

Now, I don't like to complain.

I'm not one of life's complainers, me. Glass half full, that's what I am. And I know there's a war on, and we've all got to do our bit. And I never liked my legs anyway, so I don't really miss them.

But thing is, with his nibs, the Great Scientist, bloody Davro over there, it's all rhetoric, innit? It's all "The Kaleds shall prevail!" and "The Travel Machines shall bring us victory!" and "The power of static electricity shall crush the Thal horde!" All mouth and trousers, that's his problem. Leather ones, the ponce.

See, it's not him what's got to prevail, is it? Not him what's got to sit in a jar, waiting for one of his bloody Travel Machines to be ready, to rattle around threateningly in. Nah. Course not. That'd be muggins here.

Wouldn't be so bad if he could think up a decent bloody name for me.

## Anagram of the Kaleds

by Nic Ford

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"Mornin', Kaled Daev. Nice weather for clams."

It's Normon. The lab technician. Every morning, like clockwork, he comes in here and says that.

At least he remembers my name, I s'pose. Not many do. That nasty Mr Nyder, he never does. Just comes here for a bit of a nose around, checks up on what Davro is doing. Sticks a spatula in my jar and gives me a bit of a stir.

Sodding liberty!

Course, I can't answer Normon, tell him where to stick his clams. I haven't got a voice

box any more. No way of making a noise. Not got much of anything left, in fact, since the accident. No legs, no real body. Just a sort of squelchy torso, a few tentacles and one remaining eye.

I suppose I could blink something rude at him.

But it's not Normon's fault. He's just obeying orders, isn't he? Just doing what Davro tells him to.

Bloody Davro!

"Look over there, Kaled Daev," says Normon. He nods at the far corner of the lab, where I can just make out – through the grimy distortion of my jar – a waist-high... thing. It's black and gleaming, sort-of circular like a pedestal. And it's covered in golden... lumps. It's beautiful. A bit bloody menacing, but beautiful. What is it, I want to ask? But course, I can't.

"I 'spect you want to know what it is," says Normon.

Ooh, get him. Sharp as a varga.

"It's your new legs," he goes on.

New legs? Is he having a laugh?

"Honest," he says. "It's the next bit of the Mark 3 Travel Machine. Davro's just finished it." Normon goes over to the thing, leans into it and flicks a switch. It start to hover, a finger's width off the ground. "It's got the lot, this," Normon carries on. "New alloy armour, life support system, a little bell to let people know you're coming. And it hovers. Never be a problem going up stairs with this. And the lumps round the side..." – he indicates a lump – "...are bombs! The Thals won't know what's hit 'em!"

Davro saunters in, leather trousers squeaking. Bloody Davro! "That will be all, Kaled Normon," he says, and indicates the technician should leave by flicking his fingers at the door. Very rude! Normon tugs his forelock and backs out of the room. Davro just pokes around the inside of the Mark 3 Travel Machine's 'legs' and pretends to ignore him.

Once Normon's gone, Davro is immediately up and over to my jar. He bends down to peer in at me, and strokes the glass with his 'orrible brown fingers. Ugh!

"At last, my beautiful," he says to me. Bloody weirdo. "At last, my lovely. Tell me, what is your mood? Your desire? What do you feel?"

Pissed off, mate, that's what. Me, no legs. You, leather trousers. Rub it in, why not? How d'you think I feel?

He strokes my jar again, the creep. "What are your thoughts, my creation?"

You really don't want to know, sunshine.

"Do you know, I wonder?" he continues, a bit of spit appearing at the corner of his mouth. "Do you have the slightest inkling that you are the first of a whole... new... species?"

Who, me? Kaled Daev?! I was a lollipop man! Motorbike comes off a roundabout at seventy in my direction, next thing I know, I'm jelly in a jar. Call that evolving into a new species? 'Cos I don't!

"A whole new species!" he repeats. He's let go of my jar now, and he's standing up again. He's got that look back in his eyes, the slightly loopy one. And he's ignoring me, just staring up at the ceiling and punching the air with a funny, slightly suspicious salute.

"The saviours of the Kaled race!" he cries, spittle spattering the side of my jar. Very hygienic! "The inheritors of Skaro! The scourge of the Thal brutes!"

