



# UNIFICATION

# *Prelude #0*

Unication is not an ordinary story. It is not one that you will be able to breeze through and understand on the first try. I don't claim to be able to understand it, and I wrote it. The thing with this book is that it holds itself to too high a standard. What I said was partially a lie. This can be an easy book. This *is* an easy book. There are many sections which are filled with non-sequiturs and random shifts in tone, and all sorts of things thrown in to make things seem more 'esoteric' or 'obscure'. This book will teach you things. It will make you forget an equal amount of things.

There have been several people who have reported that reading this book gave them incurable illnesses. We at Unication Incorporated chalk that one up to some overzealous hypochondriacs with too much money to spend on stamps posting us letters. It has nothing to do with the newly patented Glow In Tha Dark™ pages we have in the centre of the book. On the off-chance that the residual radium left on the pages (that give them their distinguished Glow In Tha Dark Hue™) is causing these irrevocably damaging diseases, we have removed those pages from the centre of the book. And no, this is not a reprint. This page has been added in manually to each copy of the book after we tracked down all 212 people who have already bought the book off of Amazon. If you have found this tossed into a public library, please, do us a favour and return it to the big box near the front that says "Radium Infested Books" - most libraries have one, it's next to most of the other radioactive element boxes. If you can't go to your local library due to looping restructuring, then take it to your local dump and ask fi they have anyone trained in training others in disposal of hazardous nuclear waste. They should have the ability to refer you to a specific radium-handler who will be able to take care of the problem for you. Most of the time, you can save a lot of money by disposing of radioactive materials with government-run services rather than going to specific companies, (eg. Technetium & Technetium, North Coast Radiation Disposal, Klaproth's Caretakers). The services at most waste

dumps cost about a fifth of the average radiation disposal company -  
that's something that most people won't tell you.

One Man	1
To Another Place	15
#WhyDoes: Things Come In Threes?	28
A Promotion For You	30
Five Pound Pints	33
Six Things About Village Life	33
Near Heaven	33
Eaten Up	33
News At Nine: Threats To The C.B.D	34
Tense Situations	34
Far From Heaven	34
The Doomsday Clock Past Midnight	34
A,	34
to Z	34

# One Man

“Oh, darn, looks like someone got out of the wrong end this morning.”

“You can be quiet, Tim. Very few people care what you have to say.”

“Don’t be like that to Tim! You know he’s more attractive than-”

Unication Smith glanced over his shoulder.

“More attractive than what?” he said, briefly handing his antiquated ceramic coffee over to a coffee-warming attendant. The attendant examines the mug and determines that there is a high probability that the mug is worth very little. They hand it back and Unication’s coffee is returned to that of the optimum temperature. The person he was talking to has walked off sometime in the last five seconds, and so he resumes his walk to his desk with a quaint smile on his face, remembering the time when he was asked to inform the database of his preferred coffee temperature, and the time he leaned over to another person’s desk and changed theirs to a blistering 336°K. No hijinks of the sort were to be had today, as his grandfather, Unication Smith II, was rumoured to be visiting this section of the building today, after making his way on a long journey from the other end. Hopefully he would get the opportunity to be promoted, or at the very least, given preferential treatment over his father, Unication Smith III.

Unication Smith I, who had passed on a few years ago, had begun his reign at the company by changing the entry requirements for their ‘Junior Writers’ program to none at all. Due to the high volume of people wanting to enter the company, especially one in such a competitive market and era, candidates could not be differentiated between in terms of actual quality - instead, a system of nepotism was created. But, all the way down the chain, Unication Smith IV found himself working amongst the swathes of like-abled people. Educated by UnicationGroup Schools, fed by UnicationGroup Meals. He felt that the family name should entitle him to at least a separate room, or maybe just a sticker that said he was the great-grandson of Unication Smith I. Either way, he felt like he deserved more than he had right

now. His supervisors told him it was something about his 'lying-down' attitude, and they then went off to speak to someone else. After spending half an hour at his desk, thinking of new ideas of things to write about, he decided it would be worth going over to the company pool to relax for a while. Some electronic muzak blared down the speaker pipes, presumably originating from the advertising jingles department. In fact, they had recently become one of the largest sectors of Unication Incorporated when a 54-minute extended version of the music their infamous 'Mega-Webz' ad was posted on a forum and leaked, gaining attention from publications similar to Unication. In fact, some of the attention came from Unication's subsidiary company, Musication, which also perpetrated the leak via its own 'Leaks & Spoilers Department'. Needless to say, Pitchfork gave it an 8.6, and said it was 'pretty good for 300 people working on the same piece of music'.

He tuned out the muzak mentally before admiring the pastel walls of the indoor pool, and floated around on a rubber ring with a palm tree coming out the side. Some people were talking over at the other side of the rapids, so he signalled to a nearby jet operator to push him over, so he wouldn't have to kick his legs and risk getting some water in his drink. Maybe that was what the umbrella was for. He hardly even remembered picking it up - oh, yes, the attendants from Danco Drinks offered him so many different free samples that at the end of the corridor, he had to pick up a bigger cup to pour them all into. Sipping gently at the mix, he wished he hadn't, now it was all sludgy. It was a shame they had to get rid of the vending machines. In a weekly briefing it was said that too many 'idiots from Marketing' had come over to our hallways for a change of scenery and had gotten their hands stuck in 'our fresh new automated machines'. His co-workers floated idly as he passed by, sunglasses faces not showing where they were looking. Each had their own mixed drink, some immiscible blobs of oily colour floated up and down, blending and mixing with other harder layers. A cherry sinks slowly down past the layer of fruit juice, but stops at the melted ice cream.

"Hi."

“Hey.”

“How are you?”

“Good, good.”

“Nice weather we’re having.”

“Yes, yes.” Unication looked up to the sky through the pane glass roof. No-one else followed. A single cloud was visible.

“Do you know anyone who works in weather?”

“What, cloud seeding or monitoring?”

“I wouldn’t know.”

“I think my cousin works in cloud seeding.” said a drink attendant from the edge of the pool. “Only on the manufacturing end, he doesn’t get to fly a plane or anything like that.”

One of his coworkers rotated her flamingo-shaped rubber ring towards the centre of the pool, smirking. A small hand gesture prompted another pool attendant to walk over to some nearby control panel and move her over to another section of pool. The others floated in silence for a few seconds before another person floated by.

“They’ve added another section to the pool over by Web Services.” he said, excited, but trying to hide it. “I think you could probably navigate from here all the way over to the server rooms by now.”

“But the server rooms are in the basement.” said someone else.

“I know, they’ve added a slide and a conveyor for rings.”

“Seriously?” said Unication. “This must be where all the budget increases are going.”

“You know what, I don’t mind this sort of thing. I don’t mind the fact they’re spending money on things that make us happy.”

