

## Dunedin, 911 by Susan Bennett

It begins. We could not have anticipated this stroke of fortune – that a man who few thought capable should attain the presidency – but President Daffy has succeeded, and is amenable to the plan where the less visionary before him failed to embrace its truths.

Elegant, leather-bound copies of the Dunedin Study have replaced the bible in every hotel room and church. Today we led the little children privileged to become Generation One (*Race: Superior*) toward their destiny, ushering them from classrooms where they laboured at fruitless pursuits such as painting and craft to PsychCon 101.

Here we showed them footage of the Marshmallow Test. Already, the bright children distinguish themselves from the dull. Watching the test subjects on the screen – tempted with one marshmallow to eat immediately; promised two if they resist eating the first for fifteen minutes – the dull children urge their screen peers to eat, while the bright call, *no, wait!*

The film ends with a magnificent cautionary tale: a small, undisciplined girl guzzles the marshmallow, crying piteously in the knowledge of what she has cost herself.

One silent little fellow sits cross-legged on the floor, still in his art smock spattered with paint, while Professor Killjoy explains that those who do not eat the marshmallow immediately will become superior grown-ups, just like us.

“Well?” I prompt the inscrutable little fellow. “Will you eat the marshmallow now or wait and have two?”

He points to Professor Killjoy.

“Lady, if I’m going to wind up like that fat old bastard, you can keep your fucking marshmallows.”

### *Day Two*

We identify *artist* as a personality disorder and redirect our efforts to high school students, taken from their literature class to attend PsychCon 101.

Our esteemed director, Professor Killjoy, explains the new order. Henceforth the human species will be divided into three categories: First Class (psychiatrists, business entrepreneurs and politicians); Business Class (those with an approved education, suitable to serving the business workforce) and Economy Class (menials: police, nurses, paramedics, farmers, theists, environmentalists and the like.)

Those in First and Business Class can look forward to solid jobs, steady marriages, mortgages, and savings begun in middle-age to prepare for retirement. We show the Marshmallow Test film to the teenagers and prompt them to reflect on who will attain the desirable classes.

Overnight, the high school is defaced by graffiti. *Carpe Diem* has been sprayed on every building.

President Daffy bans Latin. *Writer* is identified as an undesirable personality type to be eradicated by selective breeding.

### *Day Three*

**8.45am** Doctor Farquharson is despatched to administer the Marshmallow Test to university students.

**5.07pm** Farquharson is reported missing after failing to return to the lab.

**5.30pm** Farquharson is discovered in the observation room at the university, bound and naked from the waist down, a feather fallen between his thighs. The marshmallows have been taken from the safe.

**6.00pm** Farquharson is rescued and returned to the lab.

**6.01pm** Farquharson requests permission to return to the university and repeat the experiment.

**6.02pm** Farquharson is reassigned to non-marshmallow related duties.

*Day Four*

The team receives a note in the mail:

*Humanity is suing you for defamation*

*(signed) God.*

Accompanying the note is a marshmallow in a condom. A day is lost while the team analyses the possible meaning of this. The note is readily dismissed as envy expressed by some down-and-out, drug addict or possibly one of the menials.

The matter of the marshmallow in the condom is, however, perplexing, given that it does not support either the single or double marshmallow theorems. Who would squander a marshmallow in this way, with no possibility of reward? Doctor Farquharson proposes a longitudinal study of the subject to be conducted at the university. Professor Killjoy reminds Farquharson that he is no longer on marshmallow-related duties.

*Day Five*

There is grumbling from the menials. Nurses are demanding premature marshmallows for dying patients who will not live long enough to receive their second marshmallow in retirement.

Our esteemed director, Professor Killjoy, demonstrates great intestinal fortitude. Fearlessly fronting a media conference – outside a hospital for added effect – he declares cancer to be a disease of the undisciplined.

There is some debate among the team as to whether Professor Killjoy is aware of this sign in the background: *Benevolent Hospice for Infants and Children.*

Doctor Farquharson calls the media conference a disaster. Professor Killjoy accuses Farquharson of catastrophising. Marshmallows are exchanged. Doctor Farquharson accuses Professor Killjoy of throwing like a girl. Professor Killjoy bitch-slaps Farquharson and runs away.

*Day Six*

**9.00am** Press conference MKII.

Professor Killjoy is forced to defend public funding for the Dunedin Study which might otherwise be allocated to childhood cancer research/cure.

Professor Killjoy brilliantly invokes the potential billion-dollar savings in eradicating personalities likely to develop obesity, heart-disease, cancer, diabetes, and gum disease, as well as those likely to become down-and-outs or drug addicts.