He stops. Leans down to me again, does a bit more stroking. "And you, Kaled Daev," he whispers, "through my ministrations and mutations, and with the Mark 3 Travel Machine to hold you... you shall be the first! The very first! The first..." And he pauses. Puts his finger on his chin. Muses a bit. "...of the Kleads!"

Another pause. And then...

"Kleads?" Davro spits. "KLEADS?! What kind of a name is that?!" And he kicks the lab bench so hard my jar wobbles.

Then he goes a bit pale, and keels over.

It's my birthday. Or it would be, if I was still a man.

Normon's remembered. Good old Normon. He's brought me a paper hat, stuck it on top of my jar. "There you go, Kaled Daev," he says. "Happy birthday, mate."

Thanks Normon mate, I think at him.

"You'll never guess what's happened," he goes on. "Old Davro, he's hurt his leg. Says it got bitten by a varga plant, but I think he just kicked something. It's swollen up good and proper!"

Normon wanders over to the far bench, picks something up from it, wanders back. No urgency about Normon: s'one of the best things about him. "Here you go," he says. "Got a present for you."

He places the thing beside me. It's a small, grey box – I think. Not easy to tell through

the glass of my jar. Hm...

"It's a vocoder," says Normon. "Part of the Mark 3 Travel Machine, but I suppose you can have it early. You're going to get a voice back." He presses a switch on the side of the box, and immediately there's a sort of humming in my head. Different notes, one after the other, like it's trying to find the right one.

A voice? After so long?! I'll be able to speak again? Well...

**"...BUGGER ME!"**

Great. First thing I've said in three years, and it's a sodding swear.

And what's with that voice? Sounds like nails on a blackboard. That's the thing about Davro – he can make a box the size of your average kneecap get inside your head and speak your unthought words for you like it's magic. Something useful, though, like stopping it sounding like laryngitis? Not a chance in hell.

**"BLOODY DAVRO!"**

Normon sniggers. "Hallo Kaled Daev," he smirks. "You want to watch your language – the Great Scientist'll switch you off again if you're not careful." He smiles. "Welcome back," he says.

Davro comes in. Less sauntering this time, more hobbling: he's got a walking stick, and one of his legs – the one he kicked my table with, I think – has swollen to the size of a reasonable shrub. Still in leather trousers, though.

"Kaled Normon," he growls. "Report on the status of the experiment."

Normon stands up straight, and tries to do that slightly suspicious salute what I saw Davro do a couple of days previously. He hits himself in the side of the head.

"Yes sir!" he shouts. "Experiment proceeding as expected, sir! No unforeseen reactions to the growth embrocation, sir! Mutation rate at 105% prediction, sir!"

"Good, good," says Davro. He spots the vocoder beside my jar and hobbles over to it. Peers at it. "Normon?" he asks slowly. "What is this?"

"It's... it's..." Normon stutters. He's scared.

"I can see what it is," snaps Davro. "It's the Mark 3 Travel Machine vocoder unit. What is it doing here?"

**"IT IS ALLOWING ME TO SPEAK!"** I say in Normon's defence. **"IT GIVES ME VOICE!"**

I thought Normon'd be pleased, but he just seems to quake even more. And Davro

looks like he's about to explode, starts to shake a bit. Turns around and raises his stick at the cowering Normon like he wants to hit him. Then that little bit of spit shows up at the corner of his mouth again.

But all of a sudden he smiles. Lowers the stick back to the floor.

"So," he says. "My creation... speaks. Excellent. Excellent. Listen, Kaled Normon. Listen well, to the words of this being. These are the first words spoken by a whole... new... species. The first words spoken by the progenitor..." – and he pulls himself up to his full height, which is about Normon's shoulder, and raises his arm in salute again – "...of the Ek-Lads!"

Ek-Lads?! I look out of my murky glass at Davro. Across at Normon, who looks a bit perplexed. Back at Davro again.

Davro lowers his arm. Sighs.

"Too cheesy?" he asks.

**"WHERE'S MY LEG-THING GONE?"** I ask Normon, a couple of days later. **"THAT PEDESTAL HOVERY THING? USED TO BE OVER IN THE CORNER?"**

Normon looks a bit embarrassed. "It's Davro," he says. "He... um..."

