

Ordinary World

Tony McGuin



**Murder isn't murder
if it's served with fries...**

Ordinary World

By Tony McGuin

Copyrighted material, all rights reserved.

Published by LL-Publications www.ll-publications.com

ISBN: 978-1-905091-13-3

This is a free, downloadable excerpt, of the novel. Distribution of this free excerpt is allowed, and even encouraged!

Ordinary World will be released on 30th Sept 2008, in paperback and digital formats, and will be available worldwide from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, LL-Publications.com, and many other major retailers.

1

Mornings are hateful.

Boater slowly opened his eyes. Above him, spiralling like feathered roulette wheels, seagulls squawked and shrieked their greetings to the day in a fierce blue sky bereft of clouds. Even higher burnt the sun with the cocky assuredness of one that knows there is nothing as hot and yellow as they are (with the possible exception of a fire at a jaundice hospital).

Boater took all this in as he lay flat on his back. After a few crowded moments, in which the brain had noted all available information and concluded that this is almost certainly a problem, he began to consider just what he was lying on. Slow undulation and an unmistakable saltiness to the air began to form certain ideas he didn't much like. By trying to feel for materials beneath his shoulder blades, he concluded he was on something flat and wooden. A thought struck him. He rolled his head slightly to the left and was stoically unsurprised by the sight of a vast, blue, wet area stretching away all around him which he presumed, with some certainty, to be the ocean.

He considered what it might mean to be unexpectedly adrift on a raft at sea.

Ah, thought Boater, it must be morning.

* * *

Mornings are hateful.

Pale yellow sunlight found a gap in the bedroom curtains just wide enough to throw an emancipated beam on the opposite wall and highlight the biological war crimes of single living: three-day-old-shirt draped over a chair; vast pile of unsorted mail; adventurous and mathematically-impossible cobwebs clinging tenuously to any section of surface not currently under threat from leaning towers of pizza-stained laundry. There were parts of the floor where dark, sticky things battled for a foot-hold on the evolutionary ladder and, come the next mass extinction, may rise up and form new and enlightened civilisations.

The air in the room was fetid, dank and tasted of ponds.

Lying face down and motionless on a bed slept a figure in the deep, unshakable sleep of the dangerously intoxicated. The position, that of motorway road kill victim, hadn't changed all night. His wet breath spooled a hot scarf of saliva around his lips and chin creating a Velcro effect with the pillow that will require, given time, a shoehorn to separate it from his face.

A sudden fart of white noise blasted from the radio alarm clock in the corner of the room as 7.30am elapsed, shouting music that stomped around the bedroom like an embarrassing nephew.

He always forgot to turn it off at weekends.

A muffled "Bollocks!" escaped from the head in the pillow. After a period in which the figure considered it unlikely that the world supply of electricity would run out and allow him to get back to sleep, it moved slowly, like treacle learning to fly, over to the radio and fisted it into silence. The thin beam of light that dared enter this fetid place illuminated a shape that was vaguely human (though undernourished), tall (though lacking posture) and male (for all the good

that did him).

Tohon Sehsa was up.

He stood and looked around cautiously. Often, on occasions such as these, the room he woke up in was seldom his own and he usually had to try a quick re-cap of the night before to work out just exactly *how* he managed to be sleeping in someone's shed or why his bed was occupied by a rather guilty-looking badger.

Recognising, at the second attempt, the large collection of posters displaying naked ladies which covered various stains on the walls, he grunted an acknowledgment and drifted sleepily out the door and into the hallway where he tripped over the ever-growing pile of letters the postmen insisted on bringing him each morning. He promised himself he would open some of the more desperate-looking letters one day. Someone seemed to be getting quite angry judging by the shaky handwriting on them in red ink and exclamation marks.

Instead, he moved hesitantly through to the bathroom where he fumbled for the light. The harsh glare of the 100-watt bulb caused him to keep his eyes tightly shut for a few moments until his pupils recovered. Eventually his eyes adjusted and he stepped through the door. He leaned across the sink to regard himself in the mirror.

It was not a pretty sight. If his eyes were any more cracked, he would require Super Glue to keep them together. His complexion bore all the red, blotchy indications of too much booze fuelled by too little food. His hair hurt.

