



CHALLENGING: I'm left with the alien device and a Book of Destructors. Lord, I hate having to master anything new

As a desert island castaway, I'd be the one they'd eat first

IT IS 8.59am. I've been up since seven. I have tidied round the kitchen, concealed the unwashed saucepans in the dishwasher, wiped down my surfaces with pungently-scented disinfectant and closed the door on the chaos that is the utility room. I am ready for the delivery and installation of my new fan-assisted oven.

The old one snuffed it seven days ago. I got the car immediately, chose and bought its replacement within the hour – white, with foolproof functions and idiot-friendly controls. Examining the receipt, I found that delivery, installation, warranty and disposal of the old cost more than the oven itself. Also, my delivery slot would be six days hence, between 9am and 1pm – on hairdressing day. How deeply inconvenient.

In the interim I've eaten a surfeit of salad and would sell my soul for an oven chip.

I have a dismal record with all things electrical, mechanical or with moving parts. The wodge of bumf that comes with them is written in a lingo I fail to understand.

Spoiled by half a lifetime married to an electrical wizard, I never had to replace so much as a lightbulb or battery and I couldn't tell you the difference between a grommet and a sprocket.

He had a garage full of tools and a notebook full of knowledgeable contacts to fall back on if he couldn't do it himself.

Now of course he's gone, barely a month passes without something going on the blink – the boiler, the shower, the blocked drain, the broken lock – each either a drama or a crisis. The syndrome I suffer is, I believe, called 'learned helplessness'.

11.20am. Excuse me. The Man and the Lad have just arrived to install the oven. 12.00 noon. Courteous and

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efficient, they're done. dusted and down the drive with the corpse of the clapped-out oven in 40 minutes and wouldn't even take a cup of tea.

Now I'm left with the alien device and a Book of Destructors. Lord, I hate having to master anything new.

I approach the oven gingerly and twiddle a few knobs. Nothing happens. Oops! Silly me... I need to switch it on at the source.

The fan sounds a trifle asthmatic and the controls are all different. I hate it. Abandoning experiment, I have salad for lunch and microwave my dinner. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Later, I ring Daughter Dear for sympathy

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and moral support. "Honestly Mumma, it's not rocket science," she scolds from the moral high ground, having often helped her father and absorbed many of his practical skills.

Were I shipwrecked and cast away on a desert island with other survivors, as the least useful, I'd be the one they'd eat first. Maybe my ability to write an elegant rescue note-in-a-bottle might be my salvation? I doubt it.

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Once outside the system, my lukewarm interest dwindled and died. Nor have I any intention of rekindling it. My time's too precious to fritter away exchanging empty inanities online with people I don't know.

Like nearly every advance and invention devised by the good and well intentioned for the benefit of their fellow man, it has been distorted and corrupted by the unscrupulous.

The result? A modern-day Tower of Babel, where our young flounder for lack of a moral compass and grace, pity and integrity count for little.

There used to be an old epithet. "He who steals my goods takes dross. He who steals my good name takes all I have."

The difference between 'liberty' (freedom) and 'licence' (disregard for convention) is long erased. It doesn't seem to figure much in the Twittersphere.

Oh dear! My eccentricities multiply with every passing year. And d'you know what? I don't care.

Maybe I should put all this online? If only I knew how to do it...

ON THIS DAY

SEPTEMBER 7 1971

Derry Child Dies in Crossfire

A FOURTEEN-year-old schoolgirl was shot dead in crossfire between snipers and troops in Derry yesterday, bringing the total killed in the NI disturbances since August 1969 to 100.

She died holding a lollipop and wearing the gym shoes she kept on after being sent home early from St Cecilia's School when it was evacuated after a bomb scare. The child, Annette McGavigan from the Bogside, was given the Last Rites by a priest as she lay dying in the roadway. In the Bogside last night her death sparked off renewed rioting.

Annette was hit by a bullet in the Abbey Street area where there were three separate shooting incidents and nine shots were fired at troops. The Army returned the fire on two occasions. Residents claimed that the first shots were fired by the Army but the Army said the troops were sniped at first.

A ten-year-old girl said Annette had been speaking to her shortly before her death and said she wanted to get a rubber bullet for her collection of riot souvenirs. Annette excelled at art at St Cecilia's and wanted to become an art teacher.

Protest Closure by Fifty Schools

AT LEAST fifty schools in Down and Armagh will close tomorrow in protest at internment.

Teachers are to give their day's salary to the internees' dependants' fund. This was announced in Newry last night in a statement by the Teachers' Action Group. It was signed by Seamus Mallon, Hugh McNamara and Anne O'Hara. There are to be Masses for peace with justice in many areas tomorrow.

Moving Scenes at Baby Funeral

THERE were scenes of deep emotion at the funeral yesterday of Angela, baby daughter of Mr and Mrs Peter Gallagher, Cavendish Street, Belfast, who was accidentally killed while playing near her home by a bullet fired from a car at a military patrol.

Many people among the large crowd unashamedly wept as the father carried the tiny light-blue coffin in his arms from St Paul's Church where Mass was offered for peace in Ireland. The grief-stricken mother was a pathetic figure as, aided by her mother, she walked along the road for a short distance on the way to Milltown Cemetery.

(As the death rate continued to climb a month after Faulkner's internment gamble, many gasped in horror at the deaths of two children caught in crossfire. Meanwhile, the Joint Security Committee at Stormont was considering a possible military operation against the No-Go areas in Derry – seen as IRA strongholds. General Tuzo, the GOC, realising the stakes involved, favoured a negotiated solution using 'Catholic moderates'.)

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