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OOF!

The Incredible Adventures of Ares

Translated by Bruce Walter

4. The Mince Pie from Space

I'm going to describe things exactly as they happened. So here we go: I saw a round mince pie descending from the sky. It was huge—as big as the mound where they buried the Athenian soldiers after the battle of Marathon. (I know, because we went there on a school excursion). Though to be exact, perhaps it wasn't quite as big.

Christmas was not far off, and that day I had eaten fifteen mince pies while mum was not around – and then another five. They were delicious, because she'd made them using the old recipe she'd learned from her mother, whom I only know from the photo on our sideboard. But now my tummy was as tight as a drum and I felt as if I was going to burst.

Then my dog Eddie set up a furious barking in the yard and mum said, 'Ares, what on earth's got into him? Go down and see.'

I can't help saying it again, but Eddie's my best friend. And that's what I wrote in the composition Miss Dorkas set us at school. I got a gold star for it, at that—and I don't get those too often!

So I run down to the yard and what do I see but Eddie jumping around like crazy and barking at the sky—or rather at the huge mince pie that was descending from the sky. To be absolutely honest, it was Eddie saw it first, then me.

As far as I know, no one on earth has ever seen a flying mince pie before. And I can't find anything like it in the books I've searched through, either. Yet I wasn't at all surprised, because the most incredible things have been happening to me lately. My mother says it's my imagination that's to blame.

Actually, this mince pie was no ordinary pie. It was a flying saucer! And don't think my imagination was to blame this time.

The mince pie landed right in front of us. Eddie was so frightened that he nearly choked himself with barking. But as for me, I don't know what fear is and I'm crazy about stories with aliens and flying saucers, so I couldn't wait for this mince pie-spaceship's door to open. Yes, it was a mince pie and a spaceship all in one, I tell you. because when I gave it a cautious lick to make sure, it had exactly the same taste as the ones my mum makes.

Anyway, not to tire you with details, the door dropped open with a great big clunk! And fifteen aliens emerged and then another five. 'That's strange,' I thought, ' that's exactly the same number as the mince pies that I've eaten.'

My mum would call that mere coincidence and she'd add that life is full of them. "Coincidence" is how daddy would describe it, too, though he hardly ever agrees with mummy about anything.

All these aliens were wearing pastry-coloured jump suits, so they looked like mince pies standing up. And instead of eyes and mouths they had things like roasted almonds on their faces. So if I licked them, perhaps they would taste like mince pies, too—but I was afraid to do it in case it made them angry. And I didn't want to find out what angry aliens can do.

They gestured to me to come into their spaceship.

'Can I bring Eddie, too?' I asked, because I didn't want to leave my my little friend behind.

They didn't seem to mind, so in we went.

And so began our journey into space aboard the giant mince pie. At some point, the leader of the aliens took a miniature mince pie from his pocket and forced it down my throat. And then, would you believe it, I began to understand and speak the aliens' language!

'Please, sir,' I asked their leader politely, 'would you mind giving Eddie a little pie like that?'

He gave him one and now my little friend could bark in Alienese!

'Barf, darf, hraf,' he went, instead of 'bow, wow'.

The aliens kept on telling me funny stories in their language, and I gathered they were very fond of jokes. My tummy was already aching because of the twenty mince pies I had eaten (plus the tiny one their leader made me swallow) and laughing made it ache still more. And when I didn't laugh enough, the aliens tickled me as well. They seemed to have great fun listening to the way we humans laugh, though they didn't do anything that looked or sounded like a laugh in front of me. So I came to the conclusion that maybe aliens never laugh, although they certainly enjoy a joke.

'Aren't we going to see any strange planets?' I asked after a while. After all, what sort of journey into space would this be if we didn't—and what would I have to tell my friends at school when we got back to Earth again?

'Barf, darf, hraf!' barked Eddie in agreement. Like me, he seems to prefer astronomy to the astrology my mum is into. Whenever she reads the zodiac charts or watches the blonde ladies on TV who read your stars, she goes off into a dream and lets the dinner burn.

'Would you like us to take you to a planet with your name we've just discovered? Yes, it's called Ares and it's made of apple tart. Or we could go to another planet that's a huge cream bun inhabited by four-legged chocolates,' the leader of the aliens suggested in a hoarse mechanical voice that sounded like three tinny voices coming out at once. 'Or maybe you'd like to see a comet from up close, or the moon of that planet where a little prince lives?'

Unfortunately, I can't recall exactly what I answered. All I remember from then on is

that I asked him for a little water. I was dying of thirst, but he replied curtly, 'Forget water! Water only on your Earth.'

Late in the night, the flying mince pie returned me to our back yard and I immediately made a dive for the water tap. I drank and drank and after that I didn't have the strength to climb the stairs. So I had a little sleep curled up with Eddie in his wooden kennel.

Mum and Dad had been searching for me anxiously, and when they found us I got a good old telling off.

'Where have you been all these hours, you little horror?' they demanded. 'You've had us worried sick! Now just you listen! If you do this once again we'll...' And so on and so forth. You know what parents are like.

Then I told them about my journey into space on board the flying mince pie, but they didn't believe a word I said.

'Dreams,' they replied. 'Dreams.'

They weren't even impressed when I spoke to them in the aliens' language: 'Dergan sift, coee, coee' I said—which means, "I had a fantastic time tonight".

WATCH OUT FOR PIGEON POOP!

I'm ashamed to confess it, but there can't be anyone who's ever been more pooped on, at least in our town. And if things go on like this, I could end up in the Guinness Book of Records.

Just imagine, it's got to the stage where I've begun to be afraid that every splat of poo that falls down from the sky is being aimed straight at me. I'm what they call a "moving target". You'll probably say, 'Are you sure they're from the sky, these lumps of poo?' And I'll reply, 'Yes, from up there where the pigeons fly around.'

I have a real problem with those pigeons. Of course, there are worse problems in this world, but for me the only problem has been pigeon poo just lately. And don't think I'm exaggerating. Just listen to this and tell me if I'm wrong.

On the day I was going to Maria's birthday party, all dressed up in my Sunday best and walking proudly along with the present I had bought for her, I heard a sudden "splat!" from overhead and my hair was splattered with a nasty squishy dollop. Then "splish!" and my fresh white shirt was dirtied from my shoulder right down to the waist. I looked a proper mess—and Maria's the prettiest girl in my class, I have to add. But when I went home to change, my mother told me, 'Ares, being pooped on brings good luck!'

'If that's good luck, then you can keep it,' I told myself. The only luck this first bombardment brought me was a second splattering two days later, while I was wearing the new track suit and gym shoes grandpa had just bought for me. I was running to play a game of basketball and all the boys and girls in my class would be there to watch - including Maria, of course. But on my way, a big fat pigeon flew over my head, I felt a watery squelch, and there I was, all messed up again.

I almost burst into tears, but I remembered that boys don't cry about little things like