

The Gherkin

By Rick Wilmot

It had sprung up in the centre of London. London, the city of everything and nothing. Everything for the wealthy down to nothing for the lonely. Vast riches and abject poverty. Every opposite; love, hate; light, dark; mystical, soulless. New buildings, old buildings. Not enough of those. Many, like the pillars at the entrance to Euston Station, destroyed. How much longer for St. Pancras? London encompasses it all. A great cosmopolitan, multicultural city either side of the River Thames. Every known human activity among all races and colours of people. Vibrant, depressing, peaceful, violent. Noise in the streets, quiet in the museums. It is 2007, the new century of 'new world order' of violence and terror.

The train had left Clapham Junction and I was on my way for my periodical day in London. I had left my family in Wokingham, too busy to go to London. I looked out of the window and a line of a song came into my head, 'I peeped through the crack, and looked at the track, the one going back to you, and what did I do? I'

Then it appeared. They called it 'the gherkin' because of its shape. Designed by Sir Norman Foster. An office block, weird looking. And there it stood, pointing skyward looking as if it was ready to go. Years in preparation, waiting for the moment. That thing, supposedly full of offices. People coming and going daily. Security alarms and spying equipment everywhere, just in case anyone became too inquisitive. How did they keep the secret for all those years? The builders and architects must have been sworn to secrecy. They had been told. They and their families would suffer. Who wanted to take the chance? It had been done before with the American non-moon landing. 1969, fifty-one years ago, and still the conspiracy goes on. A gigantic hoax, but they pulled it off. Quite brilliant.

It is 2020. The world is descending into anarchy of the worst form. Everybody is armed. Underneath the surface the people live in fear. Since that world changing event on 9.11.2001, leaders of countries have resorted to the only type of government they know, control of the people through perpetual warfare. Eliminate one enemy, create another. The old order of the 20th century was gone. Now, something much worse has been created, a clash of religions. Christianity versus Islam. A conflict created where there can be no winners and consequently, to all intents and purposes, no end. It is what they wanted, even needed,

to keep the arms trade vibrant in the name of eternal capitalism.

Terrorism against terrorism. The incompetent leaders of powerful military countries unleashed today's disasters on the planet earth. The years of debate about environmental issues, global warming, kept the people from thinking too much about the real issues. Headlines about the melting icecaps, the ozone layer, carbon emissions kept the population in the dark. The mushroom syndrome. The most powerful nations on Earth, USA, GB, France, China, Russia, led by donkeys, some even elected under an old worn out political system. These people had the power to create wars anywhere in the world and eliminate leaders of countries if they didn't toe the line spelt out by them. The enforcing of alien political systems on unsuspecting populations in the name of democracy had been the aim. They said the people of those countries were crying out for democracy, a system they had never had. It wasn't true. It was the control of the resources, mainly oil that motivated the powerful. The planets life blood has all but been exhausted sucked out of the desert and the sea. Now in 2020 we can see the failure. The marvelous technology had been used for ill rather than good. The wasted billions of different currencies on the futile unnecessary of life spiraled out of control.

And there stands the Gherkin, ready and waiting. Waiting for the destroyers of the planet to arrive for one more meeting to decide what can be done to save life as we know it, from itself. The architects of the current dilemma were gone. They had served their terms of office. They had been de-elected, assassinated or overthrown, only to be replaced by others of the same kind. Promoting the same dead theories and having unlimited powers while the people became more and more fearful. The people, encouraged into so much debt which enabled those in control to gain more control were sold a pup called democratic freedom. But really only freedom for the rich.

The media reported the meeting in one line at the bottom of page 10 or 11. 'World leaders meet in the Gherkin to decide the future. Scheduled for 1.1.2021. Nobody noticed. Stabbings, shootings and rape were the norm and still made the headlines. The sad faces on the tube reflecting the despair of the people as they read the news. The editorials were blaming the government as they always had in the past. Governments had come and gone mostly after only one term. 'The others can do better, can't they?'

The President of the USA was sitting in the Oval Office when the summons came. The red telephone

had rung, just the one ring. This was urgent. She had been sitting at her desk mulling over the past 30 years and trying to put into perspective today's situation and how on earth the world had arrived at it.

