



*Newton Park's
Twisted Tales Pt 2*

Masking The Truth



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Years ago, before I was born, a deadly virus spread throughout the population of the planet. Many people died, more got terminally ill, but for the survivors life changed dramatically. Personally, I haven't known an existence where these strict laws are not enforced. Society is forbidden to mix with people outside their own family and we always have to stay at least a metre away from others in public places. When outside your house it is compulsory to wear a mask covering your mouth and nose. All these regulations are in place for our own protection and to stop the virus spreading. However, the older generations find these orders to be restricting and letting go of their past freedoms can prove to be difficult. My grandad often told me stories of his life before the virus and how much better it was then. I like to hear the stories, I love my grandad, though he spoke with deep reflection as he remembered all the joys he once experienced. But that's a life I will never know and it's fine, I'm pretty happy with that.

My parents were nice, they gave me pocket money which I mostly spent on sweets. I enjoyed school and had a lot of good friends who I played with, mostly online as outdoor meet ups were also forbidden. Gaming was my favourite thing to do, well, that and our weekly, family movie nights. We took it turns to pick a film every Friday night; dad always picked an action adventure, mum a romantic comedy and when it was my turn I always looked on the sci-fi section. Anything to do with aliens or space is fascinating, I wanted to be an astronaut when I grew up and discover new worlds. My uncle actually worked for NASA and the American Government. I was never too sure what he did, but grandad told me it was very important.

My daily routine was simple and repetitive. I woke up at six-thirty, ran downstairs, gulped down my bowl of cinnamon cereal and a glass of orange juice, ran back upstairs, jumped in the shower, cleaned my teeth and got into my school uniform. I did all this as quick as I could so I'd get an hour or so of game time before leaving for school. At half-eight I'd grab my bag, put on my winter coat and remember to kiss my mum and dad goodbye before I left.

As I'd open the front door my mum would always shout out, "And don't forget your mask, Bobby."

I'd yell back, "Of course not, mum. Love you."

Then I'd wait for a second, "I love you too, Bobby," came floating down the stairs.

I would smile then reach into my coat pocket and place my black face mask over my mouth and nose. I'd head straight to school, as stopping to chat was not allowed, in fact for children, only trips to and from school and to the shops for essentials were justifiable. Once in school, we'd stay there for the duration then head straight home. This was where I used to be a little bit naughty. I didn't go home. I went to visit my grandad.

As I mentioned before, I love my grandad. He was my hero. He used to be a soldier and was still surprisingly fit and agile for someone in their mid-sixties. I'd often let myself into his house and he'd be doing his exercises. He was either on his running machine, lifting weights or doing push-ups. Fitness and good health were a priority to him.

That being said, he had one weakness, the same weakness as me, sweets. It never mattered what type: chocolates, fudge, fruit gums, mints, boiled sweets, anything with a load of sugar and we'd buy it.

So, that was my daily routine: head to my grandad's, go to the sweet shop, walk back to his house and eat the sweets in front of the TV while we'd chat about our lives. After a couple of hours I would go home, have dinner with my parents, play games, read a bit and get ready for bed.

I was happy with my life, but to be honest, it doesn't make for a very interesting story. That was until my routine was disrupted.

It was a cold and drab Tuesday, I'd finished school and sneakily crept to my grandad's house. I let myself in and heard him cry out, "Hello, young Bobby." He was a bit out of breath, I could hear the rhythmic thumping of his feet hitting the treadmill. "I'm nearly done," he called out, "Just wait there by the door and I'll be there in a jiffy."

"OK, no problem," I responded. While I waited in the hall way, I stood staring at the pictures he had accumulated over the years. It was a collage of our family history and I found it fascinating. Pictures of my parents when they were young, my grandad and my nan at their wedding. Family pictures from when I was born, my grandad standing to attention in his army uniform and pictures of my dad and uncle David before he flew out to America. I stood there

transfixed by the similarity of my grandad in his youth and my uncle David. Both had very muscular physiques, quite intimidating to look at and incredibly stern faces. My poor dad, looked very small and weak in comparison, but what he lacked in size, I know he made up for in intelligence.