With no less than a theatrical flourish, Professor Killjoy reveals our *pièce de résistance*: we, the team, have established a correlation between heavy drinking and sexually transmitted disease.

**9.05am** President Daffy passes a law making it illegal to laugh at a psychiatrist in a “howling, uproarious or derisive manner.”

### *Day Seven*

We, the founders of the Marshmallow Epoch, resolve to lead by example. We will erect a city within a city – an ostentatious show of wealth where heretics may gaze upon the rewards of self-control.

When Professor Killjoy suggests we call it *Marshmallow Valley*, the team waits for his cue before laughing.

### *Day Eight*

It becomes necessary to take a more pro-active approach. We gather subjects from the Economy Class for reconditioning. Subjects are rendered chemically docile then fed marshmallows until they projectile vomit while Professor Killjoy demands, “Why are you vomiting?” and they respond, “Too many marshmallows! Too many marshmallows!”

The team implants a tracking device before releasing the menials. Doctor Killjoy intends to document the indisputable benefits of PsychCon on film.

Disaster strikes. The tracking device alerts us that one of the test subjects is on the move. We race to the location, camera in hand, but the media has beaten us there,

and are already filming our man, resplendent in his fireman's uniform, refusing to enter the burning convent behind him.

"It is better to wait," is all he will say when the reporters scream at him to put out the fire. "Good things come to those who wait," he says.

**9.01pm** It is difficult to conceive how this situation could possibly get worse.

**9.02pm** It is no longer difficult to conceive how this situation could get worse.

While our man refuses to put out the fire, a down-and-out type rushes from the shadows, racing toward the burning building, wine flagon in hand. He is enormous. The down-and-out charges towards the flames at a lumbering run, stumbling in his flip-flops, which, in the absence of several toes, barely adhere to his feet. His pants are all but defeated by his huge gut; the open waistband shies away from the enormity of the task, revealing an arse crack which can only be described as cavernous.

And he only has one arm.

He uses it to great effect; running repeatedly into the burning convent, he rescues the nuns one by one, slinging them over his shoulder and placing them gently on the lawn before risking the flames again. The last nun to be rescued – an elderly creature – is heard to cry, "Please! Save my kittens!" and so he, skidding almost toeless in his flip-flops, braves the inferno as the building succumbs.

For a moment it seems he is lost to the fire, but as the convent collapses, he emerges from the dust holding a cat tucked under his solitary arm. No sooner is he free than he assumes a stricken expression, running once more into the flames, heedless of the falling debris. This time he emerges with his flagon tucked under his arm and the cat held in his hand. He has made use of his gaping waistband to rescue the feline's offspring. His arse crack is a veritable portrait of fluffy kittens, daintily coughing up cute little clouds of smoke while they gaze up at the down-and-out with nothing short of adoration.

**9.05pm** Even worse.

While the down-and-out grins an almost toothless smile at the television cameras, the mother cat leaps from his one-armed embrace, bounds past the hesitant fireman

and sinks her teeth into Professor Killjoy's balls, where she clings, while he spins, howling; and she spins with him, holding on by her teeth like a seasoned trapeze artist.

*Day Eight (still)*

The scene: a half-frozen river. In it, a stricken woman flailing among the icy slush, begging rescue, her cries growing faint as her energy fades.

We have followed our reconditioned fireman to the call. He stands on the bridge, responding to the woman's pathetic entreaties with shouted demands for marshmallows.

There is a rustling, thought at first to be the murmuring of wind, then, from a great pile of leaves emerges another down-and-out who has been making his bed there. Racing to the bridge, he dives into the freezing water, while our reconditioned fireman demands, "Where are your marshmallows? Give me your marshmallows!"

The down-and-out deposits the rescued woman on the bank, but there is only one blanket to be found in the firetruck, and I sense that because of this, all might not be lost: the down-and-out has brought a dilemma upon himself. With no dry clothes to change into, he must light the leaves of his bed to warm himself or freeze to death.

(If I expect Professor Killjoy to bring the point home for the benefit of the filming media, I am to be disappointed. He hangs back, claiming that there are cats waiting to attack him in the shadows.)

I step up. "You there! Look where your imprudence has landed you! Now you must freeze or do without your bed. Do you see now the value of restraint?"

The down-and-out meets my gaze boldly. "I would not suffer the pain in that lady's eyes a moment longer."

The night sky begins to glow. A moonbow arches across the horizon, illuminating the darkness. Slowly, many figures emerge from the shadows; some, peeling the clothes from their own body to offer the down-and-out.

The convent fire spreads, unchecked. Now the city is burning, and a human circle

closes around Professor Killjoy and I, menacing, tightening, inching closer.

*God help us. Please.*