. And it wasn't that big a house.

Eventually, he moved into a shed at the bottom of the garden. (*which, to be honest, suited everyone*) It was in that shed that his brain began to percolate. Having picked up a few saplings on his travels, it wasn't long before he started ordering more from a mainland supplier. Having filled his parents' garden with these new varieties, he soon took to hill and dale, and, well, as they say, the rest is history.

That was twelve years ago. During that time he managed to get some of the schools involved and that really moved things along. Soon whole families were out planting trees on the weekends. Altogether they must have planted thousands of them.

The strange thing was no one seemed to ask why. Or if they did, they didn't ask him. Like a lot of things that happen on BpjrK☺w, most people just fall in line if they see something they like, and planting trees was definitely one of those things they seemed to like.

By the time the first trees he'd planted had grown a bit, there really wasn't much anyone

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could do about it anyway. And, if anyone had objected (*they'd have to have been crazy to do so*) the colour of the leaves turning in autumn would have convinced even the crotchiest old coot that having a splash of colour among all that green was not a bad thing. Not a bad thing, indeed.

And it wasn't just in autumn. Spring was pretty spectacular as well. Who would have thought there could be so many different shades of green? And the colours were brilliant. More than brilliant. Absolutely brilliant. Or as many would say, "*Fr<sup>o</sup>-br Hv<sup>o</sup>!*" which basically means "*Brilliantly Absolutely*" depending on the intonation. (*it can also mean something quite rude if pronounced incorrectly*)

During those months when the leaves were turning, you'd often see people out with sketch pads and watercolour sets desperately trying to capture the magnificence of those fiery reds and oozing oranges. "*Fr<sup>o</sup>-br Hv<sup>o</sup>!*" you'd hear them cry. Few did manage to capture their magnificence, but you had to admire their effort.

And then there were the photo boffins. Snapping away every hour of the day, hoping to nail down the definitive shot. They too rarely produced the desired results. Somehow what they'd captured just didn't do the colours justice. Once framed and secured behind a piece of glass, they often hung lifeless over a mantelpiece or in the bathroom. Eventually, they'd turn up at a tabletop sale, or in one of the secondhand shops. A bit like those amazing stones you find on the beach which once you get them home just turn out to look like ordinary rocks.

And of course, there were reams and reams and reams of typed poems and stories, not to mention quite a few learned texts about the taxonomic classifications of each and every

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species. And when smart phones started appearing, endless selfies in front of blazing flames, many looking like the subject's hair was on fire. *(with no internet connection, the smartphones were a bit superfluous, but those who had ventured to the mainland just couldn't resist)*

As for Pft $\text{\textcircled{K}}$ , he started a nursery business and, in time, moved out of the shed. It didn't bring in much income, but it was enough to live on. More importantly, it cemented his reputation across the island as someone who knew a few things about growing stuff. Eventually he married Prt $\text{\textcircled{p}}$ r, the eldest Flwmp daughter. Not long after they had twin girls they called Pr $\text{\textcircled{p}}$ p and Pff $\text{\textcircled{K}}$  who preferred building robots to planting trees. But that was ok with Pft $\text{\textcircled{K}}$  and Prt $\text{\textcircled{p}}$ r. Just so long as they were healthy and relatively happy.

The funny thing is, nobody seems to remember that it was Pft $\text{\textcircled{K}}$  who started the whole tree planting business. They all know he's handy with plants, but tree planting was just something they did. And being the easy going sort of guy he is, he isn't about to spill the beans. Some folks are like that.

In fact, a lot of folks are like that on Bpjr $\text{\textcircled{K}}$ w. Maybe it's something in the water. Or maybe it's down to growing up surrounded by so much green. Whatever the reasons, it seems most people just get on with things and don't make too much a fuss about it. Which, when you think about it, isn't such a bad thing.



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One thing you can say about the people of Bpjrkw is that you pretty much know where you stand with them. They're no shrinking violets, even if they don't always appear so to the casual observer. Not that there are many of them around. Casual observers, that is. Or violets, for that matter. Shrinking or otherwise. What with the weather and all.

Of course, there was a time when more tourists came to the island. Not that they stayed very long. They tended to be daytrippers unless they missed the last boat back.

It was the dolphins they'd come to see, and perhaps walk around the island before the next boat sailed. Arriving just around the Festival of Noodles, they'd hang around for a few days, (*the dolphins*) and then be off to who knows where (*both the dolphins and tourists*).

Mvr<sup>n</sup> Str+=kl, the ferry owner, (*it was really just a big boat*) would put on extra trips once the dolphins arrived, often as many as six a day. The usual service was once a week. Weather permitting, of course.

The boat could carry up to twelve passengers, and on those days when the dolphins were around, most of the seats were filled. The best place see them (*the dolphins*) was usually close to the village of Gl+Xk where the ferry docked. If you were lucky enough you could see them from the pier, that way ensuring you got a place on the return trip. If you happened to miss the last boat back, you might find someone to let you sleep in their shed, but most likely you'd have ended up shivering the night away in the dunes. It wasn't that the islanders were mean. They had just never gone in for that

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whole hospitality malarky. Even if there had been a spare bed going, few would have been that keen to have a perfect stranger sleeping in it.

The dolphins were the bottlenose variety. Mvr<sup>n</sup> was quick to point out their proper name: tSwgZng:)Zng (*otherwise known as Tursiops Truncatus*). But most islanders just called them ZngZngs for short.

As you might expect, a busload of pamphlets had been typed up, each providing some relevant information about the animals' behaviours, their historical significance, their eating and mating habits, and, more often than not, an account by the author recalling some personal encounter that may or may not have actually occurred.

There were also half a dozen novellas on the subject, printed up by some of the more industrious residents. And of course, shelves and shelves in all the island's libraries, heaving with essays, in-depth treatises, fictitious and non-fictitious accounts devoted to the slippery beasts.