It's hardly fair, he thought, that hair should actually be capable of inflicting pain. Where's the sense in that? You may as well make skin painful if we're going to be spiteful about it.

The dull ache all over his body indicated that, yes, his skin did indeed have the ability to supply agony should any other organ be unable to fulfil its quota. The human body understands self-harm to mean the inflicting of unnecessary pain on its occupier, not the other way around.

Tohon gaped his jaw and looked at his yellowing teeth. In many ways he was beginning to look more and more like his grandfather shortly before they had cut off his legs in order to "save" him from cancer. He died a week later but at least they had been able to save a bit on the size of the coffin.

A deep and familiar pain yawned in the middle of his head as his headache woke up. The headache stretched a few limbs and briefly jogged around his brain, causing Tohon to wince once or twice and wonder if he was actually going to have a stroke and die this time. But eventually, the headache settled down and just announced its presence occasionally with a few well-timed thumps on the floor of his skull as Tohon bent over to retrieve a few errant socks from the floor that had begun making a new life for themselves round the back of the sink pedestal.

Pain, bright lights, a feeling of deep unhappiness . . .

Ah, thought Tohon, glumly. It's morning.

2

Boater ducked behind some bins. They were large and cylindrical like the kind found in schools or hospitals and, thank God, in the occasional dark alleyway. In between two of them was a green chest bin with a roll-top lid. Naturally, it had been filled with so much rubbish that the lid was forced back to allow the waste to stretch hopelessly for the stars.

In the dark distance Boater could hear shoes scuttling across cobblestones and advancing rapidly through the maze of alleyways. He reflected that he was adequately disguised by the night and the bins to reach into his pocket and suck on a comforting chocolate.

He rolled the sweet around his mouth breathlessly as he thought about what to do next. The last twenty four hours had certainly been full. What with one thing and another, it was reasonable to conclude that desperately skulking through the grim night in fear for his life was a reasonable outcome to his rather action-cramped day. There are many large steps one should take to begin the day lost at sea and end it hiding in an alleyway behind industrial bins--and Boater had run through them all.

A hollow crash up the street followed by cries of alarm indicated that one of his pursuers had discovered the manhole from which Boater had removed the cover earlier in the chase, albeit they had discovered it a moment too late. It was probably the girl, he thought, judging by the screams.

A scrape of footwear and retreating footsteps told Boater that his second pursuer had gone to help their fallen colleague. This afforded him time to take in his surroundings. He was in an alleyway; well, no surprise there, the whole area was a string vest of alleys.

However, Boater knew his alleyway etiquette and it told him they should have an entrance and an exit. This one was clearly lacking.

“Bugger!” He mumbled through the chocolate. “A dead end.”

He dwelt on the unfortunate word, *dead* and decided to revise it to *cul-de-sac*, instead.

The alleyway was formed by a break in the faceless parade of shops out on the main street. Greasy black walls and small, pockmarked windows high up the sides denoting storage or a bathroom ran either side of him. Down such alleyways the detritus of the grace of man gathered, such as sad little condoms laying flat and flaccid on the ground, still tipped with the fruit of life; or a selection of teeth that had been clumsily removed from their rightful owner by the means of twelve pints of lager, a crazy argument about women, and a sock with a pool ball in it. Also, the rats looked fat, which was a good indicator of a healthy underworld.

Somewhere in the night ahead of him, dire cries of retribution were being voiced. Boater could feel his early advantage morphing into an imminent bruising unless he could think of a way out of this alley. Going back the way he came held little appeal, especially as it now promised an enraged and closing pursuer. So, he sucked on a second contemplative sweet and thought of how nature would cope.

Boater had once heard a story in which a desperate and exhausted fox, faced with the prospect of being ripped to pieces by an army of dogs, used its intelligence and sank its jaws into a nearby wasps nest and, ignoring the stings to its face, hurled it at the hounds who were quickly

introduced to a whole new world of angry, buzzing, pain. Boater always found that story to be very satisfying and probably symbolic of something—but he couldn't think of what.

