Welcome To Spooktown – Rob Auton

[Spooky music]

ED EASTON: Ah! A real ghost.

[Music stops]

[Footsteps, birds chirping]

ED: [singing] ‘This town, uh, it’s coming like a Spooktown. It’s the –’ [humming]

KATH HUGHES: [singing] ‘All the clubs have been closed down.’

ED: I’m so excited to go to the – the Spooktown Wanderers, um –

KATH: Stadium, yeah.

ED: Stadium.

KATH: Yeah, I am as well, actually. Not been there for a very long time. Not – not sure that I’ve been there, actually.

ED: Have you, uh, have you had any nightmares this week?

KATH: Oh, yeah. Actually I probably wasn’t asleep long enough to have a nightmare last night. But perhaps that is the nightmare.

ED: In its – in and of itself a nightmare.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Um, the night before though I, um, joined a rival panto, uh, company. And, uh, and it got really nasty. Really nasty. Like the – like the like – you know, messing about with light fixtures so they fall on people’s heads and stuff like that. It got really dark.

ED: Fuck.

KATH: Pun genuinely not intended then. But it – it did get really dark.

ED: Love that bit. Just because it’s not intended doesn’t mean I can’t enjoy it.

KATH: No, I – I wasn’t telling you not to enjoy it. I was just letting you know it wasn’t intended.

ED: Oh, just – just seems like you don’t want me to enjoy it. I’m just trying to make –

KATH: I know. I’m just – I’m just saying I don’t want anyone to think that I intended it.

ED: It – it just seems like you’re trying to stop me from enjoying it.

KATH: Okay.

ED: And I just want to make sure that we – we’re both on the same page.

KATH: Okay.

ED: Re – re that. Okay.

KATH: Have you had any nightmares this week?

ED: Yes.

KATH: Go on.

ED: Oh, very much so actually. I went swimming in a lake.

KATH: Oh.

ED: Um, but it was probably about – how big’s that? How big’s that?

KATH: Um, it’s 30 cm.

ED: 5 inches? Nah, 30 cm is –

KATH: Is it? 15 cm.

ED: Yeah, so – yeah, about 15 cm. Clear – crystal clear water. And then what looked to be the bottom of the lake. Uh, and then I would say 60 cm of pure fucking horrible mud.

KATH: Disgusting.

ED: So when you put your foot into it you’re – you’re expecting to hit the bottom. You don’t. You fall through the bottom. You keep going. For ages. Then panic because it’s sort of weeds and mud so you’re like, ‘oh, this is how I die.’

KATH: Yeah, also you don’t know how deep that is.

ED: In a shallow lake.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Yeah. Yeah. And I wasn’t wearing a wetsuit. I was just wearing, um, very nice swimming shorts.

KATH: Oh, you’re a daft lad. As long as you enjoyed it.

ED: Hang on. Is that – is that Rob Auton?

KATH: I think it is Rob Auton.

ED: Hello, Rob.

[Spooky music]

KATH: Oh hey, Rob.

ROB AUTON: Hello, guys. How are you doing?

ED: Yeah, really good, thank you.

KATH: Yeah, not bad, thanks. How are you?

ED: Nice to be out of the house in the sunshine.

KATH: Yeah.

ROB: Yeah. Alright, yeah. It’s alright. Whenever I visit this place I always – some kind of strange feeling comes over me. But, you know, it’s worth coming back to, I think.

ED: Oh.

KATH: Oh.

ROB: I do like it here.

ED: That’s nice.

KATH: Well, good. Yeah. Yeah.

ED: Very rich – a very rich sentence, uh, in regard to like back story there for me. I really enjoyed it.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Um – oh, that filled – filled me with [eating noises] like a fizz. Um, thank you –

KATH: Oh, that sounds terrible. Filled you with fizz.

ED: I know, I was like –

KATH: Ugh. Oh god.

ED: Yeah, it gave me diarrhoea. That’s a really weird sentence. Um, uh, thank you for inviting us to Spooktown Wanderers stadium. Very kind of you.

KATH: Yeah, thank you.

ROB: Welcome.

ED: Um, I’m – I’m not au fait with football.

KATH: Same.

ED: What – what is it that, um, no, neither is Kath. Thank you, Kath. Um, what is the difference between like – what makes it a stadium and what makes it just like the pitch? Do you know what I mean?

ROB: Well a pitch is made out of grass or Astroturf.

KATH: Okay. Okay.

ED: Okay.

ROB: Um, a stadium is normally made out of metal or bricks and plastic seats.

ED: Okay.

KATH: Got you.

ROB: I don’t think there’s ever been ever a stadium that has had seats for a pitch and grass for – where people sit. But maybe that would be a thing. But um, yeah. I mean I am – I am slightly into football. Not massively, but I do like it. Um, but unfortunately with this stadium, you know, the club shut – shut a long time ago and –

ED: Right, right.

ROB: It’s a bit of a shame, really. There’s –

ED: Yeah.

ROB: You know, you can think about the people that used to be in there and something like little kids getting their shirts and stuff like that, but that don’t happen no more.

ED: That’s really sad. That’s – there’s a word for that. Um –

KATH: That is sad.

ED: Kenopsia. Where you’re in a – in a location that is usually full of sort of noise and business but it’s completely empty. So like a school when the kids aren’t there. That feeling is – is kenopsia. And you get the same sort of feeling here in the stadium.

KATH: Ah, yeah.

ROB: Kenopsia?

ED: Kenopsia, yeah.

KATH: Good word, that.

ROB: How did you find that word out?

ED: Um, just being on the internet.

ROB: Oh really?

ED: Since I was like 16. Yeah. Imagine that.

KATH: Big brain.

ED: Um, ‘big brain.’

ROB: That’s – that was a good internet session that, then, wasn’t it? If you, you know, when you come off the internet. You’re like, ‘oh.’

KATH: Came away with kenopsia, yeah.

ED: Okay, so my first question. Have you eaten since you got to Spooktown?

ROB: No, I haven’t, actually. I thought I was going to go somewhere after this.

ED: Oh, fair.

ROB: Where’s open now? Where – do they have – but I think – I used to like go to the Burger King, but I think – is that still open? There’s not much open, is there?

ED: The – the Burger King isn’t open. It’s – it’s got that sign outside that’s like, ‘closed due to Covid.’ But when everything else started opening up the Burger King didn’t. So yeah. We can’t take you to the Burger King. Maybe there’ll be some food inside the stadium. Oh, it’s been closed, hasn’t it? That would be horrible.

ROB: Okay. Maybe I’ll go to Wagamama.

ED: Great. Yeah, actually.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Waghoulmama was the –

KATH: Waghoulmama is what we have, yeah.

ROB: Or there’s a Leon – there’s a Leon at the train station.

ED: Leon is just called Leon, yeah. Yeah.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: You can go to the Leon.

KATH: You’ve got options.

ROB: Leon’s changed owners recently.

ED: Is – has it?

KATH: Has it?

ED: Really?

ROB: Yeah, a bit topical, uh, uh, words for you there. Yeah, it’s not as good. I went the other day.

ED: Shit.

ROB: Not – not in Spooktown, but I went in, uh, London and, uh, it was just full of cauliflower. They’ve spread it out.

ED: Oh, god.

ROB: They’ve spread it out with cauliflower. It’s like, ‘come on. Come on, guys.’

KATH: Like cauliflower has taken over the restaurant or the menu? Or both?

ROB: The menu. Yeah, what I – what I had, I – I thought, ‘oh, this is not –‘ they’re normally pretty generous with like the, uh, main ingredient of the dish. But um, it had been taken over by cauliflower and I – I wasn’t really that chuffed, really. But, um –

KATH: No.

ROB: No, have you guys eaten?

KATH: Um –

ED: Yeah. Yeah.

KATH: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, soz. Didn’t know you were like, ‘hey, let’s go for food after.’ I didn’t know that was the vibe. So like –

ROB: No, sorry about that.

KATH: I can always eat again.

ROB: What did – what did you have?

ED: I can eat again. I can double dinner. I can double dinner.

KATH: Yeah, I can always double dinner. Always double dinner.

ED: Um, well we have a sort of, um, you know that bit in Camden Town where they give you the – the bits of chicken? And then when you order the whole thing it’s potato? And then you’re like, ‘you’ve whizzed me there. I thought it was just going to be chicken, but it was potato?’ Do you know that place? Got one of those in Spooktown.

ROB: Oh yeah? Oh, did you?

ED: Yeah, so it – now the –

KATH: I just went round the markets and had all the samples, you know? That they give out.

