



Saturday 27th November 2021



Altrincham 1 - Southend 2



Opening Scene : Freezing cold wind, bare uncovered terrace. Up North!

Striking figure in one piece armour:

“When shall we three meet again?”

Crunched up figure inside a bear skin jacket and sporting a Southend scarf:

“When the footballs done, When the games been lost and won”

Tall person, shivering amongst a growing pile of a brass monkey’s family jewels:

“That will be past the set of sun”

Awesome striking figure :

“Where the place?”

Humped man :

”Behind the comfy sofa ’s where I now head”

Ice shrouded giant :

“There to meet with our transport home”

‘Smoke Me A Kipper’ :

“I come, Super Blues”

Grandad :

“My posh seat calls”

Boycie :

“Hallelujah”

All :

“Fair is foul and foul is fair. In these ref’s we do despair!”

Wot Shakespeare originally writted.

Scene 2: A galaxy far, far, away

The Time Lord hesitated. Somewhere, sometime, a small rip in the continuum had developed and the creature known only as Boycie was beginning to panic and so chew his nails. The maintenance cupboard though was completely bare of sonic screwdrivers and as for spare multi-coloured lizard circuits, forget it. So, shrugging his shoulders he decided to inform the Gallifrey committee at a later when and meantime just watch, interestingly on, as events developed.

Mike, totally unaware that he was caught up inside a time warp, continued preparing his sleek, aerodynamic craft as it was being rolled out of its hanger. Nearby a door slowly opened and a head popped out of a police box that for some reason was of a size only ever seen upon model railways. Accompanied by some tune that was obviously suffering from a head on collision with a deranged electronic organ, the diminutive figure bore a striking resemblance to Uncle Albert. Cursing under its breath, it swiftly withdrew, muttering something about interfering Cyberman and what he would do to 'The Master' next time they met.

Meantime, the powerful Thunderbird had taken off and was heading for the swamp within which lay Tracy Island International. There, Boycie, his aperitif of fingernails now no more than a fond burp, was beginning to gnaw away at his bruised knuckles with quite a degree of agitation. Just where was TBII and its ace pilot?

It had been due to land at least 15 minutes ago but the grey, threatening skies above him were as empty as Rodney's charity tin. The flight plan suggested a four hour flight and with it already being well after dawn, they wouldn't be arriving until just before kick-off even if Thunderbird Airlines numero uno plane landed right now! Marlene, keen to be out conducting some unsupervised shopping, was equally agitated.

Then to the roar of powerful engines which shook the ground, TBII landed majestically right in front of them. Due to the malevolent ministrations of the Master and his evil minded cohorts it was a tad late, but its skilful pilot didn't consider that to be much of a problem. So a rather relieved Boycie threw enough cold weather gear to equip both Scott and Amundson into the hold before jumping in and joining it. Apparently it was time to get moving!

Scene 3: Totally Imaginary

Some distance away, and apparently buried inside a blizzard that would make even a polar bear finch, Grandad was somewhat concernedly reporting back to base. The supporters coach he was aboard was moving only very slowly, its windscreen completely covered by a white blanket of snow. He was concerned that by the time we arrived at the point where they were now busily planning to build igloos, conditions would have become impossible. Accordingly he wanted to warn us either to consider turning back or to seek shelter inside a service station.

Translating his desperate screams into everyday speak, namely that a speck of over enthusiastic frost had been spotted causing undue panic to a certain easily ruffled personage, we just carried on discussing such worldly affairs as who would be featuring in the team today and just how much coin of the realm would be required to obtain a hot dog. Receiving dire weather / traffic warnings from Grandad is a regular occurrence on many Thunderbird flights and so we had no reason to pay any more attention to this one than we usually did.

And indeed, as we ventured into the midland foothills, some signs of frost were evident as so too was the completely clear roads. Grandad might well have been dreaming about Aled Jones 'Walking in the air' but, back here on earth, whilst it was flipping cold and indeed possible that some cloud riding artist was busily inscribing some white dust moults with individual patterns before throwing them over the side at some future point, in the here and now. it was bright and sunny. Perfect conditions in fact to be traversing up the M6 to somewhere up North even if Boycie couldn't refrain from performing awful Eddy Waring impressions as we passed by each town.