“Better than the days where Unication ‘the first’ was head of the place.” A small laugh went round, and someone who wasn’t talking much floated off.

Unication piped up, wanting to move the subject away from his forefathers, “Say, why don’t we have a trip around the new pool section?”

“I... I mean, right, sure, sure.” said someone else, tilting their head down so you could see their eyes over their sunglasses. “I don’t mind.”

“Oh, remember the time that Unication the first removed the windows on the third floor because of poor productivity?”

“Yeah, I worked there for a while. Turns out that he was hoping people would type quickly to warm their fingers back up.”

“Looks like he forgot what gloves were!” Another laugh, larger this time. Unication wonders if the drinks are alcoholic, and slowly paddles his left arm in the water, moving away, waiting for the others to follow. He floats almost all the way out of the section of the pool before someone reacts to his departure by waving at him. He waves back, wishing he could come back now, but this wave seemed like one that couldn't be backed down from. Floating back would take another minute, and they were looking at him now. He sank back behind a pale yellow wall, through an angular corridor into another, similar room. Another skylight, this time between cartoon-like pillars.

“What sort of pillars are these?” he casually asked an attendant, on the off-chance that he might know.

“Oh, I spoke to someone the other day who came through here and said they were...” the attendant trailed off, slowly getting back to fishing a piece of paper out of the pool. Unication was pushed by the jets into another room. He never did find out what sort of columns there were. Perhaps he'd find someone who had studied them at some point. Regardless of that, he found himself going through another hallway, this one more dimly lit than the first. Up ahead looked like a traffic jam was forming, the pool ahead was full of people attempting to leave for lunch. There were some disgruntled shouts, echoey and warbled against the featureless walls. The shouts were never that angry, how could you be angry when you were supposed to be relaxing in a pool? He slowly saw the faces of other swimwear-clad ring-sitters sour, eventually a wave of displeasure rolled back to where he was sitting. The plastic seal of the ring was digging into his arm. His drink was getting to cold to hold in his hand, and he hated the person who gave him ice. ‘Who likes ice in a drink?’, he thought. ‘Only a fool.’ Someone else who had clearly not been in the pool as long floated into the corridor behind him, holding his drink in his hand, the ice still there.



“What’s going on?” said the new person, not addressing anyone in particular.

“We have no idea!” said another, up front, high-strung and annoyed. “They’ve been saying that they’re fixing it for almost ten minutes now!”

“I’ve been stuck here for so long I’m going to miss my pre-meeting.”

“I can’t hold this drink any longer! Can someone pass it to the front so someone can put it down?”

“You should have paid for a ring with a cup slot.”

“Oh, right? Really? I didn’t want to have to pay another ten dollars for that.”

“Well, you obviously didn’t think you’d need to put your drink down, then.”

“I didn’t think that something like this was going to happen!”

“Well you should have. You know how busy the pool is today.”

“No, in fact, no I don’t!”

“Your loss.”

The first person threw the contents of their drink upstream in a valiant effort to hit the snarky back-talker. However, the backs of lots of other people’s necks were coated with fruit juice residue and slushy ice shards. Someone rolled over on their ring to see what was happening. Someone threw the first punch, and soon enough, someone was dragging the ice-pelter out of his ring and down into the pool, sticking their hands on his throat and trying to drown him in the pool. People started to paddle frantically out of the hallway, fighting against the gentle jets, abandoning glasses to sink to the bottom of the pool. A different ring was popped with the sharp end of a cocktail umbrella, and people thought that there was going to be some sort of shooting - but who would bring a gun to a pool? Unication managed to escape without any harm, although he narrowly avoided being hit by a slab of glass falling after a drinking tub had been lobbed at the ceiling.

Drying himself off in the changing rooms, he heard the sound of a siren running past, the Unication health department had come to the rescue, they fished a body out of the bottom of the pool and sprawled

him out over the white tiles. He wandered back into the pool area, through the turnstiles, and watched on as they took the water out of his lungs. Some technicians had arrived on the scene and were running an extension cord to some other corner of the room. An officer told him to move along, he walked back down the corridor and kept his head straight, trying not to attract the attention of any of the drink dispensers, lest he end up with another horrid concoction. When he got back to his desk, he put his towel in his personal chute and got on with some work. Half a dozen letters came his way, both from people on the other side of the building, the main pneumatic rail chute had gotten stuck again, all of his mail seemed to come at once. Perhaps, he thought, there was something about his mail coming in threes, like people say buses come in. Well, that was probably worth writing about. After frantically chopping his way through four spam job-offer letters about working in the Mail Department, skim-reading an invitation to a sex-party, and throwing the results of his Sustainability Estimate down the chute, he got to work on producing something about things coming in threes. Perhaps, a visit to the mail room to figure out what they do there would be in order. He folded out his computer and wrote a precisely-worded email to a Booking Attendant to inform him he needed a lift to the Mail Department. Several rows over, the booking attendant signed on to the nearest available computer after a blinking light on his wrist went off, and after a few minutes of slavish writing and precise formalities, he had composed an email that could be summed up in only a few words.

“Huh.” said Unication, under his breath. “The rail system isn’t working today. Well, that’s just great. Pretty much nowhere is working today, just great.”

He looked at the empty document he had brought up in order to start writing on. Could this be the article that would send him up through the ranks, one that would finally get him recognised as the son of Unication Smith III? He thought of getting up to try and walk all the way to Mail, but the thought of having to find someone who knew their way about the place was daunting in and of itself. The blinking cursor seemed to blink slower and slower as he put his

fingers closer to his ergonomic keyboard. As he went to press the first key, he thought that maybe dictating this one to someone and having them type it might be easier. He deliberated for a minute, and then leaned forward in his chair and attempted to start again. A sentence was typed, sloppy spelling errors made the autocorrector work overtime, and he thought that the reason that he was typing so poorly was because of a lack of coffee. Walking over to the vendor, he got a message from someone back at his desk. This one came in a red container, so it was likely very important. He walked back over, feeling silly that he had not got anything, he had merely got up for five seconds or so. No one else looked at him. No one else looked like they had gotten this red message. He opened the long, thin letter, expecting more than a thin strip of paper, hardly wider than ticker-tape. He was to attend a pre-meeting in an hour about his place within the company, and after that, a meeting. The ticker cut off before the duration of the meeting was revealed, but he couldn't care less - this was to be his big break! He was moving up in the world, starting today. To celebrate, he got himself a coffee with extra foam and also took the time off to get the coffee warmed up before returning to his desk, a full eight minutes later. The cursor was still blinking. He waited for another few minutes, an attendant warmed his flashy new mug back up. It was glossy black, with a white, heavily stylised "Unication" wrapped around the face. He wondered if anyone else had this type of mug. It was convenient for him in a way, having company mugs with your name printed on them was nice. But, if he had got a personal mug, he would have to deal with people attempting to steal it all the time, just because they would have thought it was 'just another company mug'.