ED: Sample the samples, yeah.

KATH: There’s a sample, I’ve had it. So I’m very full. Yeah.

ROB: Oh yeah, that’s a good idea.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Sample dinner. Mm.

KATH: Mm, I love a sample dinner. Really do.

ED: Um, second, uh, second question. Thank you for answering that. Second question. Uh, this is a – this is straight in at the deep end after the first question. Rob.

ROB: Yeah.

ED: What’s the spookiest thing that’s ever happened to you?

ROB: Um, actually?

ED: Yeah.

ROB: Like in real life?

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Yeah. Well, yeah.

KATH: What – whatever – whatever feels right to say out loud.

ROB: Okay. Um.

ED: But obviously yeah, if you don’t want to say it it’s like really bad.

ROB: I’ve have several experiences with – with the paranormal. Um, or maybe the, um, do you know the word ‘paranormal?’ It’s like – you know, like what does ‘para’ – what does ‘para’ mean? You know, like paratrooper? Paranormal?

ED: Along – alongside, doesn’t it?

ROB: It’s what?

KATH: Is that what it means?

ED: Alongside, doesn’t it?

ROB: Is it?

ED: Like the Paralympics is alongside the, uh, the original Olympics. Parallel.

ROB: Oh. Oh, so paranormal is alongside the normal.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Oh.

ROB: Is it?

ED: Parallel to the normal. Yeah.

KATH: That’s, um, blown my mind a little bit.

ROB: Well what’s parachute then?

ED: Uh, next to the chute. Because you’re under the – you’re underneath the –

ROB: Yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah. Okay, so once – once I was doing a gig –

ED: Keep going.

ROB: I was doing – no, I’ll start with the one that happened first in my life. I used to work on a Safeway’s.

ED: Oh yeah.

KATH: Nice.

ROB: Safeway’s supermarket.

KATH: Yeah yeah.

ROB: And, uh, uh, nighttime. And, uh, well first of all I – I worked during the daytime. But then it was, uh, it was the summer holidays and I was at uni so I needed some money. So I, um, got a job on a night shift and it was half past eight until half seven in the morning. And, uh, you used to be able to get quite a lot of money sometimes because you would work all the time and never have any time to spend your money. So it was a really good way to go back to uni with a bit of beer money and things like that.

And, um, there was – there was this one night where I was working and it was me and this other guy called Chris. And Chris had worked on – in this night shift for ages. Long before I got there. And, um, there was one night where I was stuck in – I was stuck in, uh, shampoos and things like that, right? Loreal, Avene, and everything. Putting that on the – which is – that’s not a very scary experience, that. It’s like – yeah, it’s quite – it’s well-lit, you know?

ED: Yeah.

ROB: It’s like you’ve got VO5 on you and you’re putting it on. And you’re like putting some Gillette on the shelves and it’s not – but every now and again I was like – I’d think I’d seen something out of the corner of my eye. And I’d go like that. ‘Oh nothing, yeah.’ And then it kept on happening. I was like that. ‘Oh, nothing there, nothing there.’ And I – I was like, ‘I’m sure there’s something there.’ And I thought it was Chris, uh, having a laugh. And it wasn’t.

And, uh, anyway, got to lunchtime or our first break that was, uh, at about 1:00 in the morning. And, um, he said, ‘oh Rob, can I ask you something?’ A bit weird. I said, ‘yeah yeah yeah.’ And he said, ‘oh, have you seen – been seeing things out of the corner of your eye tonight?’ And I was like, ‘what do you mean?’ And he’s – he said, ‘well, you know, like black – kind of like black shadows, you know? Just dark areas that – that have quite –‘ I said – I said, ‘yeah, I have, actually.’ And he said, ‘oh yeah, it’s been really bad for it tonight, hasn’t it?’ And I was like, ‘what do you mean?’

KATH: What?

ROB: And he said, ‘oh, well this used to be – this building was built on the site of a, um, like insane asylum.’ And I was just like, ‘okay.’ I was like, ‘I don’t want to hear anymore about that.’ So that was the first one.

ED: Oh, so you just gave up and walked away?

[All laugh]

ROB: Um, yeah yeah yeah yeah. I was like, ‘alright, mate.’

KATH: Went back. Left your shift. Went back to uni.

ROB: Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. And, uh, ‘I’ll been working on the booze aisle from now on.’ And, um, it – and then there was another time when I felt that something strange happened that I’ve, um, I don’t know if I’ve said this before, but I was – I was – well, I had – I have said it before. I don’t know if, uh, I should say it again, but I will do. Um –

ED: Yes, please.

ROB: It was, uh, I was doing a gig in Hereford. Um, at the – is it the play something? And, uh, it was a tough gig, it’s fair to say. And, um, got back to the hotel room. I was staying in this place called the Green Dragon Hotel in Hereford. And, uh, I was just falling to sleep and, uh, I heard someone say my name. Like so much so that it – it woke me up. And I was like, ‘okay, someone just said –‘ and it wasn’t like I’d heard a voice. It was – you know there’s a big difference between someone talking to you – no, someone just saying your name and someone talking to you, right? You can feel it somehow. And, um, I woke up and I – I said, ‘pardon?’ I didn’t – I didn’t go, ‘what?’ I was like – I was like –

[All laugh]

ED: So polite.

ROB: I was like, ‘pardon?’ Uh, uh, not – not like, ‘what the fuck? What was that?’ I was like, ‘uh, yeah? You alright?’ Um, and anyway, nothing was there. But I absolutely bricked it and, um, put my head under the covers. Went to sleep. Woke up in the morning, put the name of the hotel and ‘haunted’ next to it into Google. And it came up and it was like, ‘paranormal activity in this room.’ Um, ‘great stay here if you like staying with poltergeists and ghosts and things like that.’ And, um, it was all on the thing. And it was like, ‘yeah, our kettle fell into the sink,’ or, ‘the taps kept coming on’ and stuff like that. I was like, ‘oh god.’

And then it turned out that I had a – well, it didn’t turn out. I did have another gig that night in the same place. So I was like, ‘oh great, I’ve got to stay in this hotel again tonight.’ And, um, anyway, I did the gig. Another difficult gig. And, uh, got back and, um, unplugged everything. I was like, ‘right. I don’t want any kettles turning on.’

KATH: Yeah.

ROB: ‘I don’t want the TV – well, there wasn’t a TV.’ I’m not that rich. But, um, there was – there was nothing there. But I unplugged everything anyway. I was like, ‘right. Come on. Just go to sleep. Don’t worry about it.’ And, um, anyway, I was just falling asleep again. Exact same point where you just go in. And the landline started ringing. I was like, ‘ugh, I forgot to –‘ and I was like, ‘what?’ And I was – I was like, ‘no.’

And then – but I – I wasn’t scared. It – it quickly turned into something. It was – I was like annoyed. It was like having a fly in the room that was just pissing me off. And I was like, ‘right, there is something. Something is happening here and it isn’t normal.’ And I – I was just – I couldn’t get my head around it. And then I – I went to sleep, woke up in the morning, and in the hotel there was a – there was like – I saw this dog coming around the corner. Little dog. And it was, um, shaking. And, um, the owner looked like proper scared. And she was – she was really, um, agitated, the owner. And this dog was just going mad.

And, um, I went up to check out and, um, I said, ‘oh, sorry, is there a guest book?’ And, um, the lady said, ‘no, no, there – there isn’t a guest book.’ And, uh, I said, ‘oh.’ She said, ‘why?’ And I said, ‘oh, is it?’ She said, ‘have you had anything weird happen?’ And I said, ‘yeah, there – there has, actually.’ And she said, ‘oh, what room are you in?’ I was like, ‘room 14.’ And she said, ‘oh, no, well there’s a poltergeist in the room above you, but that shouldn’t have been in your room last night.’

[All laugh]

ROB: And I was like, ‘oh, really?’ And she said, ‘yeah yeah yeah yeah.’ I was like, ‘okay.’ But then if that does kick off all the time, why isn’t it on ‘Most Haunted’ and all that, you know?

KATH: Yeah. Also if they’re in the room above, what’s stopping them coming downstairs?

ED: Yeah, that’s mad. That’s absolutely mad.

[Spooky music]

ROB: I was writing this story that I’m going to do later, and I was like, ‘oh, I don’t know if I can put that in. That’s a bit dark, that.’ Um, because I don’t want people to think that I’m a psychopath. But then –

KATH: Sure.

