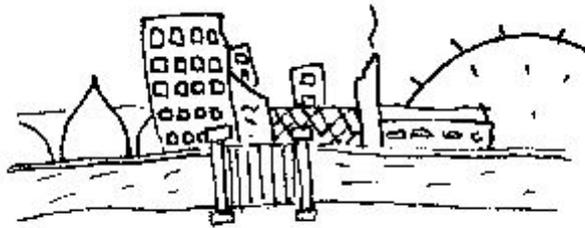


# Saint Street School Magazine

Summer 2010



"Working to facilitate the enablement  
of the pedagogical and personal development solution

in accordance with the company's health and safety policy  
and industry standards"

# Team Leader's introduction

First of all, may I congratulate our service users on their success in the non-competitive inter-school sports day. I am delighted to say that we absolutely thrashed all the other schools in the non-competitive stakes. While they are busily nursing their wounds after the humiliation of defeat, it's worth remembering that Saint Street was responsible for turning the day into a non-competitive one in the first place. It was all competitive until we turned up. I should also like to offer my thanks to all fathers who turned up to the Dads' Race, and to all the representatives of the Child Support Agency who were waiting for them at the end of it.

Secondly, I should like to give our greatest thanks to Mr Riggerton, who has taken early and sudden retirement. Many of you will know Mr Riggerton as very much a "hands on" teacher, who in his long career has seen many changes both to the teaching profession and to forensic science. I am delighted to say that Mr Riggerton leaves without a stain on his character, and the police have promised to restore the playing fields to their former condition. Many are the pupils who have been touched by him, and it is a mark of their respect and admiration that they still won't tell me the nature of their secret games!

Finally, may I say a few words about punctuality. Many lessons have now had to be rescheduled later in order to accommodate the service users who cannot arrive on time, and as this

means that the entire class has to be placed in detention our administrative costs have soared, particularly since the lateness of the lesson frequently causes it to overlap with the detention, which the service users consequently miss. As an experiment therefore, I have decided that in future French lessons will run backwards and finish an hour before they start, meaning that anyone who arrives halfway through will still be half an hour early. I hope that this will vastly improve our punctuality targets.

In the meantime I would like to reassure parents that Saint Street Comprehensive continues to offer the finest education for your children. We'll teach them a lesson they won't forget in a hurry.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M J Farpworth'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal dashed line.

M J Farpworth, BMc, JFshKp, Cop.,  
Team Leader.

# The Knowledge Vampire

"Information cannot be created or destroyed," wrote Spam carefully in his exercise book. Then he surveyed the room. Next to him, Huskinson was staring vacantly ahead. Too late: he was gone, exploring some new planet in his head, rescuing an inexplicably large-breasted princess from some unlikely danger. At the back, some of the kids were engrossed in a magazine, of the kind that Mr Botfrob kept getting caught with. But the rest of the class were concentrating, writing notes and paying attention. To an unskilled observer, the lesson might appear a success. Only Spam knew the truth.

"Except in Mr Botfrob's lesson," he wrote. At the front of the class, the friendly teacher was writing his own notes on the blackboard. It seemed to be something about the causes of the Second World War. In large capital letters, in the centre of the board, Mr Botfrob had written, "THEY STARTED IT".

The lesson was coming to a close. "So we've covered a lot of ground here," said Mr Botfrob. "As you'll have seen, the Second World War owed its life to a whole cluster of complex reasons, which I've had to simplify slightly in order to talk down to your level. Now, are there any questions?"

There weren't, of course. If the students had learnt anything, it was that teachers got very annoyed if you asked them questions. Especially Mr Botfrob. Especially if the questions were being asked by the police, but that was another issue entirely.

Spam had a question. "Sir," he said, putting his hand up. The students who had been paying attention stared at him, wondering what he was up to. Mr Botfrob did a guilty double-take, as if he'd been propositioned by someone he suspected of being an undercover agent. Spam persevered. "Sir," he said again, "I've got a question. Just one. It's to do with what you've been saying."

"Go on," said Mr Botfrob suspiciously.

"What were the causes of the Second World War?"

Quickly all the other students stared at the pages in front of them, not wanting to get caught. They knew the standard teacher's cheat now - Mr Botfrob should congratulate Spam on his question, then get one of the pupils to answer it to "make sure they've been paying attention". But there were some things that Mr Botfrob simply hadn't learnt. The pressures and tensions inside him began to build up. Blood raced to his head, making the veins throb on his temples and his eyes bulge. His head seemed to expand as the colour deepened to red, then finally his skin burned so much that he went white hot and gave off a visible glare of anger.

"Have you not been listening?" he thundered.

The bell went, as Spam had known it would, just in time to save him, and Mr Botfrob began to cool down, disaster averted. The class began to file out of the room in a solid mass that became stuck in the doorway. Spam thought for a moment, then decided to push it. He was one of school's survivors, and that was because he understood how things worked. If something wasn't

working in a predictable manner, he needed to know why.

Testing the heat in front of him by holding out a pencil, he approached Mr Botfrob. The teacher seemed uncomfortable at the prospect of a boy holding out a pencil so provocatively, but Spam could take no chances.

"Aren't you worried, sir?" asked Spam.

Mr Botfrob nodded dumbly, staring at the pencil.

"I meant about knowledge," said Spam. "At the start of the lesson, you knew all about the causes of the Second World War. By the end, we should all know, but in fact nobody does - not even you. Surely, at the very least, it should be a zero-sum game - if the knowledge has left your head, it should have entered somebody's. But in fact, none of us have learnt anything."

Mr Botfrob spluttered, then finally managed to speak. "It's not about learning," he said. "It's about education." And then he fled to the sanctuary of the staff room, where not even Spam could follow him.

\*

Huskinson didn't even know what knowledge was. Spam tried to teach him.

"Suppose I know what knowledge is," he explained. "Then I tell you. Now you know what knowledge is as well."

"But I don't," objected Huskinson. He had only been back in reality for five minutes, and it was already confusing him.

"So let me get this straight," said Spam. "You actually don't know anything? You've been at school all this time, and you've learnt nothing?"

Huskinson tried to think of something he'd learnt, but it had gone.

"What happens in lessons?" tried Spam.

"You get put in detention for not paying attention," said Huskinson.

Spam persisted. "But what if you pay attention?" he said.

"Fear not, Your Highness," said Huskinson. "I, Huskinson the Iron Man, shall protect you from the vast river of killer fish that even now flows towards -"

Spam hit him. It was the only language he understood. This was literally true: Spam had hit him in French once, and Huskinson didn't get it.

"Euler's Equation!" shouted Spam. "You must know Euler's Equation, even if you've forgotten everything else!"

" $e^{i\pi}+1=...$ " began Huskinson.

"Go on," said Spam, shaking him.

"= ..."

"= what?"

Huskinson shrugged. "Nothing," he said.

Spam relaxed. "Thank the stars," he said. "He's not taken that."

"Who hasn't?"

Spam looked into his friend's eyes. Should he tell him his suspicions? Then, as he saw Huskinson start to drift off, he realised that it probably didn't matter much anyway.

"The knowledge vampire," he said.