No one can remember when the dolphins first appeared. "*For as long as anyone can remember,*" was the usual response if anyone asked. Leaping out of the water seemed to be their main party trick, though a few did that thing where they shoot out of the water, stand on their tail, and then travel backwards. It was always a good show. And it was free. And if the rain held off, well that was just icing on the cake.

Not that these 'performances' were only geared for tourists. Most Bpjr<sup>k</sup>☺ws would down tools (*not that many Bpjr<sup>k</sup>☺ws worked with actual tools anymore*), and head over to Gl+χk to see the spectacle. Teachers would drop whatever lesson they were in the middle of and bring their classes down as well. Of course, it wasn't like the dolphins performed

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on command, or even at regular intervals, so it was a bit hit or miss whether you'd see them or not. But since the island wasn't that big, if you didn't see them on your first visit, you'd probably catch them the next time around. All in all, it was a pleasant enough diversion from the daily grind. Especially if it wasn't raining.

That is it was until the year the dolphins didn't show up. It was two weeks after Mrs JÇw had scooped First Prize at the Festival of Noodles with her classic 'roof of the mouth destroying' Garlic Chilli Chicken and Grapefruit Noodle Supreme. One of the judges, Mr HgB from the island's most popular vegan cafe, The Happy Snappy, was rushed to A&E on account of having lost consciousness after tasting it. Since it was the last of the entries, the other judges decided to skip the tasting part, and instead awarded Mrs JÇw with the trophy right then and there.

While no one expected the dolphins to come on any particular day, as one week ran into the next people began wondering what the heck was going on. Of course, Mvr~n Str+=kl was more interested than most. For her it was the difference between spending the holidays with her sister in Thailand and not spending the holidays with her sister in Thailand. A lot was riding on those dolphins appearing.

Prospective daytrippers had been calling for weeks hoping to book their ferry ticket. At first she asked them to call the following day, since no dolphins had been sighted yet. After the third week had come and gone, she dug out her old answering machine and put a message on it saying something to the effect that no news was good news. By the end of the month, she unplugged her phone.

No one said much about it at first, but you could sense the whole island had slipped into something of a collective downslide. Of

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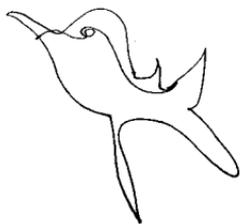
course, the rain didn't help. And boy, did it rain. And rain. And while there wasn't anything specific you could put your finger on, it was as if a cloud of pea soup had descended over the entire island. If you met someone on the street, or in a shop, there was a kind of vagueness about the encounter. Even family members seemed to go around as if they were on some kind of medication.

Some said it was probably due to global warming. Or maybe they had just decided to take a break and stay wherever they were. One of the more creative minds started putting it about that they wouldn't be surprised if the dolphins had been killed by those fishing for tuna. When some of those who made their living out of fishing for tuna heard this they were none too happy. In fact, they made it pretty darn clear in no uncertain terms that if the certain clever clog who'd been spreading the rumour didn't knock it off they'd be knocking something off him.

And that was about it. There were no dolphin sightings that year or the next. Or the one after that. After awhile most everybody had become resigned to the situation.

*"Maybe next year,"* you'd hear someone say.

*"Ya, maybe next year."* But few believed it.



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Last weekend was the Annual Flower and Vegetable Show. Some years ago the somewhat contentious proposal to allow handmade crafts to be included was begrudgingly agreed on, but the real stars of the show have always been the flowers and veg. Actually, it's less of a show, more of a communal blood letting, but in the nicest of ways.

Among the traditions is the time honoured one of nepotism, along with the time honoured accusations of nepotism. Which isn't all that surprising given how small the island's gene pool is. It's no secret that in years gone by it wasn't uncommon for close family relatives to have carnal relations with each other. Some of them ended in marriage, though certainly not all. And while everybody says that rarely happens these days, a quick look around one of the school playgrounds might lead you to think otherwise.

Owing to the fact that there are only six towns on the island, it's become the custom that a different town host the 'show' each year. This year was CwOyyt's turn. Over two hundred interested parties submitted their humble offerings with the intent of wiping the floor with their competing neighbours.

Situated on the western most end of the island, CwOyyt bears a striking resemblance to a Mediterranean seaside town, if that town were situated in the North Atlantic and subjected to gail force winds and torrential rains most days of the year.

Bearing every description of floral arrangement and vegetable mutation known to man, all those entering are required to do so by noon. Judging normally takes about two hours, with a tea break sandwiched in half way. Once the judges have made their

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decisions the doors are flung open and anyone prepared to pay the modest entry fee is free to wander around for an hour or so. The winners are then announced and presented with their trophies.

It often takes about two hours to get through all the prizes and commendations, which means that by five o'clock you'll be lucky to see any more than a handful of eager beavers waiting to accept their award. By the close of ceremonies most people will have already gone home, or headed for a pub.

Such was the case on this particular occasion when those who had won something had made their way down to the *RBCζππm*, the town's only pub. Here they had spent the last couple of hours knocking back their celebratory drinks and enjoying a few heartfelt slaps on the back. And while many of those who had not walked away with a prize had buggered off home to be miserable in private, a few had also made their way down to the *RBCζππm* intent on drowning their sorrows in public. Most of those celebrating victory knew only too well what it meant to spend months nurturing a *RBEeg*, or a *Qk* only to have it rated second best by the judges. So on the whole the winners kept a healthy distance from those whose entries hadn't cut the mustard. No sense rubbing salt in somebody's wound if it could be avoided.

Among this year's top winners were *Brtn Pkn®* for her orchid display, and *Mnbl Fgj* for his four foot three inch *Xππbth*, which is a kind of vegetable that looks like a cross between a rutabega and a parsnip with fur. It was so heavy *Mnbl* had to use a wheelbarrow to transport it. Now it sat in place of honour on the bar.

Most judges have learned to stay well clear of any pubs after the show. Experience has shown some losers can get a bit touchy once

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they've got some fire in their bellies.

