

**MALLOY, MERGENSER, Z'BEARD, DESMOND, OSSZEFOGVA AND THE INTERGALACTIC PICKLE
PROPHET- A SHORT STORY BY NIELS NIELSEN**

revision 1: April 5, 1970

revision 2: Nov. 18, 1995

Once upon a time, in a land known to all as the Pickle Realm, there lived Pickle People in great number. Four of them- Bucket Malloy, the Drule Mergenser, Ozgood Uncle Z'Beard and Doctor Desmond (who wasn't a doctor in the usual sense of the word) met together every other Friday evening to discuss their grievances and hopes for the future. They all worked together in a Pickle Packing Plant which produced Pickle Products to supply the soldiers who fought in the Pickle Wars which abounded in that particular part of the world and to fulfill various other logistical demands of the military. Ever since Bucket and his friends could remember, there had been one or another Pickle War going on, and since they had strong feelings concerning their country they served vicariously by toiling on, patriots all, in more or less the usual sense of the word.

Alas, not all was bliss in the Pickle Realm, ignorance notwithstanding, and despite its efficiently humming Pickle Factories. Bucket (who was not a Bucket in the usual sense of the word) and his friends learned through their correspondence with the great and well-respected Petco Osszefogva, Prime Patriarch and Principal Philosopher of the Outside Empire- a land where wars were rare, and conflicts few and far between- that the Pickle Wars had been deliberately engineered by an inexplicably obnoxious character known to friend and foe alike as the Dread Intergalactic Pickle Prophet, whose malignant powers truly staggered the imagination.

As a result of the economic demands placed upon the Pickle Realm's reserves by the Intergalactic Pickle Prophet's unending string of wars, the entire Realm fell into a state of rot and decay. Young Pickle People were dropping out of society, singing the songs of Bob Dillon and the Grateful Dill and indulging in the thrills and spills of the Dill Pill. So Bucket, in hopes of salvaging the situation, summoned the help of the Drule (who did not Drule, at least not in the ordinary sense of the word), the Good Doctor (who occasionally did), and Ozgood Uncle, and together they tried to spread word of the Intergalactic Pickle Prophet's evil influence. But their warnings fell upon deaf ears and only served to attract the quiet scorn of the Authorities. Major sigh!

Bucket, fully realizing the futility of his gestures, abandoned hope of saving his country and with his friends applied for sanctuary in the Outside Empire. By way of firm reply, Philosopher Petco (who, unlike Ozgood Uncle, actually was an uncle, at least in one sense of the word) agreed to send the Every-Other-Friday-Evening-Grievance-And-Future-Hope-Discussion-Group a Magic Garbage Can, by which means they should be able to transport themselves to the Outside Empire in utmost speed and comfort. However, the Pickle Authorities were tipped off as to their intentions when Bucket received an immensely cylindrical parcel of considerable bulk in a plain brown wrapper, which was immediately suspected of being an illicit Magic Garbage Can. At that, Bucket and his friends were forced out on their own and departed in the shank of an otherwise dead afternoon in the Magic Garbage Can- with the Pickle Authorities in hot pursuit.

The Pickle People joined in and pursued the Can, which they hoped to destroy by incessantly firing upon it with Pickle Guns loaded with hollow-point dills, in flagrant and fragrant violation of international treaty. Bucket and his friends were able to escape by throwing their Magic Garbage Can into Garbage Propulsion Mode, by which means they outdistanced their pursuers. However, their added speed had the detrimental effect of causing them to lose their sense of direction, and in less than a fortnight they found themselves off course and face-to-nine-faces with the Dreaded Nine-Headed Cucumber. This the intrepid heroes dispatched instantly by striking it soundly and repeatedly upon the Brain Wart with jar after jar of Hot Peppercinis sent hurtling through the air by their Pickle Howitzer (patent pending).

Soon the Magic Garbage Can was back on course, speeding in the direction of the Outer Empire. The Pickle Prophet, concerned over the loss of his Nine-Headed Cuke, deployed the elite Flying Gherkins

(who sounded as if they might have come from Pakistan or some other Ex-Hail Britannia Colonial Anachronism, but did not) after arming them with deadly Gherkin Gas. This the Gherkins sprayed upon the Can Inhabitants with near-blinding speed, and soon Bucket and his friends had spent their last round of Pickle Howitzer ammunition in a futile effort to drive off wave after wave of Flying Gherkins. At this juncture, Bucket, the Drule, Ozgood Uncle and Doctor Desmond decided to seek refuge from this infinite nonmercy, seeking and imploring the grace and most excellent camouflage of a shortcut through the vast Zucchini Swamp. So they did, with no time to spare.