\*

The knowledge vampire entered the room during Mr Botfrob's lesson, and sucked the information out of your head. Spam had never seen him do it, of course, which was the first serious problem with his theory, but he had no other explanation. He had checked his head thoroughly at the end of the lesson and found no obvious entry points, so he assumed the trick was done by placing a straw up the nose. Perhaps some kind of nasal plug might be in order.

That afternoon, after registration, he went to the school library and looked up everything he could find about vampires. There wasn't much - mostly a long, forthright, self-published monograph about why Mr Botfrob wasn't one, and people should really stop stabbing him with pencils. But he found some other information, and spent the evening gluing a couple of matchsticks into a cross, which he hung around his neck, and wore to school the next day.

He didn't last thirty seconds before he was sent to Mr Farpworth.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked the Team Leader.

"It's a demonstrative pronoun, denoting a person or thing nearby," said Spam hopefully, but Mr Farpworth wasn't buying it. He sighed. "It's to ward off vampires," he said. Mr Farpworth would think he was lying,

and that therefore he had some more sensible, less embarrassing excuse. It was much easier than making one up.

"With a Christian symbol?" asked Mr Farpworth incredulously. "Would you remind me of the school regulation on religious symbolism?"

Spam sighed again, and recited. "Wearing the symbols of a particular religion is banned, as it offends people of other religious beliefs."

"And?"

"And wearing no religious symbols offends all of them," said Spam.

"Exactly. That's why I designed the Vague Religious Symbol, which symbolises any religious belief, including none. This is the only permitted religious symbol in the entire school."

Saint Street Comprehensive had in fact had a number of problems with religious extremism recently, and Mr Farpworth was always vigilant. Only last term Class 4C had become Christian fundamentalists, and had begun to ban anything they found offensive. They'd started with the sex education lesson, moved on to Religious Studies, and by the end of the term had banned every single lesson the school offered. In the end one of them had read the Bible, and decided that its message of peace, love and tolerance was so out of kilter with the Christian ethic of killing the heathens that they had to ban that as well. Once they realised that Christianity itself had to be banned on Christian grounds they went underground, and were now dedicated to rooting themselves out wherever they were found.

"I have a dream," said Mr Farpworth. "My dream is that this school shall be the most inoffensive establishment in the entire country." He glared at Spam. "That cross is banned. Burn it at once."

The riots caused by Spam's cruciform conflagration died down after a day or two, thanks largely to Mr Farpworth immediate repressive response. But it left Spam exactly where he'd started. His increasing ignorance worried him. He wasn't bothered about losing his academic knowledge - he didn't believe most of it anyway. But what if he lost all his other knowledge? He didn't know much in any case, but maybe he'd just lost his knowledge of what he knew. He decided that, even though she charged by the hour, he could count on Persephone to give him some sounder advice.

"Vampires," she said, not laughing at him so long as he was paying. "Vampires don't have reflections."

"Of course not," said Spam. "It's invisible."

"Then perhaps it has a reflection, but it doesn't have a reality," said Persephone.

Spam was amazed that he hadn't thought of this before, and in no time, Persephone had sold him a mirror, or rather, had sold him the rights to borrow one from the Science block boys' toilet, provided he collected it himself and returned it intact, without getting caught.

\*

"A mirror?" asked Mr Botfrob incredulously. "I can understand you wanting to look at some of the boys' reflections, but not your own."

"It's coursework," explained Spam. "Mr Gutwright wants us to talk to our reflections to build our self-esteem." In fact this was true, but the rest of the class had simply got their parents to do it for them.

Mr Botfrob shrugged and began the lesson. "And pay attention this time, Huskinson," he said.

"Yes sir," said Huskinson, and frowned. Even he was becoming suspicious at the size of the princess's breasts.

Spam tried to concentrate on the lesson, but he was more concerned at what was happening in the mirror. At first everything seemed normal, but then he noticed another presence in the mirror. An abomination from another dimension. A dark being, with pale skin, fangs, and a "chavs are scum" wristband.

Spam watched in horror as the being took out a long drinking straw. With an evil grimace, it inserted it up Huskinson's nose and began to suck. Spam added another item to his list of things never to do.

The vampire frowned. What on earth did Venusian princesses' underwear have to do with the Battle of Britain? Oh well, you learnt something new every day. It turned to Spam's reflection, brandishing its straw.

"It's up to you now," said Spam to his reflection. His reflection nodded, and turned to the vampire.

"We need to talk," he said.

\*

"I was once as you," said the vampire, sitting nonchalantly on the table. It was

a while since it had had a chat. "I once walked the world of mortals, living a finite life, doomed to die, as are you all. Decay, rot and despair stalked my footsteps. Didn't have many friends, oddly enough."

"I can imagine," said Spam's reflection.

"Yes, even at this very school I lived out my mortal days, daydreaming and doing my best to avoid learning. Then one day, I was, well, shall we say, recruited."

"Recruited?" said Spam's reflection.

"A new teacher arrived. A teacher with enthusiasm and energy. A teacher with a zest for knowledge. A zest which he wished to pass on."

Spam's reflection shuddered. He had met such a teacher himself, and had almost learnt a number of French irregular verbs.

"One day, he kept me back after the lesson. Naturally, I assumed I was in some kind of trouble. But no, it was worse than that. He had a book. A book which he wished to show me. A book which was to prove my downfall."

"What was in this book?" asked Spam's reflection.

"Euler's Equation," said the vampire. "A simple raw piece of information. Once I saw it, I was addicted, as the teacher had known I would be. Oh, he was clever. He started me off with a few soft facts, for free. But soon we were moving on to harder stuff. I turned to crime to feed my hunger for knowledge. I neglected my earthly needs, caring only for my next facts.

"But oh! The student was to become the master. Though I appeared to be his bitch, I gathered my knowledge carefully, made my plans and bided my time. Slowly I learnt the secrets of thought transference. I was able to bleed all the knowledge from his brain and install it in my own, leaving him an empty, withered, dried-out useless husk of a man."

"Mr Dangleberry!" cried out Spam's reflection. So that explained all those Maths lessons.

"Quite," said the vampire. "But the cost to myself was terrible. I had given up my own humanity, passed into the other realm, and become a creature abominated by nature."

"Hang on a minute," said Spam's reflection. "If you did this by thought transference, what are you sucking out of people's noses?"

"Never mind that," said the vampire, hastily hiding the straw. "That's just something else I like to do. Since then, my crazed hunger for knowledge has caused me to wander the corridors of this school. Here I can feed on all the knowledge I want. After all, no one else is using it. But now, the question arises as to what to do with you."

"I shouldn't bother with me," said Spam's reflection. "I don't know much anyway."

"But you know something no one else does," said the vampire. "You know of my existence. Such individual knowledge is precious to me." The vampire removed the straw from his pocket and brandished it threateningly. "And yet ... I like you. I shall make you a deal."

"What deal?" asked Spam's reflection, suspiciously.

"Join me," said the vampire. "Become as me. Follow me through eternity, feeding on the brains of your fellow pupils, acquiring the knowledge of mankind. Together we shall learn the secrets of the universe!"

"I'm not sure I like knowledge," said Spam's reflection. "It hurts."