Normally the judges do not go by size alone, but Mnbl's  $\aleph\Upsilon\text{ubth}$  was exceptional. Everyone agreed on that. Even so, the fact that both Brt and Mnbl came from the same village as two of the three judges raised more than a few eyebrows. Particularily since all four looked as if they had more in common than just a postcode. (*their identical monobrows were the root of much speculation*)

Eventually, a scuffle broke out between those celebrating and those commiserating which was soon put down by the pub's landlady, Mrs Thwp. A formidable woman, all the more so when wielding a cricket bat which she had done so on this occasion, her intervention could not have come soon enough. After a not so veiled promise that the next person to throw a punch would be limping home, things settled down more or less instantly.

The following week dozens of neatly typed letters appeared through the letter box of the Bpjr $\kappa\omega$  Gz $\zeta$ zt. Mrs Krf)-t, the paper's editor, chose six of the most representative and included them in the Letters to the Editor section of the paper. Three commented on how well the show had been organised and praised the judges for all their efforts. Two gave differing accounts as to how the tussle at the R $\beta\zeta\text{m}$  started, although they both thanked Mrs Thwp for the professional way she diffused the situation. The last suggested it might not be a bad thing if the organising committee were to consider bringing in some outside judges next time so as to avoid any future accusations of cronyism. (*say what you will about the Bpjr $\kappa\omega$  Gz $\zeta$ zt, it's editor does not shy away from controversy*)

The centre spread was devoted to photos of some of the winners holding up their trophies, as well as two closeups of Mnbl's smashed  $\aleph\Upsilon\text{ubth}$ . Mrs Krf)-t wrote a short

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editorial thanking the organisers for yet another successful year, noting that the burden of work often fell on the shoulders of a few committed Bpjrks, and that anyone interested in helping out next year would be more than welcome.

The other main news item was an update on the aluminium table that had gone missing the previous week from Mr and Mrs Ffpt's patio. Initially, there had been suggestions of a possible burglary, and readers had been advised to keep a sharp eye out for any suspicious goings-on. The article went on to say that the Ffpt's had recently confirmed that their table had been found and safely returned. The police report concluded that the most likely culprit had been the high winds the island experienced the previous weekend, and that there was a more than even chance the table had blown over the fence into the K\Lk's garden. As the K\Lk's had been away attending a wedding, the discovery was not made until after their return.

While the Bpjrks Gazette is not a thick newspaper, (*most editions have four pages*) it does attempt to cover the significant events taking place on the island. In addition to business adverts (*which keep the paper afloat*), the paper regularly features upcoming and recently past events, current news items (*if there are any*), and Letters to the Editor (*which there are always plenty*). Other items might include recipes, tips on decorating sheds, advice for the lovelorn, and any sporting activities deemed worthy of mention. Since the island doesn't have an official sports team, sports items rarely appear. (*though it had been proposed that the island should have one, no one could agree on which one*) On those rare occasions when a homegrown Bpjrks has been discovered climbing, running, swimming, or cycling up

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and down or across a mountain range, desert, or ocean on the other side of the globe, it usually finds a prominent place.

One such account was that of Kpl-nk PlnkBζ's successful attempt at breaking the island's swimming record to Gw'ŋm. The previous record had been set by Kpl-nk's biological father, Pl-kn PlnkBζ, twenty years before, which as circumstances would have it, coincided with his last sighting.

Kpl-nk had decided to make the attempt the previous November, not the warmest time of year to contemplate jumping into anything wet, least of all the sea. That he intended to swim the fifteen miles wearing nothing more than a pair of Speedos and some goggles, most people thought was just plain nuts.

But Kpl-nk PlnkBζ obviously didn't think like many people, and so, slipping into the icy water, he proved it could be done. That said, his mother had noticed a slight change in his ability to use a knife and fork after his historic swim.

When asked by a reporter why he chose the month of November, Kpl-nk said, *"I didn't really think it would be that cold."* Everybody who knew Kpl-nk had a good laugh about that. The GzQzt featured photos under the headline: N@CS 1 KPL-NK!



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It's not hard to imagine life on an island the size of a large potato might not be everyone's cup of tea. In fact, tea is about the last thing you'll find on the island. For some reason, it never really caught on. Coffee is much more popular. And gin. Gin is very popular, and it's not unusual to be offered a small glass of it should you visit someone. Whatever the time of day. Some of the old geezers continue to distill their own. A holdover from times gone by.

Running a business on Bpjrksm is no walk in the park either, as many have found out. These days there's very little produced in the way of what one would consider useful items. Those that do exist are more likely to be cottage industries at best, catering for a small clientele. Among the more popular of these items are tea cosies (*somewhat ironic, given the absence of what they're meant to cosy*), toilet roll cosies (*often with either a doll's upper torso or a dog's head attached - for some reason poodles feature more than other breeds*), hand-tooled wooden objects, and knick-knacks (*some useful, most purely decorative and useless*).

Of course, following the arrival of typewriters, not to mention the generosity of Mr PWhjv, the written word, be it prose or poetry, has also begun to feature among the island's exportable commodities. Leading the pack has been a marked rise in crime fiction. This seems somewhat unusual to anyone who has either lived or visited Bpjrksm, since the island has been virtually crime free for as long as anyone can remember.

That is to say, any sort of serious crime. Naturally, there are the odd punch ups at one of the pubs, or incidents involving mistaken identities, but generally speaking few would

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describe BpjrK☺w as the domain of gun molls and grifters. Although there was the time Mr CrtzK took Mrs WwJ's electric bicycle and crashed it into the back of Mr Jrtq><v's milk float. Even that turned out to be more a case of mistaken identity than serious crime, since Mr CrtzK had a similar electric bike, though to be fair his was orange (*Mrs WwJ's was blue*). A doctor's note attesting to his colour blindness had been the clincher in his defence. Not only had he not noticed the colour difference, he was totally unaware that Mr WwJ had fiddled with the electrics on his wife's bike enabling it to go twice as fast as the manufacturer had designed. Police reports stated Mr CrtzK must have been barrelling along at close to 40 mph before hitting the back of Mr Jrtq><v's milk float.

