

SIMON CHESHIRE

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**Totally
Unsuitable
for Children**

First published by Walker Books Ltd. 2000

This revised edition published in the
United Kingdom in 2010
by Simon Cheshire
www.simoncheshire.co.uk

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A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

ISBN 9780956504944

Cover illustration by George & Isobel Cheshire

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simon Cheshire is the author of many hugely popular books for children, including the bestselling Saxby Smart detective stories. He writes in a tiny little office which used to be a cupboard, and which is bursting at the seams with books, old chocolate wrappers and letters from his readers. All his stories are based on fact - only names, dates, places, descriptions and events have been changed, to make them more believable. He lives in Warwick, but spends most of his time in a world of his own.

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PART 1

“Ladies and gentlemen! The next act in tonight’s show is TOTALLY unsuitable for children!”

The audience went “Oooooooo.”

“What you are about to see,” continued the showman, “has sent savage beasts white with fear! It has caused shock, horror, and many terrible cases of squirry tummy!”

The audience went “Eeeeeee.”

The showman standing proudly on the stage was tall and wiry, with a thick moustache which stuck out at each side of his round face. His name was Julian Chimes, and he was in charge of everything. The glow from the lights along the front edge of the stage made the thousands of sequins sewn onto his long coat glitter in a hundred colours. He flung his arms wide, and his eyes even wider.

“Ladies and gentlemen! We present! The

one! The only! Dennis Biggs and his Cabinet Of Death!”

A band of musicians was squashed into the tiny orchestra pit in front of the first row of seats. They quickly flipped over to the next page of their music sheets and struck up a creepy tune. They dodged and ducked in time with the music, in order to avoid each other’s arms and legs as they played.

Shadows flickered around the Victorian theatre. They danced across the beautifully decorated ceiling. They skipped along the elegantly shaped balconies. They got lost in the folds of the huge, heavy red curtain, and the fringe of yellow tassels along its base.

The curtain rose to reveal a short man and a tall box. Both were dressed in black, but only the man wore a top hat. Unlike Julian, Dennis Biggs wasn’t in charge of anything. He stepped forward, doing his best to look strange and mysterious.

“Can I have a fearless volunteer please?” he cried in a flat voice.

Claws and tentacles were waved in the air. In that night’s audience, there were no

Earthlings at all. The lack of humanoids was unfortunate, because Dennis Biggs's cabinet was designed to fit someone with only two legs and one head.

"Er... Um... ," said Dennis. He shielded his eyes from the glare of the stage lights, searching for a hand. Or at least, a hand with five fingers.

"I'll do it!" came a squeal from the darkness in front of him. "Me! I'll do it!"

A very large Gastropule rippled up to Dennis on her slimy belly. She waved a couple of tentacles at her friends in Row 3, with half her faceful of eyes blinking nervously. A little giggle escaped from her favourite mouth.

Dennis glanced at Julian, who was now standing offstage in the wings. Julian paddled his hand at him, as if to say 'the show must go on, so get on with it.'

"Give this brave young lady a big round of applause, ladies and gentlemen," cried Dennis. The audience hooted and cheered.

"Now then," said Dennis. "What is your name?"

"My name's Glubbla," said the Gastropule, giggling.

“Smashing. And where are you from, Glubbla?”

“I’m from the third moon of Zephlon Beta.”

Her friends in Row 3 whistled loudly. A couple of them flung showers of popcorn through the air. Dennis raised a hand for silence. The serious expression on his face hushed the audience, and they waited expectantly. A group of Andromedan Water Lizards were so frozen with anticipation that they accidentally dribbled venom onto their ice creams. The ice creams turned purple.

“And now!” cried Dennis. “Prepare your minds for boggling, my friends. Shield your nerves from fear. For now, I will slice Glubbla into eight pieces... in my Cabinet of Death!”

The audience went “Aaaaaaaaaa.” Glubbla went slightly wobbly.

Dennis flung open the front of the cabinet, to reveal a blood-red interior. Black slots marked the eight slicing points.

“Glubbla, you will now please... step into the cabinet!”

Glubbla giggled. With a last glance at her friends she shuffled past Dennis. She managed to wedge most of her tentacles, about half her

head and a bit of her T-shirt into the box. Then she got stuck.

She squealed and twittered, not sure whether to push or pull. The audience peered closer, not sure whether this was part of the act or not. Dennis took a running jump at her from behind, and forced another couple of tentacles in. Glubbla squeaked in alarm. Her eyelids all started fluttering at once.