ROB: Some of the stuff that you see on – it’s an obvious point, but people write that stuff. You know, like ‘Saw’ and all that. It’s like –

ED: Yeah.

ROB: And they – and they are paid to write the dark and – and then I was – I sort of was like, ‘oh, people love – people seem to love it, being scared and seeing blood and stuff like that.’ It’s like, woah. I don’t – it’s kind of weird. It’s very obviously strange and weird, but I mean there must’ve been so many psychological tests being done on what stimulates the brain, danger while sitting comfortably, you know? And stuff like that. It’s like – yeah, really mad.

ED: It is – it is weird, isn’t it? It feels like – it feels like going – like coming up with all that stuff. And then when people are like, ‘that’s disgusting,’ you’re like, ‘yeah, it’s a prank. Like I’m – I’m doing it as a joke. Like it’s so that you get scared. It’s not real.’ It’s like it kind of is real because you are coming up with it. Like just because you’re not acting on it doesn’t mean that you haven’t originally come up with it. It is pretty fucking – especially, I think ‘Saw’ is the perfect example of like – because you can come up with – you can think of different ways that you could die and be scared by it, but Saw is a different – it’s a different world, isn’t it?

KATH: Yeah, someone’s sat down and gone, ‘I know what’s – I need to get out of my system.’

ED: Yeah. Yeah.

ROB: But then it – people do watch it and they’re waiting – they’re really waiting just for the next blood, aren’t they? Bit like –

KATH: Yeah, some people are in it for the gore.

ED: Yes.

KATH: Some people – I think what I like about horror is that thing of like the tension and then the relief that – of – of a –

ED: Yeah, it’s balloon popping, isn’t it?

KATH: Yeah. I think it’s that. Like – and I enjoy it in the same way – like the sea and the ocean. Like deep water terrifies me, but I will look at videos and photos of deep water in the same way that I enjoy a horror film.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: It’s like really uncomfortable, but I kind of like it.

ROB: Yeah.

ED: Have you seen that horrible dangly, uh, squid.

KATH: Yes. Holy hell.

ED: That’s just like floating near a, um –

KATH: It’s so big. It’s so long.

ED: What is it? An oil pump.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: And it’s just like staring at – I know it’s not, but it is staring at the camera. I know it’s obviously not.

KATH: It’s staring at the camera.

ED: But it is. It 100% is, okay?

KATH: It is.

ROB: Oh, I totally know – you see that with, um, I’ve seen an octopus once in – I think in the – in the wild. And it – its eye, you know?

KATH: For real?

ROB: It just looked – yeah, somehow. I can’t remember. Maybe it was – a squid or something like that. And – and, uh, I can’t – and – but its eye. It was like, ‘yeah, I’m looking at you. And, uh, I – I mean it.’ Do you know what I mean?

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah.

ROB: It wasn’t just like, ‘oh, I don’t know anything, I’m so stupid.’ It was like, ‘I know I’m alive and I’m looking at you, mate. And, uh, help me get back into the sea, please.’ And, um –

KATH: Yeah. Did you – did you help him?

ROB: Nah. No. Um, well –

ED: Fair. That’s so sad.

ROB: I follow loads of, uh, whale accounts on, um, Instagram. Not loads. Probably one. About three.

ED: That’s loads.

KATH: I think more than one is excessive.

ED: Yeah.

ROB: More – more than one’s excessive, isn’t it?

ED: Three’s loads.

ROB: But some of those, where you see it like – it –

KATH: Their eyes, yeah.

ROB: The ones – the ones that make my stomach go the most are when it’s like still ocean and then a whale just comes up and you’re like, ‘woah.’

KATH: Yeah. Yeah.

ROB: You see the size of it and the – it’s almost like vertigo inducing, the way that –

KATH: It absolutely is that, yeah.

ROB: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah.

ROB: And you – just the scale of it. And, um, yeah. Yeah, it’s not – it’s not –

KATH: Yeah, it turns me sick.

ROB: It’s not spooky but it’s kind of – I’m not saying it’s spooky.

ED: I think it’s spooky.

KATH: I’d say – I’d say something that big –

ED: I think it’s spooky.

KATH: Emerging from the sort of deep, dark ocean, is really spooky. Like what else is down there?

ED: What would you – what would you be most scared of if it – if a whale that size came up like out of the ocean and in it was like a massive tooth or something that you like couldn’t even imagine? Do you know? Like just a huge tooth. Or a really big like lipstick mark kiss?

[All laugh]

KATH: Like the size of like a boat on the size of –

ED: Just like all along its flank, yeah.

KATH: Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah yeah. Yeah.

ROB: Oh, what? So there was like a giant mermaid down there?

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Yeah, yeah.

ROB: Or something’s kissed it. God, yeah.

ED: Someone’s kissed its side and it’s blushing. It’s like blushing when it comes out of the water.

ROB: Oh yeah, no, that – I mean that. I’d be more scared of that than, uh, that would be – that would be insane, wouldn’t it?

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah.

ROB: But it does – that – the – I love that, all the unknown of everything.

KATH: Yeah.

ROB: That’s why, you know, there’s – talking about spooky stuff, I mean the reality of life is fucked up enough as it is anyway, isn’t it? It’s like – I shouldn’t have sworn then. I really did try not to swear. But real life is –

KATH: Hey, you can swear all you want. You’re in Spooktown, you can do what you want.

ROB: I know I can, but I don’t – I don’t like it. It’s, uh, it – it is, though. And it’s – you just go, ‘woah, right, okay.’ Like I remember once I was – I was in, uh, Edinburgh and there was a seagull. You know what they’re like when they’re slapping their feet on the concrete on Saturday afternoon on Princes Street and it’s like slap slap slap. They’re massive feet, aren’t they?

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah.

ROB: And anyway, I saw one near the train station under that bridge as you’re going up near the jacket potato shop, you know like up –

KATH: Oh, yeah.

ROB: And, um, it was eating a pigeon. And it had blood all down its front. Like red. And then I was – I was like –

KATH: Oh, that’s horrific.

ROB: Well I’ve got blood. What does that make me, you know? It was – it was like just being – being the same, pretty much, as this thing with blood in it.

KATH: If – if it can eat a pigeon it can eat a man.

ROB: Well, yeah. No, exactly. But it’s like, we’re all so connected and we are all – know so little. And I’m always saying that. Like we don’t know anything, really, apart from probably how we feel.

And, um, and, you know, I always feel like a bit – like I’m a bit thick. But then the top scientists, they say that. And like they say it in such a simple, beautiful way of like, ‘yeah, we don’t really – you know, we know a bit, but there’s so much unknown stuff.’ And that’s where this stuff of spooking us and us not being able to perceive, uh, things that might be looking at us.

You know like when you look in a zoo and there’s like an Orangutan eating a bit of mango. And you’re like, ‘oh, wow, they – they eat mangos just like us.’ And then – and then you go, ‘well what if someone’s watching me, you know, talking to a microphone?’ And they’re like, ‘oh, wow, he’s learnt how to speak into a microphone?’ And I – I just don’t have the brain power to perceive the person that’s watching me.

KATH: Yeah.

ROB: Do you know what I mean?

KATH: Yeah, I got you.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah, it’s mad, isn’t it?

ROB: Well maybe not, but, uh –

KATH: When – when –

ED: No, I do. Yeah.

ROB: I like thinking about stuff like that, anyway.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah, I – my – I think I delve into stuff like that, but then I sort of have to stop because I get a bit like, ‘oh no, oh no, oh no,’ eventually.

ED: Yeah. Have you – have you read –

ROB: Yeah, totally, yeah.

ED: Have you read Edwin A. Abbott’s ‘Flatland’?

ROB: No, is that good?

ED: It’s really good. It’s about a two dimensional shape that lives in a two dimensional world and then it gets like lifted up into a three dimensional world. And it’s suddenly like, ‘what the fuck?’ And – and then it – it – oh, maybe it gets turned into a three dimensional thing. And then it goes to like a one dimensional creature and it’s basically like, oh, extrapolate that into us – imagine if we went into fourth – the fourth dimension and what that would be like. It’s really good. But it’s just about like – I think it’s about a square or something, who’s just like knobbing about his – his business. Didn’t need to say knobbing about then.

ROB: Really?

ED: Going about his business. There we go.

KATH: Yeah.

ROB: Yeah.

ED: It’s – it’s good. It’s – it’s that kind of like, ‘god, imagine if we had that experience.’

ROB: What’s that book called?

ED: It’s called ‘Flatland’.

ROB: Okay.

KATH: ‘Flatland’.

