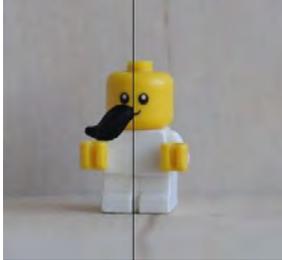


mechs
&
mustaches



Cast of Characters

Dennis Theodore Hemenace Moughnne—Dennis is a two-year-old genius who has both



wisdom and knowledge, a rare thing in anyone. Though loyal, trustworthy, and mature for his age, Dennis *is* still young, and is admittedly rather mischievous at times. Kidnapping Batman is one of his favourite pastimes, as is burning his math books, building mechs, and enjoying movie nights with his agents and generals. Dennis T. Hemenace is his pseudonym, and the name all his fans know him by.

Buster Anatis Custos Moughnne—Dennis's older brother, Buster, is barely seven years old,



though he is one of the best gduck hunters in the occupation. He enjoys stalking, tracking, ambushing, and openly attacking gducks. He rather enjoys the Harry Potter series, and accordingly his mother made him an 'invisibility cloak', which he wears everywhere he can. He is a devoted friend, a dangerous enemy, and an amazing brother. His middle names, according to Google Translate, mean 'Duck Guardian'. He is secretly annoyed by this, and wishes they meant 'gducks bane' or 'gduck's downfall' instead.

Mrs. (Grandma) Meghan Margaret Fife—Dennis and Buster's Grandmother who thinks anyone



innocent is trying to kill her and anyone actually *intending* to kill her is only trying to help her. Meghan Fife is one of the people who actually believes that gducks exist. She will not say 'no' to attacking something, be it her husband, Primum Fife, or a complete stranger who taps on her shoulder. Beware!

Mr. (Grandpa) Primum Nomen Ignotum Fife—Mr. Fife, or, Grandpa Ignotum as he is called by



his grandsons Buster and Dennis, is just as delightfully mental as his wife. He teaches martial arts and enjoys searching for gducks and adventure.

Adelphocoris Loxosceles Augochlora— The overworked leader of the aliens, Adelphocoris has a lot of responsibilities. He is hardworking, determined, patient, and kind, though he is a good deal kinder to his employees when on the job than he is when he's complaining to his wife (and secretary) Statira, over supper. Eventually, however, she always gets him civil again and ready to continue his struggle against NASA.



Statira Chiricahua Mylitta Augochlora— Sweet, gentle, and naturally happy, Statira is Adelphocoris' wife and secretary. She smooths over all the minor grievances of the gducks using simple logic and understanding. Everyone adores her shamelessly. She is one of the only people who can put up with Pigeon Toady, genuinely liking him and listening with real interest to what he says.



General Anatideas Etamentis— Named 'Etamentis' by the factory overseers because it's supposed to mean 'reassured' in Arabic (according to Google translate), it was not considered that according to the same source, add a space in it and 'et amentis' means 'the imbecile' in Latin. Sadly, General Anatideas is actually not at all reassuring, as he happens to be exceptionally senseless, like most gducks. He absolutely worships his boss, Adelphocoris, and adores Adelphocoris' wife, whom Anatideas considers the only one worthy of his most noble leader.



Once upon a problem

Oct 1st, 4:30 PM, 2019

At NASA headquarters on the first of October 2019, things were happening. Big things. Things that could change the course of the world.

The aliens had finally responded.

Scientists rushed around, interpreting the message. It was in the same easy-to-understand symbols that NASA developed and put for instructions on the Voyager Golden Record. As the cryptographers began to make progress, frowns grew on their faces. Something was bothering them. Uneasy murmurs spread around the control room. What was going on? Why was it taking so long?

Finally, The scientists straightened. The leader stepped forward and cleared his throat. The entire room fell silent, looking up expectantly at him.

“Fellow learned men,” he began, biting his lip and running a hand through his hair, “As... as you all know, the aliens have finally responded. This is a... a big step for NASA... we’ve been waiting for... well, for years. The aliens, however, they... well, they...” He trailed off, tugging at his lab coat sleeves. Clearing his throat again, he continued. “They... they want nothing to do with earth.”

Shocked murmurs spread throughout the room. Aliens, want nothing to do with earth? Such a thing had never occurred to anyone at NASA; they had always assumed that the aliens would be as pleased to find other life-forms in the galaxy as earth would be. The uncertainty in the room grew, and with it grew fear. Would the aliens be unfriendly? Would they come to attack earth? Would the entirety of humanity die? Would the world be reduced to ashes?

The murmurs grew louder until they were shouts, echoing off the enclosing white walls of the control room. Everyone turned to the head scientist. “Tell us what it says!” they cried, “Read it aloud! We need to know everything!”

The head scientist glanced around, hesitant, then resigned himself. “Very well. It goes thus:

‘To NASA:

We have known that you have been trying to communicate with us for years, but we are a peace-loving race who knows that if we become friends and neighbors, then fights will undoubtedly surface and our quiet lives will be turned into war. Please do not be offended, but we want nothing to do with your world and its power-hungry leaders.

Please stop sending us messages, listening into deep space, leaving your discarded rocket fuel tanks drifting around in outer space, and making insulting movies about our existence. I also ask that our presence be kept secret from the public.

Please understand that I do not mean to make friction between us, but I will not stand for purposeful disregarding of these requests. If need be, I will enforce them. Please do not make us enemies.

Sincerely, Adelphocoris Loxosceles Augochlora

Backed by his advisors.'

Now you see, the aliens will have nothing to do with us.”

“What do we do?” called his audience, needing answers. “How can we do what they’re asking?”

The lead scientist sighed. “We can’t. That’s the problem. All we can do is pretend it never happened. Continue as we were, or the public will get suspicious.”

“But, sir!” One man protested. “The aliens will send someone to enforce their wishes!”

The lead scientist shrugged. “They’re probably bluffing. And anyway, there *isn’t* anything else to do but continue. I don’t know about you, but I have no control over Hollywood.”

The man shrunk back. “But... but sir...”

“Quiet. We don’t even have proof that this isn’t just a prank. No, until there is unquestionable evidence, we, and the entirety of humanity, will continue as we were. That is the final word. No arguments.”

And with that, the lead scientist turned on his heel and strode out of the room.

Adelphocoris Loxosceles Augochlora was having a very bad day. A bad month, actually. NASA had not listened to his request, had no intention to, either. Adelphocoris himself had sent them many more notes but they continued to ignore them. He even checked to make sure that they were getting the messages and were able to decode them, but though they did and could, they refused to listen. Something had to be done.

Adelphocoris sighed and paced around his office. Yes, something definitely had to be done. He walked to his reception area and approached his secretary, who also happened to be his wife. She looked up as his shadow fell over her keyboard, a small smirk on her face. "Hey, you. Is something the matter? You look upset."

He groaned. "NASA will not leave us alone. I have tried repeatedly to convey my message so that they will take it seriously, but they refuse to adhere to my requests. All I'm asking is for them to leave us alone and stop disgracing us with their 'movies', but... now I'm going to have to enforce my requirements."

She smiled, a trifle sadly. "Maybe it's time. We knew this was going to happen someday."

He shrugged. "That's a lot of weight on my shoulders, though perhaps you're right." He thought for a moment. "Yes, you're right. Will you please tell my advisors to meet me at 13:00 in meeting room #8 to discuss NASA? I think I have an idea..."

"Sure, hon. What idea, if I may ask?"

A thin smile twisted his lips. "Infiltration. Mechanical ducks created to infiltrate earth and stop NASA. It sounds inferior, I know, but who will suspect ducks of being a mechanical army?"

"Not me, luv." She grinned. "It's brilliant."

"Thank you." He smiled back. "Things are about to get... interesting."



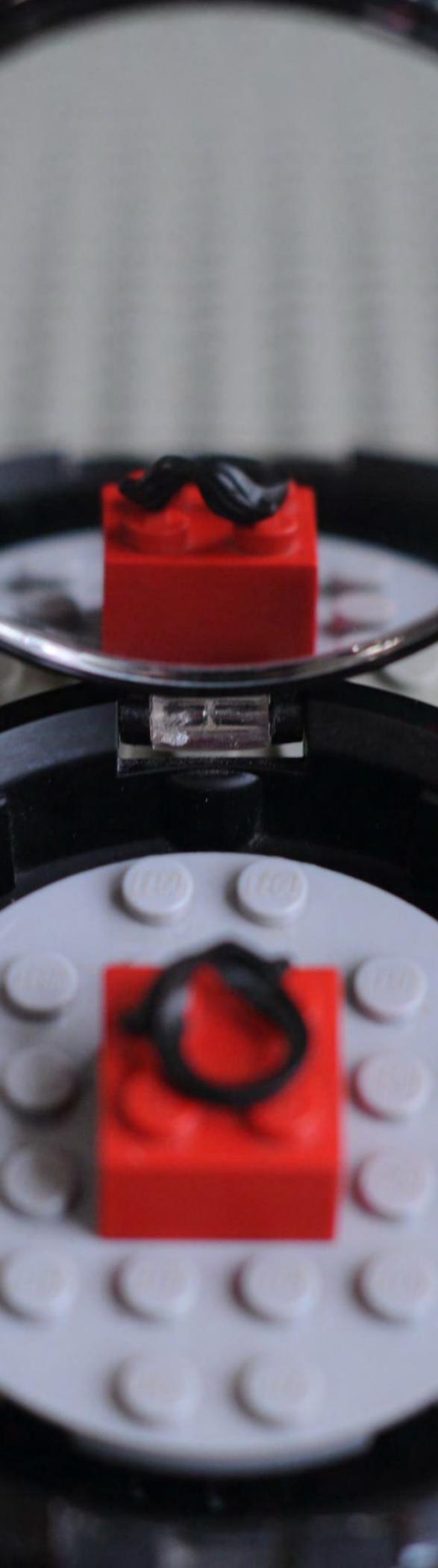
Dennis – A Limerick

There once was a baby named Dennis
Who was slightly shorter than one inch
By the time he was two,
He was more accomplished than you
And now a ninja master is Dennis.

KIDNAPPING BATMAN—A haiku

Creep through his mansion,
Through darkened hall to catch the
Bat with Coeur de noir.





AN ODE TO MY MUSTACHE—By Dennis T. Hemenace

O, my mustache,

Your bravery and intellect is unmatched.

Often you have helped me into my concerts and parties alike
by hiding my babyish features.

The oil I use to curl you could not be as slippery as you
yourself are in avoiding the police.

My mechs and machines would be worthless without your
hiding me so I could get a licence.

You let me go to concerts, the spice in my life.

You help me to focus in the midst of battle

And disguise me from the world.

Though there are many more things to say, I must depart and
kidnap Batman.

Now, let us go to battle!