The cursor still blinked. He had forty-five minutes left. The clock on his desk ticked forwards, slowly. He wound it, since it had been a few weeks since he had done so. The clock seemed to run too fast after, that, he wasted even more time sitting in front of the computer screen, waiting, watching a blank screen. What was he even supposed to be writing about again? Ah, the link between mail deliveries and buses coming in threes. But, since he had just received one piece of

mail by itself, he was thinking that maybe this story wouldn't hold up as well as he thought it would have. Maybe, if he waited around for some more mail to come, then his story might be confirmed. Half an hour. He looked at the clock. Was he just waiting for the pre-meeting? Maybe. Actually, he might need to leave sooner than he thought, the meeting rooms were not exactly close to where his desk was. He folded up his computer, and picked up some of his stuff.

The route to the meeting rooms was long and winding, going up and down escalators. Fortunately, the route he took took him past the company aquarium. He had to muscle his way through a tour group of a dozen people or so on the travelator, and eventually, he arrived outside the meeting rooms about five minutes before he had to go. He had his keycard, and he tried to get in.

"Sorry." said an attendant. "Just try again, sometimes the cards don't work." Unication tried again, and the door opened. "You just have to do it right, I don't know how they work." said the attendant, before the door closed again.

He walked down a corridor for a while before getting to the room he needed to be. There was no one there yet. He sat in an indiscriminate seat, not one near the ends or too close to the middle, somewhere unassuming, a seat that he felt he had the authority to fill. He waited there for nearly a minute, when someone opened up a door that he was unaware of, right behind him. He tried to turn around in his chair, looking very unprofessional in his contortion.

"Ah, hello!" said the person who had just walked in the room. "So glad to see you. I see you've already got yourself a seat, that's good. I like a person with strong initiative."

"Oh, well, thank you." said Unication.

"So, right, we've got a few things to talk about, right?"

"Right."

"You got your red letter thing just fine?"

"All good. Apparently the—"

"That's good, good."

A moment of silence passed, and the man clapped his hands together, and walked over to the end of the room. Unication got up

and tried to look more relaxed, but ended up haphazardly leaning on a water cooler. There was a potted plant in the other corner of the room, and the man began to feel the leaves, presumably to tell whether it was real or fake.

“It’s a real one.” he said. “We can afford to have real plants here at Unication Incorporated because we make some serious money.”

“Yup.” said Unication.

“And you, my dear friend...” he started, realising that he didn’t know Unication’s name. “Have to pick up the mantle a little bit.”

“How so?”

“Your report says that you’ve been sitting at your desk, sitting around, doing nothing.”

Unication didn’t respond to this, he didn’t know what to say other than an agreement - but he didn’t want to agree. He tried to think about moving his lips to say ‘no’, but before he could even react, the man kept going.

“Nah, I’m joking. I know you’ve been moving around, I’ve read some of your stuff! It’s really interesting, I really like the one where you found your favourite frames of that old video on the internet, the amount of effort you spent researching your topics is like nothing else on your floor! It’s a surprise you still work for us, rather than going somewhere to make your own company!”

“Well, I’m a Smith.”

“Hmm?”

“A Unication Smith. The fourth.”

“Right, right.”

Another pause. The man continued, unchanged by his comment.

“So, you’re being promoted.”

“Oh, that’s great.”

“Yes, yes, it is.” said the man, taking a look out of the shuttered window, and then opening it up. “How would you feel about having an office with this view?” He gestured out of the window.

“Sure, that’s... that’s a very good thing. I’d like that.”

“Well, that’s good, since we’ve already moved all of your stuff up to the fifth floor.”

“Oh, that’s good.”

“Yes, I know it’s good. You wouldn’t have said anything else.”

“Right.”

“So, have you any questions about your new position?”

“Not... really? Although, I do have one question.”

“Fire away.”

“Is it just what I was doing before with more responsibility involved?”

The man turned away from the window. “I don’t think that’s the right way of thinking about it. It’s not just more responsibility. You get some perks, you get more information from the higher-ups.”

“That’s also good.”

“Right, yes, it’s all good. I suppose I should probably tell you that you get quite a few more perks. Skipping queues, you get to use the express elevators, and your own dedicated mail tube rather than communal tubes where you have to like, search through a pile of stuff.”

“Well, I had a personal tube already.”

“Oooh, lucky. Anyway, there are more benefits than thee things that I have just listed, but that’s not for me to tell you. After all, this is only a pre-meeting.”

“Well, where’s the meeting?”

“In the next room.”

“Oh, right.”

“Good! Well, I must say...”

“Unication.”

“Unication, it’s been a pleasure meeting you. I will now hand you over to the folks in the other room. It’s been good, this pre-meeting. I suppose you might want to go down to the pool section later?”

“No thanks, I’ve got to be at home today.”

“Oh, sure, no worries. I wasn’t like making you do that, it wasn’t part of the job description or anyway. I’m not, like, forcing you to do anything.”

“Right.” said Unication, who hadn’t felt like he was being forced to do anything up until now.

“Alright. Now go in there and show them what’s what.”

“Who’s in there?”

“The team you’re managing.” The door was now open, and the man waved through. “See you guys! It was good managing you!”

“Oh, so you were the last person to manage these people?”

“Yeah. They’re a good bunch, you can trust them.”

“Okay then.”

Another moment of silence, and then Unication walked into the room. The dozen or so people in there watched his every move, he wanted at first to stand up tall, but then he realised he wasn’t that kind of person; he wanted to appear like the kind of guy you could trust back, a ‘cool boss’ that you could talk to. In his years working here, he had remembered the times where he was presided over by some awful humans, ones that would use their power so that they didn’t have to do anything.

After greeting everyone and introducing himself, he asked one of them to get him a coffee. Perhaps, he thought, the power was getting to him - or was it just the fact that he would have asked someone else to get him a coffee anyway? Despite being the only one who could ever understand the true intent of him asking someone else for coffee, he became paralysed with choice - should he ask them to take it back? No, because then he’d look even worse. But if he just sat there and drank it? No, he’d be ignoring the team, and he couldn’t even just let it sit, lest he waste the hard work of one of the members of this new team.

“It’s good to see you all,” he said, laughing gently, “But not that I’ve seen any of you before.” The room was silent. Maybe he was coming in here and replacing someone really nice. That guy in the other room did seem like a congenial person. He seemed like he would *get* these people, let alone get on with them.

“So, right, I don’t think there’s very much for me to say as leader, here, I think you can just get on with what you were doing before, really. I’m just going to keep doing my job, as well, but if you have any questions, then come and ask me. I’m really quite an agreeable person.” said Unication, horrified at his last sentence. Who would

have to assure someone that they were an agreeable person? But he had to stick with this now, he had to remain the sort of person to be stoic in the face of... no, no he didn't!