Then my thoughts were disturbed by my grandad rushing past me, hurriedly putting on his coat and forcing his mask on. "Come on," he said impatiently, "I've worked up a real appetite."

I laughed and followed him out of the house, struggling to keep pace with the old man and his determined march to the sweet shop.

Luckily the convenience store was only five minutes away, so I wasn't too out of breath when we arrived. We had a quick customary glance in, to make sure there weren't too many people in the shop, then speedily went in heading straight for the sweet shelves. When we got there though we were shocked to discover there were absolutely no sweets to be found anywhere. The shelves had been stripped bare. Quite often recently there wasn't much choice, but there was always something. My grandad stormed off in a rage to find a shop assistant, I hovered around hoping that more stocks of sweets would magically appear. Unfortunately, this never happened.

I peered over at the counter where a young lady was serving a skinny gentleman. I was confused by what I saw, the extremely slight man had put two baskets crammed with sweets on the counter top and was watching the lady try to squeeze them all into two bags. Who buys that many sweets? Then another thin man stood behind with another two baskets full of sweets and behind him another man with two more baskets. Obviously, this is where all the sweets had gone, these three guys had taken them all. That wasn't the only thing that seemed bizarre, none of them talked, they all just looked blankly in front of them, nodding the occasional gesture to whoever got close. They all actually looked the same too. Same height, same build and same green eyes. You couldn't see much of their faces or hair as they wore their face masks and baseball caps, which seemed to be the only difference from what I could tell. One had a blue hat and mask, one had red and the last man had green. I stared at them as one by one they were served and carried their bulging bags of sweets out of the shop.

As I pondered who the strange men were and what they were doing with all those sweets, I felt a hand grip my shoulder. I almost jumped out of my skin with fear and surprise. Then my grandad snarled, "Bit jumpy, lad. What you been up to?"

I explained what I had seen with the three strange men and he said with bitterness, "I know, apparently they've been in every day for the last week. They're taking more and more sweets and then leave without a single word, or a please or a thank you. You can't teach manners it seems, youngsters of today. Lucky you're not like that, Bobby, I wouldn't stand for it."

I nodded my head in agreement, as it's best not to argue with my grandad when he's ranting. So, we decided to buy some custard creams instead and back to his house we went.

My grandad made tea and put the biscuits on a plate, all the time angrily muttering about the rude men who stole our sweets. I too was thinking about the men and all their sweets. The whole scenario just felt wrong, I had a feeling something bad was happening and the men were up to no good. I couldn't put my finger on what it was though, but three identical men with six identical baskets of candy seemed highly suspicious to me.

I tried to talk to my grandad about it, but he was still seething about how greedy people are these days and honestly, I couldn't get a word in edgeways. The tea and biscuits were very tasty, not quite as good as a bar of chocolate, but nice none the less.

I went home, had dinner and told my parents about my day. They found my grandad's anger about the lack of sweets very funny. After I'd eaten my food I played online with my friends for a bit and got in bed to read. I still had the image of these identical three men in my mind as I started reading my newest comic book. It was called, 'The Secret Invasion.' It was a Marvel comic, based on the adventures of the superhero team, 'The Avengers.' In the story, a race of aliens had infiltrated the human race and were trying to take over our planet from within, all disguised as actual people.

My mind was blown and I was convinced that this is what the three men in the shop were doing. In hindsight, there was little proof and little logic to back up my theory, but I was convinced.

That night I made a plan. After school, I would wait outside the shop for the three men and follow them to their spaceship, take pictures on my phone, tell my uncle David and save the world. Simple.

So, when the school bell rang for the end of the day, I quickly grabbed my bag, coat and put my mask on, then ran to the sweet shop hoping to be there before the three weird men arrived. I waited by the bus stop, just outside the shop, trying to look inconspicuous. A few minutes passed and there was no sign of the mysterious trio.

