



**Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2022**



**Southend 0 – Notts County 3**



Deep inside the Black Forest and suspiciously close to the Swiss border lies a house. It's not the sort of building that would be familiar to Hansel and Gretel and neither is it the sort of place where wolves hang out overnight. Indeed, a small number of very similar houses are to be found nearby. Inside too you will find no giant oven, rather just a small stove over which Cassandra welds a spoon preparing recipes. An occupation that fully encourages Micky Pearce in his endeavours to identify new, stronger, forms of mouthwash!

Much, much closer to the centre of the universe, back on the island rather than floating around upon a drift minded slab of continent, the Thunderbirds pet dormouse, Trigger, spends his days wandering all about the county. No ruck sack decorates his back though. Rather his rations for the day are safely hidden away within the folds of the enormous lumber jacket that he sports on such occasions.

Indeed, he was just speculating about indulging in such a spot of discovery when the Greens, conducting their monthly check of the perimeter fence surrounding Tracy International, came upon him. It was quite a surprise to them as, although quite familiar with finding Albert curled up inside a hedge, a sighting of Trigs so many miles from his home, was quite unexpected.

The islands security force sniffed him suspiciously but eventually curled up under the table that they were all sitting around. Pip was hoping that some small crumbs of comfort might fall her way. However very few did despite Marlene and Trigger's attempts to eat their way through the entire menu that was offered up by the small riverside café.

Having recently obtained a more modern mobile phone, one which takes photos, Trigs was eager to capture for posterity the contents of the menu lest he travel in this direction again. However, Boycie, mindful of the time and its closeness to kick off, encouraged his two companions to their feet and to head back towards where Thunderbird III was patiently awaiting to take off.

Albert, having consumed his own haute couture of a lunch (Pickled egg sandwich accompanied by a packet of salt and vinegar crisps) too was heading towards Roots Hall. Although the proud owner of a bus pass (The photo rather flattered him) he rarely used it, preferring far more to inflict his personality upon any driver stupid enough to respond to his hitch-hiking thumb.

But, with his ramble along the verge ways just started and so still well inside local territory, the drivers were wary and fully aware of the sort of torture that awaited any gesture of generosity. Accordingly, he was encountering very little success. Equally his feet, squeezed into homemade hob nailed clogs, were beginning to ache. The screech of protesting tyres therefore came as a welcome surprise. Well to him anyway! Marlene had been forced to apply subtle pressure to TB III's air brakes in order to avoid the swaying and unstable figure who was tottering along her flight path.

Thus, then the Thunderbirds in their various shapes and guises were making their way towards the stadium where Chelski had trembled and both Man Utd and Tottenham had fallen. Their attire reflecting the weather which was giving a performance of all four seasons at once inside every hour. One moment, perfectly clear blue, sunny skies, the next, visibility closed down to zero with dense clouds of snow falling around everywhere.

Mike, still struggling to fight off his bout of man flu, was wrapped up inside a thick winter coat. He also sported a scarf, a pair of gloves and a woollen hat but still felt as cold as a skinny-dipping polar bear. However, inside the dark and shadowy West Stand it was going to be difficult for anyone at all to keep warm.

No doubt you will have heard of the Junior Blues. It is less likely however that you have ever become acquainted with the Junior Greens. An organisation whose undoubted matriarch is Marlene. With her grandchildren under her wing, she manoeuvred and steered them into seats that were directly behind the Thunderbird's perch.

A position from which they could gleefully screech directly into the ungrateful ears of both Great Uncle Albert and Mike. Furthermore, armed with well-aimed sweet wrappers, they could also lay down such a barrage that more than many an individual was forced to retreat to a safe distance. Witnessing first hand just how successfully she had moulded her dynasty into her own image, Marlene's eyes filled with tears. Fairy grandmothers might very well get off on waving wands, but with vocal ironworks like hers ....

Into this scene of utter chaos strode Denzil, fashionably late as usual. Draped inside a Hepsworths jacket, man bag swinging from his hip, he was Barbie's boyfriend personified. Ok, so Ken had more hair, a lot more, but other than that, the resemblance was almost uncanny. The contrast between him and Trigger, who once again had got dressed in the dark, was quite startling.

Blues form of late has also undergone a transformation. Having carefully re-built fortress Roots Hall, they are now in the process of once more watching it being disassembled. Events whose cause are simple to identify but less so to correct.

The loss of Lopata back to Sheffield Utd was a bitter blow. As well as being a very good defender, he was also a leader who had the ability to organise things around him that defied his youth. Clark may eventually prove to be an able replacement but nevertheless the disruption to our defence has been more than considerable.

