

Ding Dong Dell

Chapter 1

Wendell Gumshoe wasn't the smartest man alive but he wasn't as dumb as his name would suggest. Sure he was a little odd and probably had more than his fair share of peculiarities but, deep down, right down there in the bowels of it all, don't we all. "Dell, being different doesn't mean you're stupid," his mother had repeatedly told him as a child. Back then he didn't understand what she meant by this but as he got older and wiser it all became clear. Now, as a slim, slightly wiry but mostly weedy, twenty-eight year old he knew he was different, but, just as his mother's faith promised, he also knew he was far from stupid.

He had visions, that's all, visions. They weren't overly debilitating but they were frequent enough and strange enough to be distracting. However, he always did his best to conceal them. In the past it hadn't paid to draw attention to them.

When he was a child these visions were fun and, as all children do, he adapted. As he grew, he put his visions down to déjà vu but this was a poor solution and reluctantly, now as a grown adult he knew it was definitely something else and it worried him deeply. There was a slowly increasing sense of menace in these visions, a black foreboding, and, at times, it left his guts hollow and nervous. Long since seen as slightly odd and complicated, even at work, he was a loner. There was the usual bunch of work colleagues and sometimes friends but he had no real, honest to goodness, friend. His mother had died young so now he was left on his own to deal with his problem and although it took a lot of his time he was relatively happy with his methods. He lived the simple life, alone in a small meagre flat within easy walking distance from the postal sorting office where he worked as a letter sorter. Sometimes, at work he had a vision but he had learnt by now it wasn't looked kindly upon, so he kept them to himself.

These visions could happen at anytime and anywhere. They could take any form, sight, sound, any one of the senses or, stranger still, any combination of them. Many a time he would be walking home alone and suddenly, for no explainable reason and even though he lived miles inland, he would suddenly smell and hear the sea, sometimes he even felt the gentle sea breeze play eerily across his cheek. Occasionally he would hear words or even sentences repeated in his head over and over again. These visions would always be in a man's voice, growling, grumbling and low, never his own. Sometimes food would not taste like it should, or even odder, everyday foods taste like nothing he had ever experienced. All his visions varied in duration and strength, sometimes sticking with him for days, others gone in a flash. But, over time, he had warily become more and more aware that these visions

weren't random, they were tied together by something, and there was some kind of common denominator at play.

Also, just recently he had become aware of another odd thing. Although this probably had been happening for some time, he could vaguely remember it happening in the past, he just didn't have the courage to accept it. Now, once he had decided to meet this oddity face on it had become obvious. For as long as he could remember he always felt his reflection wasn't really his own. Yes, from head to toe, it looked exactly like him and moved when he moved, it's just he had this clammy feeling that his reflection was not just looking back from the mirror; the reflection was looking back directly and specifically, at him. When looking in a mirror, if he turned his head slowly to the side and gradually averted his eyes from the reflection, the reflection slowly did the same. But when he quickly returned his gaze back to the mirror he felt the reflection lock eyes just a fraction of a second before he did. It was just that split second quicker, just that tiny fraction faster. It was totally unnerving. When walking, just occasionally, he caught his reflection staring at him from a shop window or a shiny surface as he passed. Just for a second, a blink, nothing more. There was not enough evidence to stop and stare, not enough evidence to cry out and point, but there was a flicker, a glimpse.

So, one day, on his way home from work he had a strong vision. He got completely distracted, lost his way and found himself at the end of a small narrow alley. It was totally new to him and the feeling he got wasn't surprise, it was more a cautious tightening, a silent footstep. In front of him was a small shop, "Ding Dong" the sign above the door said and Dell somehow knew he would be entering it. The door pushed easily and, once inside he saw a thin ancient Chinese man standing behind a completely cluttered counter. He smiled vaguely and the man smiled back. Dell's legs compelled him to explore and dutifully, the rest of him followed. The whole shop was cluttered with all manner of stuff, but off to one side and through a bewildering maze of stands and curtains stood a full sized mirror in an elaborate frame. Dell's reflection was waiting and as Dell stood just in front of the mirror, without moving one iota, the reflection silently beckoned. Somehow Dell knew exactly what to do and as he slowly pushed his hand into the mirror he felt himself and the reflection begin to meld and become one entity. It felt powerful, strong and very very dangerous.

Chapter 2

'Well,' he thought', how dangerous could it be? Really? Alice wasn't in any great danger in Lewis Carroll's 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland', or in 'Through the Looking Glass' – yes, there were strange creatures perhaps, but not dangerous, well until you got to the poem about the slaying of the Jabberwock, but this was a nonsense poem in a nonsense story.'

There wouldn't be anything dangerous for Dell. Would there?