Then I saw them, walking in a line with a precise gap between them. The man with the blue cap and mask at the front, then red, then green, the same as yesterday. Their bright green eyes shone like emeralds in the early evening sun. They systematically entered the shop one at a time and after a few minutes left again. Each man carrying two bags of sweets, walking in their orderly line with the same exact spacing between them. My hairs stood on end, I could feel the blood racing around my body as the adrenaline took control of me. I put my hood up and raised my mask slightly so my face could not be seen, then followed the peculiar people, who would hopefully lead me to their spaceship.

I tailed the sugar fiends, eventually they turned into a large housing estate surrounded by trees. I hid behind a tall spruce tree and watched as the trio followed one another into a very normal looking terraced house. This estate was very new and built on the site of an old quarry. All the houses looked exactly the same; the same square shape, built in the same red brick, the same black front doors and bright white window frames. I always felt it looked a bit creepy here, but it wasn't really that strange. In fact a few of my friends at school lived here; Penny seemed like a normal girl, she liked drawing and jewellery, Bradley played guitar, which is an ordinary past time for a young boy. I guess little James was a bit weird though and for some reason spent a lot of his time running around in just his pants, but I don't think that's too much of a crime.

I needed to get a closer look, so I waited by the trees until the sun began to set. Using the cover of dusk, I crept up to the house where the three sweet bandits lived. Stealthily making my way up the path, I hid in a bush that sits beneath the living room window. Patiently kneeling in the dirt, I waited for a few moments to make sure I wasn't

noticed, then I slowly peeked through the living room window.

At this point I was expecting to see a whole race of alien invaders, hatching a plan for world domination. I was sorely disappointed. What I actually saw was a man in a red hat and mask sitting in an arm chair watching TV and in the distance a man in a green hat and mask moving around the kitchen carrying a glass of water. The normality of it was extremely deflating, I let out a sigh and slumped back into the bush. But where was the leader? I couldn't see the man in the blue hat and mask.

Then I heard a rustling sound coming from the garden. I carefully crept around the alley at the end of the row of houses and made my way towards the back yards. I skilfully calculated which house the men lived in and peeked through a tiny gap in the wooden fence. There, I saw the man in blue, he was standing in front of a conventional garden shed. He swung the door open and started pouring the bags of sweets into the shed. The earth beneath my feet shook, there was a sinister growling noise coming from the shed and from out of the window an orange, fire like glow shone like a flashing beacon. The man in blue was joined by his two brothers, he lowered his head slowly and the brothers bowed their heads too, they looked a bit sad. Then in unison they removed their masks.

Time stood still, I couldn't believe what I was seeing, I was gob-smacked and motionless in a state of complete shock. I wanted to scream but no noise came out. As the three beings uncovered their faces, I saw their skin, their green, scaly skin, they looked like lizards with their long forked tongues and pointy yellow teeth. I was sure they were communicating. Their tongues whipped and clicked, then they removed their hats, uncovering not hair, but short yellow spikes protruding from their bald green heads. Without any thought I quickly got out my phone and took a few pictures. I had no idea how good they would be and I wasn't really thinking, I was too afraid. The click of the camera sounded as loud as gunshots to me, the three lizard men turned hastily to where I was hiding and I ran. I ran as fast as I could. I kept running, never looking back until I reached my grandad's house.

I flew in through the front door and slammed it shut. I sat on the bottom step of the stairs shaking like a leaf. "And what time do you call this, young man?" My grandad muttered accusingly.

I proceeded to tell him everything, rambling on like a crazy person. My grandad listened to every word and when I was finished, I put my head between my legs and cried.

My grandad put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Stop crying, Bobby. You're safe now, are you going to show me them pictures now or are you going to make me wait all night?"

I passed him my phone, my hand was still wobbling around, "I-I-I am not sure how g-g-good they are," I stuttered.

"Let me be the judge of that," he said as he snatched the phone. He studied the screen for a few minutes.

"Interesting," he concluded. "So, what do you think they were doing?" he finally asked thoughtfully.

"I think there's a monster," I blurted out. "A gigantic, fire breathing monster, like a dragon, maybe their master, living underground, they're feeding him I bet, then one day when he's strong enough, maybe he'll break free and try to kill us all!"

