

One Screwy Day 26

by

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Benny Orman is in the passenger seat of a taxi, with a driver by his side. (Nope, this isn't a driverless car, but if that's disappointing for you, you have a real treat coming up, later). Trees pass with the occasional cottage. In front are winding, puddle-filled roads. The sky is grey. Benny points in front of him 'Keep driving. I need to get as far away from town as possible'. The driver looks puzzled 'Why?' Benny focuses his eyes 'I'm chasing a crook. A really nasty piece of work. He's escaped jail and it's believed he's travelled as far away as possible. Which is why I said what I said just now.' 'But you don't know where?' 'Nope, no idea. Just as far away as possible'. 'So really I could be driving you anywhere?' 'Not anywhere, as far away as possible'. 'Ok, I'll leave it'.

Benny nods 'Right. It's top secret information.' The driver looks even more confused 'Well it surely can't be TOP secret. Don't you mean classified at the most?' 'No, I trust you to keep quiet. You have a friendly smell.' 'Alright... So what's with the civilian clothes and the police helmet? Is it a weak attempt at going undercover?' 'No. Police mufti day.' 'Wow. I didn't know there was such a thing.' 'Oh yes. Got to keep the spirits up.' 'Ha.' The driver points ahead with one hand on the wheel 'Charltonham National Park is coming up. That would be a good place for someone to hide. It's very quiet. Well, relatively speaking.' Benny gives a thumbs up 'Perfect.' The driver slows down a little and looks even MORE confused 'You're really going to search a whole, almost random area, taking up valuable police resources, whilst the person you're chasing could be almost anywhere in the country?' 'Call it a policeman hunch'. 'But you just admitted you don't...' Benny interrupts 'That was a test.' 'Testing what??' Benny looks blank.

The two turn a corner to see more trees on their right, but also an extensive, muddy car park on the left with a National Park sign. It holds an ordinary car and a car with tinted windows and a numberplate with 'CR1M3' written on it. There are plenty of empty spaces and behind them is a dense wall of more trees. Benny points to the area 'Drop me off here, please.' The driver shrugs his shoulders 'If you say so. Good luck. You're most definitely going to need it.' 'Oh, no, no, no. My hunches are legendary.' The driver parks by a car 'You're not looking for him on your own are you?' 'Nope. A few officers should be scrambled now, I'm sure...' 'A few people are scanning the whole country with no intelligence whatsoever?' 'I've told you, drop it! My God!' Benny retrieves a wallet from his pocket 'Do you have change?' The taxi driver sighs 'Sorry, no.' Benny takes out a twenty pound note 'Take it.' The driver's eyes light up 'Someone less trusting than me would say you're offering me a bribe.' 'Do you accept bribes?' 'What?' 'Never mind.'

Benny unbuckles his seatbelt, opens the door and runs for his life passed the stationary cars and through the trees. He occasionally almost trips up on fallen branches.

Now he sees fields that extend out at least one mile in all directions. Trees are scattered. On the outskirts of the area of outstanding beauty and finest grass are more walls of trees. Deers roam freely and a family gazing at birds with binoculars is nearby. Out of breath, Benny comments to himself 'God, there really aren't many places to hide here, are there? Stupid driver. I guess I could climb up a lone tree with the leaves covering me. It would look weird, maybe even a little freakish for someone of my age, but it's my only option and I should be able to see and search for clues.' Benny strolls to the nearest super-plant like he's just another park visitor. He passes the bird-gazing family and comments 'Bird lovers I see? I myself am a tree lover. Just gonna climb one, right now.' The family put down their visual aids and shrug their shoulders. Benny continues walking and does indeed do some climbing. It's a long process of much trail and error, but it gets done eventually. He sits on a branch with good but partially obscured vision. He stares through a deer's soul as if it was nothing and throws his helmet to the ground.

Benny mumbles to himself 'I really wish I asked the Sausage Roll Killer where I could find Henry the Sneaky Salmon.' In the distance, emerging from the natural walls, Ben sees a strange figure. As he gets closer, it's seen he is a man with long hair, wearing a leather jacket and chains. He smokes a cigarette. He swaggers in Benny's direction. 'Wow, that guy sure looks shady. I wonder if he knows about Henry. My understanding of this town is pretty much all crooks know each other. I mean I sure know a lot of them at least. Word gets around. But Henry the Sneaky Salmon? Never even heard of the guy...' To make the tense and dramatic minute or so go by, Benny waves his hands at the punkish individual. He doesn't notice, and that's very exciting for Benny. Soon enough, the mysterious man is in hearing distance. He retrieves a mobile from his pocket and makes a call 'Hi, it's Sean. You got the pigeons?... 50? Great... No, don't worry, I'm all alone. See you later'. Sean the shifty man pockets the phone and is now meters away.

