

Helping you choose books for children



Opening extract from
Tommy Storm

Written by
A J Healy

Published by
Quercus

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

The Beginning of (Future) History

2096 could've been a very ordinary year on Earth . . .

Over 50,000 people – a pretty average number – reported seeing a bird in the sky, even though all birds had been extinct for many years.

The Grand Council raised some taxes and lowered others, thus ensuring people stayed as confused as ever. The President of Earth, Guttly Randolph, remained popular in the polls despite the tabloids claiming (incorrectly) that he was having a romance with Helena Jadely, a fellow Councillor.

And Earth's Deputy President, Elsorr Maudlin, killed a traffic-warden while showing off his sword-skills, but escaped punishment because it was 'an accident'.



Yes, 2096 could've been quite unremarkable had a certain round object not fallen through Earth's atmosphere, shot down a chimney, and landed in the centre of The Grand Council Hall.

Guttly Randolph, Elsorr Maudlin, Helena Jadely and the other Councillors looked on in amazement as the small

sphere broke open and the invitation was revealed . . .

[insert invite artwork]

****INTER-STELLAR INVITATION ****

Earth Date: March, 2096

Dear President of Earth,

Greetings.

We, the MilkyFed, are delighted to invite 5 Earth children to a training school on a space-station in the centre of the Milky Way. The training will prepare participants for a vital mission that is too dangerous & too secret for us to divulge. Many different species of space-people will take part & we hope that Earthlings will be represented.

At the end of this training, a final group of 5 people – of differing species – will be selected from the entire group of space-people for the mission.

Children rather than adults are required for 2 reasons:

1. Everyone will have to be rigorously trained once they reach the space-station & children are better at learning & adapting to new things than adults.
2. Adults can be quite disagreeable.

Yours expectantly,

Lord Beardedmoustachedwiseface-oh.

RSVP

(strictly within 22 days
– include the names of ‘The 5’ &
their hat sizes if they are to
attend)

The Wilchester Academy for Younger Adults

Tommy Storm hated two things about himself when he was a kid.

The first was his stutter – which would go into over-drive whenever he became angry or upset.

The second was possibly worse . . .

Towards the end of the 21st century, spiky hair was in fashion for boys. In fashion, meant that of the 3.5 billion boys on Earth aged 6–16, approximately 3,499,999,999 had spiky hair. But no matter what Tommy tried – gel, melted marshmallows, super-glue – his efforts always ended in failure.

You see, much to his disgust, Tommy Storm was the only boy on Earth whose hair wouldn't spike.



Two days after the Inter-Stellar Invitation landed in The Grand Council Hall, Tommy found himself in an infuriating situation.

Felkor Stagwitch wasn't the tallest boy in the class, but he was definitely the strongest. In fact, he was possibly the strongest boy in all of The Wilchester Academy for Younger Adults. He could run faster than anyone, he had a

punch that could knock out a mule and he had a laugh that set itself apart from everybody else's. It sounded like a dog being kicked. Repeatedly. Felkor was laughing now as he watched the red computer-pad float higher and higher towards the ceiling of the blue-marbled classroom. He pointed his sabre-beam a little to the left and the computer-pad dodged to the left.

'G-g-g-g-give it b-b-back,' cried Tommy, but this only made Felkor laugh even harder. 'All my w-w-w-w-work is on it.'

Again the peal of laughter like a dog being kicked and the computer-pad soared higher – towards the floating spotlights high above the classroom. Just then, someone shouted something about Tommy's hair, making all the other kids laugh hard.

'P-p-p-p-please Felkor,' Tommy pleaded, the top of his head only just reaching the maddening boy's shoulder.

Felkor aimed his tractor-beam sabre yet higher. 'G-g-g-g-give me b-b-back my computer-p-p-p-pad,' he mimicked. Then he laughed his piercing laugh. 'Darky's gonna cry now, innit?'

Felkor often called Tommy Darky. Indeed, Felkor could've called a snowman Darky since his skin was so white that he sometimes looked almost light blue (not that he'd ever seen a snowman in real life). He had blonde hair (spiky of course) and very, very light blue eyes. The other detail to remember about Felkor was that he would fart whenever he got scared or nervous – although few of his classmates knew this because he always managed to blame someone else for the smell of rotten Brussels-sprouts.

