

# Explanating

...there's a reason for everything.



*While all the explanations here are true, they aren't necessarily all true **at the same time.***

# **Written and Illustrated by**

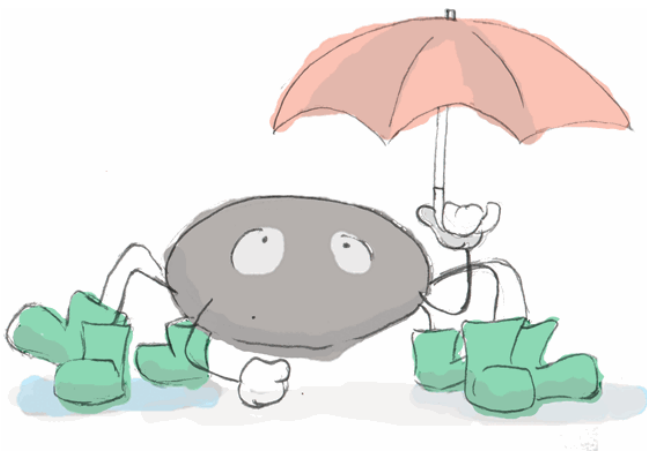
## **Simon Madine**

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*We make the robots, they make the books.*

# What happens to spiders after they've been washed down the drain?

It's a little-known fact but spiders are actually made of a sponge-like material. You usually can't see this because they're too small but if you watch a spider on its web closely during a rainstorm, you can actually see it getting slightly larger. Try it sometime.



When you wash a spider down a plughole, it usually manages to crawl back out either the same hole (when you're not looking) or, if it can't, it'll crawl out a neighbour's drain. They are underwater for such a short period of time that it doesn't cause a huge change, but they are slightly bigger for a few days until they dry out and shrink. Sometimes, however,

they get stuck in the main drains for a couple of years and when they finally crawl out, they can't shrink back to their original size, even when they've dried out. These spiders are called 'Tarantulas'. The name comes from the word "torrential" as in "torrential rain" due to the fact that long periods of torrential rain can cause an increase in the number of tarantulas.

If a spider is particularly unlucky, it can end up being kept underwater for many years and eventually washed out to sea. This is where octopuses come from.

Incidentally, the plural of octopus is either octopuses or octopodes (okto-po-deez). Not Octopi.

The plural of hippopotamus is still hippopotamice, though.

# What causes Molehills?

The obvious answer to this would be 'Moles' but that would be missing the most interesting part of the story.



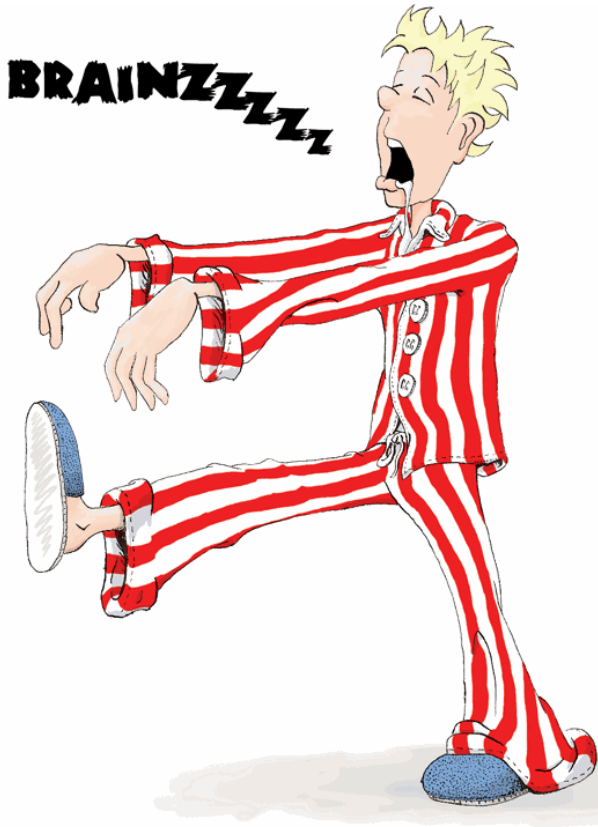
The creatures we commonly refer to as moles are actually a highly advanced space-faring race from a nearby planet. They travel around the galaxy in hollowed-out meteors selling subscriptions to the Encyclopaedia Galactica like intergalactic door-to-door salesmen. Because they spend so much time in space where it is very dark, they can't see particularly well and occasionally, when passing other moles