Add to that, injuries to Ralph and Kensdale, and the position becomes even clearer. Understandings between defenders take a long time to get established and so the sort of right Albert's that we are witnessing right now are only to be expected. Then there is the absence of Cardwell upfront. Dalby, without a partner and as willing as he is, struggles to have an impact upon his own. Players like Bridge and Powell help out as best they can; taking shots from distance. But our, once again, having both a weak defence and attack is definitely costing us dear.

So how would we fare today against a side fighting for a play-off position that is now beyond all our hopes? Well, they started the game very encouragingly from our point of view, pussy footing the ball around at the back and making pretty shapes. Denzil was enhanced by their poetry, but not so our boys in blue who closed them down at every opportunity, stealing the ball away from them with relative ease.

Accordingly, it was we, and not they, for all their airs and graces, who were creating all the early chances. Had but our balls into the box been a lot better (Dalby is decent in the air but not when the ball is passing twenty feet or so over his head!) we might even have taken an early, deserved, lead. But once they came to realise that poser footie wasn't going to get them anywhere and so started to play the ball longer and quicker, so the game became more balanced.

Even so it was clear that we had the bit between our teeth and their goalkeeper was by far the busier keeper. Therefore, when they took the lead with only their second attempt at hitting the net, it all came as a bit of a shock. A never in a million year's free kick had been awarded to them but it was at a safe distance and so should have presented no problems. However, as Maher later sadly remarked, instead of following their training, the lads had decided to do their own thing and so allowed a forward to sneak in behind them and blast the ball home from a totally unmarked position. Very much against the flow of play but if you leave men free inside your box ...

We responded to the setback well though and certainly deserved to be back on level terms before the break. It didn't happen though and so Tinkerbell's flickered into life with us still one goal down. The Junior Greens

were happy enough though. With fresh ammo to hand, provided by a generous granny who had ventured up to the tea bar in search of more chocolates and the like, the Thunderbirds nest was soon once more under heavy siege. Indeed, Granddaddy Boyice's arm, their prime objective, was hit several times causing its owner to loudly, if not also a mite proudly, complain.

Del Boy, who has happily recovered his Blues mojo, then took semi control over his charges before coming under serious fire himself. His assailants were being fully urged on by Mike, Trigs and Denzil who were therefore unlikely to get any letters of invitation from the Red Cross. But, as the latter two were also shoving food into their mouths as quickly as they possibly could, it's doubtful that they were over concerned.

A cease fire was called as the second period got underway and again it was encouraging to see Blues taking the game to their visitors. But for all our endeavours we were really not getting anywhere fast. So, the bench began preparing substitutions.

Perhaps noting this, County launched another rare attack. It occurred following a goal mouth melee where we had struck several well hit balls at goal only to see them being desperately hacked away. Now though it was we who were on the defensive and with our back three some distance apart from each other, disaster beckoned.

Some people, watching Star Trek, felt that the Klingons had an unfair advantage in that they had the 'Clock of Invisibility'. Well today it seemed as if Notts County had the same technology as the very same guy who had scored their first, netted their second. Again. sneaking in, completely unmarked, he had had our entire goal at his mercy. An option that he had not unfortunately taken up!

To a mixture of boos and cheers County then introduced an ex-Blues loanee, Brunt. The applause was totally understandable as he had been a standout performer during our rise from the ashes of relegation. But just why some felt it necessary to boo him was much more of a puzzle. Perhaps it was because he never performed a silly dance for them? Disappointing all the same.

As indeed so was the reaction of the West Stand following the same player scoring their third goal in a very similar manner. Sure, Dalby had just shunned a gilt-edged opportunity to pull one back from us from the penalty spot, but was that still an excuse to leave the game so early?

The East Stand has suffered many a rebuke in these reports for both its lassitude and attitude towards careless officials. But rarely has it suffered the mass exodus that was now occurring in the stand directly opposite them. Like mindless Old Trafford drones, the faithless made their way towards the exits. The sight of so many departing backs must really have spurred our lads on!

So, our third defeat in just four games. With another major challenge coming up next week, away to Stockport who head the table, will it soon be a case of zilch points out of twelve? Not according to Albert who is confidently predicting that we will win 4 – 0. However, he often views the world through the lens of an empty glass whereas those whose grip on reality is a tad more than simply that of holding a handful of mist, were somewhat ruefully reflecting upon the season coming to an untidy end.

But at least it won't be one featuring the 'R' word. For that we must be thankful, and we must also acknowledge that Blues are very much a team in the making. King Kev's first job was to get us into a position of safety. A mission that he and his management team accomplished with some style. Next, he has to build a squad that is capable of challenging for promotion and that will be a much harder task.

Taking a critical look at our current lot of players, a generous figure of ten might just be thereabouts. A total that means at least another twelve or so new faces will need to be found come the summer. No doubt, we already have some targets in mind, but identifying them is the easy bit. Actually landing them though, might yet prove to be Kevin's hardest challenge!

Come on you Blues!