In the end, all charges were dropped against Mr CrtzK. On the other hand, Mr WwJ was found guilty of tampering with a vehicle with the intent of making it go faster. He was ordered to restore the bike to its factory specifications along with twenty hours of community service at the recycling centre. Mrs WwJ, having knowingly engaged said vehicle, also got twenty hours at the centre.

Details of the case were highlighted in the Gzqzt, under the headline: *M%obS CpQyh<>*, (*OLD GEEZER NEARLY KILLS NEIGHBOUR*). A full page spread of photos accompanied the article. These included one of a smiling Mr CrtzK, two of the shamefaced WwJs, another of a grimacing Mr Jrtq><v, and closeups of the milk float's backend.

Of course, there have been other criminal activities over the years, but most of them have been relatively minor. Even describing them as minor requires something of a stretch. A case in point was the time young Br@p TkμH's nicked the Lkjr's morning milk delivery (*two pints and a tub of cottage*

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cheese). Br@@p was found with the goods, or at least what he hadn't already consumed. The case was settled out of court.

What does remain something of a mystery is how such a minor crimes could prove to be the compost for some of the gruesome murders that fuel C]P C/8wid's runaway bestseller, *Qnm PvQzt Qnm*.

Of those who know C]P, most would agree he is a hard worker and devoted husband. In an interview with the GzQzt, Mrs TWP, his former primary school teacher, said C]P always had a pretty wild imagination. But even she had to admit there's a big difference between a wild imagination and a psychotic disorder. Not, she was careful to add, that she had any medical qualifications, *"But teachers can sense when something isn't quite right. That's not to say he was the only one. Every class has a few."*

And there was plenty of evidence to prove her right. Not only did crime fiction flourish - Bpht Hrshfld#'s *YmYm Dwndl YnYn*, and Jn(n) Xktch's page turner *V/rr\M* gave testament to that, but all sorts of other creativity flourished as well. That said, it was the crime fiction that sold. Whatever the reasons, growing up on the island provided some of its inhabitants with just the sort of mental stimulation that encouraged grizzly descriptions of mutilated bodies, serial killers and diabolical hostage situations usually involving psychopathic nutjobs.

Of course, without typewriters, an endless supply of recycled ribbons, and some of the foulest weather this side of anywhere, most of those fertile imaginations would never have seen the light of day. But, that's just the way things happen sometimes. A couple of chance encounters, like Mr PWhjv coming upon that container, combined with his generosity of spirit, and someone figuring out how to

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recycle typewriter ribbons - and well, the next thing you know someone gets it in their noggin to describe a serial killer gone mental on a small island.

Not that crime novels are the only moneyspinners when it comes to the written word. There are plenty of cookbooks that have been churned out over the years as well. Always popular, their authors appear to be extremely clairvoyant, since quite a few of the same recipes often feature in other cookbooks. Most confine themselves to those treasures passed down from family members over the generations. Of course, given the close family ties, it's not that surprising there'd be duplications. And while many of those considered to be the more traditional recipes hardly vary from book to book, there is often a disclaimer accompanying each stating that this was indeed the original one lovingly passed down from the author's great, great grandmother, or in some cases a great, great grandfather, now deceased, never forgot, may she/he/they rest in peace and bless her/his/their immortal soul/s. And, as if to prove some sort of authenticity, it is often noted that the said recipe had been handed down on parchment, or in some cases papyrus.

In addition to the more traditional dishes, a number of recent cookbooks also offer variations on what are described as 'modern meals'. The recipe for Fish Crackers Without Fish, winner of last year's Fish Awards, features in Mrs Pngdsh's reprint of her wildly popular: *PH>-:>S%H*, which she has dedicated to her late great, great, great, great grandmother who had passed down so many beloved recipes on whale bone.

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There's an old saying on Bpjrksm: "Gr©%o mhQyvtd tfUwm" which means, "If you find yourself in a boat, sooner or later you'll get wet". That's not to say all those who live on the island are particularly argumentative by nature. Some are, of course. But by and large, most islanders would prefer to sit in a bucket of ice water than have to express their opinion. Particularly if the one in the boat happens to hold a different view. Not that this is limited exclusively to aquatic situations. It's more a universal truth.

Considering that for most Bpjrksms their universe is limited to the six by two miles of rock and sand they inhabit, it goes without saying the majority of folks try to avoid getting into a boat with someone, both figuratively and literally. For visitors to the island this has been known to leave the impression that many of the natives are downright unfriendly. Nothing could be further from the truth. That said, outward expressions of friendliness are not exactly high on anyone's To Do list. While some visitors regard this as indifference, it's really little more than a genetic trait that has been passed down through the ages.

By and large most Bpjrksms get on well enough, though there have been a few times when someone does get 'wet'. One such occasion involved members of the island's Heritage Society, commonly known as the Ūtswq. Normally it's just the executive committee that meets, but since they now make up the entire Society they no longer feel the need to make the distinction.

At present there are three members- Chair: Mrs Fmpn Zqz, Treasurer: Mrs RŪek Rdfem, and Secretary: Mrs NtX Fndslngr. Mrs Nmpn, who had been on the committee up until last June,

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had resigned due to irrevocable differences between herself and the Chair, who as chance would have it, was also her sister-in-law.

Normally, the committee meets once a month at the Nhlζχ, a pub in the village of Dwrfrwd which is situated a mile east of Glmp>k. Starting time is usually set for seven o'clock on the dot. However, on this particular occasion it had been pushed back to 7:15. This was on account of Mrs Rnuk Rdfum running late from a meeting she had with her daughter's teacher after she'd been found fooling around with a Bunson burner and half a bottle of nitroglycerin in the Science lab. (*her daughter, not the teacher*)

Once the minutes of the previous meeting had been accepted, the first item on the agenda was the issue of the Ljg. For the past year this had always been the first item on the agenda. In fact, for the past year it had been the only item on the agenda.

