

Captain Marvelous
and the Super Interstellar Circus

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If you are still reading this, I–Captain Greg Marvelous–have surely failed. Stop reading. Reading can only fill your mind with lofty ideals-grievances with reality-the notion that this world, without various tedious details, would be so much more romantic. Gravity, hard vertical surfaces, and the speed limit: they all have to go. Somehow, this world and your pedantic life are entirely unsatisfactory. Because they are.

I–Captain Greg Marvelous of the Super Interstellar Circus–fell early into this trap. Indeed, I am no more a captain than I am marvelous. Even in far flung tales and dreams, I held no significant role in The Circus, and if any role I had, I would pilot a small support craft filled with smelly, exotic animals and the trappings of my mother’s entourage because I wasn’t audacious enough to set out on my own.

I flew a yellow school bus that Mom had bought cheap. It was the short, lackluster bus that the special kids rode in. On its left side, it sported a retractable stop sign, so I could only theoretically cause horrible traffic carnage from the slow lane out of spite; “That’s right: Simon says stop!”

No panorama of stellar beauty ran rapidly across my star ship’s bow, but rather hedgerows and trees, Earth constantly reminding us of its eternal grip by flinging rocks at the undercarriage.

Captain indeed. Mom drove. I couldn’t see over the cockpit’s skirt and my extremities couldn’t reach the controls. Unsatisfactory. I was born to fly; the books said so. One day I would. One day I did. And one fated evening while Mom was asleep–I wrapped the cursèd bus around a phone

pole. “Good riddance. You didn’t even have rockets.”

Dreams, let me tell you: there’s nothing for them. They always forget to mention the important details. The castle has no bathroom. Light speed can drive you mad. The dragon—the bloody dragon—has fleas the size of muskrats. The cavernous underground lair smells like swamp gas in a mean, mean way. Even lucky push-me-pull-me’s usually die in surgery. And my personal favorite: buses don’t have an auto-pilot. Gravity sucks, fire burns, and telephone poles are far more prevalent than they usually get credit for.

At first, I hadn’t read much. I was a blank tablet. In grade school, I sat in my miniature chair behind my broad, vertically challenged desk. Occasionally, I peed when I probably shouldn’t have. Most of the time, I just sat with a silly smile, patiently waiting to be impressed.

“Welcome back to school, children. We’re going to learn about phonetics.”

I had heard of these *fonetiks* she spoke of. I was an expert, really. Loved them. Mom told me about them. Everything made sense.

My first text book was this red tome, with a plaid pattern and what I dare call a word, "Phonics", emblazoned on its cheap, recycled cover.

(Please try to imagine my head exploding, here. . . and here.)

So, it doesn’t make sense. In those fledgling years I discovered that a lot.

“No, Greg, you can’t. If you take a big number from a small number, it won’t work. Just think about it like apples. If you have five apples—hold up your fingers Greg; that’s how we count—and you take away a million, try to think of how many you’d have left.”

"But, what if...?"

"Don't try too hard Greg; your head will explode."

"Ok."

Yeah, and it didn't stop there.

"But what if I really want to divide three by five? Couldn't I just... "

"No Greg, you can't, because you're still stupid."

"But what if I really want to take the square root of negative one?"

"Were you paying attention? Maybe you have ADHD. Eat some pills."

"But what if I really want to divide by zero?"

"No, Greg. I just got finished cleaning the blood off the walls from last time."

Books messed me up pretty thoroughly. Convinced that my surroundings were inadequate, I filled a lot of the blanks with space ships, elves and The Circus. Jealous of my bliss, instructors tried desperately to draw my attention to reality. "Look, look here! Pain and cruel indifference; isn't it great! Oh, no, don't cry. You won't be ready when it gets worse."

Miss Belle built a castle of solid-color craft paper around my desk to keep me from staring idly at the gopher outside. He had escaped The Circus. Normal food had reduced him to his kin's proportions. I wasn't convinced that he was happy about it.

The Circus was a rich, detail-less product of my imagination. Its exhibitions flew from planet to planet in giant aeroplanes with holes for the giraffes' heads and turrets in the stern castle. Dolphins swam in the space

alongside. We visited planets with trains of moons, some with perpendicular rings. When the Warp Lord was out and about, we hid in the core of a red dwarf.

I was important and respected in The Circus, but not so much that I was always busy. Until its demise, I piloted the bus. I got to attend every show and meet with the ring master to discuss our next stops. One time I invited my dad to attend one such meeting. Oops.

Apparently, aeroplanes can't break any habitable planet's gravity, especially if they have stern castles. Apparently, the giraffes were going to have to do without holes to poke their heads out of. Apparently, the dolphins had already exploded in the vacuum of space. Apparently, I had to ditch the whole notion in a red dwarf and do my homework.

So, I started over. This time, I was the hapless inventor of a megalomaniacal robot and best friends with a sadistic starfish. Can't go wrong from there.

Don't let anybody unravel a yarn about a damsel in distress or a prince and princess who lived happily ever after. I did. Turns out, not many princesses need rescuing these days. Someone failed to mention the dragon predicament was all sorted out years ago, and the police have most of the villains in custody these days.

But that's nothing to deter the determined. I set out on a quest to rescue a lady and live happily ever after. Did quite a bit of looking, really. Some talking, occasional touching, but mostly looking. When I finally found one in

distress, she turned out to be more the milk-maid variety than true royalty.

I took her to the finest bistro in the land that I could afford two entrees if she stiffed me for the bill, which I had been warned might occur. We sat at a table that could have seated fourteen pixies, one ogre, or four dwarves, but was just shy of fitting both of us comfortably. The table-cloth was only theoretically clean and the paltry floral arrangements were fake. We sat politely, ordered from the condescending man, and made polite conversation. She didn't look comfortable, but she got better as the evening progressed.

The attack was silent. I smiled across the table at her innocent face. She smiled back. Something crept in on the edges of her smile. Hardly perceptible. The corners of her eyes broadened a little; she failed to keep her lower lip straight. She must have seen me squinting as she averted her gaze and showed her lower row of teeth in an awkward grimace.

"Something wrong, milady?"

"Naught at all, sir knight."

"Lovely."

I failed to notice the gent sitting behind her pulling up his napkin over his face. I didn't hear his wife inquire, "Something wrong dear?"

"Nothing. Bad eggs here; odd that."

My enchanting date had her hands in her lap, staring straight into my eyes. Ah, her eyes were lovely. Lost exploring her dilated pupils, I totally missed the scene of respectable folk gagging, regaining composure, and vigorously sawing at their meat-things while admiring their respective floral

arrangements.

"Perhaps we should away, my prince," she suggested.

"I really do love the steak here, don't you?"

"Mine's a bit rare."

"Try some of mine. . ."

The second volley wasn't silent. It was more like a freight train trying to convince a toddler that her tea party should meet elsewhere.

Then, it occurred to me that I should be writing this crap down.

I don't know about you guys, but—from now on—I'm never going to read anything unless it starts, "It was a dark and stormy night," or, "At whiles I visit the cold, abandoned basement of my psyche to feed the dead goldfish." I might consider reading something with a title like "The Horrible, Sarcastic Adventures of Captain Greg Marvelous," but I might wisely refrain.

The trick is that you're never really going to be happy. No matter how far you reach, happiness will be slightly beyond your grasp. It's a horrible, painful, and ultimately liberating truth. Yeah, get used to it. The only way you're going to have a moment of peace is to tell your heart to shut up and enjoy the carcinogens while it can.