Scene 4: Altrincham

The gates were just beginning to open as we arrived; a mooring post right outside the ground being made available to us by a departing vehicle. However it was just like stepping out into a freezer so we very hurriedly buried ourselves in our cold weather gear. Mike disappearing into a one piece fishing suit whilst Boycie deliberated over the choice between some wet weather clothing and a warmer looking jacket. He finally settled for the latter accompanied by a cap that was buried underneath a balaclava. The resemblance to a snowman was uncanny. It only needed a carrot stuck into a strategic location and Grandad's fantasy would have been realised!

Boy was it cold though!

The skies were completely clear of any clouds. Conditions that, whilst promising future below freezing temperatures (Feet were already registering zero!), presented few opportunities for exaggerated snow related stories courtesy of Grandad. Despite the bone harrowing cold, the team were already out on the pitch. But in no way could they be accused of warming up. Rather it was more like fighting off the chill. Even inside tracksuits and running about, they looked more like ice trolls than footballers. We, shivering upon the open terracing, were faring little better. However the reasonably priced burgers and hot meat pies were going some way towards maintaining a fairly positive mood.

Altrincham are currently having a fight with their local council (Sound familiar?) and as a result two sections of the ground, behind one goal and down the length of one side of the pitch, were sealed off. Under Subbuteo styled floodlights, some home supporters though could just be spotted huddled together at the far end of the pitch from where we were fighting the cold behind the goal.

To our immediate left were a pair of dubious looking shacks that contained seating. Inside the nearest, Grandad was relaxing surrounded by about 50 similar comfort seeking Blues supporters. Then to his right, the other 'stand' housed similarly minded home fans. The mon braves behind the goal, were making lots of noise whilst those in the seats maintained a very East Stand like silence. Perhaps the cockles were out of date?

Equally though they could just have been trying to work out why a groundsman was industriously watering the line. Whilst hoses, for an equally strange reason, saw to the pitch, he wandered up and down with his watering can, diligently ensuring that every inch of the line running down the side of the pitch got a soaking. Odd!

Scene 5: Totally Accurate Match Report

At 3:00 p.m precisely the game kicked off. Twice! For some reason ref's at the level seem fixated about kick off's being performed 100% correctly. If only they paid as much attention to whatever else was going on in the game, then few criticisms would be launched in their direction. But we are where we are and, with Blues (Ok yellows) attacking the goal furthest away from us, it quickly became evident that this was going to be a match between two football orientated sides rather than just jolly good chappies v thugs. Even the ref appeared to have at least seen the cover of the rule book on one, albeit probably brief, occasion !

Accordingly it was quite an open game with both sides seeing a fair bit of the ball. Maher had switched from a 3 5 2 formation to a 4 4 2 and it certainly gave us a more balanced, structured, look. Yes, the ball was still being given away on too many occasions, but rarely for overlong, and so encouraging signs of our continued improvement under the new management team were evident.

Our forwards looked sharp, our midfield uncharacteristically energetic and alert whilst our defensive line was holding firm as Altrincham began to launch some probing attacks. Our cause though was not being helped by a ref who awarded us just one free kick in the first half and four (Two for offside) in the second. This in comparison to the hatful, including a penalty, he granted our hosts. All the fouls he called were correct, as were the three bookings we received. However extremely similar offences by Altrincham players were totally ignored. Someone at the club really does now have to take these stats to whomsoever is in charge of the whisky bottle this week and get something done. Is it cos we're Southerners?

That said, the officials were a welcome improvement upon the pond life that we have suffered pretty much since the season began. As hinted, there was though a certain degree of bias against us and Murphy in particular. Does he have to don a helmet and a pair of goggles before a referee even considers that he has in fact just been sent flying?

Sure, he is one hell of a wind up merchant and supporters of other clubs must hate him. We certainly would if the situation was reversed. But far too often defenders are being allowed to do almost anything to him, beyond actually introducing him to a rack and a hot iron, without any demurring on the part of match officials. When two geezers face up to each other armed with Gillett blades, some sort of buzzer goes off if a hit gets made. Surely though, Murphy doesn't have to resort to suiting up in a similar manner before he ever gets to hear a referee's whistle?

