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Sea Otters Gambolling in the Wild, Wild Surf

John Bennett

As I write this I'm hurtling through the infinite, velvety dark of the lower troposphere, 30,000 feet above the Indian subcontinent. Next to me Dennis is snoring like a madman.

I know India is below because for the last half hour I've been watching a little white icon of a plane creeping slowly across a map on the screen in front of me. Right now we're just coming up to Hyderabad.

Whatever.

While I've been watching the screen I've been trying to work out exactly how I got here. It's pretty complicated, but I suppose if you go back to the beginning it's because Vespasian, Mrs Pretzel's Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, had a prolapse two days ago.

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When I woke up yesterday I was still feeling pretty monged from the night before. I poked my head out from under the duvet and looked at the alarm clock. It was 11.56, technically speaking still morning, though I'm sure my mother wouldn't have seen it that way, but as she and her best friend Sandra had left the day before for a fly/drive holiday on the Eastern Seaboard of the US it was totally irrelevant. I turned over and went straight back to sleep.

Which was a big mistake because I dreamed of my 'A' Levels. Again.

It was the same setting, the dusty gym hall lined with wall bars, full of the pissy stench of teenage fear and the acrid honk of sweaty socks. On the desk in front of me sat the paper; I turned it over and read the first question:

If you differentiate all the occurrences of onomatopoeia in the first act of Hamlet correlated with the effects of transhumance on the Treaty of Versailles divided by the number of hectares in the islet of Langerhans, factored by the incidence of eskers in the Haber Process: what is the value of X?

I was like, 'What. The. Fuck?' I looked round; everyone else was writing. I didn't even know where to begin. The question didn't make any sense. I tried



to remember what onomatopoeia was. Suddenly this insistent, tick-tock quizshow music started playing in the background. Surely, I thought, it can't be over already. The girl next to me stopped writing and sat back in her chair with a smug look on her face. A feeling of panic welled up from my stomach into my chest. The music rose to a climactic finale and . . . I woke up in a tangle of sweaty sheets. It was almost two months since my last exam, but still they haunted my dreams.

I sat up and tried to forget the nightmare. Sun pissed into my room through the gaps in the blinds and collected in a soggy puddle at the end of my bed. I propped myself up on a couple of pillows and lay back with my hands behind my head, watching tiny motes of dust drift in the air, spiralling in the updrafts above the vast, jagged, Himalayan peaks of my duvet, like the souls of the dead or something.

As I lay watching the dust, I started to construct a plan to rid the world of any trace of eskers, so that those coming after me would not be forced to learn about the fucking things. I figured all I'd need was a ton of money and some bulldozers, but then, just as I'd convinced myself that I'd cracked the logistical issues, it occurred to me that I'd also need a strategy to stop them being taught about in a historical sense and I was starting to consider brainwashing tactics and mass hypnosis when I realised that the whole thing was a little obtuse to be truly sustaining or keep me from the inescapable fact that I was bored. Chairman of the fucking bored. If there was a religion based on boredom, I'd have been its pope. The High Pontiff of the Church of the Grand Ennui. People would have had to kiss my ring.