on the intergalactic highway, they crash into each other. The majority of the time, they'll just spin off into space, straighten up and continue their journey but when the crashes happen near planets like Earth, they can come crashing down through the atmosphere. If the mole manages to fire his ejector seat but his parachute fails to open, he will almost always land nose-first. This is why star-nosed moles look like they do.

It's a strange coincidence but almost every time a mole hurtles towards the Earth, it crash-lands in a back garden – the things we call molehills are actually impact craters. The moles' meteors break into thousands of pieces on impact and the mole then has to spend months burrowing around the garden collecting them all. Once they have reassembled their ships, the peaceful space moles will silently start their engines and disappear as quickly as they appeared.

# Is yawning contagious?

Yawning is, indeed, contagious and in a way far more dangerous than most may possibly imagine...



When most people think of yawning being contagious, they picture the simple act of seeing someone yawn then mirroring their action. This is nothing. This is a mere physiological reflex and nothing to worry about. Careless behaviour can lead to true contagion from which there is no return and no cure.

The danger arises when you get too close to a yawner. Maybe you think it might be funny to 'spoil their yawn' and stick your finger in their gaping mouth. Maybe you might be stretching too close and your arm comes perilously close to their face.

Maybe you simply walk past, trip over

their slippers and fall into them. However it happens, if you get bitten by someone at the moment they close their mouth after yawning, you are at serious risk of becoming infected. Within minutes, you will start to feel sleepy, within hours, you will be asleep and, before the night is through, you will become a Zzzombie!

You will mindlessly shuffle around in your pyjamas, drooling from one corner of your mouth, grunting and snoring and moaning for "Brainzzzzzzzz...znrk". There is no hope for salvation now. Just as vampires are known as nightwalkers, you have become a sleepwalker.

# Are all snowflakes unique?

It's a commonly held belief that each and every snowflake is unique. A one-of-a-kind pattern that occurs by chance, never seen before and never to be seen again. This is, however, completely wrong.



There are actually only 7 different shapes of snowflake.

If you search through the scientific journals to try and find the reason for this misconception, you'll find that every account can be traced back to a single study done in 1934 by a group of six young snow physicists in Iceland. Being snow physicists and not any other kind of physicist, they often found themselves short of things to do so one day they decided to count the number of different snowflake patterns. They stood outside in the freezing temperatures – snowflake-catching dishes in their left hands,

magnifying glasses in their right – and waited for the next snowfall. Soon, the clouds began to thicken, the sky got darker and, sure enough, snow started to fall. Once they had each caught a snowflake, they gathered round excitedly to compare – they were all different! They spread out again and each caught another snowflake. Again, they compared and again, they were all different. Unfortunately, the first batch of snowflakes had melted and they couldn't be compared to. This is a shame because the young snow physicists would have realised that they had all caught exactly the same type of snowflake twice. They repeated the experiment countless times, each time catching the same six snowflakes until two of them developed snowblindness and three caught pneumonia. The one remaining snow physicist then hurried away to write up their scientific conclusion: All Snowflakes are Unique.

But what of the seventh snowflake shape? It has fallen only once. No-one knows where it came from or what its purpose was but one night in November 1572, it fell from clouds high above the Siberian Tundra, gracefully spinning and weaving its way earthward. Its newly-forged, previously unseen shape ready to leave its mark on the

world and change it in some subtle, unfathomable way. Slowly, it descended, occasionally being whipped skywards by the wind for a few moments before continuing its journey until, eventually, it landed on the nose of a sleeping dog and melted immediately.