Felkor wasn't the only classmate who called Tommy names. The freckly kids called him Dusky, the kids of

Oriental origin claimed he was Latino, the Latinos said his eyes were half-Oriental, and some of the very dark kids called him Pasty. One kid had laughed at him one day and called him a mongrel. If Tommy could've asked his parents it might've helped, but he knew nothing about them. Not even that their names were Lola and Errol.

At this moment, however, his parents were the last thing on his mind. He'd just spent two hours, under test conditions, writing an essay on The Great Climate Enhancement into his precious computer-pad (also known as a CP). Miss Gideon would be returning to class at any moment and would want to see everyone's work. Famed for her high-pitched scream, and three-time winner of the World's-Strictest-Teacher® award, she wasn't someone you wanted to cross.

Felkor's laugh and grating words pierced through all Tommy's thoughts. 'Darky's gonna cry.'

Tommy pointed his sabre-beam at his CP, but Felkor had a Royce Turbo Tractor Beam VVS sabre (VVS standing for Very Very Strong) – Tommy had a Mega Minor NVS model (you can make your own guess what NVS stands for).

Realising he had no chance against Felkor's sabre and hearing the laughter of other classmates, Tommy aimed his sabre at the platinum-plated duster on the teacher's desk. It was at this moment that Miss Gideon stepped into the room and witnessed an act of 'pure evil'. Her prized duster – the one she'd been presented with upon winning her record-breaking, third World's-Strictest-Teacher® title – yes, that very duster flashed through the air, hit Felkor's belly (sending him into a heap on the floor) and bounced onto a corner of marble, sustaining a long ugly scratch.

Felkor dropped his sabre-beam, releasing Tommy's CP from its grip.

And so it was, that a high-pitched scream rang out across the class – heard by everyone in the school – as a red CP obeyed the law of gravity and smashed into little pieces across Miss Gideon's desk.

'The Sun Won't Come Out Tomorrow!'

(7-times voted Earth's most annoying song)

In 2096, it was 34°C throughout planet Earth at *all* times. The sky was never visible through the permanent layer of clouds, it drizzled constantly and there was no wind. (Unsurprisingly, weather forecasters found it difficult to make a living.)

The Choosing

Let me take you back briefly to the day that the Inter-Stellar Invitation splattered onto Earth . . .

Once the twelve members of Earth's Grand Council had read and digested its meaning, Guttly pleaded with The Council to accept the invitation. He was supported in the debate by Helena Jadely.

'This is an opportunity for us to extend the hand of friendship to other people in the Milky Way,' she said.

'But how can we send five children to some unknown place?' said a Councillor. 'It could be very dangerous.'

'The MilkyFed could destroy Earth at any time,' said another.

'Exactly,' replied Helena. 'So why don't we send a Grand Council member with the children? Then, if things get too dangerous, the Councillor could withdraw the children from the training school and bring them back to Earth.'

mil ky eddy st ar at e my hamst er

(headline from *The Cloud* – a newspaper hostile to
the MilkyFed)

The MilkyFed consisted of 4 solar systems in the Milky Way that had sustained intelligent life for millions of years. In 2082, the

MilkyFed sent a video message to Earth, introducing itself. Subsequently, Earth received invitations to join the MilkyFed – but always refused.

Extra Bits #1, page 000, gives more info on the relationship between Earth & the MilkyFed.

The strongest opponent of the invitation was the Deputy President, Elsorr Maudlin, who had an intense dislike of ‘space-people’, preferring to refer to them as ‘alien monsters’. (He almost always voted against Guttly’s recommendations – some said this was due to the fact that Guttly had beaten him in the Presidential election years earlier.)

Eventually, despite Elsorr’s protests, The Grand Council voted to accept the invitation by a majority of eleven to one. Five children would be chosen to represent Earth on the MilkyFed space-station and a Grand Council member would accompany them. Guttly would choose one of the children and The Grand Council would choose the other four.

Two weeks later, Guttly Randolph was standing on a platform before The Grand Council members.

He was bald as an eagle (a bald-headed one, that is), although wild silver hair bushed over both ears and spilled into a thick, finger’s-length beard. Despite the widespread availability of anti-baldness pills, he stubbornly refused to alter his appearance – which surely cost him the chance of appearing in many soft-drink commercials as previous Presidents had done. Like all the Councillors, the old man wore a white cloak, draped around his body like a gown.

