

Volcano Volley: Detective Dilbert's Excursion to Iceland

Chapter 10

I pull my low-brimmed hat down to the tip of my nose, scrunch into my seat and close my eyes, trying to imagine that I'm anywhere but where I am—sandwiched between two enormous creatures. The woman on my left looks like a linebacker in a dress—what with her broad shoulders, thick neck, and painfully sharp elbows. The man on my right has three bellies that are oozing over my armrest and into my territory. I look down at my own puny skin rolls; they seem to shrink as I do. Mr. Flabtastic on my right is using his middle belly like a portable table on which he's balancing his soda and package of peanuts. Wish I could balance things on my skin rolls. I feel thorny dragon wings unfurling inside of me. Jealousy is painful. I try to ignore his majestic fountain of blubber.

Ding. The “fasten your seat belt” sign is lit; the plane is about to take off. Unfortunately, I can't see the end of my seat belt, must be hidden under my neighbor's waves of fat. Awesome. I plunge my hand below his rolls of blubber and feel around for my seatbelt. Finally, I feel the metal latch and give it a forceful yank. Instantly, a waterfall of Coke gushes out the man's mouth and nose simultaneously. He looks like a balloon that's being squeezed in the middle. A peanut shoots out of his mouth and lands in someone's coffee cup a couple of rows up. Slowly, he turns his head and looks at me, his eyes bulging, his face turning blue. I look at the metal latch in my hand. Oops. Wrong belt. My bad.

Zzzzzzz... After a while, my neighbors are both sound asleep, their heads lolling on my shoulders. Linebacker lady is drooling on my collar. Beads of sweat begin to gather above my lip, making my fake mustache itch. Reluctantly, I unbutton my black trench coat and let in a little cool air. Aah, better. I sure hope no one notices; I have to maintain my disguise, you know.

What a life. No one knows the great sacrifices of a detective; no one knows the agony, all for the benefit of mankind. But they will soon appreciate me! When I capture the thief that stole the Hope Diamond and return it to the museum, the world will finally take notice of the great Detective Dilbert.

My mind drifts to worrisome thoughts of Thester. I feel a pressure in my skull, and my forehead crinkles when I picture him, Thester—such a prankster—he actually believes it's his job to pull pranks—as if concocting jokes is a serious duty. What about my job? Now that's important—solving conflicts, catching criminals, thwarting evil... Who has time to laugh when you're busy battling the gloom and doom of the world? Not me. I close my eyes and search for a moment of rest, but Thester's face finds me; his sinister expression is dancing on the insides of my eyelids, his impish smile, his pointy, horn-like ears.

Ok, fine. I'll say it. Then will you cut me some slack? I'm actually talking to my own Thester-nightmare, but it works. Thester's haunting image freezes. But then it stares ice-pick holes in my skull. Awaiting my confession. I tuck my snout into my neck folds and blurt the thoughts as fast as possible.

Fine! You're not all bad—OK? You care about my detective work. There, are you happy now?!

Thester's face leans in and bumps my brain cells.

OK, enough already.

I pause and swallow; I know I gotta say it, or the darn horse isn't going away...

Alright; alright... You're a good friend. There, I admitted it: now will you give me a break?

Finally, Thester's face dissolves and all I see are the gates of LaLa Land. I'm almost there, one paw is on the gate's handle, about to enter that blissful state of zero problems when, suddenly, the brain cells in the back of my skull conquer those in the front. And before I can stop them, they ruin everything:

It's just, sometimes you can really muff things up! They yell at the vanished image of Thester, making the other cells moan and droop.

Of course, this clever outburst of mine zings Thester's image back. He's currently sitting front row in the back of my eyeballs. Now he's pushed his snout up into my sinuses and is blowing tickle *brrrrrrr's* through my nose and out my nostrils. Insane horse. Get out of my head!

I force my heavy eyelids open. It's either that or stare inside Thester's nostrils. I'd rather scan the plane for clues...

- Stewardess—nice smile—shiny pin on collar—could be a secret camera... Keep watch on that.
- Screaming child—could be a decoy, stopping everyone from watching the thief.
- Mr. Flabstastic could nestle the diamond between his layers of fat and no one would notice.
- Man across the aisle—dressed in black trench coat and low-brimmed hat—looks suspicious. He's scribbling notes, a definite suspect.