The Ljg had been commissioned by the Society two years before from an artist who used to live on the island. It was to be a graphic representation of the lineage of all the families who had ever lived on the island. Everyone said it was a bit ambitious, but the Utswq would hear none of it, and just plowed ahead. Not only was it a bit ambitious, it also turned out to be larger than they anticipated. It measured 4.7 by 3.2 metres.

Finding a suitable home for it was no picnic. In fact, it proved to be more difficult than anyone ever imagined. As it turned out, its size was not the only problem. It also weighed a ton. And while ordering a frame hadn't been difficult, (*Prd Gm@t had knocked one out over a weekend*), getting a piece of glass to fit was proving to be more than life itself was worth.

Originally the committee had thought the Ljg could travel around the island, spending

a couple of months in each town before moving on to the next. This idea was immediately quashed when they saw just how difficult it would be to move it, not to mention the lack of suitable venues for hanging it.

Sadly the only place with that kind of wall space and steel reinforcements was the police station. The committee felt this was totally unsuitable. It now resided in Mrs Fndslngr's shed, as it had done so ever since its arrival. This was definitely not what the committee had intended. But even finding a suitable place for it turned out to be the least of their worries.

At this particular meeting it was decided to invite the community to have a peak. As one might expect, there was a fair amount of hullabaloo when word got out there was to be an unveiling, even without the glass. It was agreed that Glmp>k's Town Hall was as good a place as any. It was also just around the corner from Mrs Fndslngr's shed, which had been the determining factor. (*Town Hall makes it sound grander than it actually is - during the week it serves as a pre-school nursery, while Friday nights it's home to Bingo*)

Dignitaries from all over the island were invited, and a speech was made by the Mayor welcoming everyone. (*the Hall legally holds 65, but after some arm twisting the Fire Chief bumped it up to twice that*) After thanking the members of the ÜTSWQ for their tireless efforts, he went on to thank all those who had helped fundraise with bake sales and raffles for what would surely become one of the island's major attractions. He then suggested everyone dig into the baked goods on offer after the Ljg was unveiled. This was met with a round of applause.

And then, the moment everyone had been waiting for. Well, not quite everyone. By this time the members of the committee were

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pretty fed up with the whole business, but they weren't going to let it show. There was a drum roll, provided by Tmnk JbWbfv, a high school student who'd been considering dropping out and forming a band. This had been kiboshed by his mother with the promise that if he ever mentioned the pea-brained idea again he wouldn't know what hit him.

And then, the Ljg was revealed. This was followed by considerable oooing and ahhhhing as everyone crowded in to get a closer look. Head shaking and nods of approval were very much in abundance. That is until Mrs PütS let out a screech and shouted, "D-XU%oo ®".

The ooo's and ahhh's fell silent, and almost seamlessly transitioned into the sound of disgruntlement. Something along the lines of a volcano in the moments before it erupts. Nodding and shaking ceased as the crowd focused its attention on what Mrs PütS was now pointing to.

The following week's GzQzt ran a four page spread on the unveiling ceremony, complete with statements from some of those making the accusations, apologies from each of the committee members, and several photographs taken on the night, including one featuring the three committee members being chased from the building by an angry mob.



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You might be tempted to think the people of Bpjrkr☺w aren't all that interested in life off the island. Of course, to a certain degree you'd be right. For starters, there's quite a bit already on offer what with the Festival of Noodles, the Annual Potato Fair, the Flower and Veg Show and of course, the Fish Awards. Not to mention the various societies that seem to take up a lot of time if you ever get swizzled into joining one of them.

That said, a few have managed to disappear over the horizon never to be seen again. In a couple of cases it's hard to say if it was by personal choice or family encouragement.

For those who succumb to the temptation of advancing their academic learning, the only real option is the mainland. Once they get that out of the way many decide to have a little wander around. Most return with the knowledge that whatever is on offer out there is just not worth the price. And yet, the reality of living back home with their parents presents its own challenges. The old saying: "*WkLckn ldp s#@ng*" or "*You can't eat bright lights*" turns out to be small comfort to a returnee, who after a couple of years of unbridled debauchery and months of vagabonding has come to the conclusion that lying around in their underpants all day is somehow acceptable behaviour for a university graduate. Especially when their mother insists they get dressed or else there'll be no supper.

Of those who've left with the hope of attaining fame and fortune, reality often kicks them in the teeth once they realise that living cheek to jowl with six former uni mates, all of whom have some questionable hygienic habits, in a two bedroom flat,

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working a job that pays minimum wage, (if they're lucky) wasn't quite what they had imagined. Returning home with nothing more than a few burst balloons and a pile of dirty laundry in their hand luggage, these are often the ones who seem to hold a permanent grudge. A grudge against what is anybody's guess. Perhaps life itself. They're usually the same people who join societies where they can unleash their sheer cantakerosity on others, and in time become the committee members who rule their minions with an iron fist.

Those that do make a go of it and succeed tend to fall into two distinct categories. The first group you never hear of again. For whatever reasons, they choose to ignore any pull the island ever had on them. Or of loved ones, for that matter. Like a puff of smoke, they're here one minute - and gone the next. Remembered, but not always sorely missed. As for the loved ones they'd left behind, sometimes it proves to be a welcomed relief. Particularly if they'd been tearaways as kids. No doubt it was likely there had already been some disharmony within the family unit prior to their departure. Of course, had there been a more regular ferry service, or Skype, or the internet, well, who knows? Things might have been different. But then, having been raised on an island whose unofficial motto was 'Htsk<sup>h</sup> J\*~nPs', (*Be Careful What You Wish For*), nobody was going to be sending out the Missing Person's Squad.

The second group were those you never stopped hearing about. Even those who had managed to secure a job cleaning out the toilets in a hamburger joint were touted out at every available occasion, as if they'd devoted their lives to some noble cause. And while it was often their mothers who could be heard extolling the virtues and self-

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sacrifices of their precious little toilet scrubbers, to be fair there were just as many fathers who saw the products of their loins spreading their DNA far and wide as something they could carry to their graves with pride. They just didn't talk about it that much.