Guttly twirled a large ruby ring on his right index fin-

ger then raised his arms to hush the dignitaries seated around the Majestic Table. 'So now our job is to choose the five children who will represent our planet within the Milky Way and beyond.'

The Councillors had been briefed for days by a team of researchers who'd made continuous presentations, promoting various children from around the world.

There was the kid who was double-jointed all over. Double-jointed elbows, double-jointed knees and even a double-jointed chin. Or the girl who could speak three different words at once. When you listened, it sounded like she was speaking gobble-dee-gook, but if you recorded her speech and separated it into three, she was having three very intelligent conversations at once. This could be very useful on an intergalactic space-station, some believed.

Helena Jadely especially remembered the boy who only ate things that began with the letter B. This would've been quite restrictive, except that he could eat anything beginning with the letter B. Bread and barbed-wire sandwiches were one thing (OK, so they were two things), but bottoms, buildings and battleships were quite another. This eating skill could be quite useful, some contended, if the boy were sent far into space where normal food rations ran quite low. Maybe he could feed on a black-hole if he got particularly hungry. (It should be stressed that he only ate things that began with the letter B in the English language, as English was almost the only language spoken on Earth at this time. This little fellow's digestive system could've benefited greatly if he spoke Gaelic or even Hungarian – there being many additional things beginning with the letter B in these languages.)

Guttly Randolph stood back and let the appointed Councillors come to the platform one at a time. Within fif-

teen minutes, three children had been decided upon. They were:

1 **Egbert 'Sugar Floyd' Fitchly** (age 11 $\frac{1}{2}$) – a boy who talked very, very fast and could convey more information in a minute than most people can in an hour.

2 **ZsaZsa Vavannus** (age 11 $\frac{3}{4}$) – supposedly, the best girl in the world at art-o-pathy* (I'll explain later).

3 **Anjeleek!** Jalfrezi (age 11) – a girl who could scream louder than anyone on the planet (it was thought she could be useful in emergencies).

It was at this point that Elsorr Maudlin raised his objections to the whole project. He stood up, pulled his sword from its hilt and stabbed it loudly into the Majestic Table.

'I object..! Co-operating with stinking MilkyFederans – pah..!! I'm not letting one child embark on this stupid space project.'

Unlike anyone else on The Council, Elsorr insisted on wearing an ornamental sword – to represent his 'duty of defence to planet Earth.' Elsorr had mullet-styled black hair, a pointy nose, angular cheekbones and a yellowy complexion that made you wonder if he had jaundice. No one was sure of the colour of his eyes as they were shadowed by a prominent forehead and thick eyebrows.

'Sit down, Elsorr. Put a plug in it,' said Helena Jadely.

Guttly tried to suppress a smile. Elsorr scowled, straining to remove his sword from the Table.

Helena was in charge of intra-planetary harmony issues on Earth and had crossed sabres many times with Elsorr.

At 37 years of age, she was one of the youngest ever female Councillors, but this never daunted her.

‘Thank you, Elsorr,’ said Guttly. ‘Your objections can have no effect. We’re sending five kids and that’s it!’ Once more, the bearded President of Earth twirled the ruby ring – the Presidential Insignia – around his finger.

Elsorr fell backwards as he wrenched his sword free from the Table. Recovering his balance, he smiled sarcastically at Guttly. ‘Hah..! I’ve got two words for you, oh mighty Guttly . . . Filibuster’

‘Isn’t that one word?’ said a Councillor.

It took a number of Councillors to hold Guttly back as he stepped forward, red-faced, towards Elsorr. His voice came out strangulated with anger. ‘You short-sighted– You . . .! You . . .!’

Elsorr broke into laughter, the meeting broke into loud disarray and Guttly felt a small palpitation sting through his heart (strangely, it always seemed worse around Elsorr).

In case you’re wondering . . . According to long established rules, any Councillor could delay actions and decisions of The Council by putting their feet on the Majestic Table, putting their fingers in their ears and repeatedly uttering the word ‘filibuster’. By having a tube inserted into his stomach to accept food and using his ability to talk in his sleep, Elsorr had once managed to delay a vote (on the world-wide banning of wigs) by almost three months. If Elsorr could filibuster for just two weeks, Earth would miss the deadline for the MilkyFed invitation.

It took over half an hour before order was restored, the room hushed and Elsorr was once again addressing the gathering. ‘I’d like everyone here to know,’ he said, ‘that I’m not an unreasonable man.’