Benny climbs down and walks a couple of steps to the dodgy man, like he does it every day. Actually he only does that kind of stuff every now and then 'Hey... You look kinda shady. You like committing crimes?' Sean scratches his head in confusion. I guess it was an unusual question even for him 'Sure...' Benny skips with joy 'Great! So... Do you know of anyone called Henry the Sneaky Salmon?' Sean pushes Benny against the tree and wraps his hands round his throat as he snarls 'How do you know about Henry the Sneaky Salmon?? Who told you?' Benny coughs 'Get off me!' Sean backs away 'Go on...' Benny pulls himself together 'I'm a trainee super villain. You know the fork robbery on the news? That was me. I need Henry to bust the SRK out of jail.' Sean nods with respect 'I'm Sean Yard. I'm an illegal pigeon dealer. You know how the things are everywhere in cities? My gang simply walk up to them and capture them.' 'What for?' 'Mostly to make pigeon burgers. Or pigeon hotdogs. It's easy money.'

Sean pulls a half-eaten hotdog from his other pocket and waves it in front of Benny's face 'Fancy a try?' Benny side-steps away. 'Not right now. I'm too focused on my mission.' Sean eats the rest. He talks whilst chewing 'I respect that. I can drive you to him now, if you like. I was just going to make a deal, supplying more of the birds, but that can wait. Busting out the SRK will be a once in a lifetime event for me.' Benny does another skip 'Great!' Sean smiles 'Come with me. I parked in the carpark. Cliched, right?' Benny scratches his ear 'Er.. .' Sean laughs 'It's ok. I know it was.' Sean leads the way as the bird watching family stare at the duo with their jaws open. Benny gives them a brief look 'Whoops, we had witnesses.' Sean puts his hands on the back of his head as he walks 'We'll be fine. No one wants to be even the slightest bit involved with the SRK. He's notoriously unreasonable.' Benny bites his thumb nervously 'I guess...'

After a short time, the two reach the car park. Benny comments 'Wow, you actually have a numberplate with 'Crime' written on it...' Sean whispers 'Shhhh! Do you want to attract the attention of the police?? No, the numberplate actually says Cr-one-mm-three... That's what the guy selling it to me said and I believe him. Even though he was a gangster. He said the letters and numbers simply look good together and I agree.' Benny looks to the floor 'Please forgive me.' 'Just get in the car.' Sean pulls a key from his pocket and opens the doors. Both jump in. Inside, it is pitch black. Benny comments, coolly 'Er... it's pretty dark in here... Where's the seatbelt?' Sean replies 'Just feel around. This car's windows are so tinted, they don't even let in the slightest bit of sunlight. You're gonna have to get used to that.' Benny sounds confused 'So how do you drive??' Sean laughs 'I have to wear special goggles. They're pretty damn advanced.' Sean starts the car and drives off.

As the car hums the atmosphere is a little tense. Benny breaks the silence 'So... How much do you make from the pigeon trade?' Sean replies 'Quite a lot. Pigeons are everywhere aren't they? It's a bit tricky capturing them without drawing attention to yourself, though. What I and my associates like to do is say we're in the pigeon research business of Charltonham and are working for the Queen and the secret services. Most people don't know how to react to that and leave us alone. The police don't though.' Benny responds, jokingly 'I bet you thought it was weird when the first thing I asked you was if you were a crook?' 'No, no, no. Not at all. Happens all the time. I get approached for drugs, fake money, all sorts. Many of the villains in Charltonham know each other or at least know of each other. It's why I like living here.' 'But you've never heard of me?' 'Well at first, I just thought you were a tree hugging weirdo. But everyone knows who you are, don't they? You're all over the telly.'

After a few minutes of blind car riding and talks of jibble jabbles and plans, the vehicle comes to a stop. Sean comments nervously 'We're here.'

Now remember, Henry the Sneaky Salmon can get very agitated very quickly, so don't do ANYTHING to upset him. Is that clear?' Benny gulps more than audibly 'Yep...' Sean opens his door to let in the not-so-bright sunlight and to make it possible to see without super-technology, which he takes off. He leaps out of the automobile. Underneath him and on his right is a gravel pathway with another car. He points out how its numberplate says 'F3L0N' and how cool that is. Even if he doesn't understand it. On the right of the naughty transportation is a fence. Immediately in front of Sean is a large house 'Get out, Benny. Don't blow it.' Benny leaves the car. Sean rings the doorbell with a blank, largely criminal expression on his face. Benny copies him.