Fløk Mwzl was one of the luckier ones. The daughter of Pdwr and Rfløk Mwzl, she had gone off to study engineering. Although unlike so many others before her, the idea of spending the year after graduating sharing a house with a pack of hygienically-challenged unhinged fellow graduates was the last thing on her mind. Instead, she applied, and got, an internship with an architectural firm.

The pay was enough to cover her rent on a studio apartment, though not enough to cover the rest of her expenses. To supplement her salary she waitressed most weekends at a cafe just around the corner from her flat. Bicycling to work meant she didn't have any travelling expenses, except for the cost of going back to Bpjrkr☺ for the Potato Festival and Christmas holidays, which her parents had generously stumped up for. The best part of that year was being able to close and lock the door after a long day, put her feet up and have a couple of bottles of Prosecco (*which, together with Scandi crime boxsets, were her only serious indulgences*). If there were any smelly socks to be smelled, she was secure in the knowledge that they were her own. All the drama of a group house she could live without. She'd done that the last year of her studies and there was no way she was falling into that rathole again.

Fløk's first month at the architectural firm was spent in the role of general dog's body to one of the company's hot shots who, if first impressions were anything to go by (*not to mention second, third, fourth...*), saw himself as god's gift to womankind.

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Fortunately for her, he came down with a stinking case of food poisoning while on a 'dinner date' he had 'encouraged' her to attend.

During his absence, Fløk was sequestered to the junior partner's office who must have seen she had some potential. Taking her under his wing, he was soon giving her more responsibilities, and by the end of the second week had her joining him in meetings with clients. By month's end, he was asking her for suggestions on upcoming projects.

Of course, it would have been easy for Fløk to fall for the guy, (*he was quite a dish and just a bit older, but not in a creepy way*) just as it would have been easy for him to take advantage of the situation. But she didn't, and neither did he. Fløk may not have had the high cheekbones and skeletal frame of a catwalk model, but neither was she unpleasant to look at. Having reaped the benefits of all the precipitation Bpjrkr☺w had on offer, her skin, not unlike many of the island's youth, absolutely glowed. More important was her self-confidence and a general bonhomie that radiated through it.

That's not to say she was a pushover. Far from it. She had a black belt in Akido and could have easily taken out half a dozen lugheads twice her size. Not that she'd ever had to test her skills, but there was no question who would be left standing had such an occasion presented itself.

As the end of her internship neared, her boss offered her a position with the firm. With a very attractive pay packet. She said thanks, but she said she'd already decided to go back to Bpjrkr☺w. She had some other plans.

The food poisoning incident remained a mystery.

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Having returned to Bpjr<sup>☺</sup>w without any warrants or convictions (*always a worry for parents*), Fløk's folks were over the moon. And yet, their joy was tempered with feelings of regret. Had they done enough to prepare her for some of the pitfalls life would throw at her? Would their little princess cope now that she was back? Limiting her breakfast cereals to the ones without prizes seemed like a good idea at the time, but had it made her bitter? They weren't aiming for fabulous. Good enough would do. Good enough would be great. No one wanted to be remembered for being just 'ok' parents?

Of course, for those who had fallen out with their kids regret was the last thing on their minds. The hard truth was, there weren't that many jobs on Bpjr<sup>☺</sup>w. Having something like an engineering degree on the island didn't make a lot of sense. But for Pdwr and Rfløk that didn't matter. Just having their daughter back in the fold was enough. They'd cross that 'what to do next' bridge when it arrived. For now, her return had brought back their smiles, and that was plenty.

Less smiley were they when one morning she announced her plans to move out. Having shared the past six months with them had been great. Really great. But she had come to the conclusion it was time to make her own way. When they asked why, she said "I don't know, it just is," and left it at that.

What Fløk hadn't told them was that they were driving her stark raving bonkers. Not that she showed any outward signs. Her Akido training had enabled her to maintain a certain degree of self-control. It was only when she thought about it that she realised both she and her parents had all too easily slipped back into those all too slippery

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parent-child patterns they had established years before. And while there was nothing specific she could point to (*except her mother staying up late to make sure she got home safe, which Fløk definitely regarded as checking up on her, or her father painting her room mauve - a colour she absolutely loathed*), the time had come for her to stand on her own two feet.

This was easier said than done. Not only were jobs thin on the ground, so too was accommodation. This meant there were any number of adult 'children' who had little option but to continue living in their parents' home longer than either parties would have wished. Given that she wasn't the only one, it wasn't long before she and a few of her friends hatched a plan. Actually, the plan had already been hatched when she was at university. Now all that was needed was some serious activation.

This came in the form of some late nights quaffing down copious amounts of beer with a few others who were in the same boat. Since bicycles were the main form of transport on Bpjrkr☺w (*there were no cars*), the issue of drink driving never came up, even though riding over bumpy roads on a two wheeler after several hours of getting rat-arsed could easily have led to some serious mishaps.

Her plan hinged on getting one of the councils to provide a small plot of land on which the Consortium (*that's what the group had decided to call itself, though she would have preferred something less pretentious*) would build small houses, suitable for one, or in some cases, two. The idea was that there would be no more than a dozen or so (*each one different but in the same style of the larger houses on the island*). There would also be an open covered area which would serve as a sort of community centre (*barbeques were suddenly*

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a very real possibility). Those interested would have to stump up the cost of materials, plus a bit extra to cover the fees of a professional builder who would act as site manager. They'd also be expected to lend a hand in the construction of the houses. Having honed her architectural skills by this time, Flæk volunteered her services to prepare the blueprints free of charge.

Seeing how many of those who sat on any one of the town councils experienced the same problem of having their own adult children living at home, the Consortium were soon inundated with offers. Having settled on a plot just outside Lk/vk, they got to work.