Mission C'est Possible Or Accidental Information (And How It Can Cause Beetles Permanent Wariness Of Ducks).

Printed by Dennis T. Hemenace

Rita Skeeter stood in her kitchen, making meringue for the top of her lemon meringue pie. "Mrs. Lovegrove will enjoy this," she thought, "and I'll enjoy all the juicy titbits of gossip that she'll bring! Gossip is the key ingredient to a sensational story, after all." She cracked a duck egg into her mixing bowl. (Duck eggs make wonderful meringues! Light, fluffy, mouth-watering, and sweet.) A plastic-covered rock fell out of the eggshell, along with a piece of paper. "What in the world?" she exclaimed, dropping the empty eggshell onto the floor and fishing the paper and the rock out of the bowl. She put them aside and finished making the meringue for her pie. "I'll look at them later," she promised herself, "after my company is gone." And so, Rita forgot temporarily about the mysterious egg and the strange note, but not for long... Fate was about to show her a cruel twist that could change her life forever.

"Well, that meeting with Mrs. Lovegrove went better than I could have hoped! Lots of gossip for future stories." Rita thought, sitting with a cup of tea by the fire. The flames crackled merrily. She put her cup down on the table, knocking down the plastic-covered rock. "Hmm, I think I'll read that paper now. Just where did it go...?" She looked around, and saw the paper lying half under her cup. She pulled it out and examined it. It was written in red ink, all capital letters. "That's odd. Whoever wrote this has no respect for proper punctuation. Humph!" Many times afterwards, she found herself wishing she had left it alone or thrown it in the fire, but curiosity got the better of her, and she read it anyway.

"AGENT 24/7", it read, "THE DAYT AND TIEM R TBD BUT WE THOT U SHUD NO U R STIL ON. I NO THAT THER WAS SUM *CONFUJEN*,"

"What is a '*confujen*'?" thought Rita.

"AT LAST NITES MEATING BUT. EARYGARDLESSE OV THAT WE STIL PLAN ON TAKENIG THE WIRLD AS RRS THE AYLEENS THAT SENT US WUD BEE PROWDE! YUR ROLL IS IMPROTANT AND

EVREEE1 AT AYCH-KYEW IS PROWDE OV U. DUCKS 4 THE WINNE!!! YURS SYNSEEEERELEY,
SQUEEBLE-SQUEAK-HISS-HISS-SQUEAK-SQUEEBLE-QUACK

APRIL 1, 2020”

“Please tell me this is an April Fool’s joke,” said Rita. “*Revelio.*” She turned the paper over and saw a post-script:

“PS. THIS IZ KNOT A APRILE FULES JOKE. UN42NET DAYTE. NOT MY FALT”

Rita sighed, “Well, I could ignore it,” she said. “The note. Pretend it never happened, that it didn’t say anything, that ducks with bad spelling don’t exist...” Then an amazing idea apparated into her head, “Hmm, this would make an excellent story... with a little exaggeration of course, but still a ‘true’ story...” And Rita got to work. “Let’s see...pencil, paper, quick quotes quill...”

Within two days, Rita had a full story, loosely –very loosely—based on the note. “Yes! The press will eat this up!” she thought, on her way to the editor’s office.

“Ah. Miss Skeeter,” the editor said when she entered. “What brings you here?”

“Well, Mr. Editor,” Rita replied, “I have a story. A good one, I think.”

“Hmm. What is this story about?”

“Ducks. Ducks trying to take over the world.”

“Fictional, then?”

“N-no... I... found something saying that the ducks are going to take over the world.”

“An April fool’s joke, perhaps?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Hmm. May I see the note you found in the duck egg?”

“I didn’t bring it here.”

“Well, come back when you have solid FACT.”

Rita left, feeling rather perplexed. Only afterward did she realize that she never told him it was a note, and she DEFINITELY did not tell him it was in any kind of egg...

All the interviews went something similar to this. A few people said things like:

“Do you need to see a psychiatrist?” and “Have you hit your head lately?”

Rita was starting to get annoyed. Why did she read the note?!

“No,” she thought, “I can’t give up. I’ll go to a concert to get my spirits back up. That’s what I’ll do.

And she did. She booked a seat in a certain Dennis T. Hemenace’s concert, to be held the next night. “Well,” she thought, “This ought to cheer me up.”

She gained entrance without a problem and went to her seat. It was in the back, near a giant loudspeaker. She was a little early, so she grabbed a can of root beer and a bag of crisps and sat down. Then she snacked while she waited for the concert to start. But the stage remained empty. Completely empty. There weren't even instruments or microphones out.

“Strange. I guess that they’re a little late,” Rita thought. Just then, a snitch-sized, grey, metal ball rolled out onto the stage and everyone craned their necks to see. The next moment, there was a small explosion and the stage was covered in thick grey and white smoke. Rita drew her wand quick as lightning. She waited with bated breath for a few seconds while the smoke began to clear gradually from the stage and she saw a very short man with a very large black mustache standing on the stage holding a microphone. Rita decided he must be Dennis.

“Hewwo, Wadies and Gentewmen!” he said with a lisp, opening his arms as if to hug the audience. There was a wild applause. “And tank youw fow coming!” While he was speaking, a few other people came out onto the stage carrying instruments like violins, guitars, flutes, and drums. Two people even wheeled a piano out. “Sow, awe youw weady to get stawted?!” Dennis yelled into the microphone.

“YES!!!” roared the crowd.

“Good! Fiwst up is ‘Dobby’, fow youw Hawwy Pottew fans. Hit it, guys!!!”

The band started playing, and Dennis started singing.

“He’s the cutest houwse-ewf I’ve ewew seen, much, much nicew than Kweacher who is pwetty mean. Now I gotta tew youw dey’re both OK...” Rita cringed at the volume. She could feel the pounding in her head and sitting next to the source of the deafening noise did NOT help.

“OWW!!! I’m never sitting this close to a loudspeaker ever again!” Rita thought. “I’m going to have a major headache!”

But after a few minutes Rita could hear Dennis again.

“He’s out of dat wag, he’s out of deir weach, not out of my mind, but off of deir weash, oh, he hasn’t ahways been dis way,” Dennis was singing. Actually, the song wasn’t bad.

“I almost like it. Maybe I’ll go visit him in the back during the intermission. Who knows? Maybe it’ll cheer me up.” thought Rita. Then she went back to listening to the music.

"Now dewe's awso Mowfoy, a death-eatew, and Dobby fowowed him awound wherevew he went. Now the gwass gwows gween ovej Dobby's gwave, but he hasn't ahways been dis way. When I was just twewve, he bwoke my ahwm and said 'Hawwy Pottew I mean no hawm!'..." the song ended and a few more songs passed.

Eventually Dennis announced,

"Owkay, dis is the wast song befowe the intewmission. Then you can get mowe food and eawpwugs if the music is too wouwd."

Then he started to sing again. The song was really weird. Something about a goat? Rita only understood the chorus:

"I'd wather be WHINY! Wike a chiwd who hasn't gotten what dey want... No need to taunt, I'm just bein' WHINY! If I wewe texting I would need an aw-caps font... DON'T YA KNOW!!! Hay is dumb, dumb, dumb, it just sits dere and I eat it... So beat it! Oh! I chew da cud, cud, cud, den I swawow and wepeat it! Wre-eat it..."

There was also something like 'zantipatowa'? Rita had no idea what it meant. She decided to look it up in a dictionary after the concert. Then the song ended and the intermission was announced. Rita popped into beetle form and scuttled down the aisle... After all, she doubted that Dennis' guards would take kindly to her showing up backstage without permission...

Before she went into the backstage area, Rita quickly resumed human form. Being a beetle would be hard to explain to Dennis, as he was probably a Muggle.

Dennis was sitting on a bar-stool style chair with a cup of water when Rita walked in.

"Ah. Mith Skeetew," he said, setting down his cup, "I've been waiting fow youw to show up."

"But I didn't say I was coming!" Rita said, confused.

"Youw didn't have to. My genewaws saw you in the audience and figuwed you'd come to see me. So... dis stowy you have. Can I wead it?"

"Um... you're a singer. You don't have a newspaper... do you? And how do you know about my story?"

"My agents awe infowmed about dat sowt of ting. And as a mattew of fact, I do have a newspaper. I awso have numewous magazines about me and a TV show. But back to youw stowy. Can I wead it?"

Rita was shocked, but she quickly assented and handed her story to Dennis. It only took him a few minutes to read it.

When he was finished, he said, "It's pwetty good, but you've exaggewated and twisted the truth."

"That's the only way that you can get a good story!" Rita protested.

"Not always. Mith Skeetew, the intewmission is almost over. Why don't you come see me tomowow? One o'cwock? Mount Ewewest? Just come to the bottom and I'w send a few of my agents to escowt youw up."

"Okaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaayyy?" Rita said hesitantly. "'Mount Everest?!'", she thought. "Oh my goodness! He can't be serious!"

But he was. "Wondewful! See youw tomowow" he said, getting up and walking towards the thick, red curtain that separated the stage from the room.

As he disappeared, Rita felt a little faint. Mount Everest. She was going... to Mount Everest. She returned to her seat and sat thinking for a while. When the concert was over, she caught a ride to Nepal on the Knight Bus, as traveling by floo powder made her sick. (Admittedly, the bus wasn't much better, but at least she ended up where she needed to go...) Then she rented a hotel room and hoped tomorrow would go well. If not... well, she'd just be back to square one.

Despite her doubt, the next day Rita found herself standing at the foot of Mount Everest, looking around for the said 'agents' who were supposed to come get her. She was rather early, but it still only took about five minutes for three agents --of sorts-- to come out of the mountainside.

Though they made no more noise than a mouse, Rita still found herself thinking: "Agents indeed! They're babies in ninja suits!" But her thoughts were interrupted when one of the babies --a girl in light blue-- said "Come dis way, pwease.", so Rita followed the baby-ninja-agents into the mountainside. Literally, they walked through a giant holograph that looked exactly like the other rocks around it. "What was that for?!" Rita asked, glancing at the baby-ninja-agents.

"It's tow ward off enemies and unwanted visitows. When we come to escowt someone in, it's open, but udder dan dat it stays cwosed. No one could get twough it."

"Oh."

They went into the elevator and one of the babies --a boy this time, and in a black suit-- immediately reached into his pocket and pulled out something that looked like a collapsed radio antenna. He stretched it out to full length and tapped an elevator button with it. The button read, '2073rd floor'.

"2,073 stories?!" exclaimed Rita in disbelief. "How will we not freeze?! How will we *breathe*?!"

"Dehwe's heating." said the blue-suited girl.

"And aiw tickening." Added the only one that hadn't spoken, a boy with a white ninja suit.

"Air THICKENING?!"

"Yeth."