The door opens to reveal a 60 year old man in a white tuxedo carrying a silver plate with one hand. On it is a salmon and a somehow magical fork. With the utensil, he eats the fish with sophistication and dignity. He places the fork back down and talks with a mature tone. 'What can I do for you two gentlemen? I know you, Sean Yard, but who is your friend with leaves in his hair?' Sean replies with his head bowed down 'Benny and I are here, Sir, because we need your expertise in getting the SRK out of prison.' Henry turns his back on the two and starts walking with a limp through the hallway. On the walls are fine paintings 'Follow me.' The duo do so after Sean shuts the door. Henry sighs 'I didn't ask you to close that door, Sean.' Sean stutters 'S-should I open it, for you Sir?' 'Never mind.'

Henry opens a fine wooden door with carvings of birds, to reveal a room with the expected sofas, table and TV. Bazookas hang on all walls causing Benny to gasp. A bird cage hangs from the ceiling. In it is a dead budgie. Benny tries to sound impressed 'Wow... You really have a nice collection of guns, there...' Henry talks with a somehow dark peacefulness 'Yes. I'm quite the collector of illegal armaments. If there's three things I love in life...' Henry places his plate on the table '... it's salmon, things that kill and of course, being sneaky.' Sean tries to be positive 'They're great things to live for, Sir!' Henry looks down 'Quite. But it is with a heavy heart that I say my fourth love is no more. I am referring of course, to that dead budgie you see. In fact, I'm so devastated, I don't care what happens if we fail rescuing the SRK.'

Benny laughs 'Good one!' Henry's demeanour changes in an instant. His face goes red 'Have I said something amusing?' Sean starts to panic and jumps in front of Benny, defensively 'Please forgive my acquaintance. He is a moronic tree hugger with a predisposition for talking gibberish. Everyone hates him. What he meant to say was 'he is very sorry for your loss'. Isn't that right, Benjamin?' Ben shuffles to Henry and puts his hand out for him to shake it. It doesn't get shaken 'Sir, I assure you my intention was NEVER to hurt you. Let's just talk with the respect that you obviously deserve, take a bazooka and get the hero, the SRK, out of jail.

Then we can have a party. How does that sound? Friend? We can do this without ever being caught. I know someone who can fly us out of England by helicopter. It's already organised. It will be a piece of cake. And think of the reward the SRK will give us!'

Henry's colour goes back to normal 'How do I know you're not an undercover cop?' Benny is defensive 'Sir, I was once on the news for breaking into a fork shop and stealing a load of the items. I've also jibbled countless people's jabbles. I am as hardcore as they come and I know that you can see me for who I am.' Sean butts in 'With all due respect, Sir, I have to agree with him. I know deep down you trust us. I know because the three of us, we're the same'. Henry turns around and limps to a super-gun which he unhooks. He then faces the two with the weapon by his side 'You're right. About me being able to trust you, I mean. But we're not the same. I'm an animal lover, whereas you're a scumbag who captures pigeons and puts them into hotdogs. Pigs in hotdogs, yes. Sometimes even beef. But NEVER pigeons. Try budgies and you die.'

Sean laughs nervously 'Once again, I'm sorry for your loss.' Henry looks down 'It's ok. It's ok.' Benny walks to Henry, puts his hand on his shoulder and comforts him 'From what Sean has told me, that budgie of yours was a fine animal.' Henry ignores him, breaks away from him and walks back 'I want you two to bring my pet back to life. You have five minutes.' Henry aims his weapon at the two. Sean protests 'Sir, please! We're not gods! In fact Benny's an inadequate manchild!' Henry is calm 'You've already told me. Well pretty much. Do you think I'm so stupid I need to be told everything twice?' Sean stamps his foot 'Fine just blow us all up because we can't bring animals back to life! You flippin' nut case!' There is an eerie silence. Then Henry laughs 'Got you!' Benny and Sean try to giggle as they wipe their tears 'Ha... ha... haha... ha'. Henry looks stern 'You weren't laughing at my dead budgie were you?' Benny and Sean shout in unison 'No!' 'Good'.