[Spooky music]

ED: Uh, so Spooktown council have said that we – there’s not enough threat for people to tell us truthful stories. So basically if we don’t believe your story, um, we’re going to have to do you in.

ROB: Okay.

ED: Which is bad. Because that like – we should probably have told you this beforehand, but, um, yeah, we’ve got – we’ve got to do you in. But we’re not assholes so we are going to give you a choice.

ROB: Right. Okay.

ED: Of death. Uh, so –

ROB: Okay.

ED: Option one is –

ROB: Yeah.

ED: Kicked in half.

ROB: Which way?

[All laugh]

ED: Do you know what? Dealer’s choice. That’s up to you, that.

KATH: I think – yeah.

ROB: Okay. Across. I’m saying – yeah. Horizontal. A horizontal kick.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: At the hip, yeah?

ROB: Yeah, yeah. Then I’ve still got my top half, don’t I?

ED: Cleft at the hip.

KATH: Yeah, but you won’t – you won’t have the bottom half.

ED: It is – it is to death. It is to death.

KATH: So yeah. So you will, um, you will bleed out, presumably.

ROB: Okay.

ED: Uh, uh, so it’s kicked in half from waist, not from full head to anus.

ROB: Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

ED: Um, or Kath’s crowbar. [clanging]

KATH: Yeah, which I’ve always got with me.

ROB: What’s Kath’s crowbar?

KATH: It’s a crowbar that I own.

ED: What it says on the tin. It’s Kath’s crowbar.

KATH: Yeah.

ROB: And that’s what, just getting beaten to death with a crowbar?

KATH: There’s options. Um, yeah.

ED: You – yeah.

KATH: Yeah, mainly that. Um, it could – it could –

ED: I don’t think there are options, really.

KATH: Well no, I think, um, I could – it could be a surprise. It could be a, um –

ROB: Oh yeah, that sounds even worse, actually.

ED: Yeah, but – also like the surprise is that you get beaten to death by the crowbar. It’s still – it’s still – it’s not really a choice.

ROB: No.

KATH: Well you because could die in very – like I could – I could like smash your mouth so you can’t eat, so then you starve.

ED: Oh.

ROB: Smashed mouth.

KATH: So there’s options. Smashed mouth.

ED: Smashed mouth, yeah.

KATH: There’s options.

ROB: What was their big song? Is it ‘Hey Now’?

ED: [singing] ‘Somebody once’ – got kicked in half, yeah.

ROB: Yeah yeah yeah.

ED: [singing] ‘You’re a rock star, get your game on.’ Get paid?

ROB: Um, I think – I mean imagine walking into a room with a crowbar and saying, ‘surprise.’ It’s not – it’s not what you want to be doing, is it?

ED: No, no. Kath – Kath, I know – I know we’re here now, but Kath has to – you know, she’ll have to find out where you live. So that’s a lot of rooms to enter shouting ‘surprise’ before –

KATH: Yeah, yeah.

ROB: Okay, I’m going to go with the first one, then.

ED: Okay.

ROB: Is it two options?

KATH: Yeah yeah, those are the two.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Yeah. So you’re going to go with the kicked in half.

ED: Yeah, alright. Kicked in half. Um, Kath, do you want to ask your question?

ROB: Yeah, it kind of goes with the football theme.

KATH: Yeah, actually. You’re right. You’re right.

ROB: Yeah, put me on a penalty spot.

KATH: Uh, right. I’ve got a question for you. Kraken, Megalodon, Captain Birdseye. Shag, marry, kill.

ROB: Hm.

KATH: Hm. That is right.

ED: Hm.

KATH: Hm.

ROB: Who’s Megalodon?

KATH: Uh, big prehistoric shark. Probably lurking down there.

ED: Yeah, a lot of people think there’s still some knocking about.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Kissing. Kissing big whales.

ROB: Uh, what would I do? Well Captain Birdseye seems like a pretty good bloke.

KATH: Yeah, a good egg.

ROB: Been eating fish fingers.

ED: Couple of kids.

ROB: For a long time. I’d probably marry Captain Birdseye.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: That’s nice. Yeah. That’s nice.

ROB: Yeah, and then –

KATH: I think you’d be happy.

ROB: What, shagging and killing?

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Yeah.

ROB: Who am I doing that to? Was it the – the big – the big shark?

KATH: Well, Kraken or –

ED: Yeah, or –

KATH: Megalodon, yeah. So a big shark, uh –

ROB: What’s Kraken?

KATH: Uh, you’re better at describing this, Ed. Big – big octopus, maybe?

ED: It’s basically a big – big octopus squid type thing. Big tentacles, squishy.

ROB: Oh, like the, um, what’s the drink? There’s a drink Kraken, is there? Is that sambuca?

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Yes.

ED: Spiced rum.

KATH: Rum. Yeah.

ROB: Oh, spiced rum. That’s well nice, isn’t it?

KATH: Yes, it is nice, that.

ED: Yeah, it is really nice.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Maybe – maybe we can chuck in a bottle of that if you –

ROB: Yeah, um, yeah. I’d probably make love to that Kraken.

ED: Yeah. Cool.

KATH: Yeah. And get a bottle of Kraken out of it as well.

ED: Yeah.

ROB: And then – and then kill the shark.

ED: Kill the shark.

ROB: Yeah.

ED: Yeah. Yeah, I – I think that’s – I think –

ROB: Not that I’d like to kill a shark but, um, you know, there’s three options and three things. But –

KATH: Exactly.

ED: Don’t want to kill anyone.

KATH: You’ve made – you’ve – yeah.

ROB: So if I – if I Google Megalodon.

ED: Yeah.

ROB: Oh, may as well do it, actually.

KATH: Yeah. It’ll be big –

ED: I think once you, um, sorry, Kath.

KATH: No, I was just going to say it’ll just be a big – big shark.

ROB: Oh yeah, Megalodon –

ED: Yeah, big shark.

ROB: Straight up. Top result. Shark. Images.

KATH: Yeah.

ROB: Yeah. Okay.

KATH: He’s big, isn’t he?

ROB: That’s – that’s going to be an interesting night.

KATH: You’re doing it at night? You’re committing to killing it in a night?

ROB: Yeah.

KATH: So you’re going to find it and kill it in a night?

ED: Yeah. Well, we’ll – we’ll provide it. We’ll provide it.

KATH: Because no one’s seen it for a very long time.

ROB: Probably swim down there. Better get myself a, um, snorkel.

KATH: Yeah, that’ll do it.

ED: Uh, we hear you have a – a spooky story about the, um, Spooktown Wanderers football stadium that we’re stood next to.

KATH: Yeah, I’d say next to. This feels next to.

ROB: Yeah.

ED: Does it have a name, the story?

ROB: Simply the – it’s called ‘Spooktown Wanderers.’

ED: Nice, yeah.

KATH: Great. Yeah.

[Spooky music]

ROB: Spooktown Wanderers.

This is the story of Tony Raven. A quiet, polite and solitary man who lived by himself in a wooden house in the woods on the outskirts of Spooktown. It wasn’t a Tim Burton, falling apart at the seams, moon always near it type wooden house. It would pass as an older villa at Center Parcs. It had a massive satellite dish on the top of it. Residents of Spooktown were often confused as to the exact whereabouts of Tony Raven’s wooden house due to the fact that sometimes they would walk through the woods and his house would be there and other times people would walk through and the woods and it wouldn’t be there.

There is not a trace of homemade scary magic where a man called Tony Raven lived in a wooden house and could make said house disappear. It’s just the fact that different people would get lost in the woods and then they would tell their mates as to whether they’d seen the house or not. ‘No, it wasn’t there. I couldn’t believe it,’ they would say, as if it had fallen into the spirit world when really they just walked through the woods a different way and didn’t see Tony Raven’s house because the woods surrounding the house were quite complicated like that.

Some people saw it. Some people didn’t because they didn’t look in the right place. It certainly existed. There was digestives in it. He had a resilient peace lily. He had a drinks fridge. On the top of it there was an unopened bottle of Sierra Tequila complete with little red sombrero. Inside the fridge were low alcohol stubbies from Lidl.

‘£1.99 for 8,’ he could often be heard muttering to himself, ‘that’s under 25 p each. Some people pay £6.45 for a pint of neck oil in Spitalfields market in London apparently. I could get 24 stubbies for that with 48 pence left over.’