His pursuer was closing in. Audible footsteps sent frantic signals down his spine and to his feet by way of his bowels. The call was to run, and if the feet didn't, the bowels would. But Boater knew better than to give in to instinct and began quickly to investigate his environment. The shorter, squatter, slide-lid bin looked the most promising to explore, as the two cylindrical bins were much too tall and would mean standing up and exposing his hiding place.

He began, cautiously, to excavate some of the bin's treasures, which meant gliding his hand into something globulous, watery, and with a stench like a sauna full of Frenchmen. It is often said that you need a strong stomach for such a task, but it is reckoned, at the Institute for People Who Study Such Things, that a weak sense of smell and imagination are paramount. Boater's sticky exploration revealed:

Pandora's Box Gift Number 1: A plastic doll with one arm missing. Boater snorted and threw it away.

Pandora's Box Gift Number 2: A dented, rusty biscuit tin which, to Boater's dismay, held no biscuits.

Pandora's Box Gift Number 3: A cracked, but largely intact, brass knuckle duster, glinting menacingly in the moonlight atop an empty packet of Jaffa Cakes.

Boater, not a religious man but certainly fluid in his beliefs, offered up a quick prayer of thanks to urban violence and under-funded policing. He picked up the brass knuckles and found them reassuringly solid. He gave a long sigh, took careful aim and threw the knuckles through the high little window opposite with all the force his ample frame could muster.

The noise of the smash startled Boater, who was already as jumpy as a kangaroo smuggling frogs. Shards of glass rained down into the alley, stapling unwary rats to the ground in a fatal embrace.

But the surprise of Boater and the rats paled in comparison to that of the occupant of the bathroom through which the brass projectile had crashed.

Mr. Singh, retailer of cigarettes, newspapers, frail birthday cards seemingly printed on toilet paper, and magazines of "special interest," was taking his nightly constitutional on the toilet and leafing idly through *Dim Men with Shiny Guns* magazine, when through his window flew a Bosto-Watcher No. 5, *Avenger* with reinforced alloy, Sheffield made, three-year guarantee, jaws-broken-or-some-of-your-money-eventually-back.

Mr. Singh had read an article about this classic piece of urban tooling in last month's *Lonely Men with Access to Weapons* magazine and just had the faculty of mind to recognise this street-fighting classic before the knuckles continued their arc into the toilet bowl and connected with his sensitive bits therein.

Mr. Singh's cheeks blew out and his face reddened, giving him the impression of manually trying to inflate a hovercraft. He dropped to the floor and sought for breath while blinking the tears from his eyes.

Thanks to the adrenaline-heavy blood pulsing through Boater's ears, the scream from the owner of the broken window was deafening. But he was not given time to contemplate anything further because, skidding around the entrance to the alley, obviously alerted by the noise, came one of his pursuers.

It was the man. From behind the safety of the bins Boater could make out his face. It wore all the signals of the seriously angry, coupled with the exasperation of exhaustion. However, vengeful as the man was, he was no fool. He knew Boater was cornered because the only objects in view were some stinking bins. The man's face broke into a jagged grin as he concluded the fat toad would certainly be hiding around them and proceeded, with authoritative

caution, into the mouth of the alley.

“I know you’re in here, fat boy. I can smell your fear.”

Boater blushed. He was bound to have a certain perfume. He was a big lad and had done a lot of running tonight.

“And when I get my hands on you,” continued the voice as it advanced, “I’m gonna beat you to within an inch of a chalk outline!”

Fear stilled the slightest movement from Boater’s body.

“I don’t like perverts,” said the man. “What did you think you were playing at, exposing yourself to my wife?” He started to remove the piled-up rubbish from around the bins and chucking it wildly over his shoulder.

“Stupid, dizzy cow! How many times do I have to tell her to fucking ignore door-to-door salesmen?”

Boater calculated the current rate of refuse removal would have him inside a hospital in five minutes and at the cemetery in ten. He closed his eyes.

Mr. Singh, however, had his eyes very much wide open and was observing with specific and bruised interest the deranged, red-faced drunk attacking his garbage bins. He stood in the entrance of the alleyway, his hastily grabbed dressing-gown slowly turning from cream to red as blood collected in his groin region. Mr. Singh slipped the knuckle dusters onto his hand and clenched experimentally, pleased with the feeling of added gravitas that he could employ in his argument with this unseemly fellow. He approached slowly from behind, his groin buzzing like a wasps nest.