"Oh?" said the vampire. "Then try this for size." It bent down towards Spam's reflection, its lips glistening with saliva. Spam's reflection trembled as it placed its lips against his ear, and whispered. At once, his eyes widened, his jaw dropped, and he stared at Huskinson who was sitting vacantly next to him.

"You see?" said the vampire. "There is so much we can learn. I will give you twenty-four hours to decide. And if your answer is no ..." Once again, the vampire held the straw up. "You shall become Mr Dangleberry's apprentice!" With an unearthly laugh, it floated from the room, passing straight through the door.

\*

After Spam compared notes with his reflection, he realised he was in trouble. His first act was what he always did when he was in trouble - he blamed Huskinson for it. This didn't seem to work this time though. He knew that the traditional remedies against vampires would be ineffective as well. There was only one weapon. At home he armed himself with a small bundle of straws, but he knew that if it came to a fight he would be no match for an experienced vampire.

Lying in bed that night, he examined all the knowledge that he had gathered during his life. Perhaps he wouldn't miss it. He had learnt too much in any case. He thought of the secret that the vampire had whispered to him. Perhaps it would be better to lose all his knowledge, than to gain everything. What kind of a life would it be, living only in mirrors, having no real existence?

What would happen if he found himself in a wobbly circus mirror? Would he actually be that shape? If he got trapped in a periscope, would he be able to see round corners?

Suddenly Spam sat bolt upright in bed. So the vampire lived in mirrors and was hungry for knowledge? Then let him have knowledge.

The next day he arrived at school early, almost on time in fact, ready to save the staff and pupils from a doom that they didn't even know about.

\*

"Which brings us to the terrible tragedy that signified the end of war in Japan," said Mr Botfrob, writing the word "Gotcha" on the blackboard. Spam set his mirror up once again, waiting for his visitation.

"I love the Second World War," said the vampire to his reflection. "There's always more to be learnt about it. Some new history arises every day."

"Don't tell me how it ends," said Spam's reflection. "We haven't got to that bit yet."

"You'll love the twist," said the vampire.

Spam's reflection put his hands over his ears. The vampire shrugged.

"And so to our deal," it said. "You have a decision to make."

"I've made up my mind," said Spam's reflection. "I can't join you."

"A shame," said the vampire, taking out its straw. "You could have learnt everything known to man."

"It's not really about the knowledge," said Spam's reflection. "It's more about the straw up the nose. I think I'd really like that."

"You would?" said the vampire, startled. "Most people aren't really up for it."

"I really want it," said Spam's reflection. "I did it on my own last night, but I think it would be better if someone else did it for me."

"Well," said the vampire, recovering. "You're in for a treat, then." He leaned towards Spam's reflection's nose.

"You do realise I've got a cold?"

"Don't you worry. It's better that way. Now, let's see what you've got." The vampire inserted the tip of the straw into his nose.

"Just a minute," said Spam's reflection. "Before I forget. I've got something I want to show you."

The vampire stopped, puzzled. The real Spam reached under his desk and pulled something else out. It was the mirror from the boys' toilets in the Languages block. Persephone would be furious when she realised - he hadn't paid her for this one. Carefully he set it opposite the original one. The

vampire looked out from one into the other.

"But what is this creature?" it said. An infinity of mirrors reflected each other, each one displaying the vampire.

"A creature whose knowledge is equal only to yours," said Spam's reflection. "I know nothing. Next to me, this being is an encyclopedia. And there is an infinite number of them."

"Gracious me!" cried the vampire. "What great knowledge! I had never dreamt of such an opportunity! So, you unearthly beast, you feel you are a match for me? Then open those nostrils!"

Spam learnt a very important lesson that day. "Never suck your own brains out with a straw," he wrote in his exercise book. It was the first thing he'd ever actually learnt in Mr Botfrob's lesson, and he thought he should have got more marks for it, because as knowledge goes, that was a blinder. He could only watch in astonishment as an infinity of vampires sucked at each other, absorbed their own knowledge even as they were drained of it, and collapsed on the floor, empty worn-out husks, every one.

And as the corpses shrivelled up, Spam could see wisps of knowledge escape, like gas during the weekly Friday afternoon double-maths farting contest. Slowly it dissipated in the air, and then was gone. And Spam laid down his mirrors, his work done.

\*

"So you still haven't learnt anything?" said an exasperated Mr Botfrob.

"No, Sir," said Spam sullenly. "After I killed the vampire, I thought all the blocks to learning were removed. But it still isn't working. Perhaps there are other supernatural creatures at work, eating our brains: or perhaps there's a fundamental flaw in the nature of knowledge itself. Perhaps it can only be taught, never learnt."

Mr Botfrob sighed: he'd heard it all before. "So would you care to read to the class the essay you wrote on the history of the Second World War?"

Spam looked at the paper in front of him. He'd begun to panic when he'd realised that he still didn't know anything on the subject. As time had gone on, he'd become increasingly desperate, and finally had focussed on the one thing he knew for sure: the piece of knowledge that the vampire had given him. He stood up.

"Venusian princesses make their underwear from the skins of schoolboys," he read.

There was laughter throughout the class. Only Huskinson didn't seem amused. "How do you know that?" he hissed. "Martian traitor." But then he was off again, on a new adventure. The balance of power in the universe lay in his hands, and Spam preferred to keep it there - it kept his hands out of trouble. He sat down again.

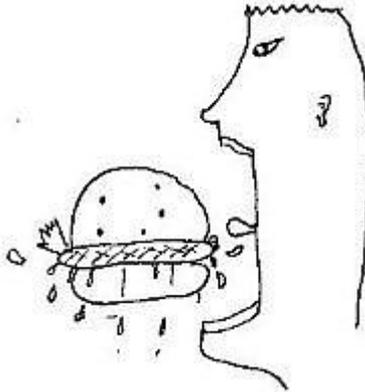
He never found out where the knowledge had gone when the vampire had died. He guessed it was just flitting around, trying to find a home, or even a mate. In some ways it was exciting to think of all the knowledge that just hung in the air, invisible, like radio waves that make no sound until they reach a receiver. But Spam was no receiver of knowledge, and it remained forever beyond his grasp. Sometimes,

out of the corner of his eye, he thought he could see the causes of the Second World War: but when he looked, it had gone.

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"Bring the little ones unto me"



"They'll not be so little  
once I've finished with them"

\*The LL guarantee includes Homo Sapiens Sapiens, Homo Sapiens, Cro-Magnon Man, Americans, Neanderthal Man, Homo Erectus and Homo Habilis. Piltdown Man is known to be a hoax and is therefore not included in this guarantee.

# The Return of Morton Gruyere

Class 3A slept as Miss Svankbom tried to teach them her new language.

"Remember, the subjunctive expresses doubt," she told them, as they snored away. "At least, I think it does. I'm not sure. That's why it has to be the subjunctive. Whereas the indicative deals with pure facts. If you're telling lies, you have to do it in the subjunctive. Anyone caught lying in the indicative mood will have their lies accepted as truth, which would be disastrous for history."

Mr Botfrob coughed next to her. "Are you sure sleep-learning is the best way to do this?"

Miss Svankbom was in a bit of a subjunctive mood about it herself if the truth be told, but then again, if the truth be told, it should be told in the indicative. She looked confident as she replied. "Have you ever tried teaching them while they're awake? This can hardly be any worse."