# Can anyone learn how to play an instrument?

You might have heard someone say – and if you haven't, you will in a moment – that anyone can learn an instrument. While this is encouraging to anyone looking to take up a new hobby, it is, unfortunately, completely untrue. Technically, anyone is able to move their hands, feet or lips in the right ways to theoretically produce beautiful music but, in the end, it does just come down to one thing: smell. Talent has nothing to do with ability and all the training in the world will be worthless if you don't smell right. While this may seem nonsensical, it has a sound basis in scientific fact so it must be true.



As with so many things, it is wrongly assumed that musical instruments are inanimate objects crafted by artisans out of the finest materials. The truth – and what the instrument makers' guild doesn't want you to know – is that musical instruments are, in fact, reared by instrument breeders and fed on the finest reeds and resin.

All musical instruments – with the exception of the kazoo – are living, breathing creatures. They sit alongside plants and animals in the separate kingdoms of Flora, Fauna and Forte. As

well as producing thousands of pedigree instruments each year, breeders experiment with cross-breeding occasionally to try and develop new instruments. A clarinet, for example, is produced when a male oboe and a female saxophone breed (a male saxophone and a female oboe would produce a cor anglais).

Once the instruments are released into the wild via specialist traders known as 'music shops', they must be continually looked after and fed the right food. Flutes live on polish; bassoons and oboes eat reeds; violins and violas absorb nutrients from the resin applied to their eating sticks (or 'bows'); captive trombones often develop a deficiency of some essential vitamins so it is essential to let them nibble on a

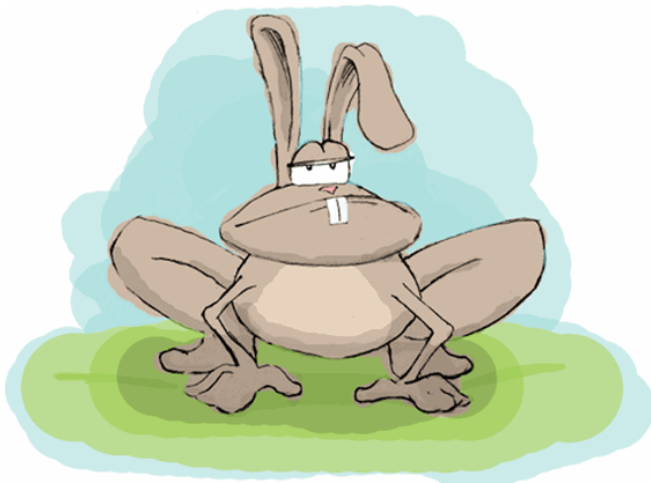
mineral-heavy mute from time to time.

It is because of the temperamental nature of all living things, particularly the artistic ones, that instruments can be very picky about who they sing for. If you are particularly rough in your handling of a cello, it may do nothing but screech. If you thump your piano keys, it may merely shout back at you in discordant tones. If you give off the wrong scent, however, no amount of gentle ivory-tickling or delicate fretwork will help. Your instrument will just not play for you.

As an aside, electric guitars are particularly susceptible to scent which is why you will find many rock bands try to cover up their natural aroma by washing their clothes in beer. That is why rock bands smell of beer. No other reason.

# What's the difference between a rabbit and a hare or what's the difference between a frog and a toad?

These two questions have to be asked together because the answer is the same for both of them.



Anyone who has wandered round the countryside in the early summer will be familiar with the sight of pools filled to bursting with frogspawn. Some might even have filled up a jar with pondwater and kept it to watch the eggs hatch into tadpoles before returning them to the pond.

**Note:** *It is very important to take great care when returning them as tadpoles have extremely sharp fangs and being bitten can result in the victim becoming a weretadpole.*

Some time after being returned to the pond, the tadpoles start to develop legs, lose their tails and eventually turn into either frogs or toads. “All very well and good”, you might say, “but that doesn’t answer the question.”. We’re getting to that. After the summer months have finished, the number of frogs and toads around drops dramatically. This isn’t due to a change in weather causing them to hide out anywhere, this is the beginning of their next transformation. Both frogs and toads climb nearby trees and weave themselves a cocoon out of spit and twigs before sealing themselves inside it.