**"WHAT?"** I demand.

"That infection, it spread to his other leg," says Normon. "Swelled up too, bigger than the first. Honestly, he looked like he was wearing trees."

**"HE SHOULD DISINFECT!"** I suggest, far more stropky than I mean to be, no idea why.

**"DISINFECT! DISINFECT! DISINFECT!"**

"Yeah, that's what I thought," says Normon. "Be right as rain in a couple of days. But you know the Great Scientist, how he feels about imperfection..."

**"DISIN... NO!"** I say. **"HE DIDN'T!"**

Normon looks uncomfortable. "He did," he says. "Amputation. Both legs, just below the groin. And of course, then he needed new legs. So... um..."

**"HE'S NICKED MY BLOODY LEGS! HASN'T HE? MY BLOODY LEGS!"**

"It's not all that bad," Normon consoles me. "There's still a set of Mark 2 Travel Machine legs in the storeroom. Lick o' paint, they'll be lovely."

I sigh. As much as a lump of jelly in a jar can sigh, anyway. **“DO THEY... HOVER?”**

“Not as such,” says Normon. “They more sort-of... trundle.”

**“ALLOY ARMOUR? BOMBS?”**

“Plywood. And custard.”

**“CUSTARD?!”**

“The lumps have got custard in ‘em.”

**“IT’S USUALLY,”** I say sarcastically, **“THE OTHER WAY AROUND.”**

“Look, it was before the war,” Normon says, reddening. “They wanted something that could wait tables.” He pauses. “All right, he was going through a custard phase. Um... it’s still got the little bell...”

**“BLOODY DAVRO!”**

Normon’s painted my ‘legs’.

My Mark 2 legs. Round. Pedestal-like. And...

Grey.

So, the good news is, my leg unit has still got lumps. Bad news... well, they’re yellow.

Looks like they’re full of custard. Because...

**“THEY’RE FULL OF CUSTARD!!!!!”**

“I know,” says Normon. “I tried. But it’s hard to find somewhere to drain custard sneakily when there’s a war on. Everyone keeps looking at their ration books.”

Yeah, well, I take his point. At a time like this, you don’t want to waste custard.

“Look,” says Normon, “it’s not all bad. I’ll paint ‘em black for you. And the Mark 3 Travel Machine Containment Unit – you know, the top bit, the bit you sit in – still works. It’s got air-conditioning. And Space Invaders.”

I look at it. It’s got a dome. And vents. Gleaming black, like my original legs. But it looks a teency bit bigger than my new ones, at the base.

**“ARE YOU SURE IT’LL FIT?”** I ask.

“Absolutely!” says Normon. “If I reverse the polarity of, um... the Velcro.”

**“VELCRO?!”** I shout. And then I consider what he’s said. You know, if you think it through... nope, bollocks, it still doesn’t make sense! **“WHAT DO YOU MEAN, VELCRO!?”**

Normon looks embarrassed. "It's what keeps your top on your bottom," he says. "Only, on the Mark 2s the furry Velcro was on the bottom and the spiky Velcro on the top. And on the Mark 3s it's the other way around."

I pause. Seething. Only, of course, Normon can't see that. I pause a bit more. Then...

**"HAS HE THOUGHT UP A NAME YET?"**

Normon reddens even more. "The last one was 'Metaltron', I heard."

**"METALTRON?!"** I exclaim. **"OH, FOR F\*\*\*\*\* SAKE! THAT'S NOT EVEN AN ANAGRAM!"**

I have a top.

At last. Normon's sorted the velcro. Arguably, I should show a little gratitude.

But, you know, I can't. I'm irritable. I used to be happy-go-lucky. When I was a lollipop man, I was happy-go-lucky. Now... just irritable.

It's being jelly, I think. No legs, no arms, no body to speak of. Just a lump of jelly, a few tentacles, and one eye. Can piss you off, that sort of context.

And an itchy back, and no way to scratch it. Just to add to it. Tell me... wouldn't you be just a *teency* bit irritable too?

But, I have a top. Not the Mark 3 one – Davro needed that for something else. A teasmaid or something, probably. A nice vase, that sort of bollocks.