Within three months all twelve houses were completed. Considering how fast they had sprouted up, it wasn't long before building was started on another site. There was a palpable sensation of relief experienced by both parents and adult children who now realised there was a light at the end of the tunnel. The idea that they would no longer have to see each other 24/7 brought a spring into many a step.

An added bonus came when a couple of months later two of the new homeowners found themselves making the most of a rainy weekend. A few weeks later one of them discovered she was pregnant. Under any other circumstances, this could have proved disastrous, but it turned out that the grandparents of the other prospective parent (*not the pregnant one*) had a good sized house on the other side of DTRØbt and were more than willing to make a swap with the young couple. (*after forty eight years of marriage they had just about enough of each other, and it was either swap houses or end up in divorce court - in the end it turned out to be a perfect solution for all*)

In time, each town had a small house

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community on their outskirts, and it didn't take long for them to fill up. Not only that, but there seemed to be a ready supply of older Bpjrks eager to turn over the keys of their big house for something more manageable. Divorce rates, which had never been very high on the island, soon plummeted. The only question on everyone's mind was "G%oobd@T" - "Why hadn't anybody thought of this sooner?"

The following year a proposal was put forward (*which was unanimously accepted*), that henceforth, the first Friday of July would be known as Fløk Mwzl Day.



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Rainy days figure greatly in the lives of those who call Bpjrks their home, and they come in a variety of styles. The most common is what they call *LV%oo @B*, or *By the Bucketful*, which can go on for days on end, eventually turning the ground to psQnch, (*something resembling overcooked spinach*). Of course, this makes getting around more than a little difficult. That's not to say the people of Bpjrks just sit inside moping around the place wishing they lived somewhere with less rain. One thing you can say for Bpjrks, they are not mopers.

Take umbrellas for instance. A few years ago there was a problem with a delivery of umbrellas, an item most Bpjrks regard as a natural extension of their arm. Except of course if you're a teenager. In that case, anything as practical as a device that keeps you dry is so last week. Or as they'd say: "*Sgk %oo @ B'ppht*".

Teenagers aside, most islanders already have any number of umbrellas scattered about their homes. Nor should it come as any surprise that just as many umbrella owners leave them in places where they can't remember, for love nor money. Or else they've loaned one to a friend, never to be seen of again. And then there are those given as gifts, especially in the days leading up to the annual parade. And of course, even the best umbrellas wear out in time. That's why for as long as anyone can remember, there's always been a healthy trade in umbrellas.

Normally, there are two deliveries per year - one in March, the other in September. You wouldn't think there'd be that kind of demand given the population, but what with normal wear and tear, a frightfully high

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incidence of forgetfulness, and gift giving there was. That's why when the March delivery didn't arrive one year without so much as a 'Howdy Do' from the supplier, most people thought it a bit odd, but didn't lose any sleep over it. Given the number of umbrellas already under beds, behind cupboards, and up in attics it was far from what anyone would describe as a 'crisis'. Even so, letters began appearing in the GzQzt, most of them asking the same question: "Ltuḡ-ḡ (Lḡ Mph@?" - "Where the heck are the umbrellas?"

Being the island's sole distributor, Old Man Kvḡ-tch had tried contacting the supplier, but to no avail. Which meant he didn't know anymore than anyone else did. Not that that stopped people dropping by his shop and asking just what exactly was going on.

The March non-delivery was bad enough. But when September came and went and there were still no umbrellas, panic began to creep in. Old Man Kvḡ-tch was 'invited' to appear before the island's Main Council in the hope of shedding some light on what was now being treated as a serious issue. Unfortunately, he still didn't know any more than anyone else (*he'd given up trying to contact the supplier*). It was his opinion that no new umbrellas were coming anytime soon. He predicted it was going to be a long winter and people would just have to make do. Whether the the annual parade on the last Saturday in October would take place, well that wasn't his decision to make. That would be up to the Council.

In the end the parade did take place, but everyone had to admit, it was a pretty sorry affair. And it hadn't even rained. The line of tattered umbrellas zigzagging its way across the island brought the tone down, big time. But, being of hardy stock, the good folk of Bpjrkw just got on with things, and, as was

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their custom, just made the best of a bad situation.

It wasn't until mid-December that Old Man Kvitch finally learned the supplier had moved its operations to China. No letter of explanation. No sincerest apologies. No nothing. Accompanying this non-existent apology/explanation was an order form which invited him 'as a loyal customer' to place a new order. "Well, nuts to that," he told his wife. There was no way he'd be having anything to do with them anytime soon. She suggested he ought to type them a letter expressing his dissatisfaction, but in the end he said he couldn't be bothered.

The other reason he wasn't prepared to place an order with them was that in the interim he had found another supplier, and had already placed an order with them. This new company promised they could provide the same umbrellas at twelve percent less what he'd been paying for them. What's more, they guaranteed delivery by early March.

One of the people most affected by the non-deliveries was Mrs Fr%oo®. Over the years, she had relied on the March order which had given her plenty of time to personalise several gift umbrellas, (*for her nieces and nephews - she has six of each*) so they'd have them in time for the parade. As a result of the non-delivery she found herself scurrying around door to door begging her neighbours for any spares they might have. She also found a couple in her own attic, though what they were doing up there was anyone's guess. But she wasn't asking any questions, and even if she had been, nobody was giving any answers.

There were a few others who suffered more than most owing to the March non-delivery. Most notably Grrr, and P®p. During the months of July and August he showed silent films every Friday night on the court house wall in

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Cw#?k. As he had anticipated, numbers were somewhat down over past years. He put it down to the umbrellas, or rather lack of. Still, those that came seemed to enjoy themselves.

Thinking his regular customers might not want to get caught short again, Old Man Kv<sup>h</sup>-tch had ordered twice as many from the new supplier as he normally would haveue. It turned out to be a very wise move.

True to their word, the delivery arrived that first week in March. Sales went through the roof. As a result of the increased trade, he bought Mrs Kv<sup>h</sup>-tch a new washing machine, which to be fair, he was going to buy anyway.

If there is one thing Bpjr<sup>o</sup> don't like, it's being caught short. Living on an island people tend to take that kind of thing seriously.