This caused angry mumbles among some Councillors, but Elsorr continued and raised his voice above the noise. 'I do not necessarily want to frustrate the will of this Council or the will of our people. I will not object to sending five kids on this fanciful space-station project, on two conditions'

Once again the Councillors broke into an angry hubbub of voices, until Guttly raised his hands to quiet them. No one had noticed his right hand gently rubbing his breast. 'What are your conditions, Elsorr?'

Elsorr grabbed a candle from a nearby ledge, tossed it in the air and swished his sword in a flurry of movement – the candle floated to the ground in a shower of thin salami slices.

'I don't like candles,' he said. 'Especially bendy ones . . . Sorry, what was I saying?'

'Your conditions,' said Guttly, trying to be patient. Elsorr liked to show off his swordsmanship at every opportunity.

'Oh, yes!' replied the jaundiced-faced man. 'Quite simple really . . . First, I want to choose one child to go on this mission.'

A general nodding of heads and positive murmuring gave Guttly the signal. 'Agreed,' he said. 'And the other condition?'

'I want complete freedom, no appeals, no nothing, to choose which elder accompanies the children on their trip to and on their initial training in, the InterGalactic Space-station.'

This left the Councillors a little puzzled, but after a time they nodded their assent towards Guttly.

'Agreed.'

'I have your word on that, Guttly? Your word in front of

The Grand Council?’ Elsorr asked these questions dramatically. As if to emphasise a point.

‘You have my word,’ replied Guttly, still rubbing his chest.

The Council agreed to reconvene in a few days to hear Elsorr’s nominations. However, to save time, it was decided that Guttly should nominate the fourth child immediately. Guttly moved to the raised platform and thought once more of the child he’d chosen. He’d pondered long and hard over the last 13 days and now his mind was made up.

‘Fellow Councillors,’ he said. ‘The child I have chosen to represent Earth on this mission is currently studying in a school known as The Wilchester Academy for Younger Adults.’

The Celebration

The Wilchester Academy for Younger Adults (known to most as plain Wilchester) was a boarding school established in 2063 and was therefore one of the oldest schools in existence towards the end of the 21st century. Unusually for a school at this time, Wilchester wasn't housed in a floating building or in a floating city. It was built on the top of a dormant volcano.

Each 'year' at Wilchester had its living quarters on a single floor of the school building, and each floor was split into two dorms (male and female). Tommy's year was permanently housed on the uppermost floor, which was smaller than others, so one person was required to stay in the loft above. Every year since he'd been at Wilchester, Tommy's classmates had voted for him to take the loft-room.

This particular morning, at 6:53 a.m., the sea (as ever) lapped against the edges of the old volcano and then a square of blackness 313 feet up switched to a warm yellow glow. Inside, Tommy Storm smacked his alarm-clock and groaned . . .

Five minutes later he was showered, dressed and examining the mirror with a grimace. That stupid mass of hair lay lank upon his head. Not even a trace of anything stick-

ing up. 'Perhaps today,' he hoped. He opened a drawer and removed a parcel.

'This,' he thought, 'must be my last chance. My last chance to fit in and not to feel so . . . so . . . so . . . Well, so different and stupid-looking.'

He'd saved for months for this, sent away his order and it had only arrived last night. Through the door of his room, he heard the sound of boys and girls laughing and talking below as they made their way to the Great Dining Hall. 'They're moving a little early,' he thought. Breakfast never started until 7:15 and it wasn't yet 7:00 a.m.

He ripped the paper off the parcel, revealing a white, toothpaste-like tube, emboldened with an orange logo: ITDDINEW (short for, If This Doesn't Do It Nothing Ever Will). On the other side of the tube were the words, Danger – Very Very Very Sticky

Feeling a strange nervousness, Tommy opened the cap and squeezed a blob of the substance into his hand. Stripy light and dark green, and emitting a low hum, it felt remarkably like ear-wax (which he'd tried twice before) as he massaged it through his hair. Gradually, the humming faded and it was time to peek in the mirror.

The smiling face that looked back was exactly what he'd hoped for. Dark hair standing proudly. 'You know, you don't look too bad, Tommy Storm,' he said to the mirror. 'You don't look half bad.'

He was about to join the others for breakfast (it was already 7:12 a.m.) when he paused. Was this what happiness felt like? He wasn't sure, but something felt good deep within his tummy. He'd even spoken without stuttering, but then he could always do that on his own. But maybe today he could do it outside, in front of others.