"Interesting," my grandad remarked again. "I need to make a couple of calls."

He disappeared into the living room leaving me alone on the stairs, sobbing with fear, petrified by the hideous, fiery beast living beneath the town.

A few moments later, a shadowy figure appeared at the door and knocked loudly. My heart stopped for a moment and I curled up in a ball, had the aliens followed me? What were they going to do to us? Before I had a chance to react, my grandad reappeared and headed for the door. "Don't open it!" I screamed.

"Why ever not?" he scoffed. "It's your dad, silly. He's come to pick you up, I reckon you've had enough adventures for one day."

"But what are we going to do about the aliens?" I cried out.

"Forget about it," he replied softly. "You've done all you can, I've passed the information on to your uncle David and he'll make sure the situation is sorted." He picked me up and held me tight, "Best not mention this to anyone else though, Bobby. No need to cause panic is there? You go off home and get some rest, you've had a busy day."

I nodded. My grandad opened the door and I rushed to my dad, wrapped my arms around him and squeezed him tight. We drove home and I fell asleep straight away as the adrenaline wore off as quickly as it had arrived.

All night I dreamt about the three aliens and the monster hiding underground. I woke up in a cold sweat numerous times. I felt exhausted and weak when my morning alarm went off at six-thirty. I didn't want to get out of bed, I was safe wrapped up in my thick duvet, I wanted to stay there forever. But mum wouldn't have it. After countless arguments, eventually I was out on the street making my way to school.

I got to the end of my road, turned right and slowly trudged down the long straight road to school. I was very anxious and felt extremely nervous. All of a sudden I felt a chill shoot up my spine, I turned slowly to see three figures behind me, stalking me, moving hastily in my direction. I rubbed my eyes, hoping it was a dream, but they were real. I saw a flash of blue, of red and of green. My heart jumped out of my throat, I ran and ran and ran. When I eventually made it to school, I looked back through the gate and saw the three lizard men in their disguises walk past the entrance, staring at me with their bright green eyes. What was I going to do?

I spent all my lessons feeling incredibly distracted and scared about the three lizard men chasing me. I mean, I couldn't tell anyone, they'd think I was crazy. I can't ring my parents or my grandad as phones aren't allowed in school. I was trapped, I had to hope and pray they weren't waiting for me when the bell rang. The day flew by and in what seemed like an instant it was home time. Packing my bag and slowly putting my coat on gave me time to formulate a plan. Maybe if I stayed in the scrum of children rushing out of school I might not be seen. I put my hood up and pulled my mask over my face, then bowing my head I joined the excited mass of youth charging towards the gates.

My plan worked splendidly, there was no sign of the masked aliens anywhere. I sped towards my grandad's, as that was closer to school than my own house. I moved faster and with every passing second I grew more and more relaxed. The tension was leaving my body and I could feel my heart rate lowering. I was safe, I breathed a huge sigh of relief as I walked up to my grandad's front door.

I put the key to the lock and to my surprise the door slowly sprung open. Standing in front of me was the tall, slim alien in the blue hat and mask. I screamed, I wanted to run, but I was frozen to the spot.

I yelled at the lizard man who stared at me through his lifeless green eyes, "What have you done with my grandad?"

"Calm down, Bobby," came the reassuring, familiar voice of my grandad from down the hallway. "Just come in and stop making such a fuss."

I was relieved he was OK, but absolutely perplexed by what was going on. The lead alien gestured for me to enter, so I slowly, cautiously obliged. As I made my way to the living room, my grandad was sat in his chair with my uncle David stood next to him. Opposite them, gazing intently at their prisoners, were the other two strangers. For some reason they had removed their hats and masks. Their long, forked tongues flapped aggressively as their leader made me stand by my grandad. I was panicking, "What do we do now?" I cried. "Are they going to kill us?"

My grandad chuckled, he and my uncle grinned at one another. "Stop being so silly, boy. Your uncle and I wouldn't have allowed them to capture us, we're much smarter than that. Your uncle brought them here so they could explain themselves."

