

## Macilroy, the Reluctant Dad

By Dean Scurlock

John Macilroy was unhappy. John Macilroy was out of humour. John Macilroy was in essence, to all accounts and purposes, to even the casual observer, a hapless, time traveller.

A lifelong fan of the TV drama 'Doctor Who', John had studied hard. He refused to be dragged down by people who said that human science hadn't advanced far enough to enable time travel, by people who accused him of urinating on Einstein's grave with his 'outlandish' theories on worm holes and string theory. Of course there were others that said he was bordering on the clinically insane.

Undaunted, John Macilroy studied quantum physics, particle physics, and everything else he had heard of in television and film sci-fi. There was nothing written on the theories of time travel that John Macilroy didn't want to read, although he found Jules Verne more enjoyable than Stephen Hawking.

With most people, perseverance often doesn't bring results, just disappointment and that little feeling of guilt which comes with the realisation that they'd bought into a universally known ball of horse droppings known as the American Dream. Not so in John's case. For John, perseverance finally brought results. Whether the results were good ones was an assessment that he had to come to the hard way.

Not for John the comforts of a police box or a suspension balanced Italian car. No. Too conspicuous, he thought. Instead, based on the justification that it would blend in with most homes in most times, he decided to install the time circuits into a Mahogany Welsh Dresser. Through spatial calculations he intended to materialise inside kitchens and dining rooms, at a time of day that lunch would not be being served. As mentioned, the hard way.

Whereas most of his heroes appeared in the midst of some conflict or mystery, did a bit of running about before solving the issue/s involved, John's 'adventures' were never so easily played out.

For instance, take the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots. Not a merry monarch by most people's accounts. Originally, according to John, her execution led the way for the unchallenged rule of Elizabeth 1 in the sixteenth century. John decides, purely out of historical interest, to visit the execution by means of the kitchen of a local draper in the district surrounding the executioners scaffold. A slight miscalculation in direction led to the surprising sight of a late nineteenth century style mahogany Welsh dresser appearing upon the scaffold and doing for the executioner as Dorothy did for the Wicked Witch of the West. Stunned silence quickly led to anger, confusion and a riot. Seeing his error, John quickly reversed the machine and

disappeared.

The aftermath of the Phantom Dresser incident is well documented in reliable history texts. Every schoolchild is taught about how, in the midst of the Phantom Dresser riot, members of the crowd loyal to Mary hurried her away from the scene and onto a boat to North America as soon as possible. The relatively new colony was seen as the ideal place to re-position herself as a rival to Elizabeth's throne. This she did in spades. The revolution in the late eighteenth century saw the descendants of Mary beat their European cousins, leading to the creation of the UCBA (United Counties of British America). This mighty country today strides ahead of all other nations in its ambitions of world domination, fuel dominance and obesity league tables. It's now lesser cousin, Great Britain, in Northern Europe, is allowed to tag along on foreign warmongering missions in return for a few quid off the price of a barrel of oil.

John is adamant that this is not the way history should have gone, but that it's not far off the mark.

Feeling himself responsible for a major shift in the planets history did not, however, account for John's unhappiness as he sat in his ageing grandmother's front parlour. As he sipped his tea, reflecting on his recent visit to the bridge of the Titanic, he thought that maybe getting drunk on apple schnapps with the navigator was not quite a good idea after all. His grandmother was staring intently at the Welsh dresser against the wall, convinced that there were times when she entered this room that the damned thing wasn't there. This worried her, as she could remember that at her age, her mother had imagined that her father was Gladstone, William Ewart that is.

'I've never done anything worthwhile!' John suddenly exclaimed, causing his grandmother to drop the end of her éclair into the earl grey. After throwing him a glance so severe it would have felled a legion of Spartan warriors, she quietly inquired as to what the hell he was going on about, and that whatever it was, would he kindly refrain from shouting it out inches from her dodgy left lughole.

'I've got to go, and I've got to go now!' he exclaimed decisively, whereupon he immediately sat there for a further fifteen minutes sipping tea and eating creamy éclairs, followed by going to the toilet for a further twelve minutes where he proceeded to utter a series of expletives, came out, ruffled his grandmothers hair, climbed into the cupboards at the bottom of the Welsh Dresser, and disappeared, dresser and all.

His grandmother looked around and saw a space where she was sure there had been a Welsh Dresser only minutes before. 'But I put my glasses down on there!'. Her bleary eyes rested their sights

upon a gilt framed photograph of former Prime Minister Gladstone and she became worried. 'Oh bugging hell!' she whispered.

The Third Reich, Germany, a regime held responsible for the systematic and often mechanised murder of millions of Europe's citizens, had been led by a man universally described, in essence, as an arse. That this man was not liked by generations to come could be symbolised in the pub and bar conversation common around the world, from China to France to the County of Upper California, where ale philosophers would muse upon the possibility of killing Hitler's parents before he'd been born. Of course, that would take a time machine, which at the time was a machine that human science could not yet conceive of.

John had heard these conversations whilst sitting alone in the pub studying his physics books. He was not a natural mixer. Downing his diet squash in one, he set the idea to the back of his mind, promising never to get involved in the motions of history. Never.

It was not usual for a Welsh dresser to adorn the dining room of an Austrian home, but Frau Hitler assumed that her husband had bought it during his trip to the capital. Their new lodger Jon von Macilroy was very attached to it, she noticed, often climbing inside to rattle about with a screwdriver or to hammer about for a bit. His red hair interested her, as she felt that, maybe in a former life, she too had been a ginger.

John believed that Frau Hitler was what one might call a handsome woman. He'd heard this said of women who had lost that spark of youthful beauty but retained a trace that would point to earlier days. Why kill them both, it takes two to make a baby doesn't it? She cooks well, cleans my clothes, and has a wonderful wit, why should she die? I will make her my wife, he swore to himself.