‘Yes,’ he thought. ‘Now that my hair looks so . . . so . . . NORMAL, I’ll be able to do it.’



Everything in the Dining Hall was fashioned in grey marble and reflected a cheerless sheen from fluorescent lights overhead. At the top of the Hall was a raised platform. Teachers sat up here during meals, keeping an eye on the pupils below. The Hall’s walls were festooned with large floating screens that usually played images and boomed out instructions, reminding pupils of various rules, competitions taking place or newly invented rude words that were forbidden at Wilchester.

As Tommy left his room, unbeknownst to him, 499 students were standing, staring up at the platform in the Dining Hall. Behind them, 499 CPs were stacked on a large table, leaving everyone’s hands free to clap and wave. But no one was clapping or waving. Everyone was standing motionless, paralysed with wonder. In front of them, Mister Withers was talking into a floating microphone, a bank of teachers seated behind him. Not one of these people noticed a boy descending at the back of the Hall, on a panel-lift, through a gap in the ceiling.

The three seconds it took to reach the floor were enough for Tommy to register surprise, fear and excitement.

Surprise, because he could think of no reason why everyone should be gathered so early this morning. Tommy was well used to his class-mates disconnecting the information-screen in his room, but even so, there’d never been a before-breakfast assembly in the whole time he’d been at Wilchester.

The fear arrived when he realised that he was the only person not at the assembly. He'd already incurred the wrath of Miss Gideon for the smashed CP and scratched duster incident. A week's detention had been his punishment and Miss Gideon had awarded him an F for his exam essay on The Great Climate Enhancement. Alarmingly, this result, along with that of all his class-mates, had been relayed to the central data bank of The Grand Council to help them in assessing (for some unknown reason) the ability of all students throughout the world. (He'd also incurred the wrath of Felkor who'd twice since punched him in the stomach, leaving him retching for breath on each occasion.)

Lastly, the tingle of excitement was because Tommy reckoned that everyone would turn to look at him. Now, finally, with his extra-spiky hair, he could look everyone in the eye.

Mister Withers, the headmaster, seemed to be enjoying this assembly. The old man had wispy grey hair that fell to his shoulder, framing a wrinkled face. One of his eyes always remained fixed in the same position so that whenever he looked down to read something with his 'good' eye, he could still keep a watchful gaze over everyone listening. His oversized glasses magnified the effect, making you think of a giant drunken fish looking out of a goldfish bowl. (Two pupils were once expelled for scrawling 'Googly Eyes' on a dorm wall, though the nickname remained frequently – if quietly – used by most students.)

'And so,' Mister Withers announced to the gathering, 'The Grand Council had to choose five children to represent Earth on this mission – which involves an . . . intergalactic space-station.' The words intergalactic space-station were uttered as if they were very rude words that shouldn't be uttered in polite company. The old fellow

cleared his throat nervously, then continued quickly. 'It should be stressed that only the most gifted, most celebrated children could be chosen.'

Tommy tip-toed forward from the back of the Hall. All the students were transfixed by the old headmaster's words – there weren't even paper fexa-cettters flying in the air. This was highly irregular. What was going on?

If Tommy had realised that his hair was beginning to wilt, he'd have been more careful about tip-toeing into the assembly. But he didn't know. He still thought he looked normal. And once he stepped off the lift-panel and heard Old Withers mentioning an intergalactic space-station, he became entranced.

Space? For some unknown reason, Tommy had always dreamed about travelling into space. It had a strange pull on him. He felt that Earth was like a little hut, with all its windows covered in cotton-wool. There must be something huge and unknown out there. And the unknown was more exciting than frightening. You see, due to Earth's constant cloud cover, Tommy didn't even know that space is black and that the stars look white. If truth be told, he imagined space as being like a giant beanbag – Earth being just one bean alongside millions of other planets all squished very closely together.

— — — — —
'We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at
the clouds.'

(from *Fanny's Windy Lady* (2092) – a play by Tim-Id Oscar)

After The Great Climate Enhancement, adults believed that children had enough difficulty adapting to floating cities without worrying about huge things like space. The clouds had blotted out the stars for a reason. And once the space-people of the Milky Way con-

tacted Earthlings, adults felt that it was even more important to keep all talk of space hush-hush. Children would be frightened to death if they learned that intelligent beings existed beyond Earth.