Bloody Davro!

No, Normon's found an old Mark 2 top. And he's fluffed up the pillows a bit, stuck it on the legs, gave it a quick paint, and here I am. No more jar for me – woo hoo!

A few problems, course. Can't control the legs properly from in here, for one. Wheels, these legs have got, not a hover unit. And the engine just grinds a bit and then stops. Doesn't go anywhere.

And it's not easy to see, either. There's only one eyehole. Yes, I know I've only got one eye, but there's no reason to make it worse by having me peer through what looks like a long shiny loo roll.

My vision is impaired. I mean, totally trollied. It's rubbish.

I've got arms of course. One long one that I can use to unblock loos, and a short one that I think is for whisking eggs. Course, can't reach either of 'em with the other one. And I can't actually see 'em through this bloody tube, neither. So I'm just guessing.

But if I concentrate on the smaller one... think *really* hard... make it do something...

Stuff me, that was loud. Where's the wall gone?

"Bloody hell, Kaled Daev!" I hear Normon panic. "Stop waving your gun around!"

Gun? Davro's given me a gun?! No eyesight, no way of seeing where you're going other than straight ahead – but here, have a gun that'll take walls out if you think too hard. What could possibly go wrong?

"Try this," says Normon. "It'll help make up for the tubular vision thing." He holds something up in my field of view: a small, blue ball with wires sticking out of it.

**"WHAT IS IT?"** I ask. **"A NEW EYE?"**

"Not exactly," says Normon. He places the ball on the dome of my Travel Machine and suddenly...

**"THAT'S INCREDIBLE!"** The world has come alive! I am aware of everything around me, in perfect clarity and with more colours than you could shake a frond at. **"I CAN SEE PROPERLY AGAIN!"**

"Well, not exactly 'see'," explains Normon. "It interfaces directly to your olfactory lobe. You're more sort of... smelling."

**"YOU MEAN, THAT'S WHAT THE LAB... SMELLS LIKE?"**

"Yeah," says Normon. "I guess."

**"AND WHAT'S THAT...? OH, YOU HAVEN'T!"**

Normon colours.

Davro comes in. Hovering. He's wearing my old Mark 3 legs like a wheelchair. They look – smell! – good on him. Better than the leather trousers ever did, anyway, the ponce.

"Leave us, Kaled Normon," Davro orders. Normon backs out of the room again.

Once he's gone, Davro floats over to me. He looks my new casing up and down appraisingly. "My creation," he says with pride. "The saviour of Skaro. I name you..."

**"LET ME GUESS,"** I say. **"IS IT 'METALTRON'?"**

"No," spits Davro. "It is not 'Metaltron'. The word 'Metaltron' was Nyder's idiotic suggestion. My creations, my... children, shall take a corruption of our own name, Kaled. Just as their bodies are corruptions of our Kaled bodies."

**"RIGHT,"** I say. **"BACK TO ANAGRAMS AGAIN, THEN."**

Davro ignores me. "You are Daev," he continues. "But no longer 'Kaled' Daev. No!"



From this day forth, you shall be known as the first... of the Dakles!" He peers at me. "What do you think?"

What do I think? Dakles? DAKLES?! WHAT DO I BLOODY THINK?!

And something's happening. I feel it inside of me. An impossible rage, building and building. Wave upon wave upon wave of fury, pushing up and up and up until...

...my custard explodes.

You know, I never knew I could do that. Custard everywhere. The lab... well, it's covered in the stuff.

And so is Davro.

I think he's got some in his eyes.

I wake up, sitting in my Travel Machine, to darkness.

"NORMON?" I call out. "WHERE ARE YOU, NORMON?"

"I'm here, Kaled Daev," Normon's voice comes out of the darkness at me.

"WHY CAN I NOT... SEE?" Ooh. My voice is getting more mechanical all the time, more and more broken. Weird.

Normon sighs. "You *can* see," he says. "You just can't smell anymore. The Great Scientist has taken your olfactory augmentation unit."

He's right, I realise. The tubular view is still available to me - I'd just been ignoring it because the smellyvision was so good. But it's not there anymore: the blue ball has gone.