"Oh." Rita felt a bit faint. "Air thickening. And heating. On top of Mount Everest," She thought.

"Am I going mental? Possible. Very possible. Probable, even..."

Suddenly she realized there was music playing quietly in the background.

"They say our solar system is centred 'round the sun. Nine planets large and small parading by..."

Rita had no idea what type of music this was. A few minutes passed and the song changed.

"Elementary, my dear, two times two is four..."

School songs? Really? In a singer's lair? On top of Mount Everest?

"How... educational," thought Rita. She glanced down at the three ninja babies, who were all lined up under the speaker, their mouths moving in perfect synchronization to the music.

"Do you listen to these songs often?" Rita asked.

"Onwy about once ewevy two weekth."

"Oh." After a few minutes they came to the top floor and the elevator went 'Ding!' Rita stepped out and looked around. She was in a simple hallway with a few pictures on the wall.

"Just down dat hall, last door to the left," the blue-suited-ninja-baby said, pointing.

"Thanks," Rita replied. The baby nodded mutely and stepped back into the elevator, motioning to the others. When they were gone, Rita made her way to the last door on the left. She knocked tentatively and a voice came from inside. "Entew."

Rita opened the door and found herself looking into a brightly lit office. Dennis sat across from her behind a large oak desk. When she stepped inside, he looked up.

"Hewwo, Mith Skeetew. How do you do?"

"Um... very well, thanks. How are you?"

"I'm wondewfuw. Now, to business. I am pwepared to pubwish youwe stowy on the ducks... but it has to be one hundwed pewcent twuth." (Now, Dennis didn't exactly *need* her help, but he did want an article and it would be nice to give her a chance to be honest. Besides, she might actually find something he didn't know yet.)

Rita's eyes widened. "But it would never be long enough! And how would it be interesting?"

"Well, you could wite just with what youw have, but dat might be bohwing, yes. Owh... youw couwd twy to find out mowe about the ducks. You know, wesearch."

Rita felt dizzy. What? *Actually work*? Get her story published, but only tell the truth? Or try to look for a different publisher? But no other publisher would even look at her story!

"Umm... how would I find out more about the ducks?" Rita asked.

"Wew, you couwd go spy on dem at deir headquawtwews." offered Dennis, shrugging.

"I don't know where their headquarters is!" protested Rita

"My agents can tew youw. They'w vewy infowmed at dat sohwt of ting."

Rita thought about it. What had she got to lose? If she spied on the ducks, then she might find out more. And even if she didn't find out more, she'd only have lost a few days.

"I'll do it." She said.

Dennis smiled. "Excewent!"

"When do I leave?" Rita asked.

"Whenevew you'we weady." said Dennis, still smiling. "My agents wiw tew youw what youw need to know."

"Okay. May I see them now so I can plan?"

"Absowutewy." He pressed a button on the wall and a minute later 3 babies came in. There were two girl ninja-babies and one boy ninja-baby.

"Yes, Bothe?" said the girl in a light-grey ninja suit.

"Ah, Agent Wynde. Wouwd you, Fyew and lythe pwease tell Mith Skeetew evewyting she needs to know about the ducks?"

Agent Wynde nodded. "Yep. Dis way, pwease, Mith Skeetew." Rita followed them to a room near the other end of the hallway.

"Um... so, what are your names?" Rita asked.

"Oh, I am so sowwy." said Wynde apologetically. "Um... my name ith Wynde, that guy in the red is Fyew, and the girl in the white is lythe."

"Okay, thanks. So... ducks. I... don't know anything."

"That's okay. It's why we're here, isn't it?" Wynde smiled, looking down at a map on the table. "So, we think that the ducks have a base here, in a Canadian factory, and here..."

Rita spent two hours learning about ducks and then she was ready. She caught a ride to Canada in one of Dennis's private planes, accompanied by the three generals. They rented rooms in a hotel close to the duck's lair and unpacked the spy equipment. Then Rita caught a muggle bus ride to the factory in question and started her mission.

Seeing the base up close, you wouldn't suspect it was an evil lair at all. It looked like a normal factory. Big chimneys belched white smoke into the sky, and the walls were drab and grey concrete with a logo on one of them.

The logo was one grey eye with the words:

"We're plastic! World tour April 30, 2020." written on it.

"Hm... might be a code..." Rita murmured. She snapped a pic and moved forward. When she was right beside the factory she turned into a beetle and went through a tiny crack in the concrete wall.

The inside of the factory was very much like the outside. Drab, grey and depressing. As she walked down the hallway, Rita had to suppress a shiver.

"Okay," She thought "Just a big, scary factory. I can cope with this."

It was louder inside than it had sounded from outside. "The cement walls probably did it." As Rita scuttled along beside the wall, two ducks rounded the corner.

"Yeah, J- 10 is in the recovery room," the first one was saying. It had a nasal, robotic voice. "His brain got mouldy, or something. I guess he had a hole, and when he went to cool off in the mud, some leaked in."

"Ouch!" said the second duck. It sounded about the same as the other one, except it was a little noisier. "That's gotta hurt! Poor gduck!"

“Yeah.”

“Ugh,” Rita scoffed silently. “They sound like badly behaved two-year-old's, with all their whining!” As if it had read her thoughts, the first duck spoke again.

“Hey, you know A-1? He’s the most whinyesting badliest behavinged immaturest duck that I’ve ever set eyes on.”

“Yeah. He acts like a two-year-old! He’s a real- uh-” He coughed. “April fool’s joke.”

The other duck snorted. “Uh-huh. He’s always complaining that no one takes him seriously. As if we could!”

“Yeah!” said the second duck, snorting. “April fool’s!!!”

(Snorting, it seemed, was used as a comma by these ducks. Rita hoped that not everyone did it. It was very annoying.)

The two ducks moved on down the hall and Rita decided to follow them. They turned a corner and the ducks started talking again.

“Hey, you know L-12?” said the first duck.

“Yeah.” replied the second. “What about him?”

“He’s really whiny, isn’t he?” the first duck snorted. “He’s always complaining.”

“That’s not nice!” said the second duck, offended. “He’s my brother! We were manufactured on the same day! Don’t ever insult him again!”

And with that, he promptly threw himself at the other. An alarm went off, emanating from the ducks themselves. A minute later two ducks in nurse-like costumes hurried around the corner with a stretcher. The original two ducks were now lying on the floor, but they weren’t dead. The two nurse ducks picked them up, put them on the stretcher and started wheeling it away. Rita quickly climbed onto one of the stretcher's legs for a free ride. After a few minutes and a lot of turning corners, they came to a door with a red cross on it. The door opened automatically, and Rita saw a... hospital. There was no other word for it. A one-room hospital. The nurse ducks wheeled the unconscious first two ducks into the hospital room and Rita caught a glimpse of a different duck lying on another stretcher. A nurse-duck was hovering around it. A minute later the nurse duck did what can best be explained as opening up the patient’s head, revealing various wires, switches, gears, and gadgets.

“Aha!” Rita thought. “So, they aren’t life-forms!”

She snapped several pics and nodded in satisfaction. Now just to see if all the ducks were robots. Or perhaps ‘mechanical’ was a better term...

Rita, in human form, wandered in and out of the factory rooms, making notes, snapping pictures, and eavesdropping on conversations. While she was taking a photograph of a map pinned to the wall, a duck walked up behind her. She was so surprised she accidentally turned into a beetle. The duck quickly trapped her in a plastic container.

“Alright.” Rita heard the nasal voice through the walls of her prison. “Let’s take her to General Anatideas. Won’t he be pleased with us!”

She was thrown against the wall as her cage was picked up and carried down the hall. After five minutes she was set down. The plastic container was taken off and swiftly replaced by glass with a few holes in it, though they were too small for Rita to fit through. Outside the glass Rita could see a huge duck (No, Rita quickly reminded herself, not huge. I’m just small.) with a war helmet on its head.

“AH!” he yelled. Rita covered her ears. “THE SPY! I KNEW MY GENERALS WOULD FIND YOU SWIFTLY! THEY ARE SWIFTER THAN A DUCK WITH LOTS OF OIL, AS I ALWAYS SAY! WE WILL HAVE NO TROUBLE TAKING OVER THE WORLD! JUST YOU WAIT UNTIL APRIL 2020 AND YOU’LL SEE!!!”

Apparently, this duck never spoke normally. It continued yelling as it told her how ducks are in control of everything, how they have top of the line security, how they have no traitors (probably because they killed them all, Rita thought nervously), how they have infiltrated the human world in places such as rubber ducks, Ducks Unlimited, duct tape, and the dead duck. It also told her how no one can get into their camps unnoticed, and how they knew she was there from the first moment.

“AND ANYWAY,” The general continued at a yell, “EVEN IF YOU ESCAPED WITH THE INFORMATION YOU DESIRED, YOU WOULD NEVER FIND A PUBLISHER WHO WAS NOT UNDER THE INFLUENCE OR CONTROL OF US, THE MIGHTY *ANAS PLATYRHYNCHOS*! EVEN THE MANY NEWSPAPERS THAT YOU VISITED WHERE NOT A ONEHUNDREDTH OF THE NUMBER WE CONTROL! WE KNOW WHO’S WILL YOU’RE HERE ON! *DENNIS T. HEMENACE!*”

“Oh,” said Rita lightly as her throat constricted. “I suppose he’s under your influence, as well, then?”



“UM...” The duck looked embarrassed and slightly sheepish. “WELL... YOU COULD... UH... WELL...”

Rita raised an eyebrow. A beetle eyebrow. They *do* have them, you know.

“...NO.”

“Hmm... pity. I don’t suppose you’d allow me to resume human form, would you?”

“AFRAID NOT. THAT WOULD BE TOO DANGEROUS.”

“Pity.” Rita said again, eyeing him. A smile slowly spread across her beetle face, bringing with it, an idea. “But I’m sure a big, strong duck like you could keep me under control.”

The general looked uncertain for a minute. “UM... SURE I COULD! ARE YOU IN DOUBT?! YOU SHOULDN’T BE!”

“Oh, no, *I’m* not.” Rita said, realising that just because a duck had a pea-sized brain, didn’t mean it couldn’t have an *enormous* ego. Now just to find out if she could use that ego. She heaved a dramatic sigh. “I’m just slightly worried about what the other, um, *Anas platyrhynchos* say about you.”

“UM... WHAT DO THEY SAY?” asked Anatideas, clearly worried about his public image.

Rita sighed again. “Well... I don’t want to poison your view of the troops...” She said, despite that being *exactly* what she intended to do.

“YOU WON’T!” The general said quickly.

“Oh... are you sure?” she pretended to be hesitant. “Because they say some pretty mean stuff...”

“YES! I AM SURE! I MUST KNOW! PLEASE!”