"I suppose so," said Mr Botfrob. A typical lesson involved him losing all the knowledge he had on a subject, but without the students taking any of it on. It just seemed to vanish. Somewhere, he thought, there must be a realm of pure information, which expanded as the knowledge was lost to mankind with every passing lesson.

"Placing the entire class under hypnosis and implanting knowledge by suggestion is at the cutting edge of pedagogical research," said Miss Svankbom proudly. "I can think of no other way of imparting such a radical new language."

The new language had been the saviour of the whole department. The pupils at Saint Street Comprehensive had such ethnic diversity that it was impossible to work out which languages they should actually learn. The school's English as a Foreign Language course had been highly popular, but it had eventually been realised that it was most popular with native English speakers. But the problem had been the same with any language. The school had experimented with French, Urdu, Russian, Mandarin, and even Esperanto, always with the same result - some of the pupils were native speakers and therefore had an unfair advantage. Even the introduction of Latin had brought to light an unexpected community of Ancient Romans, whose contribution to school life had been undeniable - everyone was looking forward to sports day, now that the Romans had built a new arena with exceptional drainage facilities.

But it had taken a teacher with the genius of Miss Svankbom to solve the language problem. She had simply invented a new language called Gruntish, which absolutely no one could speak. Consequently all students were on a level playing field, and had the same educational opportunities. It wouldn't be much use, but at least the pupils would be able to talk to each other.

The only problem was that it was a nightmare to teach, which is why she was experimenting with hypnosis. "And while you're all under," she told the class, "I believe Mr Botfrob would like a few words."

"Thank you," said Mr Botfrob. "Now listen carefully. Mr Botfrob is your friend. Mr Botfrob doesn't want to hurt

you. There's no need to tell stories about Mr Botfrob to your parents. And forget about the police, they know about him already."

Mrs Svankbom looked at him strangely. "Is there something you need to tell me?" she asked.

"You can't be too careful," explained Mr Botfrob. "I wouldn't want to get into trouble for something I didn't do."

Mrs Svankbom was about to reply when the door opened. Outside was a man in his forties, old before his time, with grey hair and a face cut deep with lines. He strode in to the room as if he had every right to be there, and he sat at a spare desk. Something worried at Miss Svankbom - there was a reason why that desk was unoccupied.

The man was wearing a Saint Street uniform. Miss Svankbom frowned. The uniform was changed every three months, in order to stimulate the economy and allow wealth to trickle down to poor families. But this uniform was decades old.

"What is the meaning of this?" she asked.

The man spoke. "I have come to reclaim my rightful place at my rightful desk," he said. "After years of wandering, I have returned. I have returned to take my place in the lesson, that I might fail my end-of-year exams, and spend the rest of my life in a dead-end office job."

The two teachers gaped. Could it be true? "And what is your name?" asked Miss Svankbom, frantically consulting the register.

"My name is Morton Gruyere," said the new pupil.

\*

Morton Gruyere. The name had been handed down through the decades at the school, part of its history. The man was a legend. Even the pupils knew about him, without getting his name wrong. His desk had been kept free, his locker still contained his mouldy lunch from that fateful day in the 1960s.

It was rumoured that when he returned, the school would enter a new age of prosperity and happiness. "But ... you're back!" said Mr Botfrob.

"Indeed I am," said Morton. "Awaken this class. I shall tell them of my labours."

"Oh, they learn better when they're asleep," said Miss Svankbom.

"Just the same," said Morton.

"Class, awaken," said Miss Svankbom. Slowly, the class began to stir, rub their eyes, yawn, and make various attempts at convincing their teacher that they had regained consciousness.

"I trust you have taken in the lesson?" asked Miss Svankbom.

"Yes, Miss," said the class, as one, using the subjunctive mood. In fact, no one had heard anything because they were too worried about the trouble they'd be in if Miss Svankbom realised they weren't asleep. They hadn't fallen under her hypnotic spell because they were too busy worrying. They worried because each member of the class knew that they, and they alone, weren't susceptible to the hypnosis. They only had to look around to see that the rest of the class had succumbed, and had no choice but to pretend that they too were in a deep trance.

"We have an unscheduled talk for you," said the Gruntish teacher. The class sighed with collective relief. Talks were boring, but as long as you didn't throw anything at the lecturer you probably wouldn't get into trouble. Carefully the pupils moved potential missiles out of the way of temptation.

"I, too, was once as you," intoned the old boy. "I remember it as clear as day. We were just coming to the end of a PE lesson ..."

\*

Morton Gruyere placed the oval-shaped ball in front of himself and took a few paces back. The two posts stood in front of him. He ran to the ball and kicked. It spun into the air and struck the left-hand post on the head.

"Ow," cried the post. Morton sighed. It was very bad form for a post in the game of Bugry to exclaim. As team captain, Morton got to choose which boys would be the posts, and he had chosen Goblief Minor for his stoicism and stamina. As usual, he'd let himself down.

Gruyere was not only captain and star player of Bugry, but he was also the inventor of the game. He had designed it to be character-building, and to build as big a character as possible. He was therefore careful in choosing which boys would act as targets. Many of the larger boys had big enough characters already, it was the smaller ones who needed the kind of nurturing that only Morton and his game could provide.

This was especially evident in the scrum. In this part of the game, the larger boys made the smaller ones run at each other head first while they kicked the ball at them until only one, the "prop", remained standing. It made

Morton proud to see the boys overcome their mental obstacles as they fell to the ground. In his nightmares, Morton foresaw a world in which schools banned such contact sports, and made boys do girly things like dancing or cooking. Worse, he could foresee a day in which the school allowed girls as pupils. That was wrong. It gave him a funny feeling in his stomach. Brrr.

(Mr Botfrob interrupted his story. "We do still play this game," he said. "But in a non-contact manner. The pupils give each other detentions instead.")

Morton stared at him with a look of infinite grief, then continued.)

As usual, Morton's team had won, and had wiped the floor with the smaller team. They could use the showers to get the mud out of their hair later. Their chests stuffed with pride, the team marched back to the changing rooms, where the PE teacher cowered in his office.

"Five minutes and you can have your job back," Morton told him.

"Yes sir," said the teacher gratefully.

"Wasn't impressed with Goblief Minor," said Morton. "Some kind of reparation might be in order."

"As you will," said the PE teacher. One of Saint Street's innovations had been to introduce the rough and tumble of sporting life into the whole of the academic curriculum. If the A team were after you, you never knew when they were going to strike.

Morton stripped off and entered the showers. His muscles rippled beneath the jets of water. Other boys soaped him and rinsed him, grateful to have

been chosen for the honour. His personal assistant oiled him up and scraped him down with a strigil, bottling the used oil which could then later be sold as an aid to virility.

Morton Gruyere was a Greek god made flesh. He strode out of the changing rooms with his entourage in tow. Teachers nodded to him respectfully and stood aside to let him past. Ahead of him was the new Physics teacher, Mrs Heartburn. She was a popular teacher among the boys, because she was a woman. Although Morton felt that female teachers were a bit of a hippy fad, the Headmaster had felt that she would be a valuable addition to the school. She had made important contributions to the understanding of sub-atomic physics, for which her husband had been nominated for the Nobel prize, and the Headmaster felt that it would be useful to have someone to do the washing and ironing.