“I’ll tell you what, fat boy,” chuckled the man as he all but exposed Boater’s motionless figure from his hiding place, “you don’t even know what pain *is* yet.”

From behind his tightly shut eyes, Boater could feel himself being exposed. Rubbish was falling all around him as the man tore into the filth. An undeniable breeze on his head and the feeling of space above him tingled his senses and electrified his bones in readiness for flight. He opened one cautious eye which bulged at the site of the shadowy image above him, the moonlight highlighting the outline of a grin. The eye snapped shut again.

“I think I may be a reliable pool of knowledge,” said an unexpected Asian accent.

Boater’s ears rang to the fanfare of a dull thud, a cracking noise and then the unmistakable sound of a body collapsing in a heap, such as can be heard outside nightclubs up and down the country.

Boater, battling down the urge to cry out with joy, carefully peeked over the edge of the bin just in time to watch his Asian angel of mercy walk, crab-like, out of the alley and back into his shop. After a period of a few minutes, Boater deemed it safe to crawl out from his foul-smelling hideaway and scramble to his feet. He brushed himself down, adjusted his clothing, patted his pockets for sweets and then strolled out of the alley after pausing, just briefly, to steal the prone man’s wallet.

6

Tohon looked mournfully at his glass. It still had over a half pint left inside it, but Boater was already at the bar ordering fresh drinks. It was late, he was drunk, and he was completely full.

There was perhaps a time when he could have drank for England and never have felt full. His friends used to say that when it came to beer, he had hollow legs. He must have. He was such a skinny little bastard where else could it go?

But a near lifetime of drinking had left Tohon with few friends and very nearly at total saturation point. These days, it seemed, he only had to have one, maybe two glasses before he was back to being hopelessly, embarrassingly drunk again, as if he was just topping-up the levels. He rubbed his red, blotchy skin with a hand and noted with bleak acceptance that having hollow legs were only of use to those who swam with sharks.

At various points in his life, Tohon had tried to pin the blame for his drinking on any number of things. First, there was his name—Tohon Sehse—which his alcoholic father, after spending another night face down in a gutter, had seen on a plastic rubbish bin and thought it sounded rather natty, little realising that it said *No hot ashes* upside down. But Tohon had grown to find it rather appropriate to his life; he being a refuse for waste and rubbish and having no fire in his belly about anything. So much so, in fact, that he dropped his real last name, Willis, from Tohon Sehse completely.

Then he tried to blame his appearance, which could best be described as the long, sausage-type men that children often roll out of clay. The fact that he wasn't a strapping, devilishly chiselled hunk with perfect teeth and a penis you could bend iron on was a constant irritation.

And then he just blamed the rest of the whole world for being a terrible disappointment and populated by feckless, duplicitous bandits who'd rip your throat out as soon as look at you. Tohon liked to numb himself to the torture of being alive and having to deal with people through a general anaesthetic of booze. Most people looked better when viewed from the bottom of a glass, with the obvious exception of the French.

But these days Tohon felt he was being washed out to sea on a current of alcohol and beginning to lose sight of land only to wonder, belatedly, if it was too late to try and swim back.

Eventually Boater arrived back at the table carrying fresh supplies. He set them down on the sticky surface.

"Looks like there could be a lock-in tonight."

Tohon groaned inwardly. "Great."

Boater took another appraising look at his friend. Crow lines around the eyes and bulging, purple veins on the face added years to a man who was still in his twenties. It was clear that he was crumbling under a heavy burden.

"Look, Tohon," he began, "you can tell me to get lost if you want, but it's clear to me that something is on your mind. Perhaps you would feel better getting it off your chest?" Boater looked momentarily puzzled at his own mixed metaphor.

Tohon stared at his drink and said nothing.

Then Boater remembered.

“How’s that lady of yours? Mary, isn’t it? Last time I saw you together, oh, it must’ve been at that leaving do for that twat you work with? I.T. guy. Funny accent. Lived in a fantasy world of quite scary proportions. Always doing battle with Orks and Elves on the Internet.”

“Martin Brune.”

