

Billy Jones,

King of the Goblins

by Ed Wicke

**For David Gustavo Eggington...
... and Goblins I have known**

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Chapter 1 Birthday Surprise

Thursday: We had a Maths test and I got the lowest mark in the Universe. I told Miss Allen it's my tenth birthday tomorrow, the first of June, but I don't think she heard me. She was gazing out of the window with that dreamy look she sometimes has.



Billy Jones chewed on the end of his pencil. He hated writing his diary. But tomorrow was Friday, and he had to hand it in to be marked. He thought hard, and added:

Only 36 days until the Country Dancing Display. Yuk!

He counted the words. He needed eighty more – eighty!! What could he fill all those blank lines with? Nothing ever happened to him.

Not *ever*.

Except of course –

But he couldn't write about *that*. They would think he was crazy! Still, he had all those words to waste...

Next we went out for morning break. And I saw THEM again, peering out from the bushes. More of them this time. Shaped like those crazy creatures you can make from modelling balloons. Long bodies and tiny heads. Or tiny bodies and stretched-out heads with weird, flapping ears like wings. I pointed them out to a dinner lady, but she couldn't

see them. No one sees them except for me. But I've seen them every day this last month.

He stopped and counted. Seventy-nine words. Just one more! He took up his pencil again and added:

Really.

Then he went to bed.

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... He wasn't sure what had wakened him. He lay in bed with his eyes closed, wondering.

There were odd sounds in his room. As if a dozen rabbits were playing football, watched by a murmuring crowd of pigeons - or maybe penguins, shuffling from foot to webby foot, nodding their heads gravely and exclaiming "Auk!" whenever one of the bunnies scored a goal.

Then someone - or something - coughed. One of those coughs which mean: *We're ready to begin now and we'd like your attention, please...*

Billy opened his eyes and sat up, yawning. But he stopped with his mouth still wide open.

In a half circle about his bed stood a grotesque gathering of creatures. By the dim moonlight from his window he could see that they were of many colours and shades - lime green, royal purple, deep red, dusky bluish grey. And all of them with a soft, smooth, half-shiny look, as if they'd been made out of modelling clay.

Some of them were almost as high as the room; others could scarcely be seen over the end of his bed. Some of the shorter ones were as wide as they were tall, and some of the tall ones were thinner than Billy.

Their faces were all different: from bulbous, squishy noses to long, dangly ones; big, round eyes to small slits at odd angles; great, flapping ears or ears so tiny they looked like button mushrooms.

They had some things in common, though. Arms too long for their height, with seven fingers on each hand - well, more like five fingers and two thumbs. That smooth, shiny, leathery skin. Heads that were bald or had tufts of oddly coloured hair, sometimes covered by jaunty caps topped with bright feathers.

And no clothes.

The closest creature - a pale blue middle-sized one with a podgy nose and small ears - removed his tall, pointed blue hat with an elegant sweep of the arm and bowed stiffly.

The creature said in a gruff voice:

'Yer Majesty, we brings ya birfday greetinments from yer loyal subjects, we do.'

The creature bowed again. He looked back at the others and mouthed something to them; they bowed as well, though some of them - who appeared to be ladies - dropped what might have been a curtsy instead. That is, they did a sort of half-squat and then straightened up again.

A few of the curtseying creatures exchanged glances and made gargling, snorting sounds which Billy took to be laughter.

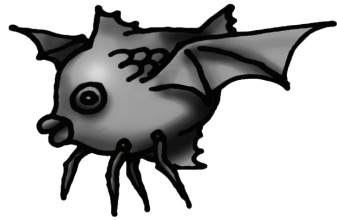
As they bowed, Billy saw behind them a group of even odder creatures, like the ones he'd caught glimpses of at school that morning. Some were like distorted cats, all gangly legs below a furry body of blue or green or striped yellow and pink; some



looked like small, bouncy puppies; others resembled lambs but with long, flapping ears.

But no! The green lamb's ears were changing, becoming wings, and its body was shrinking into its head, so that it was now just a fat flying head, rather like an owl that had eaten too many mice.

And now that he looked carefully, he could see that many of these animals were busily changing shape. One cat was turning into a spider, one bouncy puppy into something halfway between a snake and a corkscrew.



He also understood the scuffling noise now. The animals were playing a non-stop game, tussling, chasing, leaping over one another. The puppies bounced into the tall

cats and bowled them over, and the corkscrew snake spiralled around its fellow ex-puppies one by one and trapped them in its spirals. But then one puppy wriggled about and changed into something very like a pogo stick with a tiny head, and sprang free of the corkscrew.

All this Billy saw in the few seconds that the Goblins were bowing to him; then he realised they were waiting for him to return the bow, and he did so. But it was difficult to bow in a kingly manner when sitting

in bed wearing pyjamas and clutching an old teddy bear.

As the Goblins straightened up, Billy said, 'But that can't be right. I'm not - well, whoever you think I am. I'm Billy Jones.'

The Spokesgoblin growled. 'But you is!' he said. 'You is der King of der Goblins, like it or lump it.'

'Me? There must be some mistake!'

'Yeah, dere's been a mistake, an' all. But you was Kingified der day you was born, an' dat's der solemnful truthness.'

The Goblin shot an angry glance back over his right shoulder, towards a tall, thin, sad-looking dark blue Goblin standing near the bedroom door. He had some sort of rope tied about one ankle, the end of which was held by a huge yellowish creature standing at his side and holding a large, knobby stick.

'He did it,' said the Spokesgoblin. 'An' it wuz der most Margish fing ever condimented by a Goblin High Vizier.'

The tall blue Goblin made as if to speak but its keeper poked him with the stick, and the sorry creature sighed and fell silent.

'A most dreadfullous mistakement,' continued the Spokesgoblin. 'But rules is rules and Kingdust is Kingdust. You is Billy Jones, King of der Goblins.'