"Morton," she said. "Would you do me a favour, please?"

Morton was nothing if not chivalrous, although none of the male teachers would have dared address him like that. "Of course, madam," he said.

"Just carry these books to the office for me."

One of Morton's flunkies came to carry them, but Morton waved him away. This was a job he would do himself. Gallantly, he took up the burden, and strode towards the office, where he deposited the books. The entire school watched in admiration, and learnt that he was not a man who was above helping a damsel in distress.

"Thank you Morton, that was very kind," said Mrs Heartburn. But Morton

noticed movement from the corner of his eye, and turned to see. Goblief Minor! Why was he watching him so carefully?

"Mmm?" said Morton, as the smaller boy ran off. What sort of punishment should he inflict?

"I said that was very kind," repeated Mrs Heartburn.

Morton had other things on his mind now. There was a lesson to be taught. He replied to Mrs Heartburn absently, without thinking. "Yes, Mum," he said. Then he realised what he'd said. "I mean, Mrs Heartburn," he corrected himself quickly. What on earth had he been thinking?

(Class 3A gasped as they heard his mistake. All had heard rumours of such a thing, or had even, God help them, come close to saying the same thing themselves. And Mrs Svankbom herself remembered a time when ... but no, it wasn't for thinking about. No one in the classroom would meet anyone else's eye.)

Quickly Morton looked around to see who had been in earshot. He had left his entourage outside. Mrs Heartburn herself merely laughed. "Did we not wake up properly today?" she said.

Morton never blushed, as he never needed to. This was the first time in his life he had shown the slightest imperfection. He blushed, and, embarrassed to be doing so, blushed further at his own blushing. Each new blush seemed to provoke another, more intense blush. He was caught in a feedback loop which would never end until his face reached Absolute Red, a physical constant that represented the total amount of redness that could ever be reached.

Morton bowed, in a bid to hide his mistake. "I apologise for my transgression, madam," he said. "If you need my help in any other matter, do please ask."

And slowly, with as much dignity as he could regain, he began to walk from the office to the outside door. And then was amazed as a smaller boy pushed past him. Automatically, Morton curled his hands into fists, then saw that the boy was pointing and grinning at him.

Goblieb Minor had heard.

\*

Morton decided to put the incident out of his mind. Goblieb Minor could be dealt with at his leisure. Besides which, he had his court to attend. The Headmaster had been happy to delegate minor matters of discipline to him, and Morton would spend much of his school day ruling on disputes between pupils. His was a civil, not a criminal, court, and major infractions still remained the responsibility of the establishment. But he knew that with his wisdom and sound judgement, he had prevented many situations from developing into major confrontations.

His wisdom was legendary. Once, two boys had come to him disputing ownership of a small puppy. Morton had ordered that it be torn in two so that they could have half each. He knew that the real owner would then have given up his claim to save the creature.

That had been one of his failures actually, but how was he to know that neither was the real owner? Not even Morton was perfect. He took his seat in his assembly and called for the first case.

First off was the case of two sorry-looking specimens who had been caught by Morton's police grappling outside the science block. It appeared that one of them had scribbled over the other's Latin book, and worse, had used medieval Latin rather than classical. The use of a "j" rather than a consonantal "i" made Morton's blood surge with injured pride. Quickly, he calculated the likely injuries the boys would incur in the ensuing fight, inflicted them himself, then made the two shake hands.

"Next," he said, glancing at his watch. He had an appointment with the Headmaster at midday.

"Goblieb Minor," said the clerk of the court. Morton watched in astonishment as the boy strode insouciantly in front of him.

"And what is the nature of this complaint?" he asked thickly.

"I just need some advice," said Goblieb. "My Mum made me comb my hair before coming here. But I think that the times call for us all to loosen up and do our own thing. So I was just wondering, who takes precedence - me or my Mum?"

Morton stared at him. For a moment he actually considered ruling in Goblieb's favour to avoid the trap. But the thought of the entire school turning into long-haired drug-taking unhygienic girly hippies was a dreadful one. Finally he ruled, as quietly as he could, "your Mum."

Goblieb Minor pretended not to hear. "My what?"

"MUM!" bellowed Morton, determined not to be undermined by this wretch. But he heard sniggering

from among his courtiers. He stared at them in anger, but couldn't work out who was the culprit.

"This court is closed!" he shouted. "Take this boy away and have him flogged!"

And as Morton stormed out of the assembly, he heard someone say behind him, "just like mother used to do."

\*

"I heard about your little difficulty this morning," said the Headmaster of Saint Street. "A very bad business, Morton, very bad."

Morton stood as tall as he could and stared straight into the Headmaster's eye. "A tiny slip of the tongue," he said. "A matter of no importance."

"Undermines the confidence of your troops, though," said the Headmaster. "Cigarette?"

"Thank you, but I don't," replied Morton.

"You should. It helps steady the nerves. You see, Morton, we at the top have a responsibility to our underlings. Whisky?"

"Not before lunchtime," said Morton.

"Shame. There's nothing like a drink to fortify the spirit. Makes a man of you. Morton, there are mutterings among your troops. Some of the chaps are wondering if you're the man for the job. Marijuana?"

"I don't have time for it," said Morton.

"You should find time! It frees your mind from the mental slavery of

Babylon. Morton, to you it may seem a minor infraction, but the chaps don't like it when their idols turn out to have hearts of clay. You need to reassert your authority. Tab of acid?"

"Goblieb Minor," said Morton. "He's the cause of this outrage. I shall make an example of him. Tell the school there shall be a show trial tonight. The little creep will learn his place once again."

"That's the spirit, Morton!" said the Headmaster. "Now, I trust you'll stay for a wee snifter?" From the drawer he pulled two hypodermic syringes, and rolled up his sleeve.

"Thank you, but no," said Morton. "There is work to be done."

\*

"Mummy's boy," read the graffiti on Morton's locker. He got one of the first-years to clean it off. The boy simply didn't show the kind of respect he demanded. Throughout the day he seemed to find himself the butt of other people's unspoken jokes. He was sure that some of the boys were calling him "Ma-ton".

"I want to hear no more of this nonsense," he told one of his lieutenants.

"Mum's the word," was the reply.

"We need to devise a new strategy," said another. "After all, necessity is the mother of invention."

"That's just mumbo-jumbo. I say we just attack Morton's enemies. If we die, we'll all be maters."

Morton had to tolerate this all afternoon. And throughout, he could

see Goblief Minor, sauntering through the school as if he were Morton himself, drunk on his new-found power. Morton would make that power short-lived.

\*

The entire school turned up after registration in the afternoon. It was always entertaining to watch Morton teach someone a lesson. But this time it was different. There was a more threatening atmosphere. Morton realised that the audience wasn't entirely behind him. Perhaps it was the murmuring that persisted even after he entered the arena. Perhaps it was the way some of the kids were looking at him as if seeing him for the first time. Or perhaps it was the many placards in the audience, all bearing the same legend: "Hello Mum".

Morton could see that the situation had deteriorated much further than he'd realised. If he was to retain his standing in the school, he would have to act quickly and decisively. He turned to his valet.