Dell decided just a peek would not cause too much trouble.

His mind went into overdrive conjuring up fantasy stories from his childhood about people who had had similar experiences.

CS Lewis's 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' wasn't dangerous. Sure there were talking animals, especially a lion, but he was magnanimous and killed the White Witch. And they all lived happily ever after.

But what if there was no compassionate saviour for Dell once he passed to the other side? Would he ever get back to his safe postal authority job, what if he was stuck there FOR EVER?

'Anyway, nothing ventured, nothing gained', said Dell to himself, 'let's give it a go. Even Charlie won out over the Umpalumpa's in the Chocolate Factory, and Dorothy dispatched the Wicked Witch of the West before she met the horrible Wizard of Oz, and then he turned out to be completely harmless at the end.

'There's also Gulliver who in his travels met giants and midgets, and came out triumphant. And even, to be completely ridiculous, Dr Seuss's 'Horton Hears a Who' had a happy outcome, where Horton the elephant saves the Who's who just happened to live in flower heads.'

But then a reality thought: 'Dell, take this slowly', he told himself, 'this could be dangerous, it's not just a fantasy, it's real', but he kept on going, passing his whole body through.

Dell looked back to see where the back of the mirror was, and all he could see was brilliance. Green, green and more green, but no mirror.

Turning slowly around, there was more green, and only green.

Gradually he began to discern shapes. The lush pasture in which he was standing contained cows, dairy cows. There was a fence behind them. But still no mirror back.

Sounds came to him. Chirping of birds. The sound of church bells in the distance.

Slowly a village began to materialise in the distance.

This would make some sort of sense he thought. Cows here, a village there.

It reminded him somewhat of the children's TV series, 'Prehistoric Park', in which the present day park had a time portal which allowed the capture of dinosaurs to be brought back for exhibition.

Dell was overcome by everything being so brightly coloured and exceptionally well defined.

'It must be like being on LSD' he thought.

Dell moved slowly towards where he thought was a gate in the fence, given that there was a change in the spacing of the fence posts.

It was a good guess, and the gate itself was easy to open. He found himself on a bitumen road so turned towards the village.

But there were people coming towards him. Was this a welcoming committee? Were they going to arrest him? Perhaps there was something worse in store for the interloper. Did the ringing church bell mean something ominous?

Then he could hear singing. A nursery rhyme. It sounded like 'Ding Dong Dell'. But why?

Chapter 3

Dell's confusion overcame him. The scene before him began to swim and distort, as though he was seeing through tear filled eyes; tears of frustration or tears of fear? He wasn't sure which. The blurring became all encompassing and the village disappeared from his distorted vision, though the bell and the voices remained. In fact they became clearer with passing seconds. Suddenly he doubled over and vomited lunch at his feet, then breakfast, and then dinner, then nothing. He felt a hand on his shoulder and as he straightened himself he realised his eyesight was clear again and he was looking into the old mirror at a reflection of himself and his two companions: he; looking rather worse for wear, the Chinese shop owner; looking a little pissed off and Yani.

Wait! What the fuck! His still slightly addled brain struggled with the knowledge that this rather tall, cycloptic humanoid was recognised by him and judging by the look in its captivatingly blue eye, it knew him. How did he know that this was Yani, head priest and Mage of the outer colony of Skew? Why wasn't he scared? Why was the Chinese guy more pissed off with *him*, than he was about standing next to a six foot tall Cyclops? His vision blurred again and this time he passed completely into unconsciousness.

*"How now, Horatio? you tremble and look pale.
Is not this something more than fantasy?"*

The line from Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' sounded in his head as he slowly surfaced from his unconscious peace. At least there was no bell to be heard, so maybe the rest of the pre-unconscious business was all in his mind. He slowly opened his eyes and immediately knew it was no fantasy. Yani stood with his back to him, leaning over a bench upon which were placed a number of jars, a large book (open to about the middle), a sword and a cat which turned to look at him and made a rather alarming sound: the sound of a distant church-bell. Across the table, the Chinese guy took his concentration away from the bench-top and locked eyes with Dell.

'I'm not cleaning that mess up in the front room kid. So once you get your bearings grab a mop and bucket and start cleaning'. He then muttered something that sounded like 'pathetic creature', to Dell.

Yani straightened and spoke, 'Take no notice Dell. Suma knows that you have far more important work than house-cleaning'. He turned slightly and brought his gaze to bear upon the Chinese guy, who seemed to slump with resignation and shuffle away from the table.

As Yani continued to tell Dell that the time had come for him to prepare for the expected troubles of the near future, he suddenly realised that he also knew Yani's voice. It was the voice that had accompanied most of his visions over the years.

‘It’s been you, hasn’t it? In the mirrors, all my life, watching me?’