Now I use my secret weapon, my nose. Aiming it at the stewardess, I inhale. This activates my built-in sensory radar system. Immediately, my whiskers become rigid and start to twirl; they're picking up any sensory data and transmitting it to the Intelldatadopetameter that's lodged in my brain. The Intelldatadopetameter triggers my eyeball faxing device, and soon I get a readout as to what I'm sniffing. The words "vanilla" and "soap" print across my eyeballs. Next, I point my nose toward the diaper-wrapped decoy and breathe in—yuck, the word "fertilizer" clicks across my eyeball screen. Hope someone brought diaper wipes. I don't even need to turn my head to smell Mr. Flabstastic; he's a mixture of sweat and cologne. Lastly, my laser-like snout collects data from the trench coat guy. My bionic nose gives me a readout—coconut-scented cologne with a faint undertone of hay.

Suddenly, KAAAASHEEEWWWW... a football-sized rock shoots past my window. KABANG! It hits one of the plane's wings. The whole plane is jarred; it staggers like a drunk person. My heart is yanked into my throat. What was that?! Everyone is jerked awake. Then, KAAAASHEEEWWWW... BOOM! Ping. Ping. Ping. Fiery rocks are hitting us left and right. The emergency airbags drop from their compartments above. No use, that air bag won't fit around my big snout. I peer out the window and down below. We're hovering above Iceland—a region of fire and ice. Looks like we've interrupted a volcanic volleyball game. Flaming rocks are being hurled back and forth between the volcanic players, and our plane is right in the middle of their game.

Suddenly, Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!! The plane turns sideways and everyone on my side flies across the aisle and smashes into the people on the right side of the plane. First,

it's Mr. Flabtastic who crashes onto the other side of the plane. Then, it's me. I hit Mr. Flabtastic's stomach. It acts like a trampoline, and I bounce off him. But then, Linebacker Lady hurls her weight right into me. We just start to detangle ourselves from each other—when, Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!! The plane tips the other way.

Oh noooo, here—comes—Mr. Flab. I'm going to be smashed to smithereens, squashed like a cockroach, flattened as a pancake.

Closer, closer, closer. My eyes are bulging; my mouth is hanging open, my body is quaking. Here he comes—I close my eyes and cover my face, preparing for impact. Just then, Mr. Flabtastic, who's still in midair and flying across the aisle, grabs me by the shoulders, picks me up, and whirls me around so that he smashes into the plane's left wall before I do. Mr. Flab becomes my airbag; his rolls of fat suck me in, cushioning me from the blow. My hero.

"Does anyone here know how to fly a plane?" the stewardess shrieks, her voice sounding like a lidded pot of boiling water.

"What?!" the passengers gasp in unison.

"The pilot's fainted!" The flight attendant's words bumble like the farm's squawking ducks. I think she's referring to the pilot who is doubled over, his face pointed at his shoes.

"I can do it! I'll fly the plane!" I pump my paw into the air as I shout. My (invisible) superhero cape becomes apparent to all as I run to the cockpit, shove the pilot aside, and plop down in his seat.

OK, so where's the steering wheel? Hmm... I scrutinize the knobs, buttons, gadgets, and gizmos on the control panel. It's a spiraling maze of numbers and lights. I'm a detective; I'm sure I can figure this out.

"What are you doing? I thought you said you could fly a plane!" the stewardess screams in my ear. I believe she'd make a better opera singer than she does a flight attendant.

She should calm down. Of course I can do this; detectives always know how to do stuff like this.

"Pull up on this," the stewardess shoves me out of the way, grabs a handle-like mechanism and, leaning back, pulls it with all her might. The plane's nose lifts.

I was about to do that. People get so impatient; they don't realize that a super sleuth must always analyze the situation before deciphering the solution. And, being a shrewd detective who always takes the time to scrutinize the data, I then Google Iceland to study the predicament more thoroughly. The stewardess is one of those careless types of humans who doesn't look at all the details before jumping into a dodgy situation. I'm in the middle of scanning the data on Iceland, but the stewardess won't stop screaming in my ear. It's hard to focus. I could use a little help.