"I'm sorry, I mean, I'm not that agreeable once you get to know me. I'm just someone else, right? You seemed to like the last guy that managed you all?"

"We hated him." said one of them, taking her jacket off of the back of the chair and starting to walk off.

"Where are you going? Oh, right, yes, no, go ahead. Do go ahead."

A few people thought he was being sarcastic.

"No, please leave."

Now they just thought he was going to have a breakdown in the meeting room by himself, and he wanted to leave.

"I just... do what you were doing. Really, don't mind me. I'll be moving my stuff and reorienting my mail slots for the next hour or so. Maybe tomorrow I can get to know you all a little bit more?"

They filed out of the meeting too, as did he, after a while of looking out of the window. He called down the hall, "Where do you guys work? I wasn't told where my office is?"

No one replied. He figured it was probably best to go back to his desk and ask from there, someone would probably know. Better yet, see if his desk location finder had updated. He unfolded his computer, and sat down, and to his disappointment (but not surprise) the location was the same.

Walking down the corridors back to his desk, he saw someone who he recognised earlier. The man who had turned the jets on and moved him into the cramped corridor earlier. He was sitting on a chair outside a different, much larger and ornate meeting room. Through the small reinforced plastic opening, he could see a few more people he remembered from earlier, they were all in the middle of the rubber ring fight. On the side of the room was large wooden box, and he wondered what was in there. He stopped and asked the pool attendant if he knew what was going on.



“There’s a court case going on in there.” he said, saddened. “I’m only outside because I’m not a witness. But my brother is... he’s in there. I can’t go home without his key.”

“Does he not let you have another key?”

“We can only afford one. It’s on his wrist.”

“Oh, that’s fine, right? You can just call him and ask him to come to the door?”

The attendant’s eyes watered a little, and he raised his head. “You can’t take phones in there.”

“Well, why don’t you try and wave?”

“I don’t think that will... work. He’s in that coffin there.”

“Why is he in that...” started Unication. “Oh, right.”

The attendant burst into tears and keeled over in his chair. Someone from inside the courtroom came over to the door and before they opened the door, Unication was down another hallway. He did not have the time for getting sucked into this, especially when he had just missed out on being a witness.

The walk back was marred by this man’s loss. To think that one second, you could be chatting to your brother in a pool, and then the next thing, he’s at the bottom of the pool at the hands of an enraged pool-goer. To think of the abrupt change reminded Unication of the changeability of his own life. This morning, he had woken up and been insulted by Tim, the lowest of lowlives in his area. But today, he was promoted to a level that he could have only wished for before. Coincidentally enough, that is all he did towards his promotion. he hadn’t changed his ways or anything, he hadn’t written anything that he felt was ‘spectacular’, or whatever the guy said. He was going to write something spectacular, right now. Right after he did all of the things that he was going to do.

After picking up his stuff, he found a letter from the previous day about where his new office would be. It looked like spam, he felt quite lucky that he hadn’t absent-mindedly thrown it into the chute as ever. Standing on another travelator, he wondered if his new place would have a bigger chute that didn’t occasionally waft smells up into his general vicinity. He wondered if his new team would end up liking his

company. He wondered if, one day, Unication could be his company. He then remembered that Unication Smith II didn't visit today.

His mail tube didn't deliver him any more mail for the rest of the day, his team sat silent and asked him no questions, and everything was quiet. A few hours after setting up all of his new things, it was time to clock out, to go home. He walked along the walkways between the buildings, glad that he didn't have to breathe in more of the fumes than he already did. The pastel coloured walls of the Unication building bled into the surrounding area, the surplus paint used in making every wall a vaguely 'crime-reducing' shade. There were no muggers or thieves up here, he thought, so why did they need to paint the walls up here? But that thought was quickly replaced by the wonder of whether or not a train would be there, or if he would have to wait for one. An attendant scanned his card on the way in, he waited on the platform for ten seconds, and a train pulled in. Watching out the window, he saw the tenth floors of buildings as he floated by, making no noise but the whooshing of the air moving out of the way. He sat in his apartment, looking out the window at yet more people going by, wondering if anyone there could see him, whether anyone would recognise him as the son of Unication Smith III, who was arguably one of the most powerful men in the city. He waited, and attempted to listen out for the whooshing noise again, but it was drowned out by the sound of the two people he lived with watching the TV. They sat and ate chips, one had been here all day, and the other also worked at Unication, but only as a night watchperson for the exports warehouse. She said it got cold in the evenings, but after everyone went home, she was free to turn on all of the space heaters. They had once had an argument about how much it had cost the company to heat up this gigantic warehouse just so she could wear a shirt rather than a jacket. Now, with his new managerial role, he could report her for wasting electricity. But, he looked over at her face and remembered why she was here. Because, on some level, he loved her. And she paid her share of the rent on time.

# To Another Place

The sun didn't shine in through the shutters, they had been positioned by the man who controls the shutter angle. They hadn't ever filled out their 'shuttle angle rota' form, they had simply chosen to go with the easiest option, to opt (by default) to the regular schedule. It was pretty well maintained, they must have had the same person doing this for years now. But they'd only been here for a few months, moving their boxes from another apartment slightly further up the street. A quick jaunt, a few trinkets and keepsakes from times of yore, and then a new house was made, just as 'homely' as the last one. Getting furniture was too much of a hassle, they were glad that the place came with everything. A toaster with the dial worn down, a kettle where the paint was cracking off near the bottom. Unication remembered the first time he cooked here (the internet had gone down), there being the remnants of the previous tenant's pasta stuck to the bottom.

A few planes and helicopters flew past, nothing out of the ordinary, the contrails streaking the newly-visible sky. A gaudy, round-edged sofa bed stuck out of the wall, and Unication got up to try and close the blinds. But the man controlling the blinds knew better than he did, he would be late for work if he were allowed to sleep in for any longer.

He'd once seen the blind-controller walking along the street. He wondered who was controlling the blinds when that happened. Probably another person, another dishevelled looking person who spent their life in one singular room. The wires along the walls jutted out, not in a chic way like a modern coffee house, but in a way that makes you think that the wires are going to strangle you if they fall off the ceiling. A great coloured mass of pulsating, messily ordered cables stretched the lower floors until they all collected together, like roads to Rome, to enter into a box on the outside of the blind-controller's room. He didn't have a sign, only a mark where one used to be.

Unication opened the window and saw that all the other blinds were open. Interesting, perhaps he wanted everyone to see the sky. It did look very nice, to be fair.

His commute was spent in much the same way, looking out of windows at the sky, the purple and blue and grey of the average morning. The air was clean, the odd plastic bag floated by like a pristine tumbleweed, ready to scatter its seeds to grow into another hypermarket a few miles down the line. The train was fast and smooth, the news ticker below the information screen read the same news as it did yesterday, things were good. Unication had been promoted yesterday, and today was going to be the day he proved to himself he was worthy of such an honour, he was going to write that thing about mail always coming in threes, or was it about buses? Maybe the notes he had attempted to write on his blank document could help him. In the midst of a fairly dense train, he partially unfolded his computer and checked to see if he had written anything last night, as he couldn't remember anything. Nope, nothing there.