‘Therefore,’ continued Withers, ‘I am very proud to announce that one person has been chosen from The Wilchester Academy of Young Adults to join four other children who have been chosen from amongst all the children on Earth. Now, I hope that none of you children will be scared when I say this, but this expedition is going to involve a place called space’

He paused for breath, relishing the hush and the tinge of fear in the room.

‘. . . So, with no further ado, let me say that I know you will all be pleased and I know you will all be proud, when I tell you that this person is in fact a boy. And that the name of this boy is—’

CRASH! KERBLASH! KITTISHH!!

Old Googly Eyes stopped mid-sentence and 499 faces turned to stare at the back of the Hall. There, lying on the ground, was a pale-faced boy with lank dark hair falling about his head and a pile of broken CPs all around him.

A chorus of angry voices rose from the assembly.

‘The idiot’s broken our CPs.’

‘He just walked straight into the table. Idiot! Knocked ’em all over.’

‘What a moron!’

‘The fellow with the stupid hair and the stutter – look what he’s done.’

Tommy tried to stand up. ‘I’m s-s-s-s-s-sorry,’ he mumbled, before slipping on a CP and landing once more on his back.

The cries got louder. Tommy recognised Felkor Stagwitch's voice through the crowd. 'Hey, look! What's that green stuff dripping from his hair? It looks like a giant bogey, innit. Must be. Tommy Storm's got boogers in his hair!'

A chant of 'Boogers! Boogers!' rose from the crowd and, above the throng, Tommy could hear the sound of a dog being kicked. That laugh. Felkor was enjoying himself even more than usual.

Before the group could move forward and attack the boy who'd destroyed their CPs, Mister Withers bellowed into the microphone.

'Silence! Silence! Stay where you are. That boy will be dealt with later. Severely dealt with . . . Now, I still have to announce the name of the boy who will make us all proud here at Wilchester. The boy who has been chosen from billions.'

The chant of 'Boogers!' died and the 499 faces forgot about the stupid wretch struggling to stand up amidst the scattering of shattered CPs.

The happy feeling in Tommy's tummy was gone, but he didn't feel as bad as expected. It was weird. Maybe Withers' words about space had something to do with the odd feeling. The very thought of space filled him with a strange sense of hope. A hope that could lift him above the wreckage of the CPs, the disaster of green floppy hair and having everyone – everyone – yelling Boogers! at him.

'One boy from this school,' he thought. 'One boy to travel into space. Imagine. Imagine . . . How wonderful to escape this dreadful place.'

He closed his eyes and made a wish. If there was anything above the clouds, if there was anything out there

watching over him, if somehow his mother or father could hear him calling, then surely his wish would be answered. He felt a pulse of strength swell momentarily through his veins. There he was – just a speck of dust in the expanse of the universe, sending out a pure, honest wish.

‘Please let it be me,’ he pleaded silently.

Old Withers cleared his throat and Tommy opened his eyes. Was it really possible that someone could get his message far, far out in space and somehow alter his destiny? He felt oddly composed. What was this? Confidence? But he never felt confident. Maybe this was the power of someone responding out in space. Could it really be his mother or father responding? Hardly. Lola and Errol were names he’d still never heard. The empty feeling in his tummy turned to butterflies.

Please let it be me

Again, old Googly Eyes cleared his throat, savouring his role in the moment of drama. He opened his arms – his gnarled, veiny fingers outstretched. ‘I am very pleased to announce that the boy who will be representing Earth from this school is . . .’

He paused – his good eye looking out over the crowd, his bad eye locked on the floating monitor before him. There was an audible intake of breath from 499 expectant faces. Behind them all, a young boy pressed forward onto his knees, clenched his hands together and closed his eyes. Please. Please.

Withers waited for absolute silence before he spoke again. ‘The boy who will be representing Earth from this school is . . . Felkor Stagwitch.’

A great cheer rose from the mass of children and filled the vast hall. It echoed across the ceiling, around the tables

and past the miserable figure kneeling, hands clenched, upon a pile of ruined CPs.

Smiling and beaming, Felkor Stagwitch was carried over the heads of 498 children by 996 excited arms. 'Felkor! Felkor! Felkor!' The chant grew louder and louder. 498 cheering children delirious that one of them had been chosen. Felkor cleared his throat and tried to think of a speech that would convey to everyone how great he really was. He had time to think, because it took some minutes before the cheering and chanting died to such a level that he could make himself heard.