"So, we're not going to get eaten by a fiery beast then?" I asked in bewilderment.

"Not at all," my uncle chirped gleefully. "When I received your pictures I knew exactly who these intergalactic beings were. They are friendly creatures from the planet Alim. I have met their kind before and am fluent in their language."

"Really?" I said doubtfully. "So, what is that monster they're feeding all those sweets to under their garden?"

"It's not a monster." My uncle rolled his eyes and shook his head. "They told me that they're very sorry for taking all of your sweets. You see, they've been trapped here on this planet for years, trying to find a way to get home and return to their families. The leader discovered, a long time ago now, that they might be able to use the sugar in sweets to power their spaceship. The three of them could have left this planet sooner, but could only safely leave their house when masks became compulsory. Humanity would be terrified if they knew aliens were living among them and unfortunately, they really don't look very friendly."

I felt foolish, I had jumped to conclusions and judged the beings based on their fearsome appearance alone. "Can you tell them I'm sorry," I said to my uncle shamefully. "Is there anyway I can help them get back to their families?"

My uncle smirked. "There is," he beamed happily. "I've been informed that only four more bags of sweets are needed to fully charge their ship. If you take the old man to the shop, buy four bags of sweets and deliver the goodies to the aliens house, we can help them get home."

"Of course," I yelled excitedly. "Let's go."

I pulled my grandad out of his chair and dragged him out of the house. We charged to the shop and filled four baskets full of sweets; chocolates, fudge, fruit gums, mints, Turkish delight, in fact anything with a load of sugar in. We paid the lady and headed straight to the aliens house on the strange estate.

When we arrived, the being with the red hat and mask led us straight into the garden. At this point I was no longer scared, just incredibly excited that I was about to see a real life spacecraft. When handing the lead alien the first bag of sweets he made a weird clicking noise, which I think meant thank you, then he poured it into his wooden shed. The engines rumbled, streams of fire shot up and the ground shook. Then silence. The lead lizard man returned for the second bag, the third bag and then the fourth.

After the third bag was tipped, the engines rumbled, fire shot up and the ground shook, but this time it didn't stop. Two of the aliens ran into the shed and disappeared from view. The leader in blue stayed for a moment, kneeled in front of me and gave me back the fourth bag of sweets. He made the same clicking thank you noise as before and hastily followed his friends into the shed. The engines grew louder, the fire got more intense heating the air around us, until from out of the ground shot a large silver disc. My grandad, uncle and I flew backwards with the force. As we lay on the ground, we watched as the spinning, flying saucer disappeared into the sky and out into space. We all looked at each other and laughed triumphantly, then went straight back to my grandad's house to celebrate. We ate sweets in front of the TV, watching our favourite sci-fi series.

My uncle David stood up to leave, he had to catch a flight back to America that evening. He picked up his bag and crouched in front of me, "Remember Bobby, no one must know about this. People are afraid of things they don't understand, some things must always remain hidden for the greater good. It's my job, it's what I do every day. I mask the truth to stop fear from spreading. We're all scared we can't control where humanity is heading. It's like you wearing a mask to stop the virus spreading. We're all trying our best to save the world from a fate it's dreading. For fear moves fast and is contagious, just like a virus. Sometimes something as simple as a mask is all that is needed to stop things from getting out of control."

I nodded obediently.

"Good boy," my uncle said and patted my head. "I'm positive one day you'll be working with me too, you're a clever little lad. Goodbye for now, Bobby."

Then my uncle David winked and smiled. I waved with pride as he walked out of the house and slammed the door shut.

"Come on, boy," my grandad mumbled with a mouthful of sweets. "Don't let me eat all of these."

I rushed back in, swiped a handful of chocolates out of the bag and sat on the floor. That night, as I munched sweets with my grandad and watched TV, I dreamt how great it would be to be like my uncle. From that moment on, that was all I wanted to do with my life dreaming of taking over from my uncle, discovering and communicating with alien species all over the universe.

The End