Refolding his computer, he wondered how many of the people he was managing were going to show up for work today, and how many of them would be more receptive. His fears, however mild they were, could not be pushed all the way to the back of his mind until he came into work and saw all of them there, sitting at their desks, working. On what, he didn't know, but he felt that since he was overseeing them, he might be able to make them all work on the same project for a while, a team effort to get the admittedly lacking morale up.

"Alright, team." said Unication, standing on a raised section in the middle of a field of desks, trying to sound as approachable and not authoritarian as he could, "We're going to be working on something... together, today."

No one responded. "Well, not just today. I'm sure you have your own things to be getting on with, your own articles to write, but I feel we have to... carve out a... 'niche' within the company." Air quotation marks accompanied the 'niche', which he wished he had just avoided. To him, it just made it sound like he was undermining himself. And perhaps, by giving this speech, he was doing exactly that. Unless, of

course, he actually got them to do some work together. But what, he didn't know.

"We're going to produce a special, right, a special long article on 'City Life'. How many of you live in the main... uh, city?"

Almost everyone said yes, and the ones that didn't weren't paying attention, they had gone back to what they were doing a few seconds ago. Computers began to start up again, the occasional tearing of an interdepartmental wad of mail punctuated the silence.

"I know it sounds like it's been done a million times before, and that, in all honesty, is because it has. But it's something we can work towards, together, you know."

He stepped down from the platform. "As a team."

Most people had already started doing what they were doing, perhaps some of them had taken his idea to heart and had started writing up their own experiences of life in the city. He returned to his desk, some part of his brain satisfied with that amount of team interaction, and the niggling thought in the back of his head was finally relegated to the unconscious, to sit and stew with all of the other thoughts which had the same fate befall them. His office window wasn't quite as wonderful as the one that the man has sold him yesterday, looking out over fields of white roof merely one floor below his own was not good. The visual variety largely came from the odd service flap or vent cubes. He wanted to go somewhere to get away from this endlessly repeating architecture, somewhere where the windows and corridors didn't stretch out in hypnotic parallax-heavy lines. Some construction was going on, perhaps they were rebuilding a section of pool, maybe a new travelator was getting put in. These things came and went quickly, he remembered his department being swarmed with construction workers when they had put the mail tubes in, it only took a few days to strip out all the old wires and cables. More recently, the chute installation had taken mere hours, great chains of workers handing each other tools in perfectly choreographed manoeuvres, he had sat and watched and tried his hardest not to get in the way, but no matter where he went, there were always more people. Toolboxes being placed down and opened

by four people at once - and they weren't even that big! But, the whole thing was done in a few hours, so, he couldn't complain. It was worth it for the immeasurable quality of life it afforded him, especially at his last desk. He could drop a whole plate down it, flat side down, and it would fit. This new one was smaller, clearly put in as an afterthought.

His mind drifted back to his idea of the 'mail comes in threes' bit, and he decided he was going to take some time off to clear his mind, so he could get rid of the clear space on the document that was killing him, another one stuck in the door that he couldn't get rid of. Well, the way that everyone in his old area swore by was to head down to the Arandar Building, and see if they could book some sort of company holiday, or at the very least an outing. He headed down, and met some funny looks the closer he got. Perhaps they were the people he was managing, and they were looking at him because they knew he was going to Arandar. They knew, he thought, keeping his head and gaze directly forward, they knew.

The receptionist was nice, he forwarded him to another desk, who asked if he was to be going on a long or short trip. He said a short one would be the most he would want, and then another desk was visited. Someone took him through the first list of outings, which he rejected for various reasons. Another person read him the next list, and that was no good either. He asked if there was anything that was on the 'specials', so to speak. In-between all of the bedroom-pop lounges, spoken word poetry slams and black midi tribute band sets, he noticed there was an offer to go out of the city for a while, to embrace nature, to clear the head. He said that that might be good, and he put himself down for a car. Like most people, he had a driving licence that was good for semi-automatic cars. He had spent enough time in emergency situation simulators to know what to do if the autopilot gave control to him for any reason. Besides, most of the cars that he was likely to get had enough crumple zone so that any collision under seventy-five kilometres an hour was almost certainly going to be fine. He always wondered what it would be like to flick the drive switch off and put his hands on the steering wheel of a real car on the road, but

it was probably too dangerous. Lots of people used to die from car crashes, he'd written an article on that a while back. Thinking back to that article, he thought back to a few more things he had written about that time. A few politically related things, a slogan for his department for the interdepartmental slogan competition, (of which the prize was to become the new slogan department), perhaps a video on wildlife or two.

He focused back on the person at the desk as they gave him a slip of paper to sign, and then he was told to take it over to another desk where they would check the signatures against the records they had in the signature storage areas. After a few minutes of waiting, and chatting to someone waiting for approval to use a company helicopter for the afternoon, he was glad to see that his signature was approved.

"Sorry it took so long, Mr. Smith." said the person behind the desk, who looked mildly out of breath. "We didn't realise you'd been promoted earlier, so someone else had to move your file to a different section, and then I had to go and retrieve it from the executives section. Sorry about that."

"Oh, no, it was fine, I didn't mind that at all."

"Good." said the person behind the counter, wiping the hair from their face and readjusting their glasses. "Who's next?"

Unication had wanted just a little bit more reluctance to stop apologising from the signature-finder. He looked at them on the way out of the room, glancing quickly at the row of different desks he had walked by. Eventually, he walked out into the Arandar Building's main lobby, in which a helicopter was being dragged through. A skill white sheet was draped over it, but that didn't hide the fact that the twisted metal of the broken propellers stuck out from underneath it. A long time ago, he had seen a helicopter crash into the roof of part of the main building, he was lucky that he chose to have his lunch at the coffee house further away from his work, otherwise he could have been crushed, unawares. Perhaps, he thought, that would have been a nice way to go, to be drinking his favourite coffee and then all of a sudden not know he wasn't going to exist. Or whatever. He didn't like to think about that sort of thing very often.

He remembered again, this time, an absent minded recollection of a memory floated back to him while he was on another travelator, he had once seen a man with no hand. The man, between drunken slurs, had said that it had been cut off in an accident in a factory. He didn't believe him. The man insisted there was such a thing as a 'factory' but Unication wasn't taking that. Unication never took these sort of things. He then wondered what it would be like to live without a hand. Or even a mechanical hand, or one of the implant hands that a few people he knew had. He didn't want to get one, he thought they were tacky and cliché, surprisingly enough. His car would be waiting for him somewhere amongst the dizzying lengths of the tunnels he had to travel down. According to the printout he had been given, it would be a white car. The numberplate was just an amalgamation of letters, not a word as such. The car was, unfortunately, a fully automatic one, so he would have to work during the trip as the company would know he would be in there for a few hours or so.