Grumbles began to appear here and there in the audience. They were starting to realise that Glubbla really shouldn't be turning mauve like that. Dennis gave her bottom a couple of hefty kicks, but it only made her twitter all the more.

The grumbles rapidly merged into a pool of discontent. Dennis loosened the collar of his shirt. He grabbed two armfuls of Glubbla and heaved up, left, right, up again.

Squiiirrrt-PHHPHHHH-PLATT!

The huge sac of digestive juices on Glubbla's back burst like a wet balloon. Dennis, the cabinet and the band were drenched in stinging, acidic slime.

"I was saving that to dunk my dinner in!" squealed Glubbla tearfully.

The audience went “Booooooo!”

“Look at it!” cried Dennis. “Look at my Cabinet of Death! You’ve ruined the paintwork!”

The audience also went “Gerroff!” “Rubbish!” and “We want our credits back!” Dennis, still dripping, stormed off stage just as Julian came rushing on.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” called Julian, flashing his best smile. “Merely a slight technical hitch. The management would like to assure you that -”

The audience yelled “Shaddup! We’re going home!” Glubbla’s friends carried the cabinet away with Glubbla still in it. Her bottom slapped back and forth as they hurried for the exit.

Backstage, a boy called George sat at the long bank of controls which operated the theatre’s lights, scenery and food dispensers. He had an angelic face and a mop of fair hair, and he wore battered and very grubby old Zero-grav overalls. Like Julian and Dennis, he was a human, but unlike Julian and Dennis he was still a kid, if his age was counted in human years. He swivelled around in his chair,

munching on a fish and lemon curd sandwich.

“Well, that went down like a cup of cold sick, didn’t it, Dennis,” he said cheerfully. Bits of bread sprayed onto the floor as he spoke.

“Tourists!” spat Dennis. “I keep saying we shouldn’t do these in-flight shows.”

They could hear a distant Ka-Bleep Ka-Bleep coming from the front of the theatre. Mrs Tikkitz, the robot box office, was stamping the audience’s credit cards with refunds as they left.

On stage, the curtain fell. The band started to pack up for the night. Julian joined George and Dennis. He closed his eyes, and put a weary hand to his forehead.

“Ruination,” he sighed. “We face a bleak future full of poverty and hunger, my dear colleagues, if we keep on having to cough up the readies like that.”

“Riff raff,” mumbled Dennis. “And they’ve nicked my cabinet. Dregs of the universe, the lot of them.”

“They, Biggs,” cried Julian, “are our public. When I was but a humble floor scrubber at the Black Hole Concert Hall, they used to say to me ‘Julian, the customer is always right.’ And

they were perfectly correct. If the audience thinks you're rubbish and wants its dosh back, Biggs, then so be it. It's all part of the magic of the theatre."

"Blow the magic of the theatre," said the sharp voice of The Great Projecto. "He's cost us a night's wages!"

The show's performers were gathered from many points in time and space: Projecto was a hairless, three-eyed being from the planet Volpok. His stage act involved firing his own ear wax at various novelty targets, by building up pressure beneath his brain. Thanks to this regular clearing-out, his hearing was absolutely brilliant. He had heard the conversation from over in the performers' dressing room, and had come out to interrupt it.

"I demand that Biggs be removed from the show!" he cried. His blue skin turned green with fury.

Dennis prided himself on his ability to come up with cleverly witty and amusing remarks in answer to Projecto's regular taunts: "Bog off, bum head!" he shouted.

Julian patted their backs gently. "Now now,

gentlemen, there's no need for us to behave like Martian war-bots. Let us not forget that we are professional artistes. We rise above such petty problems. We concern ourselves with more worthy things."

The Great Projecto gave Dennis a smack in the mouth. They grappled. Projecto dragged Dennis towards the dressing room.

"You can come and explain to the rest of the performers why we can't afford to get the costumes cleaned again this week!" he grunted.

George stuffed down the last of his sandwich. He swivelled in his chair, and his shadow twisted neatly on the stripey wallpaper beside his control desk. He looked out of the tall, sash window beside him. Stars drifted past, but he didn't recognise any of the constellations. The dozens of vehicles owned by tonight's audience were vanishing into the distance. They scattered in all directions, leaving thin trails of ion vapour glowing faintly against the blackness of space.

Julian sighed. "George, my boy, this has not been the most successful of evenings."

