

The Curse of the Green

By Eileen Everitt

May Day! May Day! Come in Zebra Base. Where the hell are you Zebra Base!" Sitting in his cabin by the harbour wall, a radio ham named Tony Casselli picked up the feint message. After a moment's indecision, he contacted the coastguards. Even when they accepted that he had heard a distress message, they were doubtful as to it being genuine. It hadn't registered on their sophisticated equipment. "I am a single wing light plane flying due west, maybe 500 miles north east of Mongonga Bay" was all he had heard.

Way to the east, Ice Baxter wrestled with the controls, trying to gain more power before committing to the inevitable crash landing. The radio crackled and faded. "Come in Zebra Base! Urgent you get a fix on my position! All systems are failing and full engine cut out is imminent. I am about 500 miles north east of Mongonga Bay, but instruments now unreliable and situation desperate. I must make emergency landing." He peered out through the dirty window in front of him: Trees, damn it, nothing but trees. There must be a clearing somewhere big enough to land this heap of junk and he needed to find it fast, otherwise it was melt down for Ice. He was cruising on a prayer at about 150 feet when he saw a miracle. There was an opening in the trees just ahead with a flattish grassy patch just big enough. He pushed the stick forwards and headed for the ground. The plane bumped and bounced until eventually coming to a halt nose down in a bank on the edge of the clearing. "O.K. so I'm still alive" Ice muttered "better get out quick though, just in case we go up in flames!" Once on the ground, he discovered he wasn't standing on grass at all, it was some sort of moss. It was soft and silky. He brushed his hand across it and found it sticky and smelling faintly of - no, it was a strange smell he couldn't place it at all. He was surprised by how quiet it was - none of the usual calls from birds or animals.

Ice considered his position. The plane might be spotted by an aerial search party, however as he had no way of knowing whether his radio message had been picked up this might waste valuable time. A jungle village could be only a few miles away. On the other hand,

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if he left the plane, how would he know which would be the best direction to walk? He realised he was ill-equipped for jungle trekking; he had only the statutory tin of emergency supplies. He enthusiastically cursed the cut price carrier company he worked for. The plane was not fit for purpose and someone would hear his opinion about this the minute he got back.

He returned to the plane to retrieve his mobile telephone which was somewhere in the cockpit, but was surprised at how difficult he found climbing back inside. Every muscle in his body seemed to ache. It must have been a much worse landing than he thought. As he rummaged along the shelves he noticed a strange thing. In between the fingers on his left hand there was a patch of the mossy green stuff. He couldn't remember doing it, but he must have grabbed on to it when he had left the plane.

He woke with a start. What was happening to him? One minute he was cursing the company and the next he was slumped in the pilot's chair – out for the count! He ran his fingers through his hair then gasped in amazement. His fingers were now wearing a spattering of blister-like bubbles. What was that green stuff! He mustered his energy and half sliding and half running he headed for the ground again, this time trying not to touch the strange green monster below him. It was everywhere. There was nowhere to put his feet. He began to sweat and crawled to the edge of the patch to get into some shade under the trees.

The drowsiness came over him again. He had no will to escape this strange place any more. Let it happen. Whatever evil thing was living here, Ice had no energy left to fight it. He slumped against a stump of a tree and closed his eyes. At some point in the night he must have woken. He wasn't sure, but he thought he must have wandered into the trees to relieve his swollen bladder. Somehow he had got disorientated on his way back. He could see no clearing now or the shiny silver and red wings of his plane. Damn it, but it was hot and sticky even under the trees. He undid the buttons on his shirt and flapped the opening to get some air to his itchy, sweaty skin. There was more of it! What the hell was it! Green blotches covered the now exposed skin in his armpits and in the crevices at his elbows. His fingers were covered in much larger blisters, in which swam tiny worm-like creatures. He watched transfixed with horror as

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one by one the blisters burst and pale green worms slither over his skin. They moved rapidly and purposefully getting bigger all the time. The more he tried to brush them off, the quicker they seemed to hatch out from their bubbles. His ears were blocked by worms, and then a strange buzzing noise seemed to fill his head. Were they talking now?

Through his watering eyes he could see only vague shapes that seemed to be moving towards him through the trees. It could be monsters coming to harvest the worms he had been the reluctant host for! He badly wanted to vomit. The worms in his mouth were slowly choking him. Mercifully, he passed out again.

Tony Casselli was relieved to receive the message. "He's in a bad way, Tony. Thanks to you, old mate, we got there just in time." "Glad my plotting skills came in handy Bill. I thought I couldn't be too far off." "You were spot on Tony. The chopper did a few circles and the early morning sunlight was low enough to pick up the silver on the plane. He's delirious now – keeps muttering about worms – but apart from a few cuts on his arms from the smashed windscreen, he's o.k. I'll get the hospital to let you know when he can have visitors.

Ice was very pleased to meet Tony. "If it hadn't been for your quick thinking, things could have been much worse. I really thought I'd had it you know and then those chopper guys suddenly came out through the trees. They said I was losing it! Seeing little green men and the like! Still all's well now, they're letting me out tomorrow. I plan to spend a month or two in my shack up in the mountains. Do a bit of fishing. It's good for fishing up there. You only need a few handfuls of worms for bait and they eat out of your hand."

Tony Casselli was to tell his mates in the bar later "and then he picked a little green worm out from under his finger nail! I tell you, if I hadn't seen it for myself, I wouldn't have believed it!"

The End

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Eileen Everitt bio: I am 75. I am a Londoner by birth, but lived all my married life (38 years) in a small village on the Essex coast. Later I moved to Wiltshire but as a leaving present to the village I produced a booklet outlining how the village came to be. This was only sold locally and made over £2000 for the village. I was quite proud of it, as you can imagine. Since retiring I have more time to write and got through to the national final of a W.I competition. As my interest grew I jointed Fareham Writers, who have given me lots of encouragement. Last winter I won a short story competition in Prima magazine which was included in their March edition this year and in April I had a poem included in the WI Hampshire magazine.