Eventually, his legs became tired with the standing, and he chose to walk around the sides of the travelators, and there, he saw someone lying down next to the glass fish tank wall that had recently been installed, marvelling at the colourful sharks. Unication marvelled at the man, stationary in a travelator tunnel. His head turned and he saw lots of other people looking at the man in much the same way. he felt bad for doing so, he remembered something about his mother always telling him not to stare. But looking at people who looked like celebrities in restaurants was okay, if they *really* looked like the celebrity. But how would you know whether they really looked like the celebrity if you didn't look? He stopped remembering and focus on getting into his car, which was in a side room, along with a few dozen other cars on a vertical rack, which was, even to him, still pretty cool, and the rack shuffled down until he saw the one that was his, and tried to open the door without unlocking it first (he was used to the city car sharing programme) and stepped inside once someone had handed him the appropriate key. The attendant was younger than him, and sighed in such a way that made Unication feel as if he was doing something embarrassing, something which he generally avoided



doing. Did the accompanying stare make him feel embarrassed, or was it the act itself? Trying to open a car without a key was silly, but not to him.

The drive there was littered with signs to all sorts of places he'd heard of before, but never visited. Most of the people who had visited them had said they weren't worth it, and they were generally right about these things. A journey with his parents once took him through one of these towns, and he had remembered seeing the small supermarkets, people walking in and out, and there was a clock tower which he always remembered. He saw someone smoking there, that day. What, he didn't know, the windows were sealed shut, the air conditioning turned up to full blast, a live podcast on minimum volume. The signs kept coming, and they grew more and more dense, until the main road gave out, branching out into a network of smaller ones. The new tarmac felt wonderful, the suspension making it feel like he was on a cushion of air, like he was in a plane. His memory attempted to remember the name of the place he went to, but there was nothing. Perhaps a main road was closed, and they'd weaved throughout the countryside, with his memory picking out little bits to be remembered later.

The smaller road moved in and out of a few larger ones, crossing over and under them when it was appropriate. A hill, the electric whine growing ever so slightly more than the noise of the wheels on the ground. "Alright," he thought, "the first town I get to, I'll stop for lunch."

The town came soon after, and on its edge was a supermarket with a small but packed car park. He got out and walked to the shop, past a car with a cabinet sticking out of the back, held in only by a threadbare ratchet strap. Trolleys strewn about the place, an attendant attempting to wrangle them as the valley wind blew plastic bags around in tight circles. Two eyefuls of dried and crunchy leaf particles. Walking into the store, there were only a dozen or so aisles, and the handheld scanners had been mostly taken. All along the aisles, people scanning objects, some with attendants to do it for them. One person even had a mobility scooter, pushed around by

what was presumably a family friend. Or another attendant. The faint markings of scuffed and picked-back adverts littered the floor. Some of the tiles pointed in the direction of non-smoked ham products. His parents had always said that smoked was better, but they didn't understand the health risks behind it.

The ready-meals seemed like the best option for now. No hassle of having to assemble a sandwich in his car. He got a text from his car that said that it had found a spot to park, and he opened up the notification. He closed it again, not before opening it again to re-check the parking spot number. But there was no number - the car had parked across town outside a church. Well, he needed a bit of a walk. The cashier was very friendly, and asked him what he was up to out here.

“Er... how do you know I'm not from here?”

“I didn't say that you were! *So-rry.*”

“Oh, well, um...”

The rest of the checkout was done in silence. He scanned his card and his account was charged, the quiet only punctuated by the bleeps from other tills, people walking around. The plastic shell of the ready meal sounded as if it was going to break when she lightly dropped it down. Her expression was roughly the same as the man who gave him the car keys before. She said nothing as he left, but three attendants near the exit told him to “have a good day”. Such an odd place.

As he was walking out, a bus blew past him, racing around the narrow road that weaved through the centre of town. The map on his watch told him that a good place to sit would be near the town square, and as he walked there, another bus passed. Incredible! Two buses in the span of two minutes. Perhaps, a third would come. He wondered if he should stand around and take some footage of a third one, if it came. The town centre was tiled with grey bricks, and some cobble near the clock tower in the centre. It wasn't the one he remembered, this one was set against a dingy background of chemists and kebab shops. One of them had repurposed a barber's pole to look like a rotating doner. He almost laughed, halfway through a bite into his turkey sandwich. He didn't know what was in it, he bought it

because it was something that he'd seen before. His bench offered him a place to sit and enjoy the warm sandwich - pretty warm, but not quite as warm as the people at work would have made for him. 'Well, that's what you get when you pay ten pounds for a sandwich', he thought. Two people dressed in tracksuits argued at each other down the high street, one on a flip phone, attempting to hold a conversation while fending off insults from the other. If the was supposed to be a couple, Unication didn't think he could tell which was the man or the woman. If, his sometimes self-scrutinising urban sensibilities reminded him, they were a heterosexual couple. Perhaps, he somehow thought, that that kind of thing hadn't made its way here yet. He'd only seen references to homosexuality in the contexts of a parade which he used to watch out of his window. His parents encouraged him to go to at least one, but he was just more content to watch. The shimmering smooth gradient rainbow flags were a welcome break from the stained blue plastic of the exteriors of his apartment complex.

But regardless of all that, there were much more pressing issues on hand. To ask someone here whether there was such a thing as buses coming in threes. Stuffing the wrapper of his sandwich in an overfilled bin, he slipped slightly on the wet cobbles. They were wet, it had only begun raining in the last minute or so, but they were wet. People began to scurry off, hiding under a mouldy plastic cover, loosely draped over a hardware store's brim-full outdoor section. A single washer-dryer sat alone in the corner of the square, and Unication walked over to the corner to dry off as the rain came down stronger. There, he bumped into a woman, pushing an empty pushchair.

"Excuse me," said Unication. "Do you have the time to answer a few questions?"

The woman didn't stop.

"You could be on the news!" he continues.

She stopped slowly. "But you haven't got a camera."

"Well, no, it's this one I have implanted in my eye."

"That's bullshit."

“No, really, I have a... look, why don't we just use this one in this... this pair of glasses I have.” said Unication, fishing out a pair of glasses from a trouser pocket.

“Are you a spy or something?”

“No, I... look, the questions are about buses.”

“I don't ride the bus.”

She walked off again, around the courtyard so as to not get wet.

“Do buses come in threes?” he shouted, catching the attention of the people huddled in the front of the adjacent shop. The woman turned around and walked off faster.