“Well? You and the young lady seemed to be quite the item, as I recall. Always holding hands and such like,” averred Boater who could feel himself tip-toeing across unfamiliar territory, women being an affliction that mostly happened to other people in his happy experience. Boater watched him closely. “Still seeing her, then?”

Tohon, in an effort to get the conversation over with, brought Boater up to speed.

“Yeah, well, it was all going fine until one day she said she was pregnant.”

Boater, shocked, jettisoned beer through his nose and back into the glass. Some boorish-looking apes in a corner snorted their amusement but Boater ignored them. Instead, he wiped his chin on his sleeve and carefully placed his glass down on the table.

“Pregnant, eh? Well, that is good news. Isn’t it?” The question creaked in the air like a weathercock.

Tohon cleared the back of his throat, ran his skeletal hand through his limp hair and unconsciously wiped it on his jeans. He allowed a sneer to worm across his face, which gave him the expression of a villainous twig.

“I fucking hate kids, me.”

Ah, thought Boater. “But they are such charming little devils, surely?” he said, waving an arm expansively. Boater’s understanding of children was limited to the sticky oiks his sister used to foist onto him whenever she fancied a night out, which was quite frequently, as he recalled. They were a chaotic storm of ripped wallpaper and damaged ornaments fuelled entirely on jam sponge and fizzy green pop. However, he felt obliged to unearth some good in them for the sake of rational argument if nothing else. “I seem to remember my parents having children. Jolly good thing, too, I say. Don’t know where I’d be today without my parents.”

“It’s not that I’ve got anything against children . . . in *principle*,” agreed Tohon. “I can see that they would be handy for certain tasks such as, oh, say lying next to doors to exclude draughts, or perhaps somewhere to store pineapples. But I have no need for any of those functions around my home, thank you so very much. It would detract from the in-built air of degradation I have carefully managed to cultivate within its walls.” Tohon gulped heavily at his pint, the formulation and delivery of a whole paragraph having left him temporarily breathless.

Boater, having given up trying to work out what Tohon had meant by “somewhere to store pineapples,” began to expand upon his theory that kids weren’t all bad.

“It seems to me,” he began whilst lighting a fat cigar and puffing out a blue fog like a highly panicked squid, “that her being pregnant could be a good thing for you. You may find that seeing the world as a responsibility instead of a chore might just make you less unhappy. Who knows? You might even like being a dad. Be good at it, even! You might bring into the world the saviour of all mankind.” Boater beamed at his friend but he could see that being the father of the saviour of the world held little appeal. He tried more appropriate ground. “Think how useful he or she would be getting drugs for you from the playgrounds. Everyone knows it’s only quality gear you get in the playgrounds.”

“Well, that’s true.” Tohon rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

“What does Mary think? Pleased, is she?”

Tohon’s face purpled still further and became as uptight as a gorilla in a lift.

“She didn’t want to be pregnant, either. She always said that if ever she wanted something parasitically growing off her flesh from the inside she’d have a tape worm fitted.” Tohon was getting loud and attracting attention from the goons, but he was warming to his theme and couldn’t give a toss about anyone else. “Oh yes,” he began, and it was clear the sarcasm was heavy, “she could indeed have gone and done the decent thing by getting down to one of Mr. Gargoyle’s ‘Departure Lounges,’ for a quick scalpel ‘n stitch job, thereby putting this

fucking kid out of our misery, but she didn't. She fucking didn't! And do you know why?"

Boater gestured that, alas, he did not. Everyone knew of Gargoyle's abortion clinics. It was only recently that the full horror of what he intended to do with the waste matter had come to light.

"She didn't have an abortion because she knows I hate kids! Which is exactly why she had it! Just to piss me off. Can you believe that, eh?" He sat back in his chair looking exasperated.

Boater indicated that, indeed, he was aghast.

"I mean, Jesus! Someone would actually go through nine months, or in her case nearer ten months, of enormous physical pain—or so they always tell us—and the near destruction of what womanly physique they once possessed just to piss off a bloke who may have accidentally have slept with her two sisters is completely beyond belief." He offered a put upon expression to the world but no-one seemed to care.

Boater, feeling that things were getting a little lost in translation, tried to dot a few I's and cross a few T's. "You slept with her two sisters?"