"Mmmm," agreed George. "I think we might

be in need of one or two new acts to liven up the show.”

“Quite right, George, as always,” grinned Julian, holding up a finger. “And by the best of good fortune, only this afternoon I received news of a possible addition to our cast. I have already arranged for us to make an extra stop along the way to our next scheduled landing.”

George’s eyes narrowed. “‘Extra stop’ where?” he said at last.

“Oh, um, just a refuelling station. Nowhere special, nowhere terribly interesting.”

“What ‘possible addition’?”

“Something, I am reliably informed, both spectacular and unusual. A marvel of the natural world, so I’m led to believe. Now run along, my boy, I’m sure you have jobs to do, props to fix, that sort of thing.”

Julian, whistling merrily to himself, hurried away before George could ask any more questions. George watched him go. Suspicious thoughts tiptoed nervously through his mind. He wiped a dribble of mayonnaise off his chin.

The theatre flew on through space, with the powerful engines in its basement humming steadily and the solar panels on its

roof soaking up power from the light of the stars. Both its outside and inside appeared to be Victorian because that style of decor had been very fashionable last time the theatre went in for a refit. Its tough outer shell had been specially moulded to look like real bricks and mortar. Its next scheduled landing was on the planet where the Victorian style had originated - a watery, bluey-green planet circling a medium-sized star in Sector J, which its inhabitants called The Earth.

PART 2

Meanwhile, on this same watery, bluey-green planet circling a medium-sized star in Sector J, Sophie Ottershaw was finishing her homework. Her fingers flew across the keyboard of her laptop, rapidly tapping out a detailed timeline of the reign of Henry VIII. She ended her essay, e-mailed it to her History teacher, and ticked off item twelve on her To Do list, which was: “Complete work by 8:45pm.”

The clock above her bed said 8:37pm. She smiled to herself and nodded happily at nobody in particular. She always felt better when things were on schedule.

“Ottershaw Averts Homework Deadline Crisis,” she said. Her words landed softly in the cushions scattered tastefully around her peaceful, smartly decorated room. The computer sat exactly square on her desk. Her sharpened pencils stood to attention in her

'Souvenir Of Weymouth' mug. She always felt better when things were tidy. The many dozens of books on her shelves were arranged according to size and colour. Her hair and clothes were equally neat.

An open packet of chewy Squeezi-Mints sat on her bedside cabinet. She popped one into her mouth, dropped its wrapping into the waste paper basket, and made a selection of "mmmm" noises.

She was just playing for time. Now that she'd caught up on her History essay, she knew that she couldn't avoid going downstairs any longer. The book she was currently reading, ("Careers In Web Journalism"), had been left under the coffee table in the living room. She'd never be able to sleep without at least an hour's study of Chapter 2 ("Brilliant Blogging"), so downstairs she would have to go.

"Ottershaw In Book Fetching Shock," she mumbled.

She sighed and left the room, pausing only to make sure the light was switched off. She heard her father at his piano before she reached the foot of the stairs.

...ping... ping ping ping ping ping...

“La la laaaa,” he sang, on the same note as the pings.

...ping ping ping... ping ping ping ping ping ping...

The door to his study was wide open. Sophie would have to pass it on the way to the living room. Maybe... if she stepped... very quietly... along the--

“Who’s that?” His booming voice made her jump. His wild, black hair and even wilder, blacker beard would also have made her jump if she hadn’t been used to them. He tugged at the edges of his tatty old cardigan.

“It’s me, Dad. I’ve been upstairs working on my To Do list, remember?”

“Oh. Yes,” mumbled Dad, remembering. “You’ve been up there for four hours. I don’t know where you get these obsessive habits.”

...ping... ping ping ping...

“La la la laaaaaaaa.”

...ping ping ping ping ping ping ping...

A dozen sheets of music paper were perched on a stand next to the piano. He ripped them into tiny pieces and dropped them into the overflowing waste paper basket

by his feet. “No. No no no no no!” he huffed. “Should be C major. Sophie, must you stand there? It’s very distracting. I’m trying to work.”

Sophie started edging towards the living room. Dad suddenly turned towards her.

“I forbid you to go to that party!” he cried.

“What party?” said Sophie.

“That one, you know,” grumbled Dad, waving a hand at her. His bushy black eyebrows knotted themselves together into a frown. “Near the shops. Big ugly red house.”

“... Dad, that was two years ago.”

“Oh... Did you go?”

“No.”

