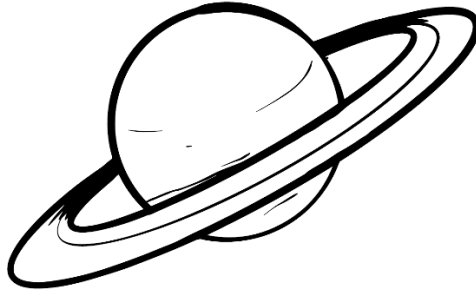


# Daily Grind

And Other Astounding Stories of Mundane Matters



## Daily Grind

*Bip! Bip!*

At the sound of the horn, Sloom came rushing out of his home and jumped into Vorn's skitter. "Hey."

"Morning."

Sloom buckled himself in as the skitter quacked into nilspace. "How's things? Good weekend?"

"Yeah, not bad," Vorn said. "Yours?"

"Meh. So, where are we working today?"

"Earth. Schedule's in the glove box." Sloom pulled a face.

Vorn shot him a look. "What?"

Sloom shrugged as he rummaged for the schedule. "It's just—y'know. *Earth*. It's such a dreary little hole. Places like that make me wonder what I'm doing in this job."

Vorn shrugged. "Pays well."

"Yeah, well, not everything's about the pay, y'know?"

The skitter plopped out of nilspace and fell to Earth. Sloom checked the schedule, then grabbed the flensing kit as they clambered out and moved towards their target.

"So," Vorn said, "the job's really getting you down, huh?"

Sloom sighed. “It’s just...not what I pictured myself doing at my age.”

The cow looked up as the barn doors opened. “Moo?”

Sloom opened the kit. He and Vorn selected the appropriate tools.

“MOO!” the cow exclaimed as Sloom removed its eyeballs. “GURGLE!” it added as Vorn removed its tongue. Sloom drained the cow’s blood into a pouch. The cow fell over. Sloom and Vorn went back to the skitter.

“I mean, I’ve got a degree in Bacteriological Mnemonics,” Sloom griped. “But it was such a hard field to get into after I graduated that I had to take this job just to pay the rent. I thought it’d be a short-term thing, y’know?”

The skitter bounced up and shot eastwards, dropping onto the roof of a very nice two-storey rural homestead, with a white picket fence and everything. Sloom and Vorn clambered down the side of the building to an upper-storey window, which they peered into. A piercing scream issued from within. They casually climbed back up to the skitter.

“I know you said it’s not all about the money,” Vorn said as they took off again, “but this level of pay surely takes some of the sting out of not being able to work in your preferred field?”

The skitter shot northwards, tumbling into a suburban backyard garden. Vorn and Sloom activated their chameleonware to assume native form, donned the black suits and sunglasses packed carefully in the trunk of the skitter, and made their way to the back door of the house.

“Look, yes, the money’s great. But that’s part of the problem.” Sloom knocked at the door. “If I entered the Bacteriological Mnemonics industry now, at ground level, my starting salary would be less than half what I’m making now. And it could take years for me to work my way up to—”

Sloom abruptly fell silent as the door opened. The human occupant of the house stared at them. “Who are you? What are you doing in my yard?”

“Mister Tepid?” Vorn enquired.

“Yes?”

“Mister *James August* Tepid?” Sloom pressed.

“Yes?”

“Born nineteen sixty-five?” Vorn continued. “Graduated Lucemore High in nineteen eighty-three? Got off with Enid Kapler behind the Trent Street bus-stop in nineteen eighty-two? Single, never married? Habitually eats Aldi off-brand Corn Flakes for breakfast? Suffers from piles? Prefers womens’ underwear because it’s—” Vorn gestured to indicate air quotes, “More Comfortable?”

“How the bloody hell—??”

“You spotted a UFO over your house last night, I believe?” Sloom cut in.

“Well...yes, but—”

Vorn nodded. “I see. Well. Don’t tell anyone, Mister Tepid.” “Or else,” Sloom added.

“Yeah. Or else,” Vorn echoed.

“Got it?”

The door slammed shut. Vorn and Sloom returned to the skitter, where they changed back into something more comfortable. Moments later, the skitter bounded south.

“It wouldn’t matter so much if I *enjoyed* this job,” Sloom continued, as the skitter buzzed a lone hitchhiker wandering along the interstate. “Like I said, it’s honestly not all about the money. Job satisfaction’s important too, y’know? And I want to feel like I’m doing something *worthwhile*. But I’m *not* enjoying the job, I *don’t* get any satisfaction from it, and I really don’t feel like it’s even slightly worthwhile!”

Vorn activated the suckybeam and drew the hitchhiker up into the skitter. “Oral or anal?”

“Do you know how dirty their mouths are?”

“Okay then.”

“*Ooooooer!*” the hitchhiker squealed.

“At the end of the day,” Sloom grumbled, “I want job satisfaction *and* wealth. And whether I stay or go, I’m going to sacrifice one or the other. All done?”

“All done. Give him the owl imprint and dump him.”

The hitchhiker hit the ground, hooting maniacally.

Vorn glanced at his watch. “Clock-off time.”

The flutter quacked into nilspace. Sloom began filling out shift paperwork.

“Look, here’s an idea,” Vorn offered. “Try to think of the job as something you *only* do for the money without expecting any satisfaction whatsoever, and apply for a low-paid Bacteriological Mnemonics *internship*. With your qualifications, you’d get in easy.”

Sloom looked up from the paperwork. “An internship?”

“I mean, yeah, it’s a lot of extra work, and badly paid, but you’ll still have *this* job to pay the bills, and it shouldn’t take you too long to adjust to the workload. Then you look at doing one or two nights a week for a few cycles, so it doesn’t interfere with your day job, and pretty soon you’d have sufficient experience to walk straight into a high-level position with a great salary!”

Sloom nodded thoughtfully. “Huh. Wealth *and* satisfaction, but spread across two separate jobs.”

“Exactly!”

“*And* I’d be doing something worthwhile, even as an intern!” Sloom gave Vorn a warm smile. “Thanks, mate. I really appreciate the advice. And the support. I’m gonna get on to this as soon as I get home tonight!”

Vorn punched Sloom’s shoulder playfully. “That’s the way. And hey, for what it’s worth, I do get how you’ve been feeling about this job.”

“Really? I thought you loved it.”

“Oh, don’t get me wrong, I *do* love it.” Vorn glanced at Sloom’s paperwork. “I mean, mutilation, intimidation, abduction, probing. For me, that’s job satisfaction right there. But,” he shrugged, “even I have days where I can’t help but wonder...well, whether there’s really any *point* to it all...”

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