Tony had a black leather sofa with a football cushion on it. When I say football cushion and the image of a football cushion comes into your head, that’s the type of cushion I’m talking about. Like an incorrect chessboard with pentagons instead of squares wrapped around a flattened globe. He had a football cushion because he absolutely loved football, and there was not a team in the land he admired more than his beloved local team, Spooktown Wanderers Football Club.

Tony Raven’s house was riddled with merchandise from said club. If there was anything that could hold a logo and football colours in his house, then it was holding Spooktown Wanderers FC Logo, the logo being a stereotypical sheet ghost with footballs for eyes and a goal for a mouth.

When I say Spooktown colours, the Spooktown Wanderers FC colours were black. Black shirts with black stripes and other black stripes, black shorts with black trim, black socks, and compulsory black boots with sports logo blacked out. If the grim reaper designed a football kit, it would look like this. The away kit is the same. They just refuse to change until the other team wears a kit that is different enough. It’s safe to say the crowd of a Spooktown Wanderers match could double as a crowd for a Slipknot concert.

Tony had black scarf with black writing, black hat, black mug, black shot glasses, jet black metal knives and forks, black bunting he’d made himself. He had the Spooktown Wanderers FC watch, black foam finger, black golf balls, black landline telephone.

This may sound like a jovial football follower, but he was just on the wrong side of fanatical. It’s okay to be obsessed with something, but he had veered into the territory where you find that exclusive and obsessed few who are super fans of the UK royal family. The ones who make it onto the news with plates attached to their clothes. To like something so much you get on the news for it, for me, that is a sign that you might like that thing a little bit too much. The staff in the club shop knew him by name as they had printed it on the back of the obscene amounts of shirts and training tops he’d bought. They didn’t just know him as Raven, but Tony Raven as he wanted his full name on the back and it took up two lines.

The interior of Tony Raven’s house was predominantly black, but he had a bright green carpet. It wasn’t carpet, it was astro-turf. He’d astro-turfed this entire wooden house. The living room was a rectangle and his sofa was at one end and his TV was at the other. He had full-size corner flags in the corner of his rectangular living room. Not only that, but he had corner flags in every corner of his house. He started with corner flags in the corners of rooms, standard size corner flags for main structural corners. But as time went on, his cupboards had corner flags in them. And it got to the stage where if you could see a corner in his house, it had a corner flag in it. Open a matchbox, corner flag in each corner. Muller yoghurt crumble Corner, he’s eating it with the non-corner flag end of a corner flag.

He built a home dressing room with a wooden bench in it. It’s safe to say he was absolutely obsessed with Spooktown Wanderers football club. Well he thought he was, but he was about to fall into a whole new world of love for the beautiful game and his beautiful team.

One day he made an out of character trip to the Spooktown IKEA. It was his first time in IKEA. [crowd chattering] ‘Hm, I think I’m going to remember this forever, like the first time I had a stuffed crust pizza,’ he said to himself when looking at the names of the picture frames. ‘RIBBA. HOVSTA. I bet people will start naming their kids after IKEA picture frames soon,’ he said out loud on purpose.

Dressed in full kit and football boots, he moved gingerly through the massive contents. He felt like he was walking through some sort of Argos catalogue that had had all the fun stuff taken out of it and loads of stuff you can’t play with put in. He watched the people of IKEA and listened to their BILLY bookcase-based arguments until they looked and he left. ‘Alright Tony,’ said a voice through the bright glassy exhibition of hanging lampshades. He squinted passed a light that looked like a yard of ale with a bulb in it to see it was Geoffrey, who had a season ticket next to him at the football.

‘Hi Geoffrey,’ said Tony, ‘I’m just in IKEA in the light section at the moment.’ Tony had a strange manner when talking to people in person. He spoke to them like he was on the phone to someone else but he was actually talking to them. ‘How have you been, Geoffrey? Are you looking forward to the start of the new season? I can’t believe we are in the top flight of English football – the premier league!’

‘Yeah, I’m looking forward to it indeed. Oh, Tony, this is my wife, Abigail.’

‘Hi Tony. I’ve heard a lot about you,’ said Abigail. ‘Good to see you’re in your full kit like Geoff said you always are.’

‘Hello, nice to meet you. How do you say your name?’

‘Oh, it – um, just normal. Abigail.’

‘Ah, I like your name,’ said Tony. ‘Sounds like you’re saying your name’s Gayle and you’re saying ,“I – I be Gayle.” Nice to meet you Abigail, I be – I be Tony.’

‘Yeah I guess that’s funny,’ said Abigail.

‘I’m glad I’ve bumped into you actually, Tony. I’ve got something I want to show you that I think you’re going to absolutely love,’ said Geoff. ‘Our Michael showed it to me. Didn’t he, darling?’

‘Yeah he did. You’re hooked on it, aren’t you? Here Tony, look at this.’ Geoffrey took his mobile phone from his pocket.

‘No. Look, you know I don’t like mobile phones,’ said Tony. ‘I’ve got my Wanderers iPhone case but I don’t want anything to go in the case.’

‘No, look, I wanted to show you this. This is something that’s – it’s something that’s on the phone, okay? Have you seen this?’ Geoffrey unlocked his phone [phone unlocking] and pointed to a green round cornered square, a blue lion wearing a crown in the middle.

‘What’s that?’ said Tony.

‘This is the fantasy football app. And look, Spooktown FC players are finally on here for our selection. You need to get involved Tony, it’s a right laugh.’

‘Ah I don’t know about all that. Apps and likes. Apps and likes. I don’t think it’s going to do anything for me.’

‘Look, we’ve got a mini-league going with everyone who sits around us in the ground. It adds a whole different dimension to watching football, mate. Honestly you’re going to absolutely love it.’

‘Yeah, but I enjoy football. I can’t see anything that would make me enjoy football more than I do already, to be honest.’

“Alright mate, look. Just go on the website when you get home. Have a look. Pick a team and see if you like it and I’ll see you at the first game next week, alright? Can you believe we’re finally playing against Horny Town FC?’

‘Yeah, I know their fans are mad. The chants are just sex noises. And when they score everyone pretends they’ve had an orgasm. I know I wish the players would put a kit on. You can’t just have a number painted on your back and call your body a football kit.’

‘Oh, I know. It’s outrageous, isn’t it? We’re going to have some interesting games this season. Horny Town FC first match, Anxiety Town next home match after that.’

‘Yeah if they turn up.’

‘Oh, I know.’

‘Yeah, then it’s Excitement Town FC after that. Have you seen their fans on match day? They do my head in. They can’t contain themselves. They’re constantly excited so their future is always right in front of them. They never reflect on what’s happened. It’s excited about a corner. When they score they don’t celebrate because they’re already excited about what’s going to happen next. The kick-off.’

‘Alright, well great. Yeah, well see you on Saturday then, mate.’

Tony had played fantasy football when he was little, but that was in the newspaper and he had to send it in in the post. [newspaper rustling] He always found it a bit of a faff. But when he got home he opened his laptop, [laptop creaking] turned the power on, entered his password [keyboard clicking] ghoulforlife#neversaylive, and took a moment to look at his Spooktown FC screen backdrop.

He typed in the fantasy football website and before he knew it, he had created an account and was thinking of a team name. ‘Hm. Tonytowntime? Hm, no. Tonyheadsshoulderstony? No. Spooktowntony. Yeah, that’s right.’ Spooktowntony was his final decision. An email notification pinged in. It was Geoffrey. ‘Hey Tony, great to see you in IKEA. Hope you kicked some meatballs down your throat mate. Anyway, here’s a link to our mini-league. Would be great if you joined.’

Tony was surprised at the pace in which he was being swept away with this new side to football. He set about making his team. He could only select three players from Spooktown so he went with his favourites – last season’s star striker Michael Crow, a much loved man about Spooktown nightclub scene. The playmaker and club captain Dean Liquorice, and goalkeeper Sebastian Schwartz.

He read and re-read the rules. ‘Right, okay, so four points if a goal keeper or defender don’t concede a goal, midfielder scores a goal five points, misses a penalty minus 2 points, getting sent off minus three points. Right, okay. If you get more points than other people you get a green arrow, okay. And if you get less points you get a red arrow. Okay, yeah. This is – this all seems a bit much,’ said Tony. ‘What’s at stake? Arrows? It can’t be worth all this effort, can it? It seems like a bit of a time wasting exercise for me. He filled out the rest of his team without thinking too much, joined the mini league, and closed his laptop. [laptop shuts]

[Crowd cheering] Saturday came around. Tony was one of the first in the stadium, dressed head to toe in black as one of the club’s many anthems blared out from the rusty tannoys.