"Well, yes. Sort of," Tohon admitted begrudgingly. "Accidentally," he added by way of mitigation.

"Accidentally," mused Boater and there was no note of question in the word. It was as if Boater, finding the word alien, was trying it on for size and it seemed a couple of sizes too small to fit with the sentence: I slept with her two sisters.

"Yes, well, they all look very similar and I had had rather a lot to drink that night. It was a pretty wild party but look, we're getting off the point, here," Tohon looked annoyed at the diversion and was determined to pin the blame fairly and squarely on the shoulders of someone else. "She knows that she can bleed every last penny out of me under the government's Parental Irresponsibility Law if she names me on the papers as the father. Christ! The PIL! What have I done to deserve that, eh?"

Boater winced in sympathy. The PIL was feared by all men. It seemed to punish harshly those unfortunate enough to find themselves about to be a father, regardless of how much say that had in the original conception.

"You remember that guy last year?" Tohon continued. "From Wales? That girlfriend of his got pregnant and named him on the papers as the father and the Ministry of Sin took every last thing he owned, sold his house, sold his car, sold property on a web site to some scavengers of misfortune and ordered that he had to remain employed until the age of 93 while paying 30% of all his future earnings to her, or risk two years in the medical experiment labs."

The Medical Experiment Laboratories were created in the wake of the collapse of support for testing dangerous new science on animals. It was generally felt that dripping poison into the eyes of fluffy bunnies to see if it would hurt, or slamming the testicles of monkeys in a fridge door and observing the responses, was a sin. Whereas getting criminals to have half their brain removed to see if electronic stimulus can still allow them to function normally was only what the low-down, no-good scumbags deserved. It was noted, at the Institute for People Who Study Such Things, that this was another poignant example of the bizarre logic that governs most humans. No other creature on earth would consider the wellbeing of a different animal as in some way more important than their own. Yet humans were happy to destroy other humans that might poke a thermometer up the backside of a cute and furry animal under some massively ill-judged and hypocritical reason of protecting the animal's human-ascribed "rights." The Institute concluded that this behaviour can be best categorised under *Fucking Mental*.

"I can't afford all that!" Tohon wailed as he swayed unsteadily on his chair. He waved his drink about as if he were trying to swat a fly, getting most of it on his jeans. "How could I hold a job down? I can't even hold down my own puke. And two years in the medical experiment laboratories up on Wastemoor? No way, man!" He attempted to slam his glass on the table but only caught the edge. A large wave of beer sloshed onto the floor. Tohon hit the table on the

second attempt.

“I know dudes who went in there just as normal as you and me, but when they came out, they took to wearing suits made by hand, worrying about what kind of washing machine was the most ecological and devoting their chinless lives to the appreciation of rugby-football and all its toffee-nosed, hooray-henry followers.” Tohon nodded and pointed to his nose conspiratorially but looked like he was trying to dislodge a peanut. He was really quite loud now and drawing a lot of attention. He caught the eye of one goon and the sheer force of his own anger caused the goon to look away. But Boater recognised the signs. Trouble was brewing unless he could calm his friend down.

Tohon sat and thought about rugby some more. “Wankers,” he concluded and spat on the floor.

Boater could see that he had a point. On his many travels through life, Boater had been to a few of the supposed “better” schools, which took sport to be the defining characteristic in a boy and rugby in particular was responsible for being the measure of men. It was a sad fact that most of the people who run world affairs today are the sort of chaps who have played rugby, or would have done if they hadn’t been born to be a fascist dictator of some small, hot, African country.

“So, you’ll have to pay, then,” said Boater, trying to sound comforting about it.

“Mary knows I could never afford it, even though it would please her enormously to see me try,” said Tohon, breathing more easily now. “No, she has asked for a lot of money up front for her to put me down as an Act of God.”

Boater considered this. He knew Acts of God were very common now. Along with the governing theocracy came the usual batch of political scandals, missing money, and sudden offspring from surprised secretaries. Obviously, a government elected for high moral standards as the messengers of God’s Word couldn’t be seen to be sleazy sexpot despots, so any missing monies were labelled “Offerings to God,” political scandals were “Tests of Faith,” and apparent virgin births were “Acts of God.” These “miracles” were so rife that the public could get away with putting Act of God on the birth certificate because the government would never check-up in-case it turned out to be one of theirs.