“Okay... they say you’re weak and foolish and of course I don’t agree with them but they do and they say that they’d rather anyone over you, even A-1, and that they’re planning an uprising and they’re going to assassinate you! Personally, I think their wiring has gone mouldy, but...”

“WHATT?!”

Anatideas shrieked, so high pitched that the

glass of Rita’s cage shattered into a thousand pieces.

She wasted no time. Rita resumed human form and, jumping on the general's back, opened his head up and squirted ink from her quick quotes quill at the wires. He powered down with a low hum and she dusted off her hands.

So the newspapers were controlled by ducks. That explained a lot. And yet Dennis wasn't. It was queer. He didn't seem like a normal singer. For one thing, he looked too young, despite his moustache. And he lisped. And he had generals. And his generals were babies.

"I'm going mad." Rita thought matter-of-factly. "Never mind. I can't do anything about it if I am. Best to focus on the matter at hand, and that is escaping without losing my proof."

Then she heard a faint beep from the belt that Dennis had lent her. She looked down at it. The small screen on the side read:

'Record full'

"What?!" Rita's mouth fell open. "It was recording?! I got all of Anatideas' monologuing? This is brilliant!" She laughed with sheer delight. Then she turned back into a beetle and crept from the room, through the numerous hallways, past brigades of *Anas platyrhynchos*, and out the crack in the wall.

Dennis had the *best* television room Rita had ever seen. In fact, it could very barely be called anything short of a movie theatre. Dennis explained that the reason for this was that sometimes he and his troops, which were numerous, sometimes had to watch an informative video together, or they'd have a movie night, or they'd look at a map on it, or they'd Skype to their friends in other countries.

Now, however, it was being used to play the recording that Rita accidentally took of Anatideas monologuing.

It started just after Rita was thrown against the wall, which hinted the wall had started the recording. It captured perfectly and clearly Anatideas' claims, which Dennis apparently found interesting and extremely informative, and the camera aspect of the recorder accidentally featured a map which Rita had failed to see, and which was pinned on the wall beside Anatideas. The map showed where the ducks planned to strike first –somewhere in Kansas-- and also contained the duck's motto:

SWIFTER THAN LIGHT,
LOUDER THAN THUNDER,
WE WILL OVERCOME,
AND ALL ELSE WILL BE OVER.

"Wew, Miss Skeetew. Youw have stumbewed upon a gohwdmine of infowmation which I did not expect you to find. How did you come acwoss the note in the fiwst pwace?"

Rita shrugged. "I was just making meringues." she said. "It was in a duck egg."

"Dis news wiw be pubwished soon. Wouwd you wite a showt stowy on it? Owe possibwy a novewwa? I tink dis much news desewves a novewwa."

"Sure! I wonder, would first or third person be better...?" Rita wondered, lost in thought.

"...Probably third. Where in the world did I put my quill?..."

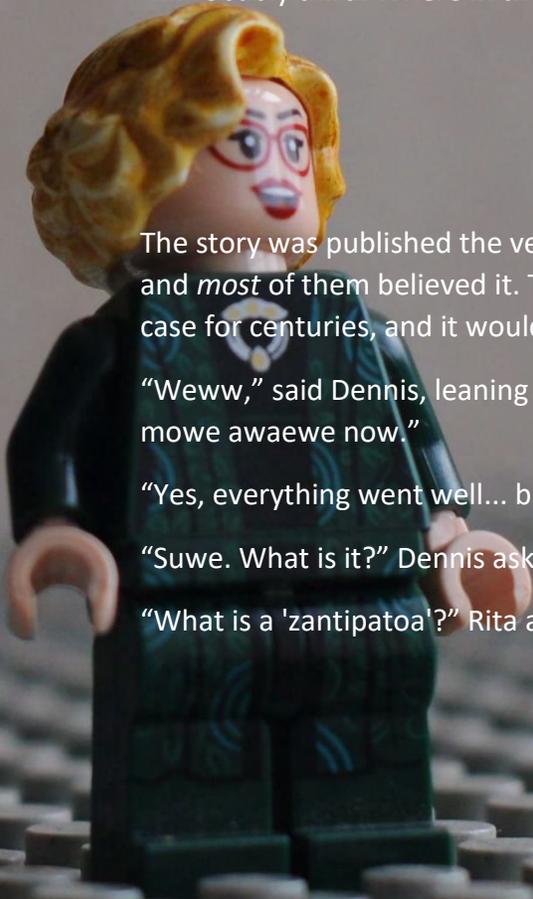
The story was published the very next day, online as well as on paper. Millions of people saw it, and *most* of them believed it. There were people who didn't, of course, but that had been the case for centuries, and it would probably be forevermore.

"Weww," said Dennis, leaning back in his chair. "Dis was infowmitive and everwyone wiww be mowe awaewe now."

"Yes, everything went well... but sir, may I ask you one thing?" Rita queried.

"Suwe. What is it?" Dennis asked.

"What is a 'zantipatoa'?" Rita asked.



AN ODE TO MY GENERALS---By Dennis T. Hemenace

O, my generals,

So loyal and true art thou!

Your karate skills are unmatched—

I almost can't understand how.

You are stronger than fiercest tiger,

Swift as the breeze in the barrens,

And steady as the moon.



Dear Dennis,

I'm curious why the aliens that sent *gducks* to earth want to take over our world. Have we done them an injustice, or are they just ambitious? Was there a misunderstanding? Have we aggravated them somehow? If you could please clarify for me, I would be grateful.

Sincerely,

A confused citizen.

Dear confused citizen,

The answer to your question is, as of right now, still theoretical, and I was hesitant to answer without first researching more about this subject. You've done me a favour by asking. The answer I'm about to give you is, as aforesaid, mostly theoretical, so take it with a grain of salt.

I think that all of your theories are informed and interesting, though one of them seemed most probable to me: I think there was a misunderstanding and we accidentally aggravated them. A bit of research proved this theory exceedingly likely.

While researching, I found several possibilities as to what might have aggravated the aliens:

- A) When rockets reach outer space, they detach their fuel tanks, leaving behind 'space garbage'. This might come across to the aliens as littering, as it basically is, and irritate them.
- B) There are devices that are owned by SETI (Signs of Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) that analyse radio signals, listening in deep space. If I were an alien, I would feel as if my privacy was invaded.
- C) On September 5th, 1977, the Voyager Golden Record was launched as an astronomical 'hello' to any aliens that might be existent. There were extremely simple instructions on this, and I find it plausible that there could be a misunderstanding, such as aliens thinking that humans were making fun of them or underestimating them, or thinking they're incompetent, though the last is far from the truth.
- D) The alien movies that have been made might have offended the actual aliens, as some are unflattering and/or insulting.

I have also contacted NASA and discovered that the aliens have, in fact, sent a message to them, asking them to stop bothering them, years ago. As NASA did not listen to any of the aliens' warnings, the aliens decided that it was the last straw and sent the *gducks*.

The aliens really have not been unreasonable. They warned NASA, and NASA didn't listen.

I hope this answers your question.

Excuse me for bloviating.

Sincerely,

Dennis T. Hemenace

ACROSTIC

Daringly determined

Energetic leader

Never cold

Never old

In charge

Slippery police-avoider

Memories

In the yard eating

Dinner cooked over open fire

Burning math page by page



MATH TO ASHES AND EQUATIONS TO DUST

By Dennis

Finally, I'm done,
No more late-night math.
Sitting 'round the unlighted firepit
Waiting for the night
To get dark enough for sparklers.
Grandpa lights the pile of
(Highly flammable) saltpetre he brought
With a cherry bomb on top—
(his idea of lighting a fire)
Later on, we'll fire off his flares
And hope no one thinks
That it's an actual emergency.
I bring out my 6-foot-tall
Leaning pile of finished homework
(All math) to burn over
The dancing flames.
Buster makes origami *gducks*,
I make planes and nautical vessels.
Grandma makes projectiles,
Mummy makes flowers, Daddy makes hats
And Grandpa makes some sort
Of zeppelin with dragon wings.
Pigeons peek from the folds
Scribbled ten minutes before they

Came outside to be launched
Into cackling orange tongues
And disintegrated to ashes,
Then crumbled to nothing and dust.
Supper's cooked over the coals of dead
math,
Addition to algebra and beyond.
Grandma's cookies, wrapped in leaves
Drip chocolate into the flames
A sad sight indeed, though
It makes them taste even better, somehow.
After supper, the marshmallows come
out—
Sticky faces covered in fluffed sugar.
Marshmallows falling from our sticks and
burning
In the blaze below.
Polaris, the north star, comes out
And Mummy decides it's time to
Get out our sleeping bags and
Bed down in the tents we
Set up, counting diamonds in the sky and
Dreaming of math transforming
From math to ashes and
Equations to dust.

The trouble with Dyslexia—Oops...

Grandpa Primum Nomen Ignotum Fife

Now listen. I'm only going to tell you once. WHY?! Because the government is listening, that's why! Haven't you learned anything from what I've taught you?!

Good, I'm glad at least that has penetrated your thick skull. Now, ahem.

As I was saying, I decided to visit my grandson Dennis at his base in the United Kingdom. ...Well, of course he has one there; he has one in every country, province and state! Now hush...

Anyway, I got to the Toronto airport just in time to board, or, in translation, two minutes before my flight left, hours after I should have been there. I casually bypassed security as I didn't want to have to give up my bayonet, chainsaw, pocketknives, trebuchet, M-16 rifle, pocket guillotine, recurve bow, slingshot and yoyo.

My dyslexia was acting up, and I couldn't read the signs, so I asked a stewardess which door led to the Glasgow flight. She smiled and said 'right'. I, being dyslexic, thought left was right and therefore went to what I fondly believed was the Glasgow flight but wasn't, and ended up in Northern Ireland at the Derry Airport.



I stayed there overnight, as the trip had taken fifteen hours. In the morning, bright and early as the cock crows, I walked to the dock and chartered a boat which I took to the Scotland part of the U.K. After that I rented a car and drove to Kirkgate park, as the simple instructions I had printed off of Dennis's website directed. The park was closed. I had to wait two hours (Not that I'm audacious enough to complain) for it to open.

The next thing on my instructions was to go down a southwest trail to Loch Leven National Nature Reserve. The only problem with that: it, too, was closed due to construction or some similar rubbish. I was forced very forcibly to take the road. I parked my rented car in the Loch Leven National Nature Reserve Office parking lot, then went inside to buy a ticket for a boat ride to Lochleven Castle, as it is on an island in the middle of the loch.

However, luck once again deserted me. All the ferries were broken and gone for repairs. I had to rent an old, bedraggled wooden boat to row myself over the loch. It sank twenty feet from the dock and I had to swim the last few yards. There were so many tourists there— probably stuck because there were no boats to take them back—that I got severely trampled and accidentally walked in a squiggly line. I also got extremely turned around, which, I suppose, is why I went around the castle the wrong way and fell into the oubliette.