[Chanting from speakers] ‘This town (town) is coming like a ghost town  
All the clubs have been closed down’

‘But not ours,’ shouted the fans.

He saw Geoffrey giddily jogging up the steps towards him dressed in his knight rider coloured onesie.

‘You joined the league, mate, didn’t you? Good on you. Spooktowntony in the house!’

‘Yeah, I buckled,’ said Tony. ‘Will probably leave it after today to be honest. But, you know, something to do, innit?’

Next Janice walked up the steps with a hotdog in a black bun with the exclusive to Spooktown black mustard. ‘Tony, you’re on the FPL flex? I never thought I’d see the day.’

The rest of the mini league arrived, all seemingly more bothered about fantasy football than the actual match.

The away end was filling up with the Horny Town FC flesh exhibition singing songs like ‘Let’s Talk About Sex Baby’ and Mousse T ‘I’m Horny’.

‘Tubular Bells’, the Exorcist theme, rung out over the Spooktown speakers. It was game time.

[Crowd cheering] The Spooktown fans were on their feet roaring their team on. Kick off. The whistle blew. [Whistle blows] Despite Tony’s fanatical approach to supporting his team, he was always quite quiet at the games, taking it in. Really studying the team’s performance. He couldn’t believe they were in the top flight of English football. And then in the 42nd minute, a breakthrough. David Liquorice delivered a delicious corner to the back post met by the head of Michael Crow to put the ball past the Horny Town keeper Stephen Sideboob.

[Loud cheering] The home crowd erupted. Geoffrey grabbed hold of Tony Raven. ‘You’ve got them in your team, mate, haven’t you? I’ve seen it. You’ve got them in your dream team.’ Geoffrey got his phone out and opened the app. ‘Look mate, points for a goal from Crow and the assist from Liquorice. You’re in the points, baby.’

A strange feeling came over Tony. Some numbers had changed on an app but it felt like more than numbers changing. It felt like life had an extra layer added on top. An exciting layer. The crowd returned to their seats and in a break in the chanting, Tony felt himself rise from his seat and shout at the top of his voice, ‘David Liquorice you’re really good!’ It was so loud and unexpected it seemed to catch the whole stadium off guard.

The members of the mini league turned, gobsmacked at this new Tony. They’d never heard him raise his voice and this seemed to really come from a different place inside him. It was so guttural and direct David Liquorice heard it, stopped in his tracks and seemed struck by the genuine nature in which the compliment was meant.

‘Thanks mate,’ he said in Tony’s general direction. The half time whistle went. [Whistle] Tony was absolutely beside himself with joy. ‘David Liquorice spoke to me. Did you see that? Oh guys this my favourite match I’ve ever been to.’

Janice had her phone out looking at the app. She went on Tony’s team. ‘Hey Tony, you’re a bit of a dark horse at this fantasy stuff. Look at this.’ He had 76 points at half time. ‘All your players are doing you such a service. Look at that. 76 points!’

‘Is that good?’ said Tony.

‘Good?’ said Geoffrey. ‘You’re killing it, mate.’

‘Oh yeah, beginner’s luck I guess.’

The second half played out better than Spooktown Wanderers could have imagined. [Loud cheering] A hat trick for Tony Crow, three assists for Dean Liquorice and then in the 92nd minute Sebastian Schwartz saved a penalty.

‘128 points, Tony. You’re number 56 in the whole country.’

‘Are you joking? What does that mean? Let’s have a look at your phone.’ Tony took Geoffrey’s phone from him and looked through the points of his team. “Oh wow. Can you believe it, Geoffrey? 56th in the world! I’ve ever never been 56th in anything!’

‘See you in a couple of weeks then, guys,’ said Janice.

‘Yeah, see you then,’ said Geoffrey. ‘Up the Spooks.’

‘Up the Spooks,’ said Janice.

Tony didn’t look up from the screen. ‘Okay, I’d better be getting home now, Ton. Can you believe this, Geoffrey? Okay, right. So look, everyone of my players did well, didn’t they?’

‘Yeah they did, mate.’

‘Oh, oh, it’s so – I’m so pleased for you. Alright, come on, mate. I’ve got to take the kids and Abigail to the cinema.’ Geoffrey went to take his phone from Tony.

‘Fuck off, mate,’ said Tony, looking at Geoffrey square in the eye.

Geoffrey had never heard Tony swear before, nor had he seen him hold eye contact for that long.

‘What? What did you say, mate?’

‘Fuck off. Look, just give me a minute. I’m – I’m looking at this.’

The fans had emptied from the stadium. The cleaners were swilling away the bodily fluids from the away end.

‘Mate, look, I’ve got to go. We – he’s coming to kick us out.’

‘Alright, come on chaps. Home time,’ said the steward in a black low vis vest.

‘Sorry Geoff, mate. Yeah, here’s – here’s your phone. Not sure what came over me then,’ said Tony. ‘See you in a couple of weeks, yeah? Can’t believe it. Absolutely loved it today.’

The next morning Tony went to Carphone Warehouse and took out a contract on the most up to date smart phone on the market. When he got home, he downloaded the fantasy football app and looked lovingly at the points his players had achieved, his name at the top of the Spooktown mini league. Number 56, Spooktown Tony.

Tony had never felt more motivated. He hoovered his astroturf, [hoovering] washed all his football mugs and plates. [dishes clanging, water running] The wooden place was spotless. He was on the top of the football shaped world. He had so much energy he didn’t know what to do with it. He went litter picking in the woods and litter picking in town. By Sunday night he had a large carrier bag and bin bag all full of rubbish. [tying bag] He couldn’t remember a time when he was more content.

‘Maybe this is the good life people talk about,’ he thought to himself.

Leading up to the next weekend’s games, Tony continued to look at his league position. He had so much fresh love for the players in his team. He felt almost related to the team somehow.

The weekend came around. Tony sat glued to the Spooktown away game at Anxiety Town. The home fans were worried and as the game went on the crowd got more and more anxiety-ridden, this being due to Spooktown Wanderers absolutely pummelling them. Michael Crow delivered his second hat-trick of the season, David Liquorice also scored a brace. Tony’s points went up and up and up. It was happening again. He felt like he was floating.

The ‘season ticket energy’ WhatsApp group was going ballistic. [phone buzzing] The news filtered through that Tony was now remarkably in the world number one in fantasy Premier League.

He phoned up Geoffrey. ‘Geoff! Geoff! This has got to be the best thing that’s ever happened to me. Thanks so much for introducing me to this app. I’ve got a massive green arrow that’s going right up to the top spot.’

‘Well enjoy it while it lasts, mate,’ said Geoffrey laughing.

Tony laughed and then didn’t. ‘I ain’t going anywhere. See you, mate.’

Tony then did something he thought he’d ever do. He downloaded the Twitter app, created an Account under the name Spooktown Tony with a screen shot of his league position for a picture, and typed David Liquorice into the search bar. With a blue tick next to his name, there he was in all his midfield glory. David Liquorice. He pressed the follow button and liked all of David Liquorice’s 998 tweets, the last one being, ‘fantastic win today! Up the Spooks.’

Tony replied to the tweet with, ‘David Liquorice, you’re really good!’

He then went onto follow all the other members of his fantasy team, switched his phone off, switched his lights off, and went to bed. [phone buzzing] The next morning he opened his eyes, then opened Twitter directly after to see that he had 20+ notifications. ‘Ah wow. 20+ notifications. That’s good,’ thought Tony. Clicking on the notifications symbol, he found there wasn’t 20 but thousands and thousands of Spooktown fans who had now followed him.

He scrolled down to see the source of all this engagement to see that David Liquorice had not only retweeted his tweet but also followed him back. He had gone from no followers to 16,000 followers overnight. ‘This phone.’ He looked at it lovingly. ‘What was it giving me, though? This is a new feeling. This new river of optimism that is flowing through my blood. I –‘ [sighs]

[Crowd cheering] The week flies by and Tony is sat in his seat in the stadium ready to see his boys annihilate Excitement Town FC. The night before he had sent tweets to all the players wishing them good luck. Some of them liking and retweeting. Tony felt at one with his team. However, it was 0-0 at half time. Tony checked his phone to see his score, or as he quickly found out, his lack of score. He dragged the screen down to refresh the numbers and they didn’t change. ‘Hm, that’s weird,’ he said.

‘Ooh, top spot in jeopardy, Tony,’ Janice laughed.