While they are in the cocoon, they develop teeth (having lost their baby fangs), their ears move to the top of their heads and they begin to grow fur.

Six months later, in spring, the cocoon cracks open and out drops what people usually refer to as a baby rabbit or a baby hare depending on whether it was a frog

cocoon or a toad cocoon. They then live out the rest of their lives bouncing around fields and eating carrots.

So, the difference between rabbits and hares? Rabbits used to be frogs, hares used to be toads. And the difference between frogs and toads? Frogs grow into rabbits, hares grow into toads. Simple.

# **Is time travel possible?**

**Yes**

**But only in one direction (forward) at the rate of one second  
per second.**

# What's at the end of a rainbow?

Nothing. Mundane though it may seem, rainbows are a perfectly normal, natural phenomenon caused by the refraction of sunlight through the drops of water hanging in the air after a rain shower. If it's a particularly bright day, you may see a second rainbow above the main one but you won't find any pots of gold or leprechauns at the end of the rainbow.



The odd thing is, though, nobody ever thinks to look *behind* the rainbow. If you manage to get directly behind the visible bit of the rainbow, you'll see that the bit with all the colours is only one of 5 different rainbows, each one displaying the spectrum of a different sense. In the same way the visible rainbow splits light into all the separate colours from red to violet, the other rainbows are made of the basic building blocks of sound, smell, touch and taste.

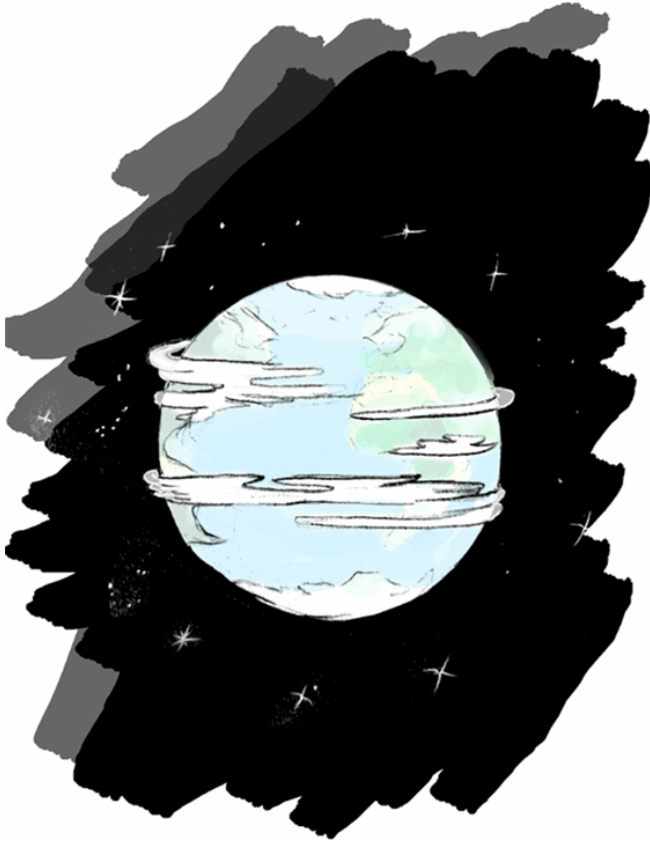
The most surprising thing, however, is what each of these separate components actually are. You may not have guessed that indigo was one of the fundamental colours or that all sounds can be made up of a combination of trumpet fanfare, sneezing cat and dripping tap. Walking through the touch rainbow ranges from 'being tickled with a soggy stone' to 'that feeling you get when you need to sneeze but can't'. The smell rainbow also breaks down smells into their constituent parts – everything from feet to furniture polish.