In thirty years everything had changed. Not only the people's total lack of responsibility but also the weather patterns which had thrown up extremes of heat, cold and stronger hurricanes. States were demanding more and more resources from the central governments dwindling reserves. They had used up everything without replacing anything. Nobody had cared except the environment lobby and no-one had taken any notice of them. The most powerful nation in the world was almost on its knees. Other countries had begun to ignore the USA after its defeat in Iraq and Afghanistan. The cost to the US had been something they could not sustain. Even their best ally the United Kingdom with perpetual right wing governments over the last 40 years were now wary of being too close to the US. Britain had also been humiliated in Iraq and totally defeated in Afghanistan with the loss of many young lives. The voters had removed the government that took the country into the chaos on the coat-tails of the Americans only to elect another government who thought they could do the same only better. Now in 2020 there was a split, except between the nation's leaders themselves. Only they, the leaders themselves, had the power of self protection. Only they knew they could survive the rapid collapse of society into hell. The TV evangelists had taken over the TV stations remembering that they, and their predecessors, had been behind the election of the people who had brought about the current state of affairs in order to bring about some old prophesy. The sane ones had spoken out and had been ignored.

The President answered the telephone. 'The emergency has begun', said a voice at the other end. She knew it was from the UK. Only there was the chance of escape, survival. 'First of January 2021', said the voice. '1100 hours in the Gherkin'. 'Understood', replied the President. Within minutes she had summoned the only two people she could confide in and who would accompany her on the journey to London.

'The time has come', she said. 'We must be in London on 1.1.2021, just ten days from now. Make the preparations for departure'. The populations of the Western countries were getting ready for the Christmas break. Most would be drunk or high on drugs. Cocaine was rife on the streets and it had been impossible to control it. The streets were controlled by gangs who ran the drug cartels. All armed and constantly at war with each other. The majority of young people caught up in the drug culture.

The ideal time to leave. Authorities all over the country would be occupied trying to keep some semblance of law and order. A losing battle but nevertheless one which had to be fought. The ordinary decent people had been looking on in horror as the American dream had disintegrated over the last 15 years. They were, by now, the minority and no-one listened to them.

Meanwhile in Moscow the young Russian President was mulling over the past. It was his 40th birthday. 40th anniversaries had always been ominous. Although he had no practical knowledge of the old USSR he had been an avid student of history and knew more than most about the past in his own country and surrounding areas. He had studied and studied and learned from the past, something his opposite numbers in the west had failed to do. He had had hope for the future and now he had taken the call.

He called his Deputies, four of them, to tell them that he had received a call from London. A meeting had been called for 1.1.2021. 'Make preparations for the journey'.

He sat down with his half full bottle of vodka and took a swig. Was this it? The call was certainly urgent. The Presidents mind wandered back over his country's history. Seventy years of the USSR had come to an end in 1990. Unfortunately, nothing had been in place to replace the old structure. The communism of the idealists had never really happened, instead there had been a paranoid leader in the beginning followed by other leaders who kept the people under so much control that they had not even been able to travel outside the country without strong supervision and a fear that if they didn't return their families could suffer.

A cold war between the east and the west had begun soon after the end of WW2. Russia and America being the main players in the game of mutually assured destruction. The communists were the enemy of the west whilst the rich capitalist countries were the enemy of the eastern bloc countries. NATO and the Warsaw Pact were names given to the cold warring sides. The two sides continually barked at each other but nothing really happened between them. Other wars around the world during those years had support from one side or the other. With the collapse of the USSR the whole eastern block area especially Yugoslavia descended into major conflicts and ancient enemies, who had lived together for years, emerged with a vengeance.

The last 30 years had seen clashes of religions once thought impossible. One side believed life was sacred the other side believing it was so cheap that they would commit suicide to achieve their aims.

The President was startled with another phone call. Riots had flared up in many towns and cities across the country. It was too late to do anything about it. Society in Russia and surrounding countries had been as bad as in the USA for the last few years.

Meanwhile in China and other far eastern countries the streets were no longer safe for the people. The very people had turned on each other in wave after wave of violence. The most populated country on the planet, China, had invaded the capitalist world economically with goods made at a fraction of the cost for the same goods in the western world. The people had thrived for a while but the country's leaders lived in luxury while the people still struggled for a living. Pictures of Mao were now covered with graffiti, a punishable offence in the past. Mao had saved China from the marauding gangs in the 1930's only to lose his mind and try and send China back to the Stone Age, as Pol Pot was to do later in Cambodia after a disastrous war in neighboring Vietnam.

The whole region had been a trouble spot on the planet since the end of WW2. Korea was split in two; Japan had eventually become a nuclear power even though it had been the only country in the world to have an atomic bomb dropped on it.

Leaders, Presidents et al, of Far Eastern Countries were now getting calls from London telling them of the situation and summoning them to the meeting. Manic contacts between them arranging the journey. The Chinese leader agreed to send the plane.

At the same time the President of Australasia was making his own preparations. His only thought was, 'Why London?' His country had severed ties with Great Britain some years before. When the Queen had died it had been their opportunity to become a real Republic. It wasn't popular with everybody. Now there were riots in the streets. A major water shortage had created fear among the population. To most of them it seemed the world was dying around them. Only the Aborigines looked on knowing they could, and would, cope with anything nature had in store for them. After all were they not the oldest race on the planet?