Tony didn’t say anything. The second half started. Then in the 78th minute disaster struck. Sebastian Schwarz, the Spooktown goalkeeper, was sent off for handballing the ball outside the area. Tony looked at the points decrease on his phone. Tony stood up as Sebastian Schwarz walked down the tunnel directly beneath where they were sitting. ‘You stupid bastard! Why did you do that? Stay in your area, it’s easy. You’ve really fucked me over here, mate.’

‘What?’ said Sebastian Schwarz. ‘Oi, shut up mate. It was a – it was a simple mistake,’ said the keeper, shaking his head.

‘Woah woah woah, Tony. Calm down, mate. Look, we’re all here to enjoy ourselves,’ said Geoffrey.

The game ended. [whistle blows] Tony had his head in his hands. Excitement Town FC had won 4-0.

‘Come on Tony, let’s go,’ said Geoffrey. ‘We’ll win next week.’

Tony didn’t lift his head from his phone screen.

‘Okay, well look. I’m – I’ve got to go so I’ll – I’ll see you in a couple of weeks then, mate.’

Fifteen minutes passed. Then an hour. A steward approached Tony. ‘Don’t you have a home to go to, mate?’

Tony looked up, and then back down without saying anything.

‘Come on pal, let’s be having you.’

Tony bolted up out of his seat and grabbed the steward by the throat. [grunting] ‘Don’t you fucking talk to me. Don’t ever talk to me,’ said Tony, with the mascara streaming from his eyes. He held the grip and held his neck and then let go and ran towards the exit. [footsteps running]

The steward with his hands on his knees trying to catch his breath. ‘Stop that man.’

Tony ran all the way home, locked his door, and looked at the app. [door closing] 28 points in total. A red arrow next to his name. He had dropped 1.5 million places in the league.

Tony screamed. [screaming] it came from the same place that he had paid his favourite player a compliment, the sound ringing out through the woods. Birds everywhere above the forest. He looked to the framed quotes from famous footballers on his wall.

‘Believe to achieve – Anton Ferdinand.’

‘If you do a little mistake everybody kills you for it. This is life and I’m ready for it – Cristiano Ronaldo.’

Tony read the Ronaldo quote over and over, the gold frame becoming brighter and brighter somehow.

‘If you do a little mistake everybody kills you for it. This is life and I’m ready for it – Cristiano Ronaldo.’

The week’s events after the four nil defeat developed quickly in Spooktown.

On the morning of Monday 3rd September, a police cordon was erected around goalkeeper Steffan Schwarz’ home. [sirens]

The next day, Michael Crow’s house.

The next day, it was David Liquorice’s.

And finally on the Thursday, blue and white tape surrounded the house in the woods.

The walls of each house smeared with red arrow shapes.

Tony Raven’s seat in Spooktown FC remained empty until the club’s liquidation. It is said they never recovered from the massacre. But it is said that Tony Raven has been sighted as a ghost, straddling corner flags at many Premier League games.

[Spooky music]

ED: That was a great story. Um, I don’t know whether it – I don’t know whether it is sort of like a ‘do we believe it or not’ because I – obviously I remember this happening. Because I – I remember –

KATH: Yeah, I remember the massacre. Yeah.

ED: I remember following Tony on Twitter. I was one of the 16,000 who – who followed him on Twitter.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Um, obviously –

KATH: And I was stood next to you when you did that, so –

ED: Yeah, because you don’t have Twitter but you –

KATH: Yeah yeah yeah.

ED: Look at my – look through my Twitter.

KATH: I look at your Twitter, yeah yeah.

ED: We share a Twitter. Like a, um –

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Like a couple having marriage troubles. We have the same.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Share social media. Um, so I – obviously it happened because it was all – yeah, it was all over the news. I remember. I remember it vividly. In fact I used to – this is really bad – not Steven Crowson. What was the striker? Steven – Steven Crow?

KATH: There was a Michael Crow.

ED: Michael Crow. Sorry, Steven Crowson bullied me at school. That’s why I have Steven Crowson written down.

KATH: Oh yeah, of course. Yeah yeah. Ew, nasty little shit.

ED: Michael Crow. Michael Crow. Um, so Michael Crow and I were in the same, uh, all male voice choir. Um, so I knew – I knew him quite well.

KATH: Oh yeah.

ED: Or should I say, [singing] ‘I knew him quite well.’ That was – I was, um, that was my harmony in there with – I just do that note for every song. Um, just the one note from me. Um, so yeah. I – I vividly remember all of this because obviously I was connected to it in two ways. The Twitter following and, um, Michael Crow, who – my mistake, I did forget his name. Just because of the, you know, I was so sad.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Um, but what a great story. I never heard it like that before. I never heard it told like that before. From his perspective.

KATH: Yeah, I – I know, I hadn’t – yeah, I hadn’t heard, um, about Tony, um, haunting the – the, you know, the corner. The – the thingies. What are they called?

ED: Corner flags.

ROB: The corner.

KATH: Corner flags. There we go. Yeah. Yeah, hadn’t heard about that before. But it makes sense because I – I’ve, uh, I’ve heard other people say like, ‘who’s that lad knocking about the corner flags?’ Uh, so it’s presumably Tony.

ROB: I think he might be trapped. I don’t know. I mean in the story it was saying that he’s at a few Premier League rounds, but I think he has actually only been seen at this Spooktown Wanderers FC stadium. So maybe his – part of his punishment is – I mean it looks like he’s enjoying straddling the corner flags, but I don’t know.

KATH: Yeah, that’s how it was described to me. It looked like he was having a great time.

ED: But I guess like, um, is it Sisyphus with the rock? He pushes the rock up the hill?

KATH: I don’t know.

ED: Is that Sisyphus?

KATH: Oh that, yeah. Don’t know.

ROB: I don’t know.

KATH: I – rock lad.

ED: Um, whoever that was, I’m sure he enjoyed it when the rock rolled down, but not the pushing it up. So I imagine it could still be a punishment. He just enjoys the straddling aspect of the corner flags, but not –

KATH: Perhaps, yeah.

ED: You know, when the game’s on maybe he’s still there just knocking about an empty stadium, which is quite sad. Brings back to that kenopsia, doesn’t it? Um –

KATH: But then he was there for a long time when it was empty. Like he’d hang around after hours, wouldn’t he? With his phone. So –

ED: Had his phone then though, didn’t he?

KATH: True. As well. And I suppose the steward was there as well.

ED: Yeah, but he won’t have his phone in the afterlife. How did you – how did you hear about this story?

ROB: Um, I can’t remember. I don’t really – I don’t – I haven’t been to Spooktown much but I do like scary – you know, the – the horror that can – football fans bring to an occasion sometimes. Um, and, uh, that was definitely one of those occasions. I mean it went quite big on the internet, didn’t it?

ED: Yeah.

ROB: And, uh –

KATH: Yeah.

ROB: I mean and it – really I – I heard about it because a lot of people on the fantasy Premier League, um, YouTube channels talk about it.

KATH: Oh right, yeah.

ROB: And, uh, how fantasy Premier League does take over a lot of people’s lives. And, uh, it seems like quite a – it can ruin football and ruin lives as well. But also it’s really good.

[All laugh]

ED: Just like gambling and drinking. It’s – it’s great, it’s fun.

KATH: Yeah, it’s really good.

ED: The Astroturf carpet. The Astroturf carpet. I genuinely had a – probably about a month long conversation with my partner about getting Astroturf carpet in our bedroom because I thought it would be really nice. Uh, I’m very sad to say that she won. Um, so we just have boring, normal carpet. But I was like, ‘it would – it would be fucking amazing. It would be fucking amazing.’

ROB: Oh, big time.

ED: What a dream. I mean can –

ROB: There’s different types of – there’s that Astroturf that has all the small bits of gravel in it that really get in your –

ED: It wasn’t that stuff.

KATH: What? That’s what – that’s what I thought Astroturf was. So I’m like, ‘why would you want that in your bedroom?’

ROB: Yeah, it can – it can be.

KATH: I thought I – like sandpaper on the ground.

ROB: Um, well there’s different – there’s different types.

KATH: Oh.

ROB: I mean you can – Astroturf – a lot of people just Astroturf their lawns, don’t –

ED: Yeah.

ROB: Well I mean obvious point, Rob, but people do – do the gardens. And then it’s like they don’t have a real lawn. It’s Astroturf. And then it’s –

KATH: Just like fake grass?

ROB: Yeah, fake grass.

KATH: Okay. Because – yeah.

ED: Yeah. People go about – yeah, people wake up in the morning, and when it’s not been raining they’ll hoover their gardens.

KATH: Wow.

ED: Yeah.