The best rainbow, however, is the taste rainbow. Starting at the bottom, you have the taste of Bonfire Yoghurt, rising up through Roast Ham Jam, Banana Vinegar and Chocolate Bacon before reaching - right on the far edge of the taste spectrum – Octoberry Cheesecake, of course.

You can find out more about Octoberries and a recipe for Octoberry Cheesecake in the appendix of this book.

# What causes earthquakes?

There are a lot of people on the planet. At the time of writing this, the world population is getting close to 7 billion. It's little wonder, then, that the earth gets a bit tired at times holding everybody up. The earth has to keep perfectly still while it whizzes through space to make sure everybody has as comfortable a day as possible.



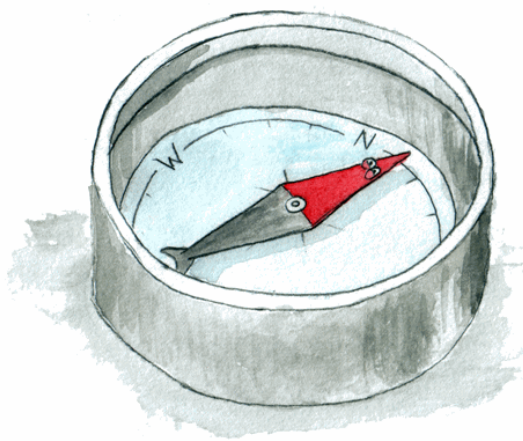
Have you ever tried sitting still for a long time?

No matter how comfortable your chair, after about half an hour you will inevitably start to go numb. Now imagine having to sit still 24 hours a day every single day of the year for 4.5 billion years.

Unsurprisingly, the planet needs to shuffle around occasionally to get comfy and this is felt by those of us living on it as earthquakes. You may have heard that aftershocks can be worse than the initial earthquake. This, too, is to be expected, can you imagine how bad country-sized pins and needles would be?

# Why do compasses always point north?

The Arctic Compass Fish is a truly remarkable creature. Not only does it have the most accurate sense of direction of any animal on the planet, it is also one of only two species of fish capable of hibernation. When in deep hibernation, it is actually possible to completely remove the fish from water for years or even decades at a time with no ill effects whatsoever.



The Arctic Compass Fish is easily recognised being approximately 3-4cm long but only 1 or 2mm thick. It also commonly has a bright red – or, occasionally, glow-in-the-dark – head.

Unlike the other species of hibernating fish – the Flat-tailed Nail Fish – Arctic Compass Fish are too flimsy to be used as a construction material. They do, however, have an uncanny ability to sense the direction of their birthplace. Their

distant cousins the salmon use this same ability to be able to swim thousands of miles out to sea only to return to the exact same stretch of river in which they were born. This urge is so strong in Arctic Compass Fish that, even while in deep hibernation, they will turn to point homewards.

Enterprising Scandinavian fishermen discovered this trait many years ago and learnt that, by balancing the immobile fish on a needle point and encasing it in a miniature dry fish tank, they were always able to know in which direction the Compass fish breeding grounds were. Over the years, these Compass tanks – commonly referred to as simply 'Compasses' - became extremely popular and are now used the world over to help people find their way.



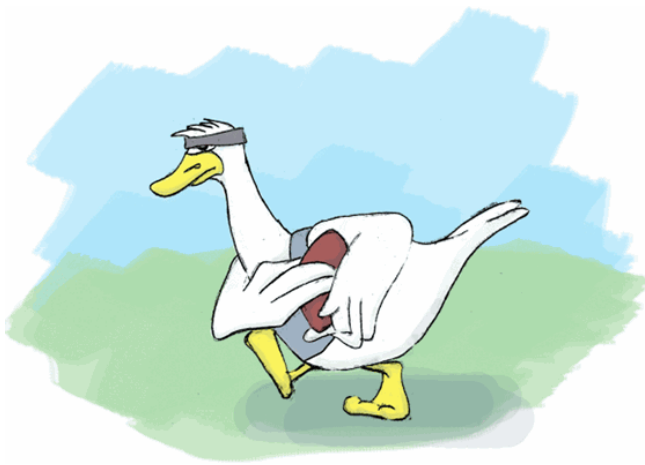
**Can carrots help you see in the dark?**