“Good. Now run along, please, there’s a good girl!”

Sophie took a deep breath. “You won’t forget I’m going to be late home tomorrow, will you? I’m interviewing the mayor for the school website.”

“For the what?”

“Dad, I’m the editor.”

Dad muttered something to himself. Sophie was about to run along, please, there’s a good girl, when she remembered to ask: “Is Mum in yet?”

“No. I don’t think so. Important meeting, or something.”

...ping... ping ping...

“Laaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa.”

...ping ping... ping ping ping...

Sophie went on her way, past the framed poster which was hung up in the hallway, announcing ‘The First Performance Of Vladimir Ottershaw’s New Masterpiece, Piano Symphony No.96.’ Dad’s most recent triumph. She fetched her book, retreated to her room, and eventually drifted off to sleep with Chapter 2 still open on the bedcovers in front of her.

The Ottershaws’ house stood alone on the far edge of the town, surrounded on all sides by fields. Sophie was a light sleeper, and so she couldn’t help but notice when a whopping great space-travelling Victorian theatre landed in the field next to the house, belching bright green smoke from its engines.

It was almost dawn the following morning. A crescent moon glowed sleepily, and the sky couldn’t quite decide whether to be a simple black or a stylish navy blue. The theatre floated to the ground, crushing six small

bushes, two empty drinks cans and a very startled mole.

Sophie pressed her nose against the window of her room. She ran a hand across her face, blearily wondering if this was a dream. No. Wide awake now. Her eyes went all boggly, in a way which would have made any optician seriously worried. What in the name of the national papers was THAT? And what did that sign at the front say? ‘The Galactic Coliseum’?

PART 3

Inside the theatre, George was asking similar questions, but about something rather different. He and Julian were in one of the store rooms, tucked away in the basement. In front of them was a metal cage.

“What in the name of the Saturn Nebula is THAT?” cried George.

“That, George, my lad,” said Julian proudly, “is our new feature attraction. And what a splendidly handsome beast he is too!”

“What’s he called?” said George nervously.

“He is of the species Repticus Incisorops. Native of... some planet or other, so I am reliably informed. It’s all there on the label.”

George reached for the slip of card tied to the cage with a ragged length of string. The creature hissed and snapped at his hand. He snatched it back quickly.

“Where did you get him, Julian?” he said seriously, getting a weird sinking feeling that

was nothing to do with the theatre's landing.
"Who did you get him from?"

"Mere details, boy, mere details. Don't worry about little things like that, think of the crowds he will attract. Think how our public will clamour for just a brief glimpse of him! Fame and fortune stand waiting in the wings, you mark my words. It'll be just like the old days, when I did my cutlery juggling routine at the Apollo on Speltron IV. How they gasped! How they screamed for more! Come along, George, we must let our new friend rest, we have much to prepare."

The creature coiled itself around the bars of the cage. It was roughly as big as a medium-sized dog, with two powerful hind legs, and crab-like pincers at the end of its three arms. Its head was bony and covered with scales. Two silvery eyes, with pupils like a cat's, scanned every inch of its new home. A thin tongue glistened its way along short, jagged teeth.

George didn't like the look of it one little bit. In the days to come, he'd wish he'd been able to prevent its arrival on Earth.

Some more titles to collect...

PANTS ON FIRE

A hilarious tale of fame, fortune, fake celebrities and shocking lies, for 8-12 year olds.

Tom Bland thinks he's the world's greatest actor. People at his school disagree. He's not a popular kid. When he's mistaken for a new soap opera star, and suddenly everyone wants to be his friend, Tom finds that he can't resist the temptation to lie... and lie... and lie...

"This is a story about fame and celebrity, so it taps into our modern obsessions. It's also one of the funniest stories I've ever read!" - Bookfinder4U.com reader reviews

THEY MELTED HIS BRAIN!

Matthew Bland will grow up to be the greatest movie director of all time. Or so he thinks. His home-made movies are awful. However, one night he stumbles across a secret transmission which could literally change the world. Only he and his two friends can save the human race from a total brain meltdown...! Beware! This book might make you burst your lungs laughing! (Although, probably not)

BOTTOMBY

A crazy crime-busting adventure. Sam worries about things. A lot. But when a family crisis looms, and the clock starts ticking, Sam and his friends must go on a madcap undercover mission to recover a stolen painting from a notorious con-man.

"A hilarious tale... that will appeal to anyone who likes books with plenty of knockabout humour" - Books For Keeps

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