ROB: It’s really cool, isn’t it?

ED: It’s really cool.

KATH: See I’m – when I think Astroturf, I am thinking like sand – green sandpaper covered in dust. That’s what I’m thinking of when I think about Astroturf.

ROB: Oh.

ROB: I think you’ve – I think you’ve made – I think you’ve had a nightmare about that and that’s –

KATH: I – no, I think that was what – my school had an Astroturf and it was – it was that. Were we lied to?

ED: Oh. Yeah, I don’t think – I don’t think that’s Astroturf, mate. I think that’s a gravel patch.

KATH: Okay. We had a gravel patch, then.

ED: A green gravel patch.

KATH: To play hockey on.

ED: Yeah, that’s – no, that’s not what I’d want in my bedroom. I’d want like fake grass. Anyway, um –

KATH: Okay, I’m back on board with that. That’s cool.

ED: Yeah, so I would – I would say – also, love the kit. Black stripes on black stripes. Really love that kit. Um, I should – I should go to a couple of games. Um, yeah, I think – I think it’s a pretty open and shut case. I mean it was – it was all over the news.

KATH: Yeah, I’d agree with that. Yeah.

ED: My – my friend, my best friend Michael Crow, um, died – died at the hands of Tony. Um, I remember putting up that – that blue and white tape up myself before the police got there.

KATH: Was that you?

ED: Um, yeah, yeah. You just – you do stupid things in when you’re grief, yeah.

KATH: Can’t you, yeah? Can’t you.

ED: When you’re full of grief you just do mad things. Um, thank you so much for telling us this story though, Rob. It was – I loved it.

KATH: Yeah, thank you. Like as I said, not heard it from that perspective before. So it’s really, uh –

ROB: You’re welcome.

ED: Yeah, and it’s nice to remember grief.

KATH: It is nice to remember grief.

ED: Um, I think that’s it.

ROB: Yeah, yeah.

ED: I mean do you want to go for that – that meal? Go for some – back to eat now?

ROB: Yeah, come on. Let’s go.

KATH: Yeah, because you’re not going to get kicked in half, are you? So yeah.

ROB: I’ll have a chicken Katsu curry.

KATH: Nice.

ED: Oh yes.

ROB: Or is that a good one? I mean I’ve had it a lot of times.

KATH: But it – if you like it, go back to it. No shame in that.

ROB: I’m – what’s your – what’s your go-to at Wagamama’s?

KATH: Um, those little bun things. They’re like –

ED: Bao buns.

ROB: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

KATH: Panko – is it? No, or aubergine.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Bao bun?

ED: Panko – Panko covered aubergine Bao bun.

KATH: I absolutely love that.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Absolutely love that.

ED: Vegan ribs. Vegan ribs, great. They’ve got a new duck thing. New vegan duck thing. It’s bang tidy. It’s all just fucking tight as hell, isn’t it?

ROB: Vegan – do they do vegan duck?

ED: Yeah.

ROB: Does it taste like duck?

ED: I can’t remember either of them. Like I don’t remember real duck or the fake one.

ROB: It tastes nice?

ED: It was nice, yeah. Whatever it was, it was great. It was fucking bang tidy.

ROB: Ah. I’ll have to give that a go.

ED: Yeah. Bang bang cauliflower. Fuck me, I love that place.

ROB: Are ducks vegan in real life? Do you know?

ED: Are ducks vegan? I think ducks themselves are vegan, yeah.

KATH: Are they vegan?

ROB: Do they eat fish?

ED: I don’t think so. I think they just eat, um, wow. I was going to say grains, but that’s not true, is it? They’ll eat insects and, um –

KATH: I don’t know.

ED: No, they’ll eat insects. They’ll eat big fucking shit loads of insects.

ROB: Yeah they will, won’t they?

ED: Yeah, that’d be their bread and butter. Bread and butter? They have that.

KATH: Bread – yeah. Yeah, that’s not vegan.

ED: Bread and butter is their bread and butter.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Yeah, so I guess insects are their insects. Um, yeah, alright. Let’s all – let’s all grab a bit to eat, then.

KATH: Yeah, okay. Let’s do that.

ROB: Let’s do it.

ED: Great.

[Spooky music]

ED: That was nice.

KATH: That was nice. Wait, the food or the story?

ED: That was really nice. Uh, the story was nice.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: The food was exquisite.

KATH: Yeah. Yeah, I’d go with nice and – and exquisite. Really enjoyed that.

ED: It feels like we should be sponsored by Wagamama’s. Because it’s come up like twice. Anyway, um, if you’re listening, mama –

[Both laugh]

KATH: Waga? Mama? Um –

ED: Either or.

KATH: Either or.

ED: Um, that was – that was nice.

KATH: Real nice.

ED: Yeah.

KATH: Ooh, nice.

ED: The story was nice.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: The food was nice.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: The company, uh oh, it was nice as well.

KATH: Yeah, everything was nice.

ED: Everything was nice.

KATH: Everything was nice.

ED: I wish I’d got something more than just, um, a bowl of water like a dog. But, you’ve got to try new things when you go out.

KATH: You do have to try new things.

ED: When you go out.

KATH: And that’s why that – that’s what I was saying, though, before. Like if you – if you like something you can get it again. That’s fine. You know, you don’t need to push boundaries and get new things like bowls of water.

ED: Yeah, yeah.

KATH: But I – you know, I appreciate you trying.

ED: Yeah, I should – probably should’ve got something new. But it’s when – when they’re upselling the bowl of water and they’re like, ‘the special today is a big bowl of – big bowl of water, you good boy.’

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Then you’re going to go, ‘I’ll try it. I’ll try it. I’ll try it. Can I have two?’

KATH: They are good in there, aren’t they? They are good.

ED: They are good. Best bowl of water I’ve ever had. Right.

KATH: What are you up to now?

ED: I’m – I’m popping – I’ve got to go to Carpetright, um, which, FYI, absolute trash. I hate it. But Celine Dion’s picked out a new carpet that she likes and she wants to meet me there because she says her throat’s haunted.

KATH: Oh, okay.

ED: Um, so I’m just going to see if there’s anything in there. She’s got anything to talk to me – to me about that.

KATH: Oh, well enjoy that.

ED: Um, but I probably – I’m mainly going to go there to be like, ‘oh, it is a nice carpet. But you can probably get a carpet like this or similar from somewhere better than Carpetright.’

KATH: Yeah, Carpetright – I find it quite claustrophobic.

ED: Because they – they, uh, they’re very bad.

KATH: Are they bad – are they bad – bad guys?

ED: Really good on the front – front-end user stuff. Back end user stuff, really bad.

KATH: Oh.

ED: Once you’ve – once you’ve paid your money, terrible. But I do like sort of rubbing my face along their samples. And they – they’re very lenient in that respect.

KATH: Yeah, even during – didn’t they encourage it during the pandemic? I think sort of rubbing – yeah.

ED: Weirdly, yes.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: Yeah. Um, ‘fuck the scam-demic, come rub your face on our carpets,’ was their, um –

KATH: Yeah, that was their – their slogan, wasn’t it?

ED: They got tattooed on a lot of their, um, employees.

KATH: Yeah. God, that’s commitment, isn’t it?

ED: Employees.

KATH: Ah well. Um, I’ll let you go do that then. Let me know.

ED: Give my best to Celine? Or –

KATH: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, if she asks.

ED: She’ll ask.

KATH: I don’t know. You know what she’s like.

ED: Well, um, see you potentially back at home if we still live together.

KATH: Yeah, maybe.

ED: Okay.

KATH: Alright then. See you later.

ED: That’s what I’m saying.

KATH: Yeah.

ED: That’s exactly what I’m saying. See you later. See you later, alligator.

KATH: In a while, crocodile.

ED: Well, we’ll see you later alligator.

KATH: Um –

ED: And we’ll leave it at that.

KATH: I – no, because that’s – you’d say, ’in a while, crocodile.’ Um –

ED: We’ll just leave it at ‘see you later alligator’ and then we’ll see wherever the wind may take us, we’ll head that way.

KATH: Crocodile – crocodile dominates this conversation. Because the crocodile is bigger. In a while crocodile.

[Spooky music]

This has been a Little Wander production. Music from Rhodri Viney. Local artwork from Suze Hughes. Voice from Melanie Walters. With special thanks to Beth Forrest, Steve Pickup, Sam Roberts, Henry Widdicombe, and Jo Williams. Other podcasts from Little Wander include Here to Judge and I Wish I Was An Only Child. Subscribe now on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts.