

THE INDENTED

I

Alpha, Alpha, Alpha

By
J W Bowe

Contact details:

Serious Biscuits.

admin@seriousbiscuits.com

Copyright © J W Bowe 2017

SCENE 1:

Ralph Arcfield is struggling along a coastal path with his walking stick in the early summer of 1995. Ahead of him Duncan Horne waits on a wall with his estate car parked behind him. He sees Ralph approach and pours him some tea from a Flask. Ralph staggers to his side and they sit together looking out to sea.

Duncan: You've done well Ralph, here in good time...

Ralph: You couldn't have come and picked me up from home, then?

Duncan: I'm out of the way, you know that.

Ralph: You're in the next village but one.

Duncan: I'm a long way out of the way. Besides, disableds need all the exercise that you can get. It's a decent wander along that path, too. Did you get the return bus ticket home?

Ralph: Yeah, it's discount after 6pm too. Thank you for the tea, Dunc.

Duncan: You deserve it; and you don't need me to take you back then? You should be able to get a taxi off the back of that cane. People need all the help that they can muster.

Ralph: We battle on...

Duncan: Yeah, but you don't really, do you. You shuffle about with your canes hoping that everyone notices, proclaiming dignity while shaking a money box in my face. I'm sorry, Ralph, I didn't mean that... probably just excited about your interests in HAM radio. It's just that we all carry things, Ralph. You're probably lucky that yours comes with a handle at the top.

Ralph: And I get the discounts as well. Your things though, Dunc; the stuff that you carry... is it in your brain?

Duncan: It's in the mind, Ralph; the transmitters of it all, not the housing.

Ralph: Would you like some of my pain killers?

Duncan: We ought to get the equipment out of the car first.

Ralph: You mean that you're going to let me touch the equipment?

Duncan: Only for the purposes of your education. Think you can manage a ruck sack?

Ralph: That's not really touching anything, is it?

Duncan: I'll let you spike the antenna when we get down there. How's that?

Ralph: Let's go and have a go.

Duncan: Have your tea first, you've earned that. It's a good clear night for some radio coms... I'm glad you came along, Ralphie.

SCENE 2:

Ralph and Duncan are at the beach. Duncan watches Ralph struggle to spike the communication antenna.

Duncan: Deeper!

Ralph: That's as far as it wants to go! I'm not trying to murder the beach.

Duncan: You're not really trying at all...

Ralph: Steady on Dunc, I'm not really down with manual labour.

Duncan: Think you could manage to assemble the wind break instead?

Ralph: That's much more likely. Think that guy you were telling me about will be on the other end tonight?

Duncan: Chris Lighthouse? I would imagine so, what else is there to get up to on The Frisian Islands?

Ralph: I don't know; I've never been there. I haven't even left East Anglia in over ten years. Did I tell you that?

Duncan: It was in the first correspondence you sent, yes. You saw fit to tell me about that but left out the stuff about the walking stick.

Ralph: Well I'm thirty years old, it's embarrassing.

Duncan: Not managing to escape Norfolk?

Ralph: No! Hobbling around with my walking stick, looking for sympathy, or whatever it is you think I'm up to.

Duncan: I don't that you lot are up to much, what could you manage? Even if you all ganged together...

Ralph: Steady on, mate. I'm just saying that I live with various embarrassments.

Duncan: I know; I'm trying to help you. When we first met you said that you didn't want me to speak down to you.

Ralph: Well you said that I was like a tripod.

Duncan: I've said sorry for that, and promised that I'll treat you the same as everybody else. I would like to help you though; you said that you were interested in radio communication.

Ralph: I did?

Duncan: Third letter. You said that you were a good listener in that one, too.

Ralph: People have said that...

Duncan: You going to listen to me talk with Chris Lighthouse then?

Ralph: I suppose I haven't got any choice after saying that. You ready to plug it all in?

Duncan: About ready...I've brought some brandy as well. After you've had enough of that you can tell me why you never go very far. Unless I'm talking to Chris Lighthouse, I'll need my headphones on for that. What are you up to tomorrow?

Ralph: Hopefully still not waiting for us to unpack everything for tonight.

Duncan: That's not good listening, Ralph, not at all. I only agreed to us meeting up in person because of the listening. I don't generally hook up with pen pals.

Ralph: I'm sorry, Duncan. I didn't mean it. I'm keen to have a go at radio communication that's all. I can't do tomorrow though, gotta go listen some place else.

Duncan: Really?

Ralph: Yeah.

Duncan: Is that what you normally do, when you're not listening to me?

Ralph: Sometimes. Sometimes I just stay in, if it's wet outside.

Duncan: What do you get up to indoors?

Ralph: Wait to go do some radio communication.

Duncan: Right you are then, let's get on with it. Y'know, I better tell you now that we're basically outlaws doing this here. I've been thrown off this site before.

Ralph: But aren't you a part of a club or something?

Duncan: You mean EARL?

Ralph: Who?

Duncan: The East Anglian Relay League. They handle all the administration for municipal laws to do with radio communication up and down the coast. I used to be with them, got my call sign as an operator through them, but in the end they're all about the rules and bullshit.

Ralph: So you've gone renegade?

Duncan: Communication should be for anyone Ralph, anywhere. There should be a hundred antenna's running along this beach.

Ralph: Wouldn't you want to go and play radio someplace else then?

Duncan: Yeah but that's not the point. The point is that it's just me, me and my transceiver. And you; is this going how you thought it would?

Ralph: It will be if you let me look at the transceiver.

Duncan: Traditionally we master spiking the antenna before moving onto the advance stuff, but I suppose you're not really here to learn.