After making a ladder out of my 23-yard-long roll of extra yoyo string and the underbrush that fell down with me, I climbed out and continued around the castle.

As I had started walking the wrong way and my dyslexia had me all confuzzled anyway, I accidentally switched the huts around in my head and went in the wrong one. Nothing was there except gardening supplies and a lawnmower, so I went into the other hut. That one was a bit more promising, but the only portrait was of pears, not apples. I knocked on it anyways. A door started opening, but it got stuck when it was only six inches wide. I grumbled a bit and pulled my titanium crowbar out of my back pocket. (Oh, don't look so surprised, you know I take it with me everywhere). It took almost an hour to pry the door open. Finally, though, it was wide enough for me to walk through without crushing my hat.

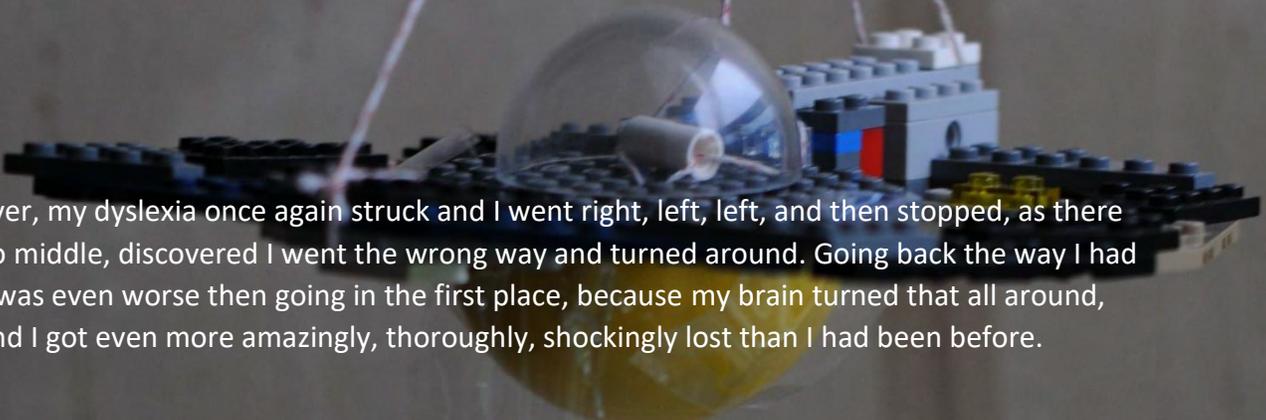
I pulled out my flashlight as there were no lights, and started down the tunnel. The door slammed shut behind me.

Gducks!

I should have wedged it open.

Speaking of gducks...

I glance around suspiciously. Nothing. Thank goodness. I start down the tunnel, beaming my flashlight everywhere to watch for *gducks*. (Don't laugh, you foolish students, if you had any sense... but then, you don't, so it is hopeless to tell you anyway.) Where was I? Oh, yes, keeping my eyes out for *gducks*. 'Let's see,' I thought, thought I, 'the instructions said left, right, right and middle forks.'



However, my dyslexia once again struck and I went right, left, left, and then stopped, as there was no middle, discovered I went the wrong way and turned around. Going back the way I had come was even worse than going in the first place, because my brain turned that all around, too, and I got even more amazingly, thoroughly, shockingly lost than I had been before.

One of Dennis's employees found me.

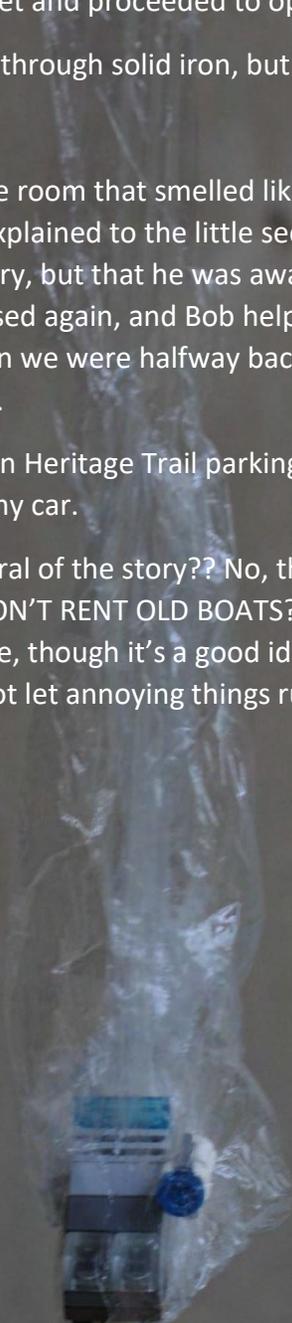
A baby (Yes, an actual baby! Close your mouth; you look like a fish. Dennis himself is a baby; why do you think he can't hire babies? Now hush.) A baby named Bob found me, then guided me to the proper door. The painting was gone, and even Bob didn't know why. I suspected *gducks* and told him so. He laughed and poked the wall, as the instructions had said to poke the portrait, but it did nothing. After much insistent poking for half a minute yielded no effect, I pulled my chainsaw out of my pocket and proceeded to open the door in the only possible way.

It is harder than you'd think to saw through solid iron, but I did it.

The wall fell into a nice, homey little room that smelled like pine and lavender. I stepped in after it, apologised profusely and explained to the little secretary girl, then asked where Dennis was. The secretary said she was sorry, but that he was away and she did not know when he'd be back. I thanked her, she apologised again, and Bob helped me find the surface again. Of course, my flashlight went out when we were halfway back and we had to feel our way out, and then I had to swim to the mainland.

I walked, dripping, to the Loch Leven Heritage Trail parking lot and was just in time to see the aliens that created *gducks* abduct my car.

...Now, you tell me. What is the moral of the story?? No, the moral is *not* to always carry a chainsaw. WHAT DO YOU MEAN DON'T RENT OLD BOATS?!?! That is most *definitely* NOT it! Watch out for *gducks*? No, not quite, though it's a good idea to be wary anyway. The *moral* is to keep your head in a crisis, and to not let annoying things ruin your mood, or your day.





Review: The Duck Destroyer 5000 [remains pictured above]

By Buster Moughnne

Let me tell you, I was bitterly disappointed in this product. I could see it a kilometer away through thick underbrush and, on top of that, the *gducks* were not fooled in the slightest. Several attempts were made by *gducks* to end my life while I was in the supposed but questionable “safety” of this duck “blind”. Obviously, they could see it, and me, perfectly plainly and clear as day, despite my camouflage. I advise everyone to not waste their money on this worthless, ludicrous, absurd, outrageous false advertisement unless their goal is to die and not try to help save their world by catching a *gduck* and exposing this dangerous and highly suspicious convoluted conspiracy.

TO CATCH A GDUCK

Buster

I peer at the darkening yard through my binoculars, wishing that the night vision goggles my brother ordered had come in today, though they are supposed to arrive tomorrow instead. Shame. They would be handy now. Catching *gducks* is hard work, though necessary when one is trying to help save the world.

I stiffen at the sound of twigs cracking below me, training my binoculars on the forest floor to identify the cause of the sound. I see a shadow moving low to the ground. My breathing comes in excited gasps. *A gduck!* I try to calm myself and move noiselessly. The shadow moves closer. I rush to the net launcher my daddy installed yesterday and aim carefully. It goes off with a quiet ‘whoosh’ and the figure on the ground topples with a surprised yelp.

“YESH!!!” I scream, pumping my fist and rushing down the ladder of my fortress to see what I caught. ‘It’s probably a *gduck* general,’ I think, resisting the urge to chortle. Despite the fact that nobody—aside from my family—listens when I try to tell them, I still believe ducks are evil. *G-ducks*, at least. As I run out the door toward my prize, my neck prickles. I spin around, sure a *gduck* is watching me. I don’t care what people say, this is not just a mild case of anatidaephobia... but I see nothing and shake off my uneasiness, rushing to the fallen figure tangled in the net.

“Aha! I have you now!” I yell, pointing my wooden sword at the net.

“Bustew?” it asks in a voice I recognise. I deflate.

“Dennish?” I ask.

“Yeah.”

I sigh. “You’re not a *gduck*.” Instead of a mechanical evil being, I caught my baby brother.

How disappointing.

“Sowwy. At weast you know the net wowks! I wath jutht coming to find you tho I couwd ask if I can hewp you wook fow ducks.”

I nod, though he probably can’t see in the dim light of the gloaming hours. “Yesh, you can. But it’sh *g-ducksh*, not *ducksh*.” Inwardly I’m glad he came to help. I can, after all, only look in one direction at a time, and *gducks* are slippery creatures. They might ambush me.

We go back up to the top of the fortress. I return to my binoculars and hand Dennis a pair of his own. We are at it only five minutes before I hear twigs cracking again. I run to the net launcher

again and fire it at a new, taller shadow than the last time. The shadow goes sprawling to the ground. A *gduck* for sure, this time! Dennis and I rush down to the struggling figure.

“ATTEMPTED MURDER!” it yells. “ATTEMPTED MURDER!!!”

I deflate again.

That’s no *gduck*.

That’s Grandma.

Sighing, I hurry to untangle her, and Dennis rushes up beside me to help.

“Oh, boys,” she says as we drag the net off her. “Hello. I was just coming to find you. ...Now, did you happen to see what maniacally clever, villainous character threw the that net over me? Mark my words, he will not live to see the light of day, or my name’s not Meghan Fife!!!” Her eyes glint.

I sigh again. “Grandma. That wash me. I thought you were a *gduck*. Shorry.”

“Oh... no, it’s fine, dear. It’s good for you to learn how to defend yourself.” Grandma starts eyeing the trees suspiciously. “Someone is always watching...”

Her face brightens. “So, you’re watching for *gducks*. Can I help?”

I nod. “Yesh, pleashe, Grandma. The more people there are, the harder it ish for the *gducksh* to try any funny businesssh.”

We all go up to the top of the fortress and I hand Grandma her own pair of binoculars, then return to my own.

It’s much longer than last time before we hear twigs crack again. Grandma runs to the net launcher (she’s always been a little trigger happy), but I put a hand on her arm. “It’sh probably jusht Grandpa, checking on ush,” I say at normal volume, disappointed.

“Why ever does that mean I can’t shoot the net launcher at him?!” Grandma asks, amazed.

I start turning away, shrugging, but suddenly a loud, nasal voice cuts through the near silence.

“AH, YOU SEE, ROOKIE? THEY SUSPECT NOTHING! WE MUST SIMPLY WALK PAST! WE WILL NOT BE DETECTED! ONWARD! PRESS ON! SWIFTER THAN LIGHT, LOUDER THAN THUNDER, WE WILL OVERCOME, AND ALL ELSE WILL BE OVER!”