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In addition to showing silent films on Friday nights during the summer months, Grrrr and P©p also owned the island's six cinemas. Now that might seem like an awful lot of cinemas for such a small island, but what with there being no television or internet connections, people weren't exactly spoiled for choice. And they were usually well attended. Not that any of them were all that big. Most could only seat about two dozen at a time.

Since each town had its own cinema, people didn't have to travel that far to see what was on offer. And since the films were usually shown in round robin rotation, if you missed the one showing in your town, you could probably catch it the following week just up the road.

Of course, what with it being a pretty big operation he had employed managers, sub-managers and even sub-sub-managers who attended to the everyday running of them. Even so, he was a pretty 'hands on' kind of cinema owner. Long a fan of silent films he realised a business such as his couldn't survive on silent films alone. To address this, he had hired a dozen or so 'shouters'.

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Their job was to supply the dialogue taking place on screen. Or at least a loose interpretation of it. Most films required at least two or three shouters, though owing to sickness and family commitments, on some nights there might only be one. Whatever the number, they would sit off to the side of the screen, and, as their title suggests, shout the lines out as the film progressed.

Since there was usually a soundtrack accompanying most modern films, this demanded a clever solution. Never one to think inside the box, Mr P®p had the bright idea of having the projectionists turn the volume down whenever the actors on screen were talking, and up again when the music resumed. It was a system that worked most of the time.

The modern films he had to order in special, although to call them modern would have been stretching it a bit. Not that anyone seemed to mind, or if they did they didn't make a big deal about it.

As for his silent film collection, Mr P®p had quite possibly every silent film known to man. These he kept in a climate controlled room of his house, much to the annoyance of Mrs P®p who on numerous occasions had indicated she would have preferred he stored them somewhere else (*her exact words: "XC@ <"\*"> l&Kp#!" - meaning: "Anywhere else!"*) so she could use the room to store her own collection of porcelain statuettes, many of which had been handed down from her mother and grandmother, or else picked up at jumble sales and the odd trip off the island. Needless to say, with over six hundred statuettes, this was no small matter. It was an issue that brought a certain amount of tension to the household. In the end she agreed to storing them in a shed at the bottom of the garden which Mr P®p had constructed

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especially for that purpose, with the added bonus of having her stop nagging him about it.

While never completely giving up the idea of having them closer to hand (*"Like in that bloody room he keeps his film cannisters," she had been heard to remark on more than one occasion*), Mrs PⓅ had become more or less resigned to trekking out to the shed whenever she felt the need to attend to them. And while she had become somewhat philosophical about it all, she rarely let it get in the way of some seriously passive aggressive behaviour directed at her husband, whenever the opportunity arose.

Of all the islanders, no one appreciated Mr PⓅ's efforts more than Mrs Krf)-t, the editor of the GzQzt. If there was anything she liked more than sitting in a darkened room with images of movie stars flashing before her, well she hadn't discovered it yet. This was also true for many other Bpjrks😊s, even though some regarded a trip to the cinema as more of a social outing. Something you might do with friends and family. Or both. Either way, you didn't think too much about it afterwards. Or before for that matter. The only problem with this sort of attitude was that there were always bound to be some people who forgot there might be others in the audience who had come to actually watch the film, rather than listen to gossip.

For Mrs Krf)-t, a widow for some twenty four years, it was more of a spiritual experience. And while she wasn't what you'd call a religious person, (*she swore like a sailor, for one thing*) the hours she spent in front of those screens (*she was what was what islanders called a 'flm flmP' or 'film chaser'*) was nothing short of an existential journey into her inner most being. It was her home away from home.

Nowhere else, not at the paper, not among

her bi-monthly Stitch & Bitch compadres, not even those times when her grandchildren, R©μ and K©H, came for a sleepover during the summer holidays (*they lived in the next town over, but her tolerance for small children had long gone south - a couple of nights a year was plenty*) did she experience that unification of body and soul which she had read so much about when studying 19<sup>th</sup> century French philosophers at university.

Faced with an increasingly absurd world (*not that BpjrK☺w was all that absurd, but being the editor of the island's only newspaper, she, unlike many of her fellow BpjrK☺ws, liked to keep abreast of world events as well*), it was not unusual to find her in one of Mr P©p's cinemas on any given night of the week.

Most of the films she had already seen any number of times. She found them reassuring. Something she could depend on. So different from the real world. Her world. A world that was spiralling out of control right in front of her nose. Stress levels of BpjrK☺w tended to be on the lower end of the spectrum, but that didn't mean it was all ice cream cones and party cake.

Stuff happened. Stuff was happening. All around her. BpjrK☺w was a refuge. The outside world frightened her. But how long would her island remain a refuge? Most of those who called BpjrK☺w their home chose to ignore all that stuff. But she knew what was going on. Oh, she knew all right. Just like she knew what was playing at every cinema every night of the week. Oh, she knew.

And yet, sometimes it was easier to sit back in one of Mr P©p's overstuffed arm chairs and be transported to another world. She preferred the silent ones. There was something reassuring about a world in black and white. Strange, yet familiar. Each

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viewing brought a new insight, a new discovery that drew her ever closer to an understanding and acceptance of who she was. Who she had become. Unfortunately, this increased awareness didn't necessarily extend to those around her.

Bpjrkw 😊 might seem a pretty tame place compared to many others, but it was not without its turmoil. Personal fulfilment came in many forms. Hers arrived in images projected on a screen.

Once the film had finished and the lights came up, she would often remain seated, taking a few minutes to absorb it all. There she would sit, wondering what it would be like to disappear into that screen and discover another world.

It was a world she longed to be a part of.



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\* Note from the author:

I hope you enjoyed reading about the island and people of Bpjrkw. As you can see there are quite a few blank pages left. Feel free to get your typewriter out and add to the story. Or you can use them to write your own story. Or use them for doodling. It's up to you. They're all yours. Free of charge.



portrait of the author  
as a young man

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