

Graeme King and the Creature

by Bradley Hook

Graeme King was disturbed. He sat at his desk feeling his bloodshot eyes rolling backwards, impatient, leaden in their sockets. Could he believe what he had just seen? Surely not. Surely the late nights spent absorbing the relentless pulse of his computer screen were responsible for such trickery. Graeme's body ached from his poor posture, his pasty skin had broken out in new patches of eczema and his stomach was now noticeably drooping beyond the brim of his grey tracksuit pants. He could smell the acrid stench of his own urine, caused by that annoying dribble that always seemed to catch him out as he walked away from the toilet. He didn't mind, so long as the piss was absorbed by the fleecy innards of his pants and didn't trickle down his leg, which was infinitely more foul. He scratched at a patch of red skin that was developing between his eyebrows and dusted away the flakes, except for the ones that disappeared into the crevices in his keyboard. With great care he unwrapped the first of his two-for-one chocolate bars, purchased only minutes before from the late night petrol station, situated next door.

His mind kept looping back to what he had seen, it was working like one of his computer programs, spinning in cycles, combing through all possible options logically and methodically. But this was one scenario he couldn't debug. He sat back and recounted the events carefully. The sweetness of chocolate infused with artificial coconut provided a momentary rush as he rocked back in his leather chair, eyes drawn towards the dark window where it had happened.

Retracing his steps Graeme counted all 21 stairs that lead to the ground floor, the green carpet, the dusty lampshade and the short

passageway that ejaculated him out onto the street. The darkness was thick with ocean fog and that fishy smell which he hated permeated the thick summer air. He had taken three steps, perhaps four, towards the petrol station when he heard a rustle and looked to his right. There, in the centre of the dark road, sat a creature. It was gazing at him, clearly visible below the haze, large flat eyes blinking like some kind of grotesque kitten. And then it sprung to the nearest streetlight becoming a blur of arms and tail as it disappeared into the darkness above. It was small, but larger than a possum, not to mention faster, and too skinny and deformed to be a monkey. It was like, like a lemur, decided Graeme as he took another coconut-infused chocolate hit. But lemurs don't exist here except in zoos, and certainly could not survive in a city. He thought back to a TV show that documented the fragility of these creatures (or was it their ecosystem?) in Mozambique, or somewhere near Africa.

Deciding to abandon an almost certain fantasy and return to work Graeme glanced at the relentless digital clock in the corner of his computer screen. Three hours 'til dawn and seven before the project was due to go live. "Shit," he muttered as he retrained his eyes on the white glare, punctuated by lines of his impeccably crafted programming code. He tapped, backspace backspace, seeing a mistake he had made before he had decided to get supplies, when he heard a clink behind him. Swivelling around in his chair he saw only the large eyes which gazed down at an empty coke bottle that had been tipped over a lonely pizza box. They then looked up at him.

Graeme was discovered dead, presumably from exhaustion, twelve days later by a policeman who had been alerted by his client, a software company. His fully completed program revolutionised web telephony forever.