Unication waited for a few minutes for someone else to come along, and then walked off, hoping that his car would come and meet him somewhere where it wasn't wet. Another woman walked by, this time, she was on her own, huddled under a birdcage umbrella. She walked off without saying a word, either. He didn't bother to try anything. His phone lost reception, and he wanted to throw it against the ground - a whole day wasted for nothing! And it wasn't even worth relaxing in! An unpleasant autumn day.

The leaves stuck to the road in odd patterns, the old tarmac ripping off in chunks and being shaped back together in clumps that looked like someone had taped them back together with a black waxy substance. Head down, he saw a lot of things that other people didn't. He felt that looking up was overrated, especially since he had come from an area where up was ceiling most of the time, be it shaded UV screens or just plain old reconstituted wood and paint, perhaps fibreglass if he was somewhere nice. There was a bus coming right at Unication, but, since the slight refraction of a particularly deep puddle was what he was gazing upon right now, he didn't know. The bus didn't hit him, but grazed the front bumper as it dived onto the pavement. No one was harmed in any way. The bus repairman allocated to this particular service was automatically informed, and began heading to this town from somewhere a few towns over, somewhere larger. He sighed, knowing that there was going to be plenty of paperwork to be filled out after he had actually done his job. The passengers filed to the front to see what had happened. An old

lady, annoyed, sat in her seat. Unication saw the people coming towards him, and maybe they were annoyed at him! A mob, that's the last thing he needed right now, a mob! He shuffled off, back in the rain, and called his car. It had been circling the town and had racked up almost thirty pounds in charges, but that wasn't a problem for him - his new position had fuel of any kind covered. He didn't know this, there were a million other things like this that he didn't know he could do now. The people on the bus wondered where he had gone, and worried that there might be a 'mental case' out on the streets. The old lady on the bus sighed once more and crumpled her bag up. The smell of damp bus was assuredly more present now. As Unication got in his car and began to program it, he noticed that people were now walking around with coats on - it had now been raining long enough for people to notice the weather before they had left the house. He thought about changing his idea for an article for a split second, but realised that this was a terribly uninteresting idea - unlike his buses idea. Having barely set foot on any sort of bus, he thought that maybe a better way to write this article would be to send the car back home and get the bus back. He peeled an advertising sticker off of his foot as he got back in the car. It then dropped him off at a main depot in a separate town, and he researched the timetables, as the maps on his phone weren't loading. He saw three buses come and ago, time and time again. Sometimes, even fours! Truly, this was the sort of thing he had to write about. He took a few pictures, and hoped that they'd turn out good enough when in the Unication Paper. The views, he thought, would be good out of the window. He just hoped that the car would make it back alright.

Eight hours later, Unication walked into the building, late for him, late for anyone who wasn't sticking around for the evening meal, or any happy hours. A messenger from the Repairs section unfurled a video in front of him, and it played a ten-second clip of a disgruntled mechanic saying. "That scratch wasn't there when you got in!" he wondered if he'd be docked anything or charged more. A previous co-worker of his had been restricted from using the break areas after an incident involving his partner. Who knows what wrath damaging

company property could incur? The lights turned on and off in the corridors, a watchful attendant presumably in some room somewhere, flicking switches in order to preserve electricity, perhaps saving the company a few thousand pounds a year. There was no way of knowing when he'd be able to see the next part of the corridor, so he walked on in fear. All of a sudden, the light in front of him turned on, and the one behind him turned off, as if it was guiding him somewhere. He walked quicker, picking up his heels and beginning to worry about the dark. The switching got faster and faster, he was almost having to jog to keep up with the lights, and as he saw his new office from across a hall, the light went the other way, and he followed it for a few seconds before trying to go back the other way. But what was there? Just darkness. Distorted flickers of light dashed around from the surrounding entrances, perhaps where the controller was leading other people around, perhaps just random switch presses designed to give the illusion of lightning rolling across distant hills.

Eventually, he got to his office, and there were no letters there, no notes reminding him of a vent check. He considered spending the night here, to perhaps get away from all the ruckus of having to head back home. The walkways were always full of groups of people, walking around, going from vending machine to vending machine, seeing what they could get out. Or perhaps people walking pets at strange hours in order to fit with their jobs. In the night, the walkways were much stranger. Any imperfections shone through more radiantly under the LED glow. Gangs of guerrilla lighting technicians, armed to the teeth with orange filters, tried to dim down the place, but people who had become accustomed to the pearl glow of the lights kept taking them off, citing them as 'moody'. At least, in the office, there were no such people to worry about. He unfurled his computer and worried that the seams near the edges were coming apart, and he hated to have to spend a whole day walking down to Repairs and trying to get it fixed. He hated when they decided to put a mirror maze on the way there, he remembered the time when a supervisor explained to him that it was there for 'fun' and to 'boost morale'. All it seemed to do was make Repairs impossible to find. And when he did

(if ever) actually get there, he had to hope one of the employees has remembered the route and got there in time. He could have sworn that they moved the pieces around, too, but perhaps that was just the sheer size of the place. If he ever had to go back there again, he thought, he would bring stickers to stick on the mirror so that he could remember his way next time. Also, it might give him some insight into if they really did move the mirrors around.

But all thinking was just distraction - from what, though? Nothing was going on around him, even the distant lights had died down. He turned his own light on through the company's system, and sat down to perhaps finally work on his 'Why Do Buses Come In Threes' article.

# #WhyDoes: Things Come In Threes?

This week on #WhyDoes, you're going to be experiencing a tidal wave of new information coming right at you - and you want to know why? Well, some people have told me that buses come in threes. Not sure why? Very strange one. But ANYWAY - we have some exciting news for you today. Do any of you remember how your parents or carers used to say that 'buses always come in threes'? Well, the origins of the phrase are quite interesting - quite interesting indeed. If we see that the word 'bus' comes from the word 'omnibus' in Latin - a language which has been gone for around two thousand years! Talk about lasting influence!

Anyway, back to the main subject - why do these buses come in threes? Well, a simple search at any library or asking any of your co-workers or friends will get you nowhere - it just seems that nothing is out there about this sort of stuff! OR SO I THOUGHT.

That's right, this next part will tell you all about the trials and tribulations I had to go through to get to the bottom of this strange saying. First of all, I had to determine what sort of thing it even was - does it have a moral? Does it have a hidden meaning? Is it... you know... naughty in that way? Well - fret no more, because you're going to find out. As a side note, how many meanings of the word 'fret' can you think of? My record is currently at nineteen. But yes, I figured out (by calling up my MUM!) that the phrase is just a surface level thing. So buses, as they are in real life, always come in threes. So, I decided to go around the city and look for buses - but since they were phased out a few decades ago, I had a hard time with that. Perhaps the underground might give me something better? Nope, they're all running on electric systems which make sure they don't arrive three at once. I was going to speak to a member of staff about



this, but I was swept away in a flood of people going through the ticket barriers. What a waste of £10!