The Australian and New Zealand Presidents talked and within a short time they were heading for London.

1.1.21. They arrived with their briefcases, all in pin-striped suits. All looking quite somber. Their limousines had driven through the filthy streets, much worse over the last decade since the abolition of the GLC for the second time. Having lost the election in 2010 the Labour Party, having come a poor third, could only look on as the much further right wing government took over and turned the clock back 20 years. The Mayor of London had resigned and no-one wanted the job.

Graffiti was covering most of the walls of the buildings. Even the Gherkin hadn't escaped. Little did the graffiti artists know what they had been standing on while they were creating their artwork.

They arrived, all within an hour. Agendas in the briefcases. Orders from the military men and women of their respective countries. They all wondered how long the meeting would last. Only one of them knew. A delegate from Israel. He had a special briefcase, one with a red button inside. Communications had advanced tremendously since the terrorists had used mobile phones to detonate bombs in Madrid and elsewhere 17 years ago. Now the technology was in the hands of the delegate from the most unstable part of the planet, Israel, whose neighbour was Iran. The paranoia of the Israelis which had accumulated since the crazy carve up of the area in 1948, had reached a peak. The British Prime Minister had the other briefcase with the other button. In fact two buttons. One red and one green.

The meeting opened with each delegate informing the others of the unrest and violence in their cities. The police were not in control and in any case most of them were corrupt. Religious leaders spoke about Armageddon and other prophecies from a variety of philosophical writings. The descent into hell was happening at an alarming rate. Demonstrations worldwide were ignored by governments as more and more enemies were mystifyingly created who had to be dealt with. There has to be an enemy, doesn't there? In the USA the Rapture Ready crowd was welcoming the situation. 'Not long now', they chanted as they moved from state to state. The violence on the streets of all the major cities was rife with no end to it in sight. Children as young as 10 years old were killing each other with knives. Their computer games having dehumanized themselves and other people. The world was in chaos.

What was to be done? They all knew but unbeknown to the others only two of them had the means. Now was the time. The Israeli delegate rose to his feet.

‘We find ourselves in a situation where the State of Israel is under threat from a nuclear strike from Iran. This cannot be allowed to happen and the only way of stopping it is to strike first. The consequence of this is only too clear. We, as world leaders, have only one choice. We are the only people on the planet Earth with the means to leave. In 30 minutes time I will detonate a hydrogen bomb that will totally obliterate Iran. The Iranians will have only one minute to retaliate. That is a chance I am prepared to take.’

The other world leaders, in turn told the meeting of the crises in their respective countries. There seemed to be no hope for the future, if indeed there was to be a future. Human beings themselves had killed the last entity from Pandora’s Box. Hope! But nuclear war? A holocaust unimaginable. Twenty seven countries were nuclear powers now. The original five had refused to disarm their nuclear weapons and other countries had joined the club.

The British PM rose to his feet. ‘Under the circumstances, I can see no other choice but to put into operation our plan to escape the planet. In 15 minutes this building will be cleared of everybody but those in this room. During the following 15 minutes space pilots will be summoned here ready to take us to the space station. I assume I can count on the full agreement of those present.’

The rest somberly nodded. The countdown began. 15 minutes later the PM pressed the green button in his briefcase. The whole building shook as the alarm system started. From the windows of the meeting room the delegates watched as hundreds of workers ran from the building. What was happening? Was it a drill? Sirens, loud enough to be heard all over London, gave out the shrill warning. At the same time other men and women dressed in silver suits and helmets entered the building. They knew exactly what was happening. A further 15 minutes after the PM had pressed the red button the Israeli delegate opened his briefcase. It had to be done together. At 29 minutes the ground around the Gherkin started to crack. The PM had pressed the green button. The silver suited men had started the operation. Bright, shiny, steel shields rose out of the ground encompassing the Gherkin. The noise as the ground erupted around the Gherkin was horrendous.

The moment had come. Israel had sent a nuclear bomb to Iran. Immediately, Iran had retaliated. A thunderous roar started at the base of the Gherkin as it started to rise away from the ground. The green button had activated 'lift off'. People watched in stunned amazement as the Gherkin, encased in inches thick steel rose into the sky leaving a smoking, gaping hole hundreds of feet deep where it had once stood.

'I thought about you'. Waterloo Station. The tannoy. 'There is some disruption on the Northern Line. Passengers are advised to take alternative routes.'

I left the train a little bleary eyed having drifted off for the 9 minutes between Clapham Junction and Waterloo. I was happy to see Cunio still sitting there, the mouse behind him. It was a beautiful day. The sun shining on the London Eye, and as I walked across Waterloo Bridge, the Thames shimmering in the sunlight, I wondered about the future...

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