"I choose to fight with the sword," he said, loudly. "It is the weapon of a gentleman. A weapon whose use will, I fear, be beyond my opponent."

As Morton took the blade in his hand, the crowd fell silent. That was more like it. Morton made a few practice thrusts: it was as if the weapon was an extension of his own arm. Stunned, the audience watched in fascination.

"Bring the wretch on," said Morton, once more in command. And Goblief Minor walked into the arena.

He was dressed in high heels, a skirt and a blonde wig. He also seemed to be wearing make-up. "Now then,

Mortie," he said in a high-pitched falsetto. "I've made your sandwiches and packed your bag for you. Now come and give your mummy a big kiss." And Goblief Minor walked up to Morton and planted a sloppy smacker on his cheek, leaving two lipstick semi-circles.

The crowd went wild. Laughing, pointing, jeering, Morton heard their vague noises slowly coalesce into a single chant: "How's your mother?"

Morton had never been a quitter. He'd reached his position by his natural indefatigability, by persistence and a refusal to admit defeat. But there was something more important than this: his dignity. Some fights could not be won. And there were higher considerations than his own pride. For all his life he had worked to make Saint Street the finest, noblest, most successful school in the country. But now he had failed it. If he were to cling on, desperately trying to kick the pupils into some kind of order whilst hearing the secret insults behind his back, his achievement would deteriorate and he would become king of nothing. His day had passed: for the sake of the school, it was time for someone else to take over.

Sadly, his face burning with shame, he returned his sword to his valet and turned his back on the arena. The jeering reverberated in his ears as he began to walk, but with distance the noise began to fade, until finally all that was left was the echo in his head, an imagined and remembered noise that almost drowned out his only thought: "one day, I shall return."

\*

"And now, that day has arrived," said Morton to the captivated class. "For

four times ten years have I wandered this earthly realm, seeking enlightenment and forgiveness. I have swum the deepest oceans, climbed the highest mountain, wandered the deserts and skated the icy wastes of Antarctica. I have purified myself in the sacred rivers, and drunk holy milk from the breasts of priestesses. I return now, humbled but renewed, ready to take my place once again at the bottom of the class, and hope that I can again win your respect and acceptance."

Morton bowed his head low. Miss Svankbom looked on him with pity.

"On behalf of Saint Street Comprehensive," she said, "we forgive you."

Tears began to roll down Morton's face. "My gratitude will be endless," he promised.

Miss Svankbom decided to carry on as normal. "Right, we were practising the subjunctive," she said. "Back to sleep, everyone."

Morton watched, astonished, as the rest of the class immediately fell into a trance. What kind of teaching was this?

Still, he didn't want to get into trouble on his first day back. Quickly and convincingly, he pretended to follow the class into the trance.

"Isn't it terrible that he could punish himself so much just through teasing?" said Miss Svankbom.

"I suppose so," said Mr Botfrob, although really he was thinking about those priestesses.

"Thank heavens we're more enlightened these days."

"Mmmm?" said Mr Botfrob.

"I said, thank heavens we're more enlightened these days."

Mr Botfrob wasn't really listening. "Yes, Mum," he said.

\*

Everest loomed above him. Good grief, thought Mr Botfrob, how on earth was he supposed to climb that?

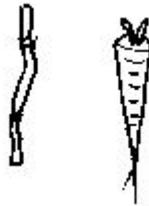
Still, he thought, Morton had managed it. With a sigh, he continued on his wanderings.

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# The Headmaster's Pleasure

Squirm energy pervaded the universe, Spam knew, and certain buildings could focus this energy, and project it into a single spot. No matter how confident you were, no matter how righteous your actions or innocent your thoughts, if you stood at the squirm spot the energy would concentrate inside you. It hadn't got him through his physics exam, but it was worth bearing in mind whenever he had to see Mr Farpworth.

Mr Farpworth's office was a squirm energiser. In most parts of the room you were safe. Behind the desk, the school's Team Leader (he had discarded the old-fashioned word "headmaster") lounged in perfect poise. If you could stand at the back of the room, you were at a safe enough distance. Or right at the front of the desk, aggressively leaning over the Team Leader, was another squirm-free space, although one which was usually interpreted as insolence. If you had to stand in the centre of the room, slightly off to one side was best. Spam now stood to the left, and desperately hoped he would be able to keep his dignity.

"Stand in front of me boy, or are you trying to escape?"

Reluctantly Spam moved to the centre of the room and began to fidget.

"Now, I expect you know why you're here."

Spam nodded. "The webcam in the staff room."

"What webcam?"

"No webcam, sir. I meant the tunnel to the girls' changing rooms."

"Tunnel?" asked Mr Farpworth, baffled.

"Not the tunnel," said Spam. "The system of hand-signals we use to communicate answers in exams."

Mr Farpworth was frantically making notes. "No, it's none of that, actually," he said. "It's about your History project."

"I did my best, sir," said Spam.

"Indeed. Now we have a target for your project, did we not?"

Spam simply didn't know where to put his hands, and spent so much effort ensuring they didn't go where they shouldn't that he completely lost control of his feet. "Yes, sir. You said that if I didn't get a C, I'd be put in the lower group."

"And what happened?"

"I got a B." Spam noticed that his nose was squirming. The energy was high today.

"And what happens when we over-reach our targets?"

"They're raised so we fail next time," said Spam, who was now guiltily squirming and fidgeting so much that he was little more than a blur.

"Indeed." Mr Farpworth leaned back in his chair and stared at the uncomfortable student, in order to relax him. "It might surprise you to learn that I, too, have targets to achieve. This school's success is measured by the results of our students. I am pleased to announce that

we have achieved our targets for this year."

"Well done, sir," said Spam.

"Why, thank you," said Mr Farpworth. "I think it's not often realised how far the success of our students depends utterly on effective management." He sat forwards suddenly. "But now there's a fly in the ointment. Someone, whom we advised, and indeed managed, to get a C, has turned up with a B. This school has overachieved, and you're to blame."

"Sorry, sir," said Spam.

"Because of your thoughtlessness, those targets will be raised next year to ensure that we can no longer meet them. The efforts of you and your fellow students, and indeed of management, must be all the greater to reach the new targets. Your actions have directly led to the failure of the school next year."

"But we succeeded this year!" protested Spam.

"There is no such thing as success," said Mr Farpworth gravely. "Only deferred failure. You may also not realise that I have punishment targets. In order to ensure a disciplined school, I have been required to issue five hundred detentions this year. So far, I have issued four hundred and ninety-nine. Given the gravity of the situation, I have no choice but to remand you in detention until the case can be brought to trial."

Shouting and begging for mercy, Spam was led away.

\*

Persephone stared at the spreadsheet in front of her. This sector of her business was thriving: she may even be in a position to employ someone else. But there was no way she could take on the job that the boy next to her was proposing.

"No," she said. "For a small and entirely reasonable fee, I can provide people to serve a detention in your place. But not a remand sentence. He could be in there for months."

Huskinson felt that familiar sensation that he always got when he knew he was about to lose an argument. "But Spam's my friend," he said. "I've got to get him out."

"I can defend him," said Persephone. "But I need to know how you intend to pay for my services."

