

Henry Ground

by Frank Dahai

Henry Ground was a healthy and well adjusted English man who excelled at chess and folk dancing. One day, for no apparent reason, he decided to fill his guinea pig with helium. He carried the animal under the light of the stars into the shed at the bottom of his garden. Then he connected it to a hose. The other end of the hose was attached to a large canister of helium.

Henry found the hiss of the transferring gas oddly comforting, so he paused to light a cigarette, helium being a non-flammable gas. By the time his match was flicked out, the guinea pig had inflated to the size of a beach ball. It was bumping up against the roof of Henry's shed.

Henry had once stuck a pin into his sister's beach ball. After it deflated, he sent it to the Royal Zoological society with a covering letter that explained it was a new kind of colorful flat fish. The Royal Zoological society was not fooled. His sister wrote to them shortly afterwards asking them if they would accept her brother as a uniquely deranged curiosity. He had pulled her hair in response. Not because she had sent the letter, but because he did not understand what 'uniquely deranged curiosity' meant and she knew it. She had cried but he deliberately ignored her. He just went to his room and quietly repressed the entire incident. Now it was unrepressing itself with a vengeance.

Henry panicked. He pulled the hose from the mouth of his guinea pig, which responded by paddling towards the open door. Before Henry could stop it, it had escaped the shed and was floating away into the star laden sky. Its name was Monty.

Monty floated over a few villages, a large plain and some low hills before sunrise. Then he was picked up on the radar system of a

secret military base and recorded as an unknown hairy threat. Terrorism was immediately suspected. As a matter of routine, two fully armed Eurofighter Typhoons were scrambled.

It is generally agreed that the Eurofighter Typhoon's performance is significantly better than that of the F-15C/D, the current air superiority fighter variant of the F-15. It can easily engage with a Saab JAS 39 Gripen coming at it full whack, for example. A low flying beach ball shaped guinea pig ought to present little problem. This proved to be the case.

Monty detonated with unsurprising ease. Tiny chunks of him fell into a village. Most of them landed in gardens and were eventually eaten by field mice. One of them, however, landed in the top pocket of a freshly cleaned shirt hanging in the garden of an old lady who was very scared of aliens. So when she came out the next morning, and discovered that the shirt smelled of sulfur and had a small frazzled lump inside it, her first reaction was to phone the government.

The shirt was sent to a police laboratory for analysis. It was discovered to be of 99% polyester, 1% asbestos. It was a popular drip-dry model from the nineteen fifties that had been technically banned in the country for years. Old people and babies were exempt from the ban, however, so the owner was let off with a warning. The shirt was returned to her, minus the lump, which was kept by the police for their secret underground museum, as a sort of trophy.

The curator of the underground museum was a pale man, very much deprived of sunlight. He compensated for this with a diligence that bordered on the insane. When he was handed the last remaining part of Monty, he noted with enthusiasm that it still had a collar attached. On the collar was a medallion inscribed with the words: 'If found, please return to Mr. Henry Ground, folk dancing enthusiast, and one time near member of the Royal Zoological Society. Esq.' The curator shook his head sadly and thought:

"Here I am, a mild mannered museum curator. And yet, it is I who have discovered a vital piece of evidence. Evidence which a trained police force has entirely overlooked. Yet again. Life is unfair and random."

Then he diligently phoned the anti-terrorist hotline.

Henry Ground was driving around his village looking skywards when four unmarked cars blocked him in and he was politely requested to get out of the vehicle with his hands in the air. He was bundled into a police van that had been cunningly hidden behind a tree and driven to the local station for processing. Then he was flown to America and handed over to the C.I.A's top secret U.F.O branch for interrogation about his alleged terrorist activities. Every time he denied he was a terrorist, they forced him to wear only one shoe. It didn't take him long to crack.

The irony was that Henry Ground really was a terrorist. He had half a pound of Ammonium Nitrate all set to go. His plan was to blow up the penguin house at London zoo. A mindless act of senseless penguin-orientated violence was thereby averted by a crazy old lady who never bought new shirts and was scared of aliens.

It just goes to show. You never know how things are going to pan out.