I freeze. *Gducks!!!* I gesture frantically at Grandma. She nods and launches a net. There’s a whoosh and two excessively armoured, crouching, winged figures topple.

The shouting starts as we race down to ground level.

“NO! NO! NO! NO! NO!” The nasal voice yells. “I NEVER, EVER GET CAUGHT! IT IS IMPOSSIBLE! THERE MUST HAVE BEEN SOME *CONFUJEN!* I AM GENERAL ANATIDEAS, A *TRUE PROFICIENT!*”

“What does dat mean, Gwandma?” Dennis asks.

Grandma sniffs. “A lot less than he thinks it does.”

My breath catches on my throat. A *gduck* general! Amazing! We caught a *gduck general!*

“I AM AN ANAS PLATYRHNCHOS!” Anatideas continues. “I AM THE SOLE REASON FOR ANATIDEAPHOBIA!!! YOU ARE BEING *FOLLYFUL* AND ABOMINABLE! LET ME *GOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!*”

I rush up to the nets. Anatideas is busy kicking and thrashing, while the other *gduck* is intensely focused on plugging his ears—or rather, his auditory sensors—with his wings.

We pick them up and put them into the prison cell we have ready for the occasion, then I run to the phone to get Dennis’s troops over to transport them to a more secure facility. The world is going to find out about *gducks* if I die achieving that goal.

I smile as I dial the number. This will throw a monkey wrench in the *gducks’* plans.

It feels good to be right.

The Ballad of Meghan Fife

(VRS 1)

There was an old woman, a walkin' alone,
With naught but her stick to carry along.
An innocent hiker, he tapped on her
shoulder,
And that is what he did blatantly wrong.

(Chorus)

"Attempted murder! Assassins about!"
She screamed at the top of her voice.
She attacked fast as lightning, he wouldn't
fight back,
And that was a *very* bad choice.

(VRS 2)

"See? Clearly a villain!" she exclaimed to
the trees,
"He's pretending he means us no harm!"
And she smacked him with rocks, and she
poked him with sticks,
Like a mischievous fairy's mean charm.

(Chorus)

(VRS 3)

"Ah! Feigning surrender!" she shrieked as
he cowered.
"Well, I'd not be fooled in my life!
I'll beat him away, and away he will stay,
As sure as my name's Meghan Fife!"

(Chorus)

(VRS 4)
"So, given up then?" She asked of the man,
"Just why would you go and do that?"
A piteous whimper escaped his dry lips,
And he vowed to NEVER come back.

(Chorus)

(VRS 5)
"Attempted murder!" does the same
woman say,
In his head, years layer, in the same
shrieking voice?

The man glances 'round wildly, eyes dart
about,
Regretting his hiking grounds choice
To this day.

DEAR MR./MRS. EDITOR

565 Sandgate Lane,
Ottery St Mary, Devon, England,

May 27, 2020

Dear Mr. Ballard/Editor,

It has come to my attention that you use a peacock feather quill to write. I think this is *follyful*, considering that a peacock is in the same family as ducks, which are basically *GDUCKS*! This is a problem because, as everyone should — but doesn't — know, a *gduck* is a mechanical evil being sent to earth by aliens who hate NASA 'cause NASA is full of capricious people. I know that people say I'm mad and that I have anatidaephobia but saying that is as *follyful* as writing with a peacock feather quill and it is no reason to not listen to me. I've got to go now because my mother is coming up the stairs to summon me for breakfast. So please try to change to a hippogriff feather quill. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely, your well-wisher (who doesn't have anatidaephobia),

Buster Moughnne.

Dear Mr. Moughnne,

Thank you for your last letter. It took two days for my experts to decode your amazing, excessive writing. (I loved it.) Your concern is greatly appreciated by all here at *Mechs and Mustaches*.

Rest assured that as soon as I learned that *gducks* are associated with peacocks, I switched quills right away. (And believe me, I am not so certain that I myself don't have anatidaephobia... especially when it's snowy outside, Muscovy ducks would blend in so well... but it is best to not linger on unhappy things.) I've heard of the work you put into catching *gducks* and just want to say, "Keep it up." You're doing well and will go far.

Sincerely,

Raynard Ballard

Behind the mustache: A blog by Dennis T. Hemenace

Hi! Thank you for coming to read this.

Today, my post's focus is fun games that my older brother, Buster, and I enjoy playing when winter clasps its hands around Canada and the weather is snowy and cold.

Here are our top 8 favourites.

- 1) Snowboarding—Stand on a sled and go down a gentle slope, holding on tight to a piece of string which should be attached to the front of your sled securely. Try not to fall off!
- 2) Snowball fights— You dodge, jump, run, dash, slide and throw, and make fortresses and walls out of snow to hide behind. Whoever gets hit first loses. Then you can start again!
- 3) Tracking— (Best played in fresh, untrodden snow). One player is the “animal”, the other is the “hunter”. The “animal” makes several sets of tracks, using tricks such as walking backwards, over his tracks, and on things without snow on them, then hides as the “hunter” follows the tracks and tries to find the “animal”.
- 4) The cop and the fugitive— (You need a hill.) Each player has a sled. One is dubbed the cop, the other the fugitive, and therefore, the cop must chase the fugitive, and the fugitive must run. The cop chases the fugitive up the hill, and the fugitive jumps onto his sled to get away. The cop follows him, and while the cop is still at the bottom, the fugitive starts running up the hill and down the side. The cop gets up quickly and follows the fugitive, and the game goes on until the cop finally catches the fugitive. Sometimes the sleds are “stolen”, and therefore switched. At the top of the hill, while hurrying to get down, sometimes you jump on your sled and go backwards, or land on your stomach. Don't try to stop; it just increases the fun.



- 5) Ice sellers—Pack snow into blocks and make a counter or find some other surface to place your wares on, then go around and collect icicles. Lay them on the counter and sell them, paying each other with carrots for snowmen.
- 6) Snow animals—Pile snow, then shape it into the shapes of animals using tools like sticks, stones, shovels, and strings.
- 7) Snow slides—Make a big pile of snow or cover an already existent hill with snow and carve a slide into it. Then pour water over it and leave it to freeze overnight. Then it's super slippery for sliding.

We've saved the best for last:

- 8) Xantippus & Donald— (Xantippus and Donald are goats, by the way.) (You need a hill for this that won't hurt too much to fall down). One player is Xantippus, the other is Donald. Xantippus stands on the hill and yells taunts and insults at Donald, who gets mad and runs up the hill and knocks Xantippus off. Then you fight back and forth, yelling playful, silly insults at each other the whole time, running to push the other off and missing, and totally pretending to be goats. (You cannot mean the insults you yell.)

So ends our list. Why don't you make up your own games and send them to me? I'd also love to hear your favourites off my list.

Happy snow day!

Talk to you later!

Dennis



INSERT SABOTEUR HERE



“WHAT DO YOU MEAN THE NEW LINE OF *GDUCKS* IS MALFUNCTIONING?!” I demand, slamming my right wing on the top of my desk. “THAT’S *FOLLYFUL!*”

The messenger *gduck* cowers before me, plugging his auditory sensors. As if I’m that loud!!!

“I-I... I meant exactly what I said, Sir Mr. General Anatideas, sir... the new line of *gducks* are malfunctioning.”

I clench my beak. The *gducks*, our brave, noble forces, malfunctioning? *Gducks*, created to infiltrate earth undetected and silence NASA’s tiresome efforts to contact us, *malfunctioning?* *Gducks*, our army of fearless metal ducks, who have saved me many a day, *MALFUNCTIONING?! Impossible!!!*

I start muttering and pacing in front of my full-wall window with my wings clasped above my tail, gazing out feverishly at the nebulae and galaxies, a million miles away from earth. So far away and yet never left alone. Curse you, NASA!!! Eat Teal!!! Cinnamon teal! And blue winged teal! And green teal! All the teals!!! *And let them peck you with their metal beaks!!!*

“Are you *sure* of this?” I question the messenger.

“Y-yes, sir, Mr. General Anatideas, sir.”

“100%, full of oil, completely, undoubtedly, for surely sure?”

“Yes, I’m completely sure, Sir Mr.—”

“Humph. Stop it with your formalities. You’re wasting valuable time. Have you investigated why they are? ...Malfunctioning, that is?”

“Um... no-t yet, Sir Mr. General Anatideas, sir. I just came with a message.” He glances up at me, ‘fraidy-*gduck* like.

“DO YOU WANT ME TO JETTISON YOU INTO THE COLD, CENTRAL-PROCESSING-UNITLESS VOID OF SPACE?!?” I screech, pointing toward the window where only the muchly reinforced glass keeps all the beings in this space station from being sucked to their death by the deadly vacuum of the cosmos.

He shrinks back. “N-no, Sir Mr.—”

“Shut up.” I say, brushing past him and straightening my centurion’s helmet. “And rest assured that my most noble leader Adelphocoris Loxosceles Augochlora will hear of this.”

I march to the factory and walk over to the overseer, Quackery-Quackity-Squeak-Squeak-Squeak.

"You sent a messenger *gduck* to me, yes?" I demand.

"Sir, yes, Sir, Mr. General Anatideas, SIR!"

"Why does everyone keep bloviating about my *obvious* greatness?!" I explode. "Will you just *stop* it?! Lead me to the malfunctioning *gducks*! Well? Hurry up! I haven't got all day! Don't be *follyful!*"

"Yes, SIR!"

He waddles off. I march after him, adjusting my helmet.

Squeeble-ing nervously, he leads me to the newest line of *gducks*, their metallic feathers glinting in the glow of the overhead lights, red eyes flashing with fluorescent flame, polished orange beaks looking especially sharp: the best army in the universe, brave, noble, and mechanical to the last.

"So, they're malfunctioning, you say?" I question, examining a *gduck* that seems to be hitting its head repeatedly against the concrete wall of the factory. "When did this first start?"

"It started yesterday, SIR! They seem to be in some form of an idiot-mode, SIR!"

"Hmm..." I start examining another that is lying on its back, kicking itself in the beak. Taking off its switch-plate cover, I lean over and glance inside. I come up grim-faced.

All the wires have been pulled out, completely out, then shredded and stuffed back in, not to mention the spilled three-in-one oil on its CPU! This is not normal!

"These *gducks* are not malfunctioning!" I exclaim. "They have been sabotaged!!!"

The saboteur seems to have disappeared overnight, leaving nothing. No clues, no traces, and no hope. Not even any featherprints. I sit at my desk with my morning cup of hot oil, trying to clear my mind.

If only I could be as great as my most noble leader, Adelphocoris, calm and collected and perfect, kind and patient and courageous, humble and generous. He would find it easy to do anything! But nay, I cannot be like him! He is too amazing! If only I could find the saboteur!