“How much is she asking for?”

Tohon looked him square in the eye with a mixture of exhaustion and nausea. The drinks were beginning to boil in his stomach where there should have been food to help absorb it. The acid chemicals burnt a hole in his gut wall and the gas was looking at all avenues of exit.

“£260,000,” he said. Somehow, he felt better now that Boater knew. It wouldn’t last, of course. It was his problem and would remain so but, for just this moment at least, he felt ever so slightly relieved.

Boater, well experienced with sudden demands for large amounts of money, took the news in his stride. His only indication of having heard was a slight purpling of the ears.

“I can see how that would depress a chap,” he soothed. “But surely there are ways of getting the money. A loan perhaps?”

Tohon gave his friend an odd look.

“Do *you* have £260,000 to lend me?”

Boater looked hurt by the question. “If I had £260,000, my friend, I wouldn’t currently be sat in underpants that are only held together by the colony of lice that inhabit them. I wouldn’t, I suspect, be living in a flat above a brothel where the only dry cleaning I get done is when the police invade the place below with tear gas. I wouldn’t, I expect—”

“Yes, yes, I get the picture,” interrupted a gloomy Tohon. For just one minute he’d entertained the possibility that his friend could have been a hitherto unknown millionaire, until reality crept up on his shoulder and pissed down his neck. Again.

Boater took in the unhappy vision before him and concluded that he must help his friend. After all, there might be something in it for him. “However, we could seek to come by

£260,000. You know, if we were lucky, I mean.”

Tohon looked to consider this.

“You mean, keep any eye out for stray wallets? Dropped change? That sort of thing?”

“Well, obviously not quite that lucky. Though, by some coincidence I do happen to have on me just the very thing.” Boater gave a smug little grin and the glint in his eye could have cut diamonds.

He rummaged in his breast pocket, and after some false starts involving an avalanche of chocolate balls and some upset pens, he unearthed the liberated wallet from his pursuer in the alley. It was dark and leathery but the surface felt strangely expensive. Snake, perhaps. It had a deep green shine that looked oily. Though slim, it fruited with forbidden money and papers. Opening it revealed a faded photograph of some troglodyte family at play on a beach.

They placed the open wallet on the table and the sticky fluids ingrained in the wood sucked noisily at the leather and held it flat.

Tohon was intrigued and began to poke about in it straight away.

“Look at all this money! Could be a couple of hundred here. Enough for a pizza and a taxi home, anyway.”

Boater peered inside and took some papers at random from out of the folds.

“Blimey!” continued Tohon, “he’s got a membership to the England Football Supporters Club! The lucky bastard.”

Watching England at football these days was no bad thing. England had the world copyright on cloning and this had led to some startling transformations in the way football clubs would go about transfers of players. Instead of selling your star player to a foreign club for loads and loads of money but ultimately losing their world-beating services, it was decided it would be better to clone your star player and sell him for loads and loads of money and keep the original. With advances in accelerated ageing (but not learning, after all, how much does a footballer need to know?) it meant the English national team was filled with about three players covering eleven positions. And they were good. Unfortunately, due to rapid mortality of clones, it did mean that players tended to die quite quickly, sometimes during games, but that was fine because the next one was warming up on the touchline and the substitute’s bench was full of test-tubes and syringes.

“Where did you get this?”

Boater contrived to look contrite.

“Let’s just say I shall not seek to return it.”

Once he had pocketed the money and the bits of change that he could see, Tohon quickly grew bored of the wallet. He was becoming acutely aware of the continual alert coming from his stomach reminding him that alcohol is a poison. The tired old question of finding something to eat was looming unavoidably in the immediate future. Tohon regarded food like others regarded oxygen, it all tasted the same to him, but he was dimly aware that without it he would probably die.

Boater, however, was completely engrossed in one of the pieces of paper he had taken and had switched off from the conversation. Occasional raised eyebrows and high-pitched gasps indicated he was looking at a note of some note.

Remember. 30th Sept 2008, the release date for “Ordinary World”

www.ll-publications.com