Benny coughs 'Anyway... When it comes to breaking the SRK free, there a few problems. First of all, the prison security keeps getting updated... for security reasons. The last time I went there, the Sausage was guarded by a heavily and I mean REALLY heavily armed robot. It was pretty cool. The second problem is that the Saus' keeps getting moved between the two different Charltonham prisons apparently in an attempt to disorientate him. However, I think him getting moved for security reasons is a better explanation. Especially when you consider all the people who want to help free him. To be honest I don't think there is a TRULY good reason, the police here aren't so good.' Henry rubs his chin 'So he could be in the Doom Prison or the Death Prison?' Benny nods 'That's right.' Henry keeps rubbing 'So it's 50/50 where he could be?' Benny clicks his fingers and points at Henry 'Right.'

Henry's eyes go wild. Knowing something is up, Sean and Benny back away, slowly.

Henry sighs 'Well, unfortunately I don't have a coin on me to toss and make the decision, so let's throw this armed thingamajig and see what side it lands on...' Sean and Benny jump back and press their backs against the walls. Their eyes are wide and shake. Henry continues 'If this rocket launcher lands on the left side we go to the doom prison. If it lands on the right side, we'll go to the death prison.' Henry throws the weapon in the air like it's an everyday football. It smashes to the ground but luckily doesn't fire. Benny and Sean exhale deeply. Benny laughs 'I guess we're going to the doom prison, huh?' Henry comments 'It seems that way. I might want to use a bazooka that actually works, though.' Henry picks another one from the wall. 'Let's go, now.' Henry leads the way out the house and to the F3L0N car.

Benny comments 'So you have ultra tinted windows, too?' Henry puts one hand on his hip with his weapon in his other paw 'Sure do. Luckily I know exactly how to get to the Doom Prison simply by the feel of the road. I won't be able to see a thing!' Sean coughs 'Er... Would you like my special goggles?' Henry laughs 'Only joking. Again. I have my own. But seriously I don't actually need them. But it's good to be safe. Let's get in.' After Henry puts his super blower-upper in the back, the three enter with varying levels of anxiety. In total darkness (once again...) the car starts to move. Benny tries to keep things light 'I like your numberplate by the way. Th-three-l-zero-n. Very catchy.' Henry sighs 'You damn fool, Benny. It says 'Felon'. A three year old could see that.' Benny protests, but Sean's plate is pronounced 'Cr-one-M-three'. 'Sean is an idiot. You shouldn't reflect too deeply on anything he says. He's good at dealing pigeons, but he's not a bigwig like me.' Sean defends himself, poorly 'Hey...'

After a fair bit of driving, Henry breaks the morbid silence 'We're here. Hand me the bazooka.' Awkward fumbling noises follow and Henry confirms he is weaponised. He unwinds all windows. He and the passengers can now see a dozen or so humanoid robots rampantly adding reinforcements in front of the jail. Such include half-built razor wire fences and guard towers. Ladders and such get climbed and moved. All sorts of materials are on the ground. Behind the defences is the Charltonham Doom jail with its sign raised high in the air. In front of the jail door, Mental observes the droids 'Excellent work, fellas. At this rate this jail will be the most formidable in the world in minutes.' By the sides of the penal structures are shops with more signs, that have been completely emptied. Some robots work with saws and planks of wood, creating mock hands giving the finger and others work with paints, creating signs saying 'This is what we think of criminals'. A helicopter hovers not so high in the sky.

Henry goes red again 'This will be sweet.' I want to soak in every moment.' He points his weapon to the right hand side of the jail. He fires through a gap in the new fence. A huge explosion is created and bricks fly everywhere. Some fly in the robot's faces, knocking them out.

Another brick lands on Mental's head. After rubbing it and saying 'Ow!' he falls to the floor. The heavily armed robot from before limps out of the wreckage and fires its shoulder mounted laser cannons at the vehicle, turning it to ashes in an instant. Henry, Sean and Benny are definitely no more. The robot speaks weakly 'Enemies... Have... Been... Neutralised...' It then collapses to the floor with a huge crash. The helicopter flies away.

Out of the fire and smoke that has been gradually building around the mess, the SRK runs for his life. From the left side of the jail that also starts to catch fire, the receptionist, Smith and Morgan scatter in all directions as the latter shouts 'Who the HELL did that?! We're gonna get you! The dying robot has one last thing to say as Mental picks himself up and moans in pain 'Enemies... Have... Been... Messed... Up... The... .. SRK... Has... Es...caped...' Mental retrieves his mobile from his pocket and makes a call 'Hello, Chief? Something terrible has happened. The whole of The Charltonham Doom Jail has been destroyed. There's good news and bad news...'