Such distractions though were still a long way into the future as we quickly set about establishing an early lead inside the opening minute of the game. Walsh swept down the wing before cutting inside his defender and taking aim at goal. This gave rise to a rather anguished cry of "Wrong foot" from the despairing lips of the Yeti standing next to Mike. Nevertheless the ball ran both hot and true and seconds later it was causing the back of the net to bulge. Something that sent the away terracing, and possibly one away seat, to leaping about in delight. Later the goal was to be claimed by Murphy, but it remains an unclarified situation at the time of all this one finger stabbing activity.

We didn't really care anyway. We're one nil up, and totally chuffed. So could we go home now please. Pretty please?

Unhappily, the ref's watch suggested that there was still at least another 89 minutes of freezing cold conditions for us to suffer and so, despite it being an unanimous vote by all the Southend supporters, we got ignored. Nevertheless, our early goal meant that our hosts were shell shocked and, unlike the home team (Chesterfield) upon the last occasion that we had taken an early away lead, they were slow to respond. This allowed us time to calm down ourselves and so a game between two fairly even sides began to develop. They seemed to have the edge in terms of accurate passing but were slow to build up an attack. We, for our part, were getting forward quicker than of late, but still forever guilty of careless passing whenever it came to the final ball.

A series of free kicks awarded against us then steadied Altrincham, enabling them to exert a fair bit of pressure around our box. But not, thankfully, upon our goal mouth. Some stout, determined, Blues defending keeping them firmly at a distance. And so things stood until, finally, in the 30th minute, we got awarded our very first free kick of the game. Ironic cheering greeting the referee's whistle.

Brunt stood over the ball as it lay just outside their area and over towards the leftmost edge of the pitch. A silence fell across the ground as defender and attackers alike jostled for positions at the far post. Unexpectedly though Brunt simply played the ball shorts towards the near post where Murphy played back it neatly into the path of Dalby who firmly planted the ball home to give us a two goal lead. The scenes, both on the pitch and behind the goal, were unbelievable. A training ground plot had just been executed to perfection. Way to go Blues. Gooo!!"

If would be nice at this point to say that all this goal scoring stuff had distracted minds away from the cold. But it was truly freezing and, with frost steadily spreading up our legs and approaching waist level, fears were growing that we would have become ice statues long before the break. Scarves were stiffer than the sentence possibly facing Ron, any exposed skin was rawer than even one of Marlene's noses and fingers and toes has ceased to exist other than as icy extensions to our arms or legs. Not nice!

Halftime was thus spent hopping around upon frozen feet trying to get some sort of circulation restored. Imagine a flock of penguins pogo jumping, and you'll get the picture. Many were also recalling what had happened in the second half against Wrexham, the only other time this term that we have established a two goal lead, and there was much speculation about our lead surviving the final 45 minutes of the match

Any such worries though were initially put to rest as Blues, thoroughly focused and once more on their game, straightaway set about keeping Altringham at bay. Obviously looking to catch them on the break, we had set up our stall accordingly. A cunning plan that might well have worked had not their manager, Phil Parkinson, so obviously thrown at least two complete tea sets during the break. In the opening half, his team had set about their business at a steady pace. However now they were rushing around like bunnies high on Duracell batteries and going for our throats. A tactic that meant that we were very much being forced back onto a defensive footing. Even worse, it looked like we were running low on stocks of wooden stakes!

But somehow, in some way, we were holding out. Just. An uncomfortable situation that meant that nerves on the terraces weren't only frozen, but also so far on edge, that the sides of the Empire State building were gentle meandering slopes in comparison. Boycie's knuckles had become history and now his arm stumps were sending out SOS messages with ever increasing urgency!

However, 20 minutes had now safely passed. So, were we through the worse of it. Had we really seen em off? Admittedly, our goalmouth remained under almost continuous siege but, even so, we were standing firm. More incredibly still, with just a mite more fortune, we might even have scored the game's third goal ourselves. Only some last minute tackles denying us both relief and joy.

But then, just as deep breaths were being drawn, they were awarded a penalty!