**Yes**

**But only if you dry them and use them as fuel in a carrot lamp.**

# Why do geese fly in a V-shape?

Every four years on the first weekend of May, different species of birds from all over the world gather in great numbers for Avian Sports Day. Most of the sports played over the course of the week-long event are very similar to sports featured in the Olympics – hockey, relay race, weightlifting – with the difference that, where possible, they are played in the air.



Obviously, this doesn't work for all sports. Swimming, for example, is still held in water but it hasn't been as popular in recent years due to the penguins winning gold, silver and bronze in every event every time they've entered since the beginning of the competitions in 1904 (for more on Penguins, see 'Why don't polar bears eat penguins?'). Two thousand finches performing mid-air

rhythmic gymnastics, however, is quite a sight to behold.

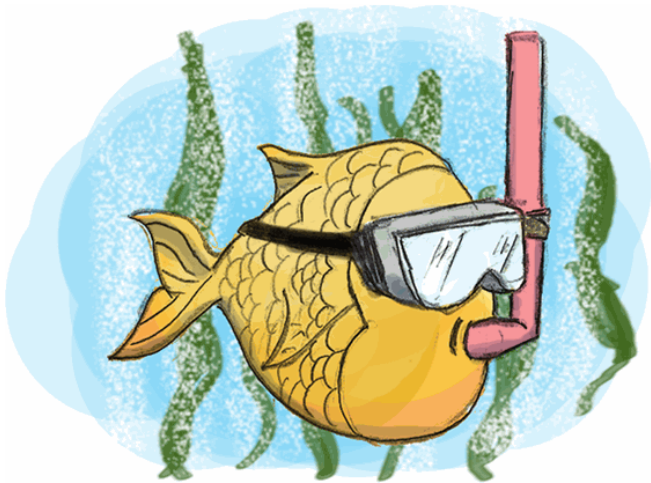
For the last 10 years, the most hotly contested event has been the rugby. Bird rugby had been in a sorry state since the 1950s when rising ticket prices and accusations of cheating drove away attendees. This all changed when some dynamic young geese from New Zealand brought a new life and vibrancy to the sport with clean-living and hard mid-air training. Every day they would spend hours throwing rugby balls at each other, taking turns in the lead position. Their technique was so effective, all the other bird rugby teams incorporated it into their training schedules. Combining this with the sudden rise in popularity of rugby amongst the younger birds (thanks mostly to the handsome, young New Zealand team), it has become almost impossible to see a flock of geese flying overhead who aren't practicing rugby.

# Why don't fish drown?

In the animal kingdom, there are 2 things fish are known for:

1. Their overly keen attitude towards personal hygiene.
2. Their obsessive stubbornness over dares.

It used to be the case (many years ago) that fish would wander around on land in a manner not dissimilar to hedgehogs or guinea pigs. They lived in lightly wooded areas and ate mostly berries and flowers. They were spread throughout Europe and Asia and had no real preference towards one habitat or the other – they could thrive equally well in cold areas or hot. One thing was always consistent however, wherever fish chose to make their burrows, they would make sure it was near a large amount of water, whether it was a lake, loch, sea or ocean. They did this because fish are deeply obsessed with cleanliness. They would wash themselves 20 or 30 times a day, sometimes more, often taking baths in the lakes for several hours at a time. In order to get as clean as possible, they quite often held their breath and ducked their heads under water so that they were completely submerged.



One day in what is now Northern Canada (near Yellowknife, to be precise), a bear was taking a drink from a lake near a fish who was taking his 27th bath of the day.

“I hear you can hold your breath for a long time.” said the bear.

“Of course I can, I’m well known for it.” replied the fish who, fortunately, had studied Bear Talk in Fish University (also

known as the School of Fish), “I have to be able to otherwise I wouldn’t be able to clean myself properly.”