There's a tentative knocking on the door.

"Enter!" I bark.

A messenger *gduck* even more squeamish than the last one comes in.

“A-adelphocoris w-wants a-a-a meeting w-with you, s-sir, Mr. General Anatideas, Sir, your most noble majesty, sir.” He falters, stuttering.

“Very well,” I reply. “You are dismissed.”

As he rushes off, I set my cup down and straighten my helmet. Adolphocoris must get the utmost respect and attention.

So, I march to my most noble leader’s quarters and knock smartly on the door.

“Enter,” someone calls.

I step inside.

My most noble leader Adolphocoris is sitting at his desk, his two front tentacles folded on the top. His suit is impeccable. His desk is amazingly neat and tidy. He is a true proficient.

I gaze at him reverently but not at all creepily, causing him to shift uncomfortably and scratch the back of his neck with the third out of his fifteen tentacles.

“You called for me, sir?” I ask.

Adolphocoris sighs and shifts again, folding two more tentacles in his lap and touching a fifth to his large, green forehead. “General. I have been hearing rumors. I don’t like these rumors. Please, tell me they’re not true.”

I inwardly gasp. *No! My most noble leader Adolphocoris must not be disappointed!*

“What rumors, Sir?” I ask calmly, wiping away the coolant that is dripping down my metal-feathered neck and accidentally knocking over a decorative potted plant.

Adolphocoris sighs. “The one that says that the new line of *gducks* are malfunctioning. No, not malfunctioning, that they have been sabotaged. Is it true?”

“I DON’T KNOW WHAT YOU’RE TALKING ABOUT!!!” I yell, perfectly relaxed as I scratch my left foot with my right and bite my wingtips. “THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH THE *GDUCKS*! THERE MUST HAVE BEEN SOME SORT OF *CONFUJEN*!”

My most noble leader sighs again, pinching the bridge of his nose and closing his eyes. “Very well. You may go.”

"Yes, sir, your most noble beneficent-ness, Sir." I bow and walk calmly through the door, running into the doorframe and scuffing my beak.

I start walking back to my office, perfectly collected. I'm not two yards away from my most noble leader's door when I hear the pattering of hurried feet behind me, and the most annoying organic being in all of outer space comes flapping up beside me.

Pigeon. Toady.

"Hey, Ani, my bruh!" he exclaims. "How're yuh? Ha, ha, I just rhymed! So, what's up, bruh? Are yuh sick? Why'd you run into the wall? Did yuh get fired? Hey, look: your head is scratched!!!"

"No, I was not fired," I respond curtly. "and my most noble leader would *never* fire me. Don't be *follyful*."

"Oh, yeah, that's great, bruh. Hey, what's all this I hear about a saboteur, bruh?"

"Nothing," I say, somewhat stiffly. "It's not true. And must you yell so loudly? You'll send the troops into *confujen*. Can't you see I have enough to worry about in the shape of a disappearing saboteur?!"

I turn away. He follows me.

"Uh, but yuh just said there *was* no saboteur!"

I freeze. "There isn't. I just have to go find him."

"Oh, ok, bruh. Hey, tell you 'bout my girlfriend?"

I hurry my steps.

"She's in Kansas waiting for me."

I turn into the hallway my office is in.

"She migrated."

I rush to my door and open it.

"She's not made up—"

I slam the door in his face. I can see his shadow pause outside through the bottom crack between the door and the floor.



“Oh, yeah, bruh, I’m fine. It’s just feelings. Stuff ‘em down. Stuff ‘em down.”

He leaves and I slump down at the foot of my door.

Whew.

That was close.

I almost had to communicate with him.

I walk to my desk, and pick up my cup of oil, my favourite beverage, my cup of ambition, and find it cold. Sighing, I set it down.

Now... To find the saboteur.

The search for the slimy saboteur ended with no success. It caused the entire *gduck* HQ to be turned upside-down, yet turned up no clues whatsoever as to the whereabouts of the vandal.

Worse yet, Pigeon Toady had not given me one moment of waking peace – which I have noted with some *confujen* and annoyance – since the meeting with my most *noble* leader. And even more regrettable is the fact that he insists on calling me ‘Ani’ in front of my own *troops*!!!

As I sit in my office, brooding, there’s a flap on the door. Quickly and quietly (after kicking a leg of my desk and shouting a few curses while hopping on one foot) , I creep to the door and peer through the peephole. It’s a messenger *gduck*.

Breathing a mental sigh of relief out loud that it’s not the pigeon, I open the door. The messenger *gduck* ducks in surprise. “S-sir Mr. General Anatideas, sir! I-I... I have a message... two messages.. for... um.. you?”

“Hmph! Make it a statement or a question, but nothing in-between!” I bark. “No statements impersonating questions! As my most *noble* leader Adelphocoris tells me, always be concise! Precise! Clear!”

“Y-yes, Sir. I have two messages for you.”

“Wonderful. Go ahead.”

“The—the first is from A-adelphocoris. He says you have two days to find the saboteur before he fires you. The second is from the factory overseer. He says that the malfunctioning *GDUCKS* have gotten worse, and that it’s not only the new line anymore! It’s spreading!”

All up the ranks, *GDUCKS* fell, reduced to insanity. Even my trusted deputy, Squeeble-squeak-hiss-hiss-squeak-squeeble-quack was affected. Very few were left sane.

Unluckily for me, Pigeon Toady is not mechanical, hence I still had him to deal with.

I am still at a loss for what is more annoying: him cheering me on, or him trying (and failing) to console me about my upcoming loss of office.

'Yeah! Good job, Ani! You can do it! Keep a stiff upper beak! Show your troops what's what!' or 'There you go! A! N! I! What's that spell? Um... let's see...' or 'Oh, wow, bruh! That's cool... Hey, tell you 'bout my girlfriend?' or 'Oh, poor yuh, Ani. I would hate to be yuh. Losing your job, barely getting any sleep, and having to wear a hat like that... I don't know how yuh can keep going!'

Yes, my most noble leader is still going to demote me, unless I find the hooligan responsible. I don't blame him. These are difficult times for us all. To not cause more burdens for my most noble leader, I must find that saboteur, lost job or not.

I am walking along the corridor with my magnifying glass monacle out, to keep an eye open for anything suspicious, when the answer to my problem becomes apparent.

Of course, Pigeon Toady is following me and bloviating, rambling, babbling, prattling, blathering, nattering and any other word that implies talking very loudly and constantly about nothing in particular to the extent that the unfortunate *gduck* that is *supposed* to be listening has no choice but to turn off his sound processors and just nod randomly so that the talker is not affronted and has absolutely no idea that one has taken these measures so that one does not have to hear said jibber-jabbering. Thank goodness *I* am more concise!

As I have my listening devices off, I do not realise that the world's most annoying pigeon is trying to get my attention until he waves his wing in front of my beak.

I jump to attention and quickly but subtly turn on my auditory sensors, muttering a few *gduck* curses when I hit the wrong button and Darth Vader's March starts playing from my sound system.

"Pardon," I say, not at all stiffly. "I zoned out for a moment there. I didn't rest my sensors enough last night. What was it you said?"

Pigeon Toady fixes his toupee. "I was just asking if you'd checked the security tapes yet, Ani."

I bristle at being called 'Ani' but keep my cool, clenching my beak as I feel my LED eye lights glow a threatening red.

"No saboteur is going to leave the security tapes after he sabotages something!" I exclaim. "That would be *follyful!*"

"Oh." Pigeon Toady says. "Of course, bruh. Anything you say, Ani. Hey, I was gonna go eat. Wanna come and grab something?"

"No, thank you." I reply, adjusting my monocle. "I've already eaten."

"Oh, yeah. Of course, bruh... My girlfriend was coming anyway."

He waddles off down the hallway, his head bobbing with each step.

As he disappears around the corner I set off at a dead run to get the security tape, which I have not checked yet. I open the compartment and... IT'S STILL THERE! THE PROOF IS STILL THERE! OUTSTANDING!

I grab it and examine the case. Yes, it's the correct one!

I rush to my most noble leader's office and hammer on the door. "Sir! SIR! I've got proof! PROOF!"

The door opens immediately, revealing my most noble leader, Adelphocoris.

"Proof?" he asks, "What proof?"

"The security cameras!" I howl. "The saboteur left the tape!"

My most noble leader Adelphocoris smiles. "Good! Who is it?"

"I haven't watched it yet, Sir. I thought you should have that honour, and I wanted you to have the good news as soon as I could get it to you."

Adelphocoris nods. "Very well. We shall watch it all together, everyone, the whole paddling."

"Of course, Sir!"

In less than an hour, the whole congregation has assembled with me on the stage and my most noble leader beside me. Adelphocoris puts the tape in the player and stands back.

Every *gduck*, the whole raft, watches in mute fascination as the screen changes to black. It's night hours in the factory. Without warning, a light snaps on, revealing the moving figure of... me.

Everyone, including me, gasps. We watch, riveted, confused, as... *I*... walk to the sleeping *GDUCKS* and one by one open their heads and rip out wires, drooling three-in-one oil all over the inside of them. This...ME... goes all down the line of *GDUCKS*.

Adelphocoris pauses the recording. "Can you explain this, Anatideas?"

I shake my head, mute. This is impossible! "I would never do this, sir! I am thoroughly loyal to this cause!!!"

Adelphocoris sighs and starts pacing in front of me, two tentacles clasped behind his back. "I do not believe you tried to do this, Anatideas. It is against psychology for a guilty being to bring proof of their guilt and then look so shocked as you obviously do."

In the second row, Pigeon Toady jumps up onto his feet. "Of *course* it wasn't him! My bruh Ani would *never* do that!!!"

There's a chorus of agreement from the audience.

I blink, uncertain. Why are they standing up for me?

My most noble leader raises his hand for silence. The shouts subside.

Adelphocoris sighs, though it really sounds more like a groan.

"Rest assured," He addresses the audience, "that I do not jump to conclusions. You there," he calls to a guard *gduck*, "Check the security tapes to see if Anatideas exited his room on that particular night, please."

The answer comes back affirmative.

I blink again. I don't recall going anywhere...

The tape is resumed for more information and after what feels like hours, we're rewarded with an answer in the shape of a giant snore.

Yes, that's right.

A snore.

The entire assembly breaks down into raucous, helpless laughter as the recorded me starts honking and snorting loudly and slumps onto the ground.

Sleepwalking.

I've been sleepwalking.

My head tilts perplexedly.

Once Adelphocoris regains breath, he says, "Well, that explains everything. A team will be dispatched immediately to start fixing the affected *gducks*. As for you, my dear general, it isn't a crime to sleepwalk. It was a brilliant idea to check the tapes."

