

## Chapter 1 - with Freddy the Scientist

Freddy carefully poured the water onto the glass slide. He straightened it up over the light on the microscope's stand, and stared into the little eyepiece.

He first caught sight of one of his own eyelashes which had got trapped in front of the lens. A big ugly black stripe across the viewfinder. He removed it quickly and readjusted his right eye to the eyepiece.

As usual, all he could see to start with was a blurry mass of grey stuff, still and confusing as his eye adjusted to the unfamiliar feeling of being pressed up against the eyepiece, and his left eye muscles became accustomed to being forced tight shut. He adjusted the little light source so that the messy grey mass became a messy white mass.

He reached down and started to adjust the focusing knob.

The first attempt had the usual result. A move from one greyish mess to another, interspersed with a split second when the lens was in focus. In that brief time a little world of blue and yellow swam before his eyes, until the focus knob took the world away from him.

More carefully now, he turned the knob very slowly back towards him, and saw the bright white circular light come into proper focus. As his eyes adjusted to the new clarity he drew suddenly back from the lens. His long fair hair flew back as he jolted his head away and rubbed his right eye, hardly daring to believe what he had just glimpsed.

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Other than that, all was quiet on New Year's Day.

The big house was cold.

In the distance, Clara could hear footsteps. She strained her ear a little as she made her way up the stairs. Straining her ear put her a little off her balance as she climbed higher, but she was then able to make out the footsteps more clearly. The steps stopped when she did, and started again when she started. But when she stopped walking she was puffing and panting so much she couldn't make out that the steps had stopped too.

The house played tricks on you like that. It was so big and old and cold that things like your own footsteps on the wooden stairs seemed not to be yours, and seemed to belong to some far-off person or place. Of course, when Clara looked down, walked, looked down, stumbled again, and listened, she realised that the steps were hers.

She relaxed and made the final few steps up to the fourth floor. At the top step, she sat down, and got her breath back. She sat there silently for a few minutes, then she got up, refreshed, and bounced her way onto the landing. Clara always bounced, or boinged, or banged her way into things, and today was no exception. She barged straight into Freddy who was

sitting at the desk with a pained expression on his face. He nearly lost his balance.

'What's up, mate?' she sung, in that annoyingly chirpy way she had.

He didn't respond to her chirpiness. She reached over and slapped him hard in the small of his back.

'No!' he yelled, 'I'm busy, look at this'.

'Busy is as busy does', she replied, cryptically. She didn't look.

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He turned back to the table and the microscope, and peered once more down the lens.

Far from the grey goo he had seen before, as he slowly refocused his gaze and his thoughts to what he thought he had seen, and sure enough, at the bottom right corner of the circle of light was a blueish round object. It was slightly out of focus. He turned the knob a miniscule amount in a clockwise direction.

The object swam into sharp focus. It had a translucent, circular body, and it had eyes of a deep blue colour. It appeared to look straight up at him before swimming away beyond the circle of magnified light.

He pulled away again, but this time went straight back to looking.

Moving the slide slightly across the bed of the scope, and keeping the same focal length, he caught sight of the creature once more. Whatever it was doing down there, this time it definitely looked upwards towards him. The deep blue eyes were clearly in view, and this time the round body split open about a quarter of the way up, with the bottom quarter hinging downwards. The effect of this was that a light blue circular object was staring up at Freddy's eye, smiling slightly, and showing off a full set of orange teeth! It shut its mouth, and darted out of view again.

A second or two later, it returned into his line of sight, and this time it seemed to be pulling some kind of worm-like creature with it. The worm was brownish-grey, but also had very clear blue eyes and a hairy blue tail. The first creature appeared to point up at Freddy. Both appeared to be laughing. Then they swam off.

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Freddy's head was swimming too. A few drops of ordinary tap water, blue bugs, brown worms, sharp teeth. It didn't add up. He tapped frantically at the device on his belt, and waited for an answer.

Clara stared out of the big picture window, uninterested in the danger lurking in their water.

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'What's your New Year's Resolution?', Freddy asked no-one in particular.

'New Year's Revolution?' replied Clara, as she spun clumsily around, half falling over his feet on the top step.

'Resolution', he repeated patiently. 'It's something you make at this time of year. You have to think of something that you are going new that you are going to do in 2006, or maybe something that you did in 2005 which you are going to stop this year'.

'I'll stop bouncing around', she said unconvincingly, and half jumped, half skipped across the landing into the big room. As she went through the door, she planted her foot on a stray roller skate which she had left lying there, and crashed headlong into the standard lamp by the bed, bringing lamp, bike, and a pot plant flying on top of her. He could hear her laughing maniacally in the next room.

Freddy sighed. 'It's going to be a long year', he muttered to himself wistfully.

As she giggled on, another more familiar sound broke the now silent landing. The handset on Freddy's belt crackled into uncertain life.

'Over, over, do you read me, over, over, over...'

Freddy took the radio from his belt.

'Speak to me, friend', he said.

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