But that meant he had to deal with the question of Herr Hitler, the man of the house, his landlord. John had been staying with the Hitler's for about a month now, and in that time he had made no less than three attempts on his life.

When accompanying them to the opera one night, John shoulder-bumped Herr Hitler off the kerb and into the way of a handsome cab. The cabbie, however, had seen the man stumble into the road and, pulling hard on the reins, had steered the horses away just in time.

Prior to journeying to the next town, Herr Hitler needed his horse re-shoed and John had offered to

have it sorted. While the blacksmith had popped out the back, John had taken off one of the shoes and led the horse silently back to Chez Hitler. Whilst cantering along a mountain path the horse had stumbled and collapsed from beneath his master. Luckily for him, a protruding branch provided a convenient handle to grasp, preventing a four hundred foot drop to his death.

On the third occasion John had tricked his prey into coming to a rough and ready bar in the rougher readier part of the old town. Whilst Herr Hitler was in the lavatory disposing of a rather heavy lunch, John spread the rumour that Herr Hitler was a police informer, responsible for the arrest of twelve of their fellow citizens at the October Fest the week before. When he came out of the toilet, John was gone and about sixteen very determined, angry looking men faced him with murder in their eyes.

During breakfast the next day John sat silently, listening to Herr Hitler detailing his early successes in pugilism as a youth, how only last night he had bested nine ruffians in that bar John had taken him to, leaving the rest to run away in fear. This called for a different approach.

John was not a killer. It did not come natural to him. There must be a way of getting the bloke out of the way without killing him. The answer would come to him over dinner a week later.

The master of the house began talking about the wilds of Canada, giant forests and deserts of snow, and how he wished that he were one of the frontiersmen forging a new country out of the cold wilderness. John was struck with inspiration.

Upon the conclusion of dinner Frau Hitler declared herself to be, as John translated, 'done in' and announced that she was away to her bed. Herr Hitler and John wished her good night and settled down to a session of whisky and cigars. Unbeknownst to his host, John had been tipping his glass into the aspidistra whenever the man of the house had his back turned, and proceeded to act as drunk as his companion, urging the drinking to continue. Inevitably, Herr Hitler collapsed in a heap in front of the fireplace, spilling his drink across the rug. Grasping his opportunity, John heaved him up onto the Welsh Dresser and, after securing the drunken sot with ropes from the stables, and appropriated certain items from around the house, climbed inside the Dresser and set off.

The year was 957A.D. and Herr Hitler awoke to find himself on the edge of a frozen lake in what is now known as Nova Scotia. Besides a bitch of a hangover, he found that he also possessed his large fur coat, stout winter boots, an axe, some rope, a knife, some flint to start a fire and a tent. In the pockets of the coat he found a pipe, but no tobacco, and an envelope. He tore open the envelope and read:

'Sir, it is with regret that I must do this but your survival skills leave me no option. I am not a vindictive man, but within a year your marriage would produce an offspring who would terrorise the world like no other since Genghis Khan. This I cannot have. I thank you for your hospitality and hope you will enjoy your new life in the wilderness that you so desired to conquer. Please do not feel ill of me.

Your humble servant,  
John Macilroy.'

P.S. the year is 957A.D.. It would take too long to explain. Best wishes. John.

An Old Norse tale tells of a voyage to a cold, frozen land and of meeting a bearded white man who spoke in a dialect similar to the peoples of Goth. He lived with a native woman and had three sons, all blue eyed with black hair and thick necks. The old man had a rather particular hatred for any travellers with red hair.

Weeks passed. Frau Hitler was distraught at the sudden disappearance of her husband. John was her only consoler as her husband was little liked in the town following rumours of his being a police spy spreading like wild fire. As a result she developed an attachment and growing affection for John, coming to see him as maybe more than just a lodger.

As is sometimes the case in these circumstances, two lonely souls thrown together in times of loss and despair, their intimacy grew. John felt free, a lover at last, his bitter virginity exorcised. But the guilt, the gut-wrenching guilt. Yes, I've stopped the birth of a monster, he thought, but I've abandoned this woman's husband in the middle of the tenth century! Could I just covet his wife as easily as that? Alright, he's been dead for nearly nine hundred years but she might still love him?

John made a decision. 'I've got to go, and I've got to go now!' he declared at breakfast one morning. At this, he immediately spent the next month at the house letting his mistress down easily. He felt he owed it to her to carry on as normal.

One morning there was a note on her pillow.

My love, you are the world to me but I have to leave. It is too soon after the disappearance of your husband to contemplate the future we may have had together. So I must go, my love.

Farewell,

Jon von Macilroy

P.S. I've taken the Welsh Dresser. Hope you don't mind. Best wishes. John.

John Macilroy would read at school about the red haired dictator of the Third Reich, mass murderer, but it was only a few months after his Austrian trip that the full realisation and horror of what he'd done, set in.

His gran was quietly attacking a macaroon when he let out an expletive that she hadn't heard since her days as a fish wife, listening to the patios of the sailors down the docks. It did take her back, she had to admit.

John Macilroy's mood had not picked up. He thought of his landlady and the time they had shared, but now that was tainted by the result, the product of their time together.

Songs of Praise started on the television and, while aimlessly staring at the screen, John was struck with a new inspiration. The camera had spanned across to Christ on the Cross.

'Seems damned unfair to me. Crucifying him like that when he just wanted to do some good. A mate should have been there for him.' His gran just tutted, in that way that suggests 'typical'.

'I've got to go, and I've got to go now!' he shouted. His gran jumped in her chair, sending the macaroon flying into her Darjeeling. She swore under her breath.

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