The zucchinis- which are just cucumbers with certain unfortunate glandular imbalances- offered the four excellent cover from aerial attack, but the going was dangerous nonetheless. They kept close lookout for Relish Pits, in which their Can would become mired, and Vinegar Vats, in which awaited slow, horrible death by pickling. Their Magic Garbage Can had not been designed with such a harsh environment in mind, and owing to the fact that it had not received factory undercoating, its bottom rusted out. Our heroes were stranded in the midst of the gigantic vines, and the Intergalactic Pickle Prophet left them for dead and returned to his golf game. In so doing he underestimated their resourcefulness, however. For nearby the team found an immense 75-foot-long zucchini, which they hollowed out and fitted with the Garbage Propulsion Unit from their now-derelict Magic Garbage Can. In this the heroes continued through the Zucchini Swamp and across the Steaming Vinegar Sea.

Bucket, the Drule, Ozgood Uncle and Doctor Desmond spent many tedious days sailing across the tepid, turbulent Vinegar Sea in their Zucchini, which proved itself to be a very seaworthy craft indeed. Inevitably, though, their progress drew the attention of the Pickle Prophet again who perpendicularly dispatched Moby Dill to splifficate the seagoing squash. Moby Dill's intent was thwarted in one nick of the time when the intrepid voyagers liberally laced the water surrounding their craft with anise extract, which made Moby Dill violently ill and thereby gave them a chance at escape- which they did.

The heat and vinegar were a supreme test for the heroes, who persevered despite all their conspicuous circumstances, but the craft in which they sailed did not. Alas and alack, like the Magic Garbage Can before it, it too began to rot, and as they landed on the shores of the Pickle Plains (the last geographical obstacle remaining), the zucchini collapsed into an enormous, moldering mound of soggy, pickled squash rind. With their nostalgia tempered with neuralgia, they took their leave, stiff in the limb from sedentary sailing and so on.

The trek across the Pickle Plains to the Outer Empire would have been too much for the now-weary heroes, had it not been for the atavistic visitation of Petco, the Philosopher King, who appeared as a cloud in the sky to present them with an Enchanted Pickle Crock and thus departed. Proof to all forms of punishment and impervious to vinegar and most pickling spice mixtures, the ceramic Crock was destined to succeed where other forms of transportation had failed- a fact not wasted on Bucket, the Drule, Ozgood Uncle and Doctor Desmond. They climbed in and were settling in for the last leg of their journey in perfect security- or so they thought- when their reverie was shattered by the sudden reappearance of the Intergalactic Pickle Prophet himself, no less, armed with the ultimate weapon: The Dill Ray (which rates four exclamation points, watch out here they come)!!!! Just one blast from this Horrible Hamburger Helper and your brain would be instantly pickled and wavy-cut like dill chips destined to garnish a McBogus Meal. Not the preferred state in which to spend the balance of eternity...

Could the Intergalactic Pickle Prophet manage to actually Heintz-57 the intrepid quartet? He certainly tried, levelling one last-chance blast of bombastic size at the Enchanted Pickle Crock. Bucket, however, saw it coming and slid the lid off the Crock, holding it as a shield. Its conveniently concave inner surface focused and reflected the blast right back to its source, who was thereby rendered unprophetable and subsequently soaked into the countryside, leaving behind a pile of dill weed fragments in red ink as an insoluble pimento of his passage.

The demise of the Pickle Prophet led to the ouster of the Pickle Masters, and the Reigns of Government precipitated instead upon the Cucumber Coalition. All evil elements within reach were placed into a

gargantuan Waring Blender with a pickle pulping attachment and quickly reduced to a harmless mountain of relish and enough pale green vinegar to raise the level of the Vinegar Sea by five feet.

And Bucket Malloy, the Drule Mergenser, Ozgood Uncle Z'Beard and the good Doctor Desmond lived in splendid splendor with a side order of glory (hold the pickle) in the Outer Empire for a surprising and probably irrational number of years before retiring from public life.