Yani turned and faced him. ‘Not always me, but yes, you have been watched since your birth. Normally your mother would have revealed everything to you when you reached puberty, however her unforeseen and untimely death left you uninitiated as an adult’.

Yani continued to explain how he, Dell, was one of 144,000 people, chosen to facilitate the integration of both worlds after the predicted collision of the two ‘time realities’.

The inhabitants of Yani’s reality have always been aware that they share a planet with another entirely different race of beings. They are also aware that all but a few of the other race know of *their* existence. This is good. Dell’s *earth and timeline* is exactly the same as Yani’s but there the similarities ended. Yani’s race is only one of the humanoid species to occupy his world. There is the peaceful and graceful Sepote - most of Earth’s politicians come from this race; the short, muscular people of the mountains known as Trolls - excellent construction workers and producers of some of the most spectacular structures to grace the planet and lastly, the Lupine. The Lupine can do just about anything that the other races can do, only faster. They are not huge people, standing around 180 cm, but they have an aura of menace, not helped by their long unruly hair, golden eyes and frighteningly large canine teeth. They are of course carnivorous and have been known to dine on the odd one or two Sepote. A truce was arranged with them around a decade ago and the killings have ceased, to everyone’s knowledge. The Lupine does have representation in parliament, but the majority of them live outside of the cities as farmers.

It is this species that Dell’s world will have to prepare for the most. The Lupine is expansionist by nature and will not take kindly to his land being co-occupied by another, seemingly weaker species – Dell’s people. It is for this perceived confrontation that Yani’s people are grooming as many of the alternate earth’s people as possible and preparing them for all eventualities.

There is of course the possibility that this melding of times may come without the loss of life, or the loss of ‘a way of life’, but that is a naive expectation when considering the attitudes of the Lupine and the somewhat inflexible attitudes of Dell’s race, who cannot even live peacefully together with their own brothers and sisters. It will be an interesting time and the preparations are only now just beginning in earnest.

Chapter 4

Yani slapped the table with palm of his hand and rose, towering well above the surprised form of Dell. 'Come, human,' he bellowed, and Dell rose instantly and followed him out into the alley.

Night was falling, and the narrow street was full of shadows that danced between expiring rays of sunlight. Yani marched ahead while Dell shuffled behind, trying to keep up with the long steps of this strange Mage. Where was he taking him with such determination? Dell didn't know, but he was sure it wasn't back home.

Though Yani's commanding presence gave a sense of security, Dell found his skin crawling with trepidation. He had changed. He'd been made aware of other realms, other realities and a purposeful future that blew his mind. How he wished it was just a silly fantasy, but it wasn't. He shivered. They were being watched, he was sure of it.

He looked above and was certain he saw movement along the rooftops. Fast movement. A shingle skittered onto the cobblestones at their feet and Dell let out a yelp. Yani peered skyward, his one eye scanning the tops of the stone buildings huddled together like fearful giants. He quickly glanced over his shoulder at Dell and then continued on, dragging Dell along by the shirtsleeve.

They rounded a corner and almost collided with a squat, muscular man in overalls, who stumbled to a clanging halt before them. He was festooned with all manner of tools that swung from a harness strapped across his chest and a belt at his waist. 'High Priest!' he cried, falling to one knee.

'Troll,' Yani exclaimed bending to lift him to his feet. 'What brings you here to this earth?'

"I have been sent from Skew on a mission.'

'A mission?' Yani's lone blue eye darkened, and a frown furrowed his brow.

'One has preceded you here to this town,' he said with foreboding. Peering around Yani's long legs at the scrawny creature hiding opened mouthed behind, he asked, 'Is that your chosen one?'

Yani nodded and drew Dell forward.

The troll nodded, 'Then that is what it has come for.'

'It?,' Yani and Dell cried in unison, though the smaller one's voice was a whole two octaves higher than the other.

The troll didn't have time to answer for an eerie howl echoed from the shadows above. Instantly uncoiling a rope and grappling hook from his belt he fastened the end to his harness and threw the hook high. When it found purchase, he scampered the brick wall to the rooftop at lightening speed and disappeared.

Dell looked up into the darkness, seeing nothing but hearing sounds so horrific that he welcomed the strong arm that drew him close to Yani's side.

Streetlights flickered on in time to catch the sight of the troll's body as it hurtled down to street level. The shredded remains fell at their feet with a moist thump and splattered them with blood and gore.

'A Lupine,' Yani wheezed and tilted back his head.

Dell followed his gaze and both caught sight of a figure perched on the buildings edge. Its long hair swayed wildly in the evening breeze and its eyes glimmered like pools of fire in the moonlight.

'You're next!' it shouted from between glistening canine teeth, long and sharp as knives.

Dell knew he was talking about him and his stomach lurched.

'Don't be so sure about that, you spawn of hell,' Yani yelled, raising a fist to the sky.

Then Yani quickly turned, his one eye staring directly into Dell's two, with a focus so intense that Dell could easily see his own startled reflection in its depth.

He grew faint. His limbs trembled and bile rose in his throat. Then a burning pain shot up his spine and exploded inside his skull. Something even stranger than what he'd witnessed so far was happening to him. He felt his spirit leave him and then suddenly return and then leave again. He watched from outside himself as his body morphed into a being as muscular as the troll but as tall as Yani. When his spirit and body became one again, he found that his mind had also evolved, as if it had taken on the wisdom of the universe. He felt truly super human.

'You are ready,' Yani said, grasping Dell's hand in his.

Chapter 5

“What the hell did you do to me?” rumbled Dell in his new voice. The wisdom of the universe coursing through his brain did not seem to know the answer to that particular question. Yani beamed at him nervously.

“You are The One!” he said, “You have Transformed!”

“Evidently.” Rumbled Dell, harassed, “Not saying I object to being a Warrior God at all, but how the hell did you *do* that?!”

“I didn’t,” said Yani, blinking his eye in confusion, “You Transformed. I was just looking to see that you were not alarmed by the Lupine, when you Transformed before my very eye. I have been truly honoured by the gift of you, My Lord. Please accept my humble apologies for not –“

“Oh shut up,” said Dell, discovering fast that as a Warrior God he had very little patience. “Whose side am I on?”

Yani did the single-eye blink again.

“My Lord?”

“Whose side am I on? No wait. Why am I here. No... *how* am I... Dammit I need to *punch* something!”

Dell slammed his now immense fist into the stone wall of the building. Apparently Warrior-Godliness came with a side serve of intermittent rage.

Also skirts. Dell looked down at himself. He seemed to be wearing combat boots, a Scottish kilt, part of a medieval breastplate, and a viking shield on his back. Also a belt, stuffed with what he knew to be an assortment of extremely alarming Japanese knives, and a few miniaturised nuclear warheads. Dell grinned. Probably *won’t* be using those...

“Right,” said Dell, dusting chunks of stone and mortar off his knuckles, “Where were we going? No, don’t tell me, I’ve had enough of your condescending ‘high priest of the outer colony’ garbage. You Cyclops types are all the same.”

Yani blanched at this, and Dell felt smug. Yani, whispering in his ear all his life, Yani, making demands... if only he’d known that Yani was just an ordinary Cyclops with an obsessive desire to be important and respected. And also that he himself was going to turn out to be a warrior god. Not bad for a weedy twenty-eight year old from the suburbs. Dell flexed his muscles experimentally and took off striding down the street. Alice never got to do cool shit like this.

“Hurry up,” he bellowed over his shoulder at Yani, who was still standing beside the fist shaped hole in the wall, looking stunned. “Got to find that damn cat.”

“The cat?”

“Warrior God here, Mage Yani, don’t play dumb; of course the cat.”

The cat in question, the cat with the bell-chime miaow, was motley grey with a tail like a moth-eaten feather duster. Dell was not at all surprised to find it a few streets away, sitting on the temple steps, one leg in the air grooming. When it saw him, it bell-chimed at him and stalked off up the steps into the temple.

“It’s just a cat, My Lord,” said Yani, eyeing the temple with misgiving.

Dell gave a booming chuckle.

“It’s never just a cat, Mage. Did they teach you nothing in High Priest school?”

“Well, there isn’t actually a school for- oh. It was a joke, My Lord?”

Dell chuckled again.

“I know all about you Yani Mage, Yani High Priest. And I know that you know about cats. And I know,” he said, casting what he hoped was a penetrating stare at Yani, “That you like to pretend that you don’t know about cats.”

Dell turned and ducked through the doorway to the temple. It was one of the major earth religions, he wasn’t too bothered which one. One of the ones with flowers and draperies and an altar, and quite a lot of cushions in piles against the wall. The cat was sitting on the altar, finishing off its leg grooming routine. It bell-chimed again, stood, stretched and languidly leapt up into mid-air and vanished.

Dell grinned.

“Come on Yani,” he grabbed Yani’s hand and lunged at the spot mid-air where the cat had disappeared.

Plunged once more into the strange greenness, Dell found himself grinning again at his own ignorance as a human. He had always been a Warrior God, lying dormant, waiting to be called to full power. It explained a lot. The inability to make friends, the inability to keep a decent job... even the way his mind worked. Alice in Wonderland, Gulliver’s Travels, The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe... how stupid of him not to have recognised the Wood Between The Worlds...

The green space with the cows and the village swung into sharp focus. They were on the other side of the village to where Dell had come through before, and the cat was slinking off before them.

“It’s probably just as well you interfered and pulled me out of here earlier,” said Dell, “If I’d Transformed here, who knows what they might have talked me into before I got the ‘wisdom’ sorted out,”

“I beg your pardon?”

Dell tapped his head and winked. There was something pleasing about winking at a Cyclops. Especially the Cyclops that had made him think he was slightly mad for twenty eight years.

“Wisdom of the universe, my Mage, wisdom of the universe. I know why Suma nicked off, grumpy old bugger.”

“Er...”

“Bet he wishes he’d never taught you the cat thing, hey,”

“But I-“

“Stuffed up big time though, didn’t you,”

“What? I don’t-“

Dell slapped Yani on the back

“Don’t worry, Mage, it was bound to happen. Question is, how many more of us did you pick by accident,”

“*What?*” Yani’s low voice rose to a squeak.

“Come on Yani, use the little grey cells. High Priests trying to make contact. Who do High Priests try to contact? Usually a deity. Am I right, or am I right? What’s the betting your little friends have accidentally called on other Gods. Earth has quite a few. But you’d know all about that,”

“What? I – well- which one are you?”

“Hard to say,” said Dell, “Not sure if I’m a *specific* warrior god, you know, Mars or Thor or something, or whether I’m *all* warrior Gods,” he grinned again, “Wisdom of the universe didn’t cover that. Or maybe I just haven’t remembered that bit yet. Either way, you and your pals are definitely in the shit,”

They were getting closer to the village, and people of various sorts were coming out to greet them again. Some cycloptic, some troll, the odd Sepote...

Dell flung around and grabbed the lupine that had snuck through behind them by the neck. Its eyes popped and it gnashed its bloody teeth at him.

“Thank you,” he said, as he ripped its head off and dumped it on the emerald grass, “I was just feeling another surge of bloodlust coming on. Convenient.”

This time it was Yani's turn to throw up.

"Yani, what's going on?" a cycloptic lady in a school-receptionist type outfit and sensible heels hurried over.

"Warrior God," said Dell, grinning, "And you people have got a lot to answer for, doing all this to the Wood Between- Hey! Love Goddess, over here,"

"My name is Sarah," said the ridiculously curvaceous woman who had just materialised beside a nonchalant cow. She had a sulky looking troll by the scruff of its neck, and half dropped half threw it on the grass beside the Lupine body. She wiped her henna-patterned hands on the floaty, semi-transparent purple skirt that hung low on her hips, and looked about her disapprovingly. The facial expression was at odds with the gold half-corset and the abundance of body glitter.

"You would not *believe* what these people have been up to," she said. "You do realise don't you, that they collapsed our world into earth? The bastards. No wonder I ended up in the loony bin."

"Nymphromania?"

"Don't be ridiculous," she snapped, "Next you'll be telling me you were in prison for assault. You *know* when they collapsed us in we fell into our human counterparts."

"Your reflections, yes," said Yani, wiping his mouth on his sleeve, "Your alter-egos, if you like. But we had no idea you could reverse the process- how *did* you by the way?"

"You can never keep Gods down for long," said Sarah, "Just takes a trigger. All that talking, talking talking in our ears, we were bound to revert at some point. This idiot," she pointed at the sulky troll who was still sitting on the emerald grass as though waiting for permission to stand, "This idiot tried to chat up a human in the street. Perverted freak,"

Dell rolled his eyes and clapped his hands in discovery.

"Right of course. I didn't realise. The Lupine killed a troll in front of me- that would have to have been my trigger... damn. This lot really are stupid."

"Hey," said Yani, "You lot didn't even know you'd been collapsed in, how stupid are you?"

"Wrong question," said Sarah, flicking her tawny tresses over one perfect shoulder, "You should be asking yourself, how powerful are Gods? And how pissed off are they? And probably also, how can I best exert myself to do their bidding?"

"I'm Dell, by the way," said Dell, eyeing her swaying feminine form with interest,

“Pleased to meet you,” said Sarah, her voice suddenly velvety. Dell found himself grinning again. Definitely better to be a Warrior God than a weedy postal worker.

A man with a frown, a judge’s wig and a scimitar materialised slightly to the left of the puddle of Yani’s vomit.

“That was close,” he said, “George,” he shook hands with Dell and Sarah, “Justice God, obviously. Shall we get this lot to explain themselves?”

The assorted people who had been following these conversations like a sort of bizarre tennis match, all took a step back as George swung round to look at them.

“Right you lot, into that building you have the temerity to call a Church,”

“It *is* a church,” muttered Yani

“Shut up Yani,”

Yani threw Dell a dirty look and they all trooped off towards the church, collecting a Prosperity Goddess and a God of the Sea on the way. The Sea God clapped Dell on the back and said his name was Steve. Dell got nose-full of a familiar briny smell, and realised he’d actually been living in the same neighbourhood as Steve for years. Pity they’d never met before now.

Once everyone was assembled in the pews, George hauled himself up on the altar and sat there, patting the grey cat. Purring, it sounded like a very low pitched bicycle bell.

“Right,” said George, once everyone had stopped shuffling, “Issue the first: you lot belong on Skew, *not* here in the Wood Between. Issue the second: in building a settlement here, and farming cows,” here he paused in order to frown disapprovingly, “You have desecrated the Wood Between, a most sacred space. Issue the third: In lopping down the trees, and collapsing the ponds together, you have wilfully collapsed worlds into each other with no regard whatsoever for the consequences. Issue the fourth: you have done all this for personal gain, and, as far as I can tell, you intend to collapse Earth and Skew, for your own entertainment, and to ensure that everyone from both worlds who survives the collapse will be too busy readjusting to work out what you’re up to and come after you. About the only thing worse than collapsing the world ponds together would be if you then started pumping them out for crop irrigation.”

The people in the pews shifted uncomfortably.

George’s eyes widened in a slightly protuberant bloodshot way.

“You people disgust me. You deserve to be tortured to death.”

There was a horrified intake of breath.

“On the other hand, perhaps you did it out of ignorance or insanity and should instead be clapped up in an asylum for dangerous lunatics,”

The room relaxed very slightly.

“Then again, perhaps you know exactly what you’re doing and it’s all for the best,” George smiled grimly, “Does anyone care to explain?”

There was a certain amount of awkward silence.

Yani stood up.

“Suma discovered the way of cats. He discovered the Wood Between and he showed us the way. He is responsible for this,”

“Suma,” growled Dell, “Tried to stop you from doing this. And he couldn’t so he went through to Earth and disguised himself as human. And he tried for years to contact us, the Gods, to let us know, to tell us what was coming. Which is why I found myself in his shop that day. And all that stuff you fed me about worlds coming together as part of a prophecy? Prophecy my arse. You lot have been planning this, and Suma knew, but Suma *had the sense to realise what would happen if any more worlds get collapsed.*”

Dell glared round at the assembled people.

“What- what do you mean by that?”

“Well you’re not really very good farmers, are you?” said the Prosperity Goddess, gold bangles clanking as she dusted plant seeds off her silk dress. “Even on the most basic level, you’ve completely messed up the ecology here- if you go any further it may well be irreparable.”

The people stared at her blankly.

“The cows,” she said, “They don’t belong. Buildings, roads. All not meant to be here. The only good thing I can say for you is that you haven’t yet started with this utterly insane irrigation plan. Stop and think for a second. What would happen, if you put a *world pond* into a watering can and started pouring it everywhere?”

It was a truly alarming thought. Dell was starting to feel the Warrior God rage building up again.

“Wait for it,” murmured Steve, the Sea God, one hand on Dell’s elbow, “Give George a minute. You start flinging grenades around it’ll be just as bad as this bloody irrigation thing,”

“We were going to use a sprinkler system,” said the lady in the sensible heels, “Much more efficient,”

A red haze descended upon Dell, but just as he lopped off the stupid woman’s head with his katana, a voice from the back of the church started singing sweet and low:

“Ding dong dell, pussy’s in the well...” a loose limbed man covered in musical accoutrements, like some sort of multicultural one-man street band, ambled up the aisle. “You know, I’ve been wondering why your church bells keep playing Earth nursery rhyme tunes,” he said. He raised a hand and waved to the Gods and Goddesses, “Lionel, Music God. Point is, I caught the last bit of that discussion,” he eyed the corpse at Dell’s feet, where the neck stump was still spurting blood on the carpet. “And I darkly suspect,” he paused for effect, “that the nursery rhyme bells are coming straight from earth.” He swept one arm out in a tragic gesture, “We’re too late, my friends,” he said, “their crop irrigation plan has already started.”

Chapter 6

Dell found his muscular fingers twitching as he mouthed the words to the bells ringing tune. "Ding Dong dell, pussy's in the well, da, da, da, dada, da, da, da, da." The church bells rang on.

"Well, looks like we warrior god types aren't complete animals." he thought. "Pity."

George, in the mean time, almost leapt into action. Judgment gods are just overblown lawyers essentially and fast moving action isn't something they generally condone, much too tough on the back pocket. Anyway George did his best to rally the masses.

In his best courtroom voice he gravely announced. "Lionel, our newly arrived music god here, has made a very valid point. I fear this recent irrigating of the earth thing may have some nasty consequences."

"No shit," mumbled Dell, his need to kill something fleshy and soft rising alarmingly. He cast his eyes about, looking for a suitably shaking victim.

"Well, this crisis will require some focused thinking," George continued seriously from his perch on the altar, still patting the purring cat.

"Perhaps we'd better form a committee. Lionel, your input may prove helpful but please, put away the banjo. Sarah, darling, mmm, perhaps you can keep notes and Steve, you're a sea god of some sort, there must be a position for you, slither over here and tell us what you know about water."

George had slipped into politician god mode without even noticing. Drip by drip the earth was doomed.

Dell rose. It wasn't his fault; it was the warrior god's doing. The need to do just overtook him. "Why don't we all pop out and have a look," he offered and gave his fingers a little airborne twinkle.

George, incapable of any other reaction, took it totally seriously. "Good man Dell. What we need is a man of action."

Dell swung his katana wildly and only severed two inattentive heads and one slow arm. The crowd wisely parted, at least one katana length in any given direction.

"I'm your man," he replied unnecessarily.

"Great. What's the plan?" George inquired.

"Plan," Dell replied blankly. "Plan." He began to think quickly but before he knew it his thinking had lapped him and in no time he was way too far behind to catch up with that particular speeding train of thought. "Plan hey. Well, what is the alternative?"

This sort of stumped George, which suited Dell, or at least he thought it did. He looked over to where Yani was standing. "Wisdom of the universe," he mouthed haughtily in his direction. "Wisdom of the universe."

Yani grimaced and slowly shook his head. "We're rucked," or "flocked," or something like that, he silently mouthed back.

Dell took whatever it was, as a complement and strode out with the crowd. He elbowed his way to the front and, cloaked in his most serious pose, looked around.

"Sprinklers, sprinkling something, looks like water, maybe it is. Hello, it is. Well there you go." As a newly hatched warrior god rarely had Dell's thought process been so long. He beamed at himself, proud to find himself more than just a sack full of assorted muscle and gristle. "Ok. How do we stop this?" he threatened the crowd.

A couple of elaborate swishes with his gleaming katana soon rustled up a volunteer.

"The main valve is behind that fence just near the gate," offered the volunteer. He was dressed in tatty oily overalls with pointy things in its pockets and he looked just like some-one who knew about greasy oily stuff and mechanisms.

Dell found the gate and after a couple of clumsy attempts, but without resorting to violence, he found a way to open it.

"Clockwise to turn it off."

"I'm not completely stupid," Dell replied offended, although he was fast realizing that while yes, he did have the wisdom of the universe in that thick, but ruggedly handsome, skull of his, the ability to use this successfully was a very elusive skill indeed.

"You could have fooled me," breathed a reply.

"I heard that," snapped Dell from behind the fence, he had found the monster cosmos strength valve and was weighing up his options. The massive bright red

handle still looked smallish in his hands and after a quick mental check on the movement of the average clocks hands, he suddenly found out just how much he hated the digital age, he gave it a spin in the right direction and stemmed the flow.

Well, nearly stemmed the flow.

The tap still dripped and together, the crowd watched as small parts of the earth still dripped through the sprinklers.

It was the lightest stuff first as it floated to the surface, mostly useless stuff. Clouds, dreams, jazz, clowns, Valentine's Day complete with dodgy love letters and insipid poetry, ABBA, well, they won't be missed remarked some wag in the crowd. Comedians started to get sprinkled, first the funny followed by the strugglers, and finally the hacks.

Then pixies, fairies, elves and unicorns, but that wasn't a problem, no-one believed in them anyway.

In huge flocks small birds began to appear, honeyeaters, finches and the like. "Maybe their feathers will block up the drip," the crowd hoped.

But no, after several minutes all the birds were gone, the crows and vultures with their distressing calls were last as they are the most horrid of the species. Even the dodo was faintly seen in the massive outpouring of flying feathers. Turns out, they weren't as stupid as they had been portrayed. After their beautiful solitary island in the stormy South Seas had been constantly raped and pillaged by starving ruthless sailors several of the more adroit birds managed to board a large piece of floating driftwood and began the adventure of their lives. Eventually the driftwood beached, half a world away, on a small island just south, over the horizon, from Easter Island. It was conveniently called Shrove Tuesday Island and as such paled into insignificance against its more illustrious brother and was therefore completely uninteresting and unexplored. Unsurprisingly, the dodos were very pleased with themselves and after many seasons of successful breeding were just at the point of boldly stepping forward and revealing themselves to the rest of humanity when this irrigation disaster struck. Tough luck for them.

"Well, so much for that theory." thought Dell as the earth continued on unabated to drip through the leaking valve.