So, the only option was to go out to the country and see what they had out there and LO AND BEHOLD - they have buses out there! I know, I didn't expect it either, but how would you get from place to place out there otherwise? I mean, car ownership there is still extremely high, but still. So the whole car hiring process was a bit of an ordeal - and if you work where I do, you know how much of an ordeal it is! It's almost as bad as having to go down to Repairs! Except in Repairs, there's no one to shout at you when you do get there!

All I'm trying to say is that maybe the hire car system could be a little nicer, you know? Not all of us have taken full tests, right? I know a few people who've only done sim driving but say they're good to go on the roads, so what's up with that? Anyway, this leads me on to my next point about buses. So, why do they end up in threes? My first thought is that the rear two drivers always drive faster. But they're not always in threes? So, how do they know how to split the drivers up? But then I had to scrap that idea - there's another layer to this thinking which comes from my experiences in the country.

I had to wait for a bus to go somewhere! And yes, it was boring, it was almost half an hour, I just stood there, and not one came, let alone three at once... at that point, I wanted to just call it quits and go home. But the bus WAS my way home! So, after crawling across the land in these things, I think I know a lot about them. When passengers get on them, they get heavier, right, and so the driver has to drive slower, well, less has to, more 'has no option but to', and then every time they come to a stop, they pick up all of the passengers. So, the passenger count at the station is now zero (much like the amount of people who like tinted walkway-lights!) and the next bus doesn't have to pick up as many, and so doesn't have to slow down as much. Of course, I would have gone back to repeat the experiment, but this was too obvious a finding to warrant repeat measurements. Q.E.D.

Buses come in threes. And mail does too - but that's an article for another time. For now, it's been fun knowing you. Hello! Bye!

# A Promotion For You

Unication woke up at his desk, bleary-eyed from having bullshitted through so much work last night, but happy that he had filled up a page or so of his blank document. At last, the curse of the empty page had been lifted! But there was still so much to do, so much to edit, so much to add promotional links to, so much to add reference links to, or perhaps add a gif or ten in there to pad out the article and increase viewer gaze retention. He was excited about the buzz that people might get by waiting for the next one - this serialised format where things were released one at a time rather than all at once to 'binge' was new to him, something that might get him a competitive edge in this overly competitive world. And also with his new managerial role, he could have someone go and tidy the text up for him, and perhaps do some more research. For now, he sat up in his chair and ordered a coffee, it was too early for people to be in the kitchenette area.

He realised that he didn't actually know where the new kitchenette was, but realised that now that he was the manager, people would get stuff for him. Not that he wanted to impose things on people, but he thought he'd written a good enough article to warrant getting someone else to have to handle the awful coffee machines they had here. His mind then turned to his home, and the fact that seemingly no one had called or messaged him about his absence. At least it was good that they didn't interfere with each other's lives that much, he had heard of people receiving a dozen phone calls if they went out to get some lunch without telling someone! Thankfully, he didn't have anyone like that around him.

this is a novel about a hyper specified company in the future, a spinoff of buzzfeed-esque companies whose sole purpose is to link unmatched things. unication smith IV, son of unication smith II, is near the head of the very nepotistic company, and things start going wrong for him. he is a bit of an investigative journalist who is scraping the bottom of the barrel for ideas, and so he visits outside the city to see if there is anything worth reporting on there. when he's there, he comes across a small village and attempts to fit their world into his, he tries to make rankings and lists of their quaint town lives. they don't hate him but they sort of put up with him. they're mystical, vague, they tell tales and he tries to recount these tales to the world at large in his stunted, capped-off, shortened list-based style. they keep alluding to some sort of secret, something about the town that may or may not be there. he asks them all what they do to make these stories up and they give him different answers. unication smith's two partners leave him after he ends up spending too much time in the village. he meets someone from the village and doesn't hit it off with them very well, but he learns a lot from the experience. he combats some of the townspeople when it comes to religion, and comes to the conclusion that there can be a fusion of religious concepts and science, they do not need to always be at odds with one another - if people are properly informed about the boons and pitfalls of both. the townspeople inform IV of a plan to go into town and kill the city folk, and he backs out of it. because he doesn't want people to get hurt, he tells them to stop and goes back to the city. eventually, in a moment of weakness, he tells the city something about their plan, and the city destroys the town irrevocably. the epilogue is unication man walking through the smouldering remains of the town looking for something secret, something hidden, and he finds nothing. he is incredibly sad at the loss, but not sad that he does not find anything - this is a parallel to the Hayterian tale of the locked chest.

plot points:

unication witnesses a death 1

unication is promoted 1

unication is given a permit to leave for investigative journalism 2

unication goes out into the countryside in his car 2  
unication stops at a village because he sees a bus going through  
and asks the villagers whether buses really do come in threes 2  
unication goes back to go to a trial 2  
unication spends some time at home with his partners 2  
unication writes “#WhyDoes: Mail Come In Threes? 3  
unication immediately goes back to the village, he’s not sure why,  
he doesn’t have a pass but they let him through anyway 4  
unication does those things in the village, he learns more about  
what they do 4  
unication is promoted again, and gets to learn more about what  
they do at the company 4  
[unication keeps saying yes to everything that’s put past him, he  
doesn’t want to hurt anyone]  
unication keeps going to the village to visit them, he tells his  
partners that he’s on business visits, they move house. 5  
unication visits the villagers and one of them tells him they have a  
plan to do something drastic to the city people 5  
unication doesn’t want them to do this 5  
unication writes: Six Things About Village Life 6  
unication is promoted again for his wonderful writings, to near the  
top of the business 7  
unication learns of a plan that threatens the village 8  
unication comes close to telling them about the plan to destroy  
their village / comes close to telling his officials about the plan to do  
something to people in the city 8  
unication writes: news at nine - bomb threat in inner city? 9  
unication goes to work and people are being killed on the  
walkways around unication inc. specifically, he runs off and tries to  
take shelter in the warehouse 10  
unication steals a car and drives out to the countryside once more,  
and he sees the town being destroyed and walks around for a while,  
seeing the destruction that has been caused 10

unication sees if he can look through the rubble to find the ‘secret’ of expression that the villagers were alluding to, and writes about it in the process 11

unication doesn’t find anything, instead, he realises his writing has been affected by the villagers and laments their passing 11

unication writes: The Doomsday Clock Hits Midnight

unication, now at the head of the company, due to the death of unication smith iv, begins a new policy of keeping unication within its limits, downsizing A

the epilogue is the story of how unication corporation becomes a small, one-man bookstore, and all the better for it. Z

the point is that the city people aren’t happier and better, but they still incite jealousy in the townspeople.

# **Five Pound Pints Six Things About Village Life Near Heaven Eaten Up**

**News At Nine: Threats  
To The C.B.D  
Tense Situations  
Far From Heaven  
The Doomsday Clock  
Past Midnight  
A,  
to Z**