"Legal aid?" said Huskinson weakly. Persephone had already charged him his tuck shop money just for this consultation.

"Don't waste my time," said Persephone. "I'm skipping Geography to have this conversation."

"Can't you defend him on a no win, no fee basis?" said Huskinson.

"No win I can do. No fee you'll have to manage yourself. Now if you'll excuse me, I've got debts to collect." She gathered her papers together, closed her laptop and walked off.

"But he's your best customer!" called Huskinson. Persephone stopped at that. He had a point. Spam was always first in the queue to buy homework in the morning. So long as he was in detention, he could play no further part in school life, and could not pay for

Persephone's services in making it bearable.

"I could always take this on as a human rights case," she said thoughtfully. "Perhaps we should pay a visit to Mr Farpworth."

\*

Mrs Spitzlong sat at the desk at the front of the room, looking sternly at Spam. He looked behind her, at the clock on the wall. The red second hand made its regular circuit of the hours, and Spam pretended it was the hour hand, ticking away a day every minute.

As he watched, Mrs Spitzlong stood up, removed the clock from the wall, and replaced it with a calendar. Spam let his head fall to the desk.

\*

"Bail is set at three hundred punishment tokens," said Mr Farpworth. Punishment tokens were a brilliant invention of his. Because of the high administrative costs of punishing students, including the especially high costs of detection, and the extra expense in providing detention facilities, he had introduced a scheme whereby a student could pay for the cost of their own punishment, and consequently be excused it altogether. Mr Farpworth had created a new currency for punishment trading, and had set the cost at twenty tokens for a telling-off, fifty for lines and a hundred for a detention.

He had had two thousand punishment tokens minted. Persephone had bought the lot on the first day, and doubled the price almost overnight. She gasped at the high price of bail. "But Spam doesn't have that kind of money!" she said. She was standing well outside the

squirm point: there was only room enough for one person in it, which was why she'd brought Huskinson with her.

"The seriousness of the misdemeanour warrants it," intoned the Team Leader.

"I thought you had three hundred punishment tokens?" asked Huskinson, once they were outside.

"I have, but Spam hasn't," said Persephone. Indeed, it was because she had them all that nobody else did. "I can try selling them to him, but he can't afford my prices."

"But can't you lend him the money?" There were rumours of a student who had been placed in detention in 1973, and due to staff shortages, had never been allowed to leave. One of the fifth-year girls swore that she'd once spent a detention in the company of a skeleton. Huskinson wanted his friend out before he was forgotten.

"Do you have any idea how much he owes me already?" asked Persephone. "He has to borrow money off me to pay the interest. The only way he could afford to borrow the money for the punishment tokens would be to pay his debts off so I'd have the money to lend him in the first place." She put her pen on her tongue thoughtfully. "Of course, if he used the punishment tokens as security on the loan that he hadn't taken out yet ..." She began to make frantic calculations.

Huskinson was glad he never got grade B's.

"With a grade B in History, that boy could go far," said Persephone. "And if retirement ages continue to go up, he could have a working life of over fifty years. Now, if he were to sign a mere

five percent of his income over to me, I could afford to lend him the bail, and defend him in court, on a no fee, no win basis. All I'll need is for him to sign this contract."

"He can't sign the contract," said Huskinson. "He's inside."

Persephone looked Huskinson straight in the eye. "Then I'll have to give you power of attorney," she said. "You'll have to sign the contract for him." Huskinson hesitated. "If you don't, he may never get out."

Reluctantly, Huskinson signed his friend's life away.

\*

Mrs Spitzlong stared at the boy at the back of the room. She sighed. He really seemed to have lost his enthusiasm for life. At first he'd been content to sit and draw his tally on the wall, but now he just lay, head slumped on the table, motionless and silent.

She wondered if there was something wrong with him. Suspiciously, she stood up and walked over. "Sit up straight," she said. There was no response. Annoyed, Mrs Spitzlong pushed at his shoulder.

She gasped in fright as his head fell off and rolled along the floor. Trying not to panic, the Maths teacher picked it up.

Papier maché. Who on earth would have thought that the boy had actually been paying attention in craft lessons? Swiftly, Mrs Spitzlong sounded the alarm.

\*

Persephone and Huskinson caught up with Mr Farpworth as he strode along the courtyard. "Bail is refused," he told them curtly.

"What?" cried Persephone. "But Spam will be in debt for the rest of his life for this."

"Bail was dependent on good behaviour," said Mr Farpworth. "Which in my book, means no escaping. Follow me, please. Yes, you too, Mr Huskinson. Relax, I've had this building evacuated."

Persephone frowned as they entered. Huskinson felt only elation. It was as if he'd entered the temple to a different religion, or a spiritually advanced nation in which westerners were unwelcome. Empty it may have been, but Huskinson was thrilled.

In the corner of the room was a set of lockers. The bottom right cupboard was swinging open. Inside there was a hole in the floor of the building, and it was through this that Spam was just raising himself to freedom. He stopped, devastated, when he saw Mr Farpworth.

"A tunnel to the girls' changing rooms," said the Team Leader. "Most ingenious. But not, alas, successful."

With a resigned expression, Spam lowered himself back through the floor, to the detention room.

\*

And so the seasons passed at Saint Street Comprehensive, but Huskinson never forgot his friend, detained at the Headmaster's pleasure, nor did Persephone forget the gaps in her spreadsheet where Spam should have been providing an income. The pair

never ceased working for Spam's release, organising a letter-writing campaign, candle-lit vigils, a rock concert at Wembley stadium and ultimately, economic sanctions against the Team Leader.

Until finally, weakened under the public gaze, Mr Farpworth allowed a trial.

\*

Spam was tried in front of a jury of twelve of his peers. This was bad news. Firstly, his peers took a savage delight in seeing their friends get into trouble. Secondly, jury duty was worse than an exam. If you got the answer wrong, you were in big trouble. Huskinson himself had sat on a jury once to decide a case of insubordination. When he'd returned a verdict of Not Guilty, Mr Farpworth had accused him of copying the verdict off the internet, and he'd had to change it before he found himself charged with contempt.

Spam looked old and worn as he was led into the courtroom. Huskinson pitied his friend, but was grateful that he seemed to be alive.

"You are charged with working for the failure of the school," said Mr Farpworth gravely. "How do you plead?"

"Not guilty," said Spam.

"You are now charged with working for the failure of the school, and pleading not guilty," said Mr Farpworth. "How do you plead this time?"

"Objection!" shouted Persephone. "Under the school regulations, a pupil cannot incriminate himself."

"Quite so," agreed Mr Farpworth. "Mr Huskinson, you'll have to do it."

"He pleads guilty," said Huskinson.

"Excellent," said Mr Farpworth. "I suppose we still have the formality of a trial to go through."

"The defence will argue," said Persephone, "that the defendant is incapable of producing work to such a high standard. The defence will argue that the defendant is a bit thick, and could only have copied the essay off the internet. Far from breaking the school target, he is in fact, a cheat."

"So he should be in detention for cheating?" asked the Team Leader.

Persephone had hoped that he wouldn't think of that. "That would be an entirely separate matter, with entirely separate costs," she said. "For now, it matters only that he could not have obtained the award himself."

"Let me clarify the matter," said Mr Farpworth gravely. "The issue here is not the quality of this young man's work. The issue is that he was awarded a grade B. Whether he deserved it or not is irrelevant."

"Mr Farpworth," said Persephone, "are you not aware of the health and safety implications of awarding students a grade B?" Mr Farpworth liked health and safety. Indeed, he prided himself on managing the healthiest and safest school within a 200 metre radius. "Go on," he said, suddenly more alert at the mention of the phrase.

"Studies have repeatedly shown that grade B students consider themselves in a no-man's land of achievement. They have neither scaled the heights of a grade A, nor plumbed the icy depths

of a grade C. They therefore spend their lives in a search for an identity, for a role between the two classes. They become little more than go-betweens, communicating the demands from the grade A elite to the lower-class grade C workers. Because of this, they find themselves more prone to diseases of stress such as heart attacks, high blood pressure, and that sickness and diarrhoea thing that no doctor has ever successfully diagnosed, but which gets you a day off school."

Mr Farpworth nodded. The teachers often went down with that one, and he had long since suspected that they were catching it from the students.

"Furthermore, these grade B nobodies are prone to industrial accidents to a far greater extent than the rest of the population. Nobody knows if this is due to low self-esteem, general uselessness or just chance. In fact it's probably just chance, but if chance alone can create the effect, how much larger will it be once the other two factors start kicking in?"

"What exactly are you arguing?" asked Mr Farpworth.

"The defence argues that by awarding the grade B, the school was negligent in its attitude to health and safety. It is you, Mr Farpworth, who should be in the dock, not one of your victims, to whom you had a duty of care."

"Hmm." Mr Farpworth was impressed. "A very interesting argument, young lady. Yes, we must never turn our backs on the school's health and safety policy. Indeed, I have only just increased the punishments for being ill or having an accident, which I believe will be a highly effective deterrent."

"But let me assure you that the decision to give this boy a grade B was not taken lightly. I can provide copies both of the risk assessment, and our Care Of Grades Hazardous to Human Health sheets."

"You did a risk assessment?" asked Persephone. "What risks did you identify?"

"The risk of detention seemed awfully high," admitted Mr Farpworth. "But frankly, you can't go through life without taking risks."

"Just a minute. If he didn't deserve a grade B and you knew he was going to get a detention for getting it, why did you give him it?"

"I told you," said Mr Farpworth triumphantly. "I had to hit my detention target."

Persephone had very little else to try. Spam stood glumly in the dock, knowing that the case was lost. Desperately, she took one last gamble. "Then I'd like to call Huskinson as a character witness," she said.

There were gasps of amazement from the jury. Even Mr Farpworth gaped for a second. "But he hasn't got a character!" he said finally.

"I meant Spam's character," said Persephone icily. "Take the witness stand, please, Huskinson."

Huskinson stood reluctantly, and placed his hand on the school's health and safety policy.

"Do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"

"Mmmm," said Huskinson uncomfortably, having discovered a new squirmhole in the fabric of spacetime.

"Apart from the webcam in the staffroom, have you ever known Spam to act against the interests of the school?"

"Ah. Well," said Huskinson. "This is it, isn't it."

"Answer the question please, Huskinson."

"Well, I think the issues that you've raised show very important areas of concern, and we should not be afraid to act on them," said Huskinson.

"I'll ask again," said Persephone. "Apart from the webcam in the staffroom, have you ever known Spam to act against the interests of the school?"

Mr Farpworth was becoming very interested in this webcam. Detention was too good for the boy, he thought. What a pity he'd run out of expulsions.

"You see the thing is," said Huskinson. "And this is the point, and I think you'll agree with me on this one. Spam's a mate."

"Huskinson!"

Huskinson gave up. "In a very real sense, Spam didn't put the webcam in the staffroom."

"Then who on earth did?"

"Er, actually ... it was me."

Mr Farpworth leapt from his seat. "Guards!" he yelled. "Put this boy in detention!" Within seconds two

prefects were forcefully manhandling Huskinson from the courtroom.

"And now," said Mr Farpworth. "As you've lost not only all your arguments, but your star -" and he said "star" in the most sarcastic voice he could manage, and made a sign to the jury to laugh - "witness, it only remains for me to pass judgement, and to warn you that you will be detained at the headmaster's pleasure for -"

"- ten seconds," finished Persephone. "Thank you very much for your time, but if we're quick we can still make the second half of French."

Mr Farpworth stared at her. "What on earth are you talking about?"

Persephone closed her file and packed her bag to leave. "Five hundred detentions, you said. Huskinson was the last one. You don't want to exceed your quota, do you?"

Mr Farpworth stared from her to Spam and back again, out-manoeuvred. Detentions were very expensive and time-consuming. If his quota were raised ...

"Very well," he said finally. "We have considered your appeal against your grade B, and have decided that in view of the extraordinary circumstances of your case, we will allow it. You may be downgraded to a grade C."

Everyone in the courtroom cheered. Spam almost collapsed with relief. Persephone merely smiled, and left with dignity, as the Team Leader glared at her back.

\*

"Today is the first payment of the rest of your life," thought Spam, as he

handed his dinner money over to Persephone. Once he'd been downgraded, Persephone had re-evaluated his career prospects, and decided he was too great a credit risk. Consequently she'd called the debt in. Only by negotiating a crisis loan with her was he able to raise the cash. He handed over his dinner money with little enthusiasm.

"Excellent," said Persephone. "My best customer. Now that only leaves us with the small matter of Huskinson."

"He can't afford your services," said Spam. "He doesn't have that kind of money."

"He's got good prospects though," said Persephone, taking the contract from her briefcase. "Now, I'm granting you power of attorney. Five percent for the rest of his life - a small price to pay for his freedom. At the bottom, please."

And Spam signed his friend's life away.

***Lardy Lou's***  
**by Cedric Botfrob**

"We have nothing to fear except fear itself" - Franklin D Roosevelt.

Possibly because FDR didn't know that Nadger Brooks' character-building service is currently seeking new clients.

Or that the school has appointed Dr Croydon Bunk as its Psychotherapist, or rather, Psycho Therapist.

He'd never suffered the soul-destroying humiliation of a class in Self-Esteem.

He didn't know of the Headmaster's plan to put the whole world in detention for being late.

He'd certainly never tried Liquid Health, the nutritional supplement that detoxifies your digestive system, in the same way that Hiroshima was detoxified at the end of World War Two.

And he knew nothing of the secret ingredient in Lardy Lou's greaseburgers - or, for that matter, any of the non-secret ones, which are equally unpleasant.

At Saint Street Comprehensive, fear is nothing to be afraid of. There's too much else.

If you enjoyed reading *The Saint Street School Magazine*, and Dr Croydon Bunk's *How to Avoid Reading Rubbish* isn't any help, then why not buy *Lardy Lou's*, the book put together by Mr Botfrob to chronicle a typical day at our glorious establishment.

Available as a download from

<http://www.lulu.com/product/paperback/lardy-lous/6379734>

or as a physical book from

<http://www.lulu.com/product/paperback/lardy-lous/6379733>

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(or go to [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) and search for Cedric Botfrob)

or you could try to borrow it from the school library but it's probably been nicked.

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