"Oh, um..." I scratch my neck with one of my webbed feet. "It.. It wasn't me who thought of it, sir."

He raises his eyebrows.

"...It was Pigeon Toady."

The pigeon looks up. "Who, me, bruh?"

I nod.

He blinks. "Oh, no it wasn't!"

"I-It *wasn't?!?*" I gasp.

"No!" He exclaims. "You suggested it while we were walking down the hallway! I only asked if you'd done it yet! Don't you remember?!"

I shuffle a bit. "I, uh... I... had my sound off... and I wasn't paying attention to what I was saying..."

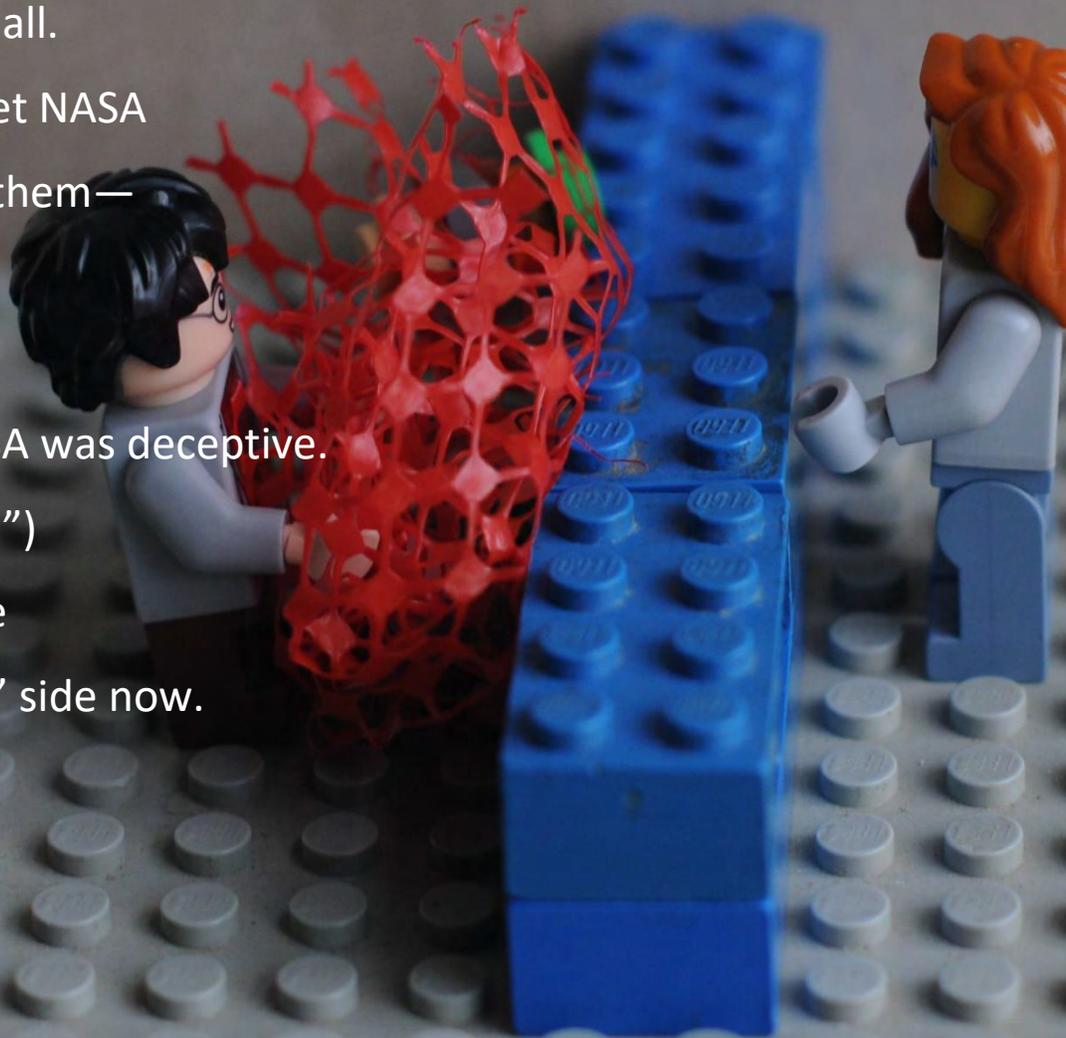
The whole bevy descends back into hysterical laughter, barring the pigeon, who blinks. "Oh. Ok. Hey, bruh, tell you 'bout my girlfriend?"



Welp.

By Buster

So apparently
The evil gducks
Aren't so evil after all.
They're trying to get NASA
To stop bothering them—
A worthy goal—
(Grandma says she
“always knew NASA was deceptive.
Small eyes will tell!”)
Guess we're on the
Gducks' and Aliens' side now.
I hope that
I can return
My gduck catching
Net...





Translation of the gduck egg note:

AGENT 24/7

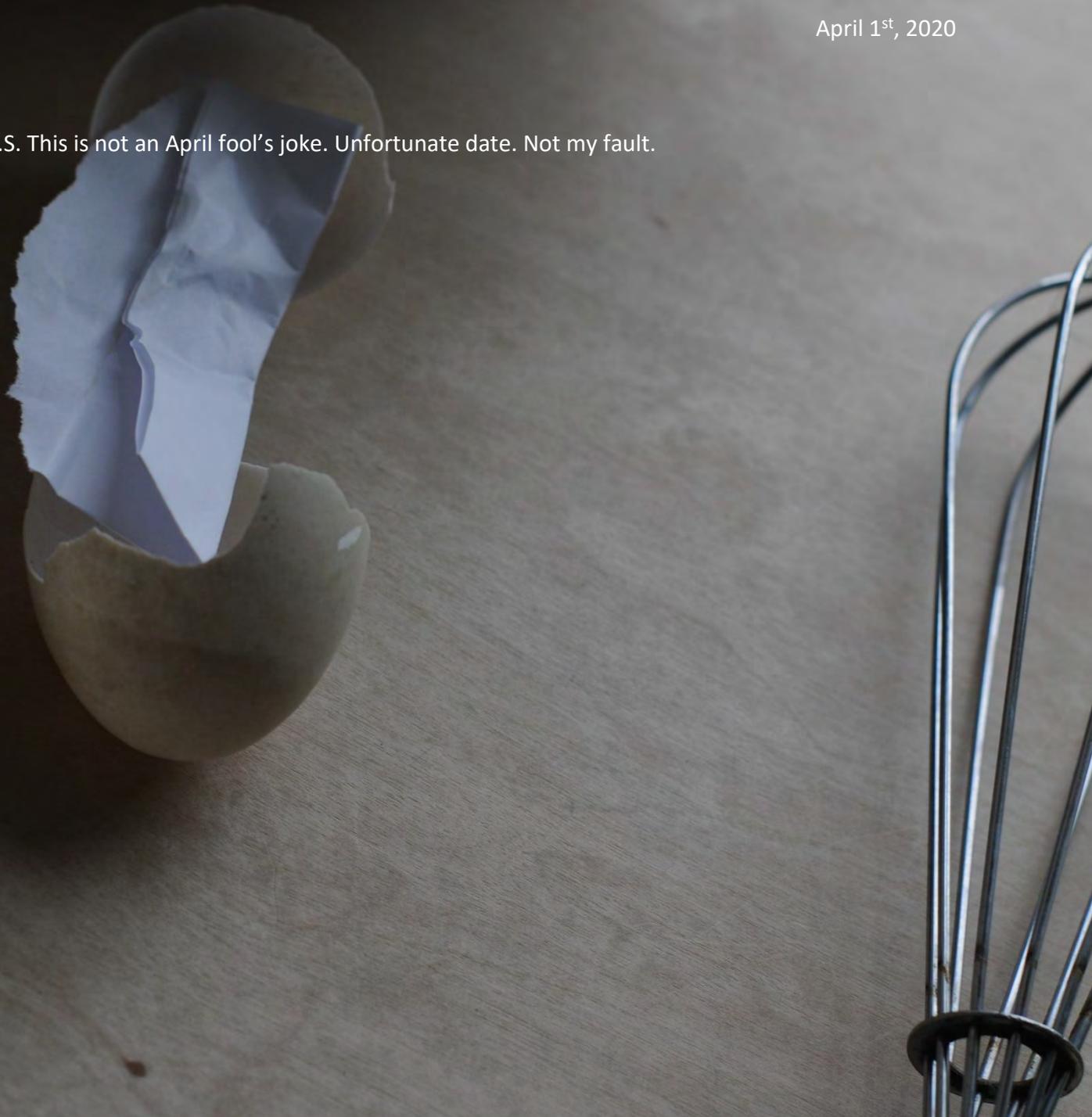
The date and time are to be determined, but we thought you should know you are still on. I know there was some confusion at last night's meeting, but regardless of that fact, we still plan on taking the world as ours. The aliens that sent us would be proud! Your role is important to us, and everyone at HQ is proud of you. Gducks for the win!

Yours sincerely,

Squeeble-Squeak-Hiss-Hiss-Squeak-Squeeble -Quack

April 1st, 2020

P.S. This is not an April fool's joke. Unfortunate date. Not my fault.



Glossary:

Anas platyrhynchos- Latin for Mallard ducks.

Anatidaephobia- The fear that somehow, somewhere, a duck or goose is watching you.

Confujen- confusion; a state of mystification; bewilderment.

Earygardless- spelled properly as 'irregardless' a double negative which should actually be 'regardless'. Sometimes used to drive people who esteem grammar mental.

Follyful- with folly; stupid; foolish; silliness; recklessness.

Gduck- a mechanical being in the form of a duck sent to earth by the aliens who want to wipe out NASA.

Zantipatoa- Actually Xantipatoa. (Zan-tip-uh-toe-uh) Named after a beloved goat, Xantippus, who, in some visionaries' imaginations, is a famous singer and a better version of Santa, Xanta Clause. (Zan-tuh-claws).

Thank you to:

- Bubble and Squeak, our Muscovy ducks, for guarding us and first inspiring my conspiracy theory about gducks and aliens, and, indirectly, the theme of this magazine.
- Dynamite, for being awesome, and for appearing (the LEGO type), in a cameo in this magazine.
- Ezra, for being my LEGO expert and top-notch builder-guy.
- Google, for helping me with maps, translations, and such.
- Grandpa, for letting me borrow his camera, for saying 'irregardless', and for all the stories when I was littler, which inspired Dennis's very soul.
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- Mr. S, for designing the Cover Story curriculum.
- My Mom, checking all my spelling and grammar.
- Shasta, for helping me design and layout, etc.
- The first conspiracy theorists, for first showing the world that such glorious things as suspicions existed.
- The LEGO staff people, for making all the wonderful pieces featured in this, especially the explosives and weapons.
- The movie *Storks*, and whoever made it, for Pigeon Toady and his awesome personality.