Most of the light stuff had gone now and some semi serious stuff followed.

Chocolate, in order of cocoa percentage, ice-cream, day time soaps, Letterman, if he can be considered serious. The more free spirited cats, complete with bells, all

dogs, punk music, no loss that and all the antiheroes of the movies, despite their understated threats and protestations slowly filtered through.

The crowd drew its breath. This was not good. The slowly dripping valve was not stopping and many useful parts of the earth were now gone the way of the dodo. Some keen worried nose smelt it before it arrived and panicked.

"Not the coffee!!!!!"

Horrified, the crowd smelt it in unison.

"No, not the coffee!!!!!"

"Earth will be completely uninhabitable without coffee. NOT THE COFFEE!!!!!"

But, alas, as the bewildered collection of hapless bystanders watched the last of the earth's coffee dripped uselessly onto the ground.

The silence was absolute.

Finally, after a brief moment of sorrow for the departed coffee, Dell fired himself up. He grabbed the red handle and, with all his immense strength, twisted the life out of it. He grunted and groaned, strained and strained and, of course, he twisted the top clean off it, destroying the valve and earth's slim chances in one almighty show of complete stupidity.

"Oops," he offered lamely hiding his hands behind his back as he watched the earth gush forward through the irreparable valve.

The crowd looked vaguely disgusted, most were still worried about his katana.

One man strode through the crowd. No-one had seen him enter but as he did have that certain look of confidence and authority, they parted to let him through.

"Well, you great idiot, look what you've done," he directed angrily at Dell.

Dell responded as all good warrior gods do with a nifty swipe of his katana. The newcomer neatly parted his body right where the katana passed through then just plonked himself back together.

"Give me that thing you stupid man."

In a flash, the newcomer grabbed Dell's katana, bit it in two and then, with comparative ease, vigorously crumbled the rest into small pieces in his hands. "You

could do someone a mischief with that thing. Now stand back," he commanded, "And let me see what you have done."

The crowd was stunned to silence and without a murmur they collectively obeyed this newcomer.

Dell on the other hand, well, he cast the fleetest glance down at his arsenal of dynamic nuclear weapons tethered at his waist. The newcomer caught this glance and instantly read the threat. He flicked his fingers and Dell's belt buckle opened and the belt hit the ground, unfortunately, as Dell's kilt was attached to this belt, so did his kilt and like all good Scotsman, warrior god types or not, he was sans underwear. Highly embarrassed he stood in a pool of his clothing and weapons and this reduced his will to participate in any further conflict somewhat.

"Who are you," Dell asked meekly from a distance gingerly gathering his skirts.

"Who am I?" Who am I? For my sakes, I'm your God you dolt.

"God," quizzed Dell perplexed. This multitier concept of the god thing had his brain doing somersaults

"Yes, that's exactly what I said, God."

"Did you really think boofheads like you would be allowed to just wander about and do whatever the hell you pleased? The place would be a disaster. "After all," he splayed his godly hands about. "Look at what you clowns have cooked up here."

Dell and the others shuffled their feet and looked guilty, even motor mouth George seemed stuck for words.

God looked around in horror. "What an awful mess," he said disgusted.

"Uh sorry," the crowd breathed.

"Well, there's nothing I can do here," God said his hands spread in explanation. "You fools have destroyed one of my favorite realities. Some of my best and funniest stuff was in that reality. The platypus, llamas, British humour. I even made an ant eating dog." He worked himself into a fury. "DO YOU KNOW HOW LONG IT TOOK ME TO MAKE EARTH?"

"Uh seven days," offered some brave soul.

"Seven days," God stormed back. "Seven days. Bah, that's just some fairy tale. Believe me it took eons to get it just how I like it. EONS!!! I should grind you all into some sort of weak organic gruel and feed you to the plants."

"Not a good idea," thought Dell, although his lips cleverly remained closed.

Gingerly the crowd gradually dispersed keen to be out of the firing line.

As they walked from the scene Yani caught up with Dell. "What about my reality, Skew, and what about my people?" Yani asked under his breath

"Looks like you guys didn't rate with him," Dell replied flicking his thumb over his shoulder at God. "You want to take it up with him."

"AH no."

Dejected and alone, hunched over in his simple beige robes with a loosely tied rope belt, God watched sadly as his entire earth, all the good, all the bad, all the things worthwhile and all the just funs things, the things that make you smile and things that make you cry slowly dribbled into the soil and turned to mud before, more or less, dissipating altogether. Philosophically he lamented:

"Ashes to ashes,
Dust to dust,
If humanity doesn't bugger it,
Some stupid god must."

He walked off alone, hands clasped tightly behind his back, head down, mumbling.