"WHY? WHY HAS HE TAK... EN IT?"

"You got custard in his eyes," says Normon. "Really old custard. He got another infection, and decided to gouge his own eyes out. Then he couldn't see, so he took the unit."

Great. "SO NOW HE CAN SENSE HIS SURR...OUND...INGS, BUT I CAN... NOT?"

"Seems like it," says Normon. "Looks a bit weird though. No eyes, just a little blue ball on his fore..."

Normon breaks sharply for some reason. But inside me I can feel the rage mounting again, and I can't stop myself. "BLOO...DY... DAV...RO!" I shout metallically.

I hear Normon make a sharp intake of breath. Which can only mean... ah, sod.

"HE IS BE...HIND...ME, IS...N'T HE?"

Normon coughs.

"OH... BOLL... OCKS."

I hear the sound of a set of Mark 3 Travel Machine legs hovering, and a glowering, eyeless Davro hoves round into my tubular view. He scowls at me.

"My name," he says at length. "Is Davros."

I swivel my head to look at Normon. Normon looks at me. We both look back at the Great Scientist. What?

"Not Davro," he says. "Davros. With an 's'."

I don't know what to say. All this time, everything he's done for me... and we haven't even got his name right.

"SOR... RY... GREAT... SCIENTIST," I say, embarrassed.

Davro – Davros! – sniffs. Then he abruptly turns away and heads for the door. "Kaled Normon," he says as he leaves. "Prepare the experiment for presentation to Nyder and the Council. It is time to go public."

And he's gone.

Normon tries to do Davros's slightly suspicious salute. It looks a bit camp, to be honest, but at least he doesn't hit himself in the side of the head this time.

"Come on, Kaled Daev," he says. "Let's show you off."

I rev my engine and try to move. It's still not working. I go, maybe, a hand's-span forward – but then the legs grind to a halt again.

Normon sighs. "All right, I'll push," he says. He gets behind me, braces himself against my Travel Machine's back, and shoves me out the door.

My wheels squeak as we go.

Normon pushes me on, up the corridor. To the Great Scientist Davros, and Nyder, and the Council, and my fate. But there's something that's been bothering me.

"NOR... MON?" I ask.

"Yes, Daev?" he replies.

"WHY DOES DAV... ROS KEEP ONE HAND STUCK IN... SIDE THE LEGS LIKE THAT?"

"I've been wondering too," says Normon. "The boys at the depot think he's got a secret kitten in there."

I ponder on this for a bit. Although, course, there's a more important question.

"NOR... MON?"

"Yes, Daev?"

**"HAS HE THOUGHT UP A NAME FOR ME YET?"**

We stop. Normon walks around into my field of view. I can almost hear the cogs turn as he works out whether or not to tell me.

"Yes, Daev," he says at last. "Yes, he has." He leans up to my head unit, and whispers the name Davros has chosen for me into my flashing ear.

**"REALLY?"** I say. **"IT'S A BIT DULL, ISN'T IT?"**

"Yes," says Normon, "it is, a bit." And he smiles at me, and I think a smile back at him. Then he goes back round, and pushes me some more. We trundle.

Up ahead, I can see the Council Chamber, with my destiny inside it. Normon stops again, and we stare at the doors together. They're black. Modern. A bit crap, to be honest, but then, there's a war on.

"You ready then, Daev?" Normon asks after a while.

**"AS I'LL EVER BE,"** I answer.

"All right," he sighs. "Let's get this over with." He braces himself again, and pushes me forward up the corridor, towards those scary, rubbish doors. But there's something I have to say to him, one last thing, and I have to say it to him now. It has to be now, see, cos he won't be coming with me. Nothing from my old life will. It's the end, innit?

**"NOR... MON?"**

He doesn't answer immediately, this time. We just keep trundling. But when he does, there's a slight catch in his throat. I wonder if he's feeling the same as me, and the words won't quite come? Cos things changing forever can do that to you, with or without custard. But eventually, as he pushes me through the modern, black doors, which only get stuck once, and on into my future... eventually, he manages.

"Yes, Daev?" he asks.

**"JUST... THANKS, NOR... MON. FOR EVERYTHING."**

"You're welcome, Daev," he says.