They had not appealed; their fans had had nothing to say on the matter either. But we weren't protesting and so the ceremony surrounding such a punitive kick got underway. The referee strutted his stuff, they encroached, we encroached, the ball got moved and then repositioned and all the whilst Arnold simply played at wobbling his bar.

The ground went hush.

We held our breaths.

They prepared to stand and cheer.

A whistle blew!

The ball got struck hard and low.

It went left.

Our fantastic, brilliant, totally awesome goalkeeper dived left.

The penalty got saved!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Woosh. The away end simply erupted. This was beyond superb, it was miles away from simply terrific, and best of all ... we were still leading 2 – 0 and there was only another 25 minutes to go. Yippee!!

Cries of "Yellows, Yellows" therefore filled the stadium causing ice to cascade down off the nearby roofs and walls. The frozen ground, already covered in white, now also featured mini glaciers and dark looking crevasses. Should David Attenborough have been present, then surely warnings about brass monkey populations being decimated would have resulted.

Pity then, the two goal keepers in such dour conditions. One a hero, the other simply a poor frozen soul. Each destined to stand for long periods with nothing save a freezing wind and plunging temperatures to keep them entertained. We did our best though to keep their keeper's spirits up. Reminding him off the score, commenting about his bald head and singing about the number of meat pies that he must have consumed. Thoughtful. That's us!

Their number 7 though was nowhere near being a caring, considerate, being and so he was causing all sorts of concerns to our besieged defence. Actions that culminated in the 68th minute when, finally giving up all hope that a forward would ever get on the end of one of his dangerous crosses, he had a pop at goal himself. What a ruddy, self-centred, totally egotistical decision that was too. The ball finding its way into the far corner of our net; putting his side very firmly, not only back in the game, but also in the driving seat. It all was more than enough to set Boycie's elbows to looking very nervous!

He wasn't the only cannibal in the away end as many around us too were starting to experiment with a nutritional source known as the common fingernail. Mike though was built of firmer stuff (Besides, he was wearing thick gloves and raw leather doesn't really taste that good). So, maintaining his faith in his beloved Blues, he began instead berating the referee about his lack of generosity when it came to awarding us free kicks.

The zod was doing very little else wrong and Mike badly needed to keep warm. He also had a reputation to maintain, 'Smoke me a kipper' and all that. Nevertheless, whatever activity we faithful Southend supporters opted to indulge in, diet control or referee baiting, time still seemed to move even slower than the East Stand performing a Mexican Wave. Zimmer frames being rather heavy things to lift.

Eventually though the 90 minutes were up. However relief was still some distance away as five minutes of extra time had been signalled. Given that Blues had had to have the surgeons on three times (No bookings, no fouls) this was probably a fairly accurate timing, if still somewhat unwelcome. Especially as the fourth official's actions prompted Altringham into even greater efforts. Forcing us into a position very akin to that of Canute's as a tide of red shirted players swept down upon us.

Corner after corner got awarded and the tension was just building and building. Things all culminating when the referee blew his whistle and pointed to the centre spot. His actions sending the home supporters wild with delight as he appeared to be signalling a late, late equalising goal.

Hearts were in our mouths too because although Arnold had caught the ball, was he behind the goal line when it arrived? All of this was happening at the far end of the pitch and so we simply could not tell. But then, joy of all joys, someone spotted the oh so welcome sight of a linesman flag. They had simply been caught offside and we had just got our fifth, and final, free-kick of the game.

A few minutes later the final whistle blew, causing awesome celebrations to break out amongst the away supporters. It had been a really tense second half, but somehow the lads had held out and here they were all now, going raving mad directly in front of us. Maher and Brunt were dad dancing, Bentley was doing some sort of Irish jig and Curry was waving and cheering like a U.S presidential candidate on polling day. What fabulous, fabulous, scenes!

Scene 6: Homewood Bound

Back at TBII, it took us simply ages to remove our winter gear and to start thawing out. Fortunately though the long journey home was fast and also a total anti-climax compared to the trip up. No imaginary snowstorms, no plans for any igloo building and no traffic snarl ups. Accordingly, a delighted Boycie was home in time for X Factor and Mike was simply content to harbour satisfied thoughts about the three extremely valuable points we had earned.

Come on you Blues!!