Ralph: Well yes, I bend more to chronicling others, but I'm happy enough to learn some things along the way. I guess you could put me in touch with EARL if things go well and I want to go further.

Duncan: Their number is in the Yellow Pages. Tell them that you're interested in broadcasting music or making money from it, they'll love that. Here, take the transceiver in your lap and we'll wire it all up before someone sees us. You can have a go on the brandy if you want, while I'll sort out the fine tuning on the megahertz.

Ralph: Then it's ready to go?

Duncan: Yes, so long as Lighthouse is about on the other end, I can't be arsed to make any more new friends at the moment if he's not.

A ringing sound grows from a small speaker beside them higher and higher in pitch.

Duncan: That's got it! We're broadcasting out... let's see if anyone is coming back.

Ralph coughs.

Ralph: Take that bottle away, Duncan! Can I have a go on the walkie talkie?

Duncan: No, you've had enough already. Be quiet for a minute... Two Echo One Alpha Alpha Alpha... anyone calling in, over?

Ralph: What are you doing?

Duncan: It's my call sign.

Ralph: All the Alpha's?

Duncan: That's what I got through the post, I didn't choose it. Be quiet again. Two Echo One Alpha Alpha Alpha... Hello?

Unknown: Hello Two Echo One Alpha Alpha Alpha, this is Golf Three Lima Romeo Victor!

Ralph: I can hear him!

Duncan: He's on the speaker. Good evening Mr Lighthouse, Duncan here.

Lighthouse: Evening, Duncan! How are the fair skies of Norfolk?

Duncan: They're still here, Lighthouse. We have the company of someone else tonight as well.

Lighthouse: What's his call sign?

Duncan: Doesn't have one, he's civilian. His name is Ralph, he's got a walking stick.

Lighthouse: ... is he safe?

Duncan: Perfectly safe, confirming again that he uses a walking stick.

Ralph: Can I say hello?

Duncan hands Ralph the walky talky.

Ralph: Hello Lighthouse! Hello...? Does he have a hearing aid, Dunc? Hello Lighthouse...!?

Duncan: Pass the talky back, Ralph. Golf Three Lima Romeo Victor, are you receiving...? Lighthouse, are you there...? He's fucked off, Ralph.

Ralph: Because of me?

Duncan: Probably, he's probably quite a private person.

Ralph: Why's he broadcasting over radio then?

Duncan: Well he's not is he, that's why I said that.

Ralph: Sorry, I didn't mean to cause anyone offense. Can I try him again?

Duncan: You'd need your own call sign.

Ralph: Could I use yours?

Duncan: Absolutely not. I'm no fan of EARL but we have to have some decorum over how we do things, otherwise it'll be fucking madness out there, believe me.

Ralph: What are we going to do, then?

Duncan: I could show you some Morse code. Probably get someone interested from Russia, they love that over there.

Ralph: I know another guy who does Morse so that's no good to me.

Duncan: Right you are, let's pack it all up then.

Ralph: You going to have some of your brandy?

Duncan: Nah, I've gone off the idea. I've got to drive home and I don't want to be pulled over with all this equipment in the back.

Ralph: Has that happened?

Duncan: Only when I've been on the brandy before I pack up and get behind the wheel. I don't like people pawing over my equipment on the side of the road when I've had a few doubles. You can have some more though if you like...

Ralph: Thank you. Don't suppose you've any port?

Duncan: I don't suppose it, no. *That's* supermarket own brand brandy.

Ralph: I'm not knocking it...

Duncan: Well I can see you're knocking it back. I can see what you do at home on those rainy days. I can't blame you, how long have you had that stick?

Ralph: Fifteen years, something like that...

Duncan: Is there a good story behind it?

Ralph: Not really, not for me.

Duncan: But you've got it written down in a note book somewhere?

Ralph: Not big on notes as a general thing...

Duncan: But I thought you chronicled?

Ralph: I do, but in a looser fashion than that. It's more like making a collage.

Duncan: You mean that you make shit up about what you think you remember people saying.

Ralph: I'm pretty sure it's not as sinister as that. I just take peoples experiences and see where it goes from there.

Duncan: And people don't mind you doing that? They don't think it's a conceited way of becoming a pen pal?

Ralph: Do you?

Duncan: Pass me over the brandy and I'll tell you by the end of it.

SCENE 3:

Ralph struggles along a semi made single track lane on his way back to the bus stop. Duncan catches him up in the car and pulls alongside him.

Duncan: I'm sorry that you came out all this way for nothing, Ralph.

Ralph: It's never for nothing, Dunc. You sure you'll be alright to drive back?

Duncan: I left the empty bottle outside the car when I pulled away so there's no evidence in case I need to hide it. You sure that you can make the bus stop in time?

Ralph: I reckon, and I know the driver so he'll be expecting me on the last ride. He'll give me a few minutes extra shuffle time if I'm not there.

Duncan: Well if you're sure... besides, can you imagine the pigs pulling me over for drunk driving with all that shit in the back and a cripple mouthing off by my side? They'd be a story in it for you, but I think it's safer if we go back separately.

Ralph: I couldn't agree more. You at the timber yard tomorrow?

Duncan: Yeah I suppose, unless they've pulled another fork lift driver out from someone's hole.

Ralph: You make it sound sordid.

Duncan: You wanna try working for a living; see how you come out the other end.

Ralph: I hope I haven't soured the air with Lighthouse, you think he's alright?

Duncan: I have no idea, probably though. He could be pleasuring himself all over a spark transmitter for all I know.

Ralph: Well drive safe then. It's been enlightening, thank you.

Duncan: C'mon, jump in the other door, I can't have you scuttling about out here in the evening like skulk bait. What time does your bus set off?

Ralph: Hugh's probably waiting already...

THE END