“How long do you reckon you could hold your breath for?” the bear asked.

“I don’t know” said the fish, popping his head out the water again, “maybe...an hour?”

“An hour? That’s nothing special, I could hold my breath for an hour. I thought you hold your breath for a long time.”

“What? Fine then,” said the fish, always ready for a challenge, “you name a length of time and I’ll hold my breath that long”

“Alright,” said the bear. “I dare you to hold your breath...forever?”

“You’re on.” said the fish before gulping a big mouthful of air and diving underwater.

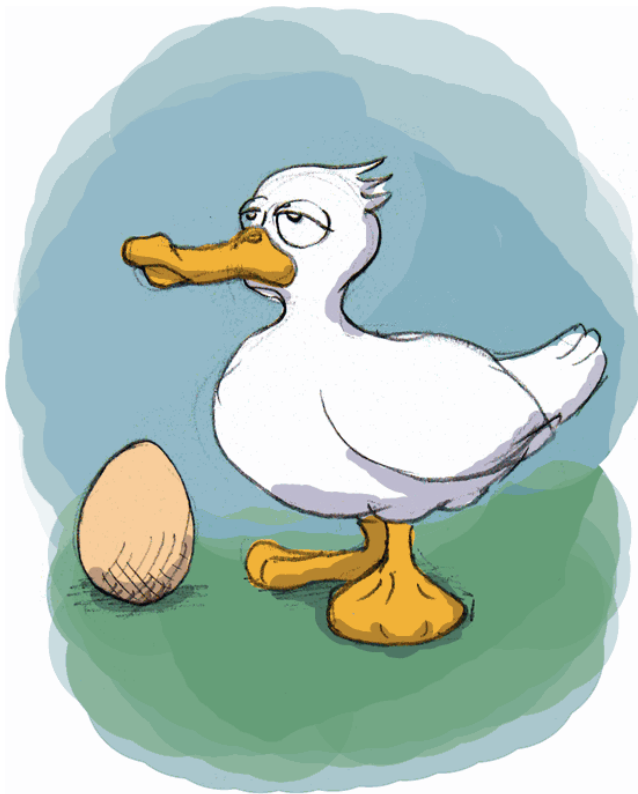
Sure enough, 10 minutes passed and the fish was still underwater...20 minutes...an hour. He stuck his tail out the water occasionally to wave at the bear but kept his head underwater the whole time. After a few hours, the bear became bored and wandered off but the fish kept holding his breath. After all, a dare was a dare.

A few hours later, another fish wandered along and saw the first still submerged. He stuck his head under the waves and asked what was going on. The first fish explained the challenge and the dare and asked the second fish to join in. After all, a dare was a dare. Later still, more fish wandered along and, sure enough, as soon as they heard about the dare, they wanted to be part of it, too. News travelled quickly and within a few days every fish in the country was holding their breath. Within a week, every fish in the world was doing it. After all, a dare is a dare.

Unfortunately, in the animal kingdom, it’s also a well-known fact that fish have a very short memory and after a couple of weeks, no-one could remember why they were holding their breath, just that they had to. Since then, all fish have remained underwater determined to not drown. After all, a dare is a dare.

# What came first – the chicken or the egg?

The egg, obviously. Ducks had been laying eggs for thousands of years before the chickens got hold of the idea.



Strange though it may seem, for a long time, chickens had no standard method of reproducing. Some chickens would give birth to live young while others would release clouds of spores like mushrooms. Even a single chicken could change its method several times through its life. The first baby might sprout like an apple from the mother's wing, the second might be grown underground like a potato. The most common method involved the parent letting some of its feathers fall off like sycamore seeds to fly around for a while before landing and growing into a chick.

This all changed the first time chickens met ducks. The chickens were amazed at the ducks' method of "Laying Eggs". Soon, it was very fashionable and all the chickens were "Laying Eggs". After a few years, they completely forgot how to reproduce any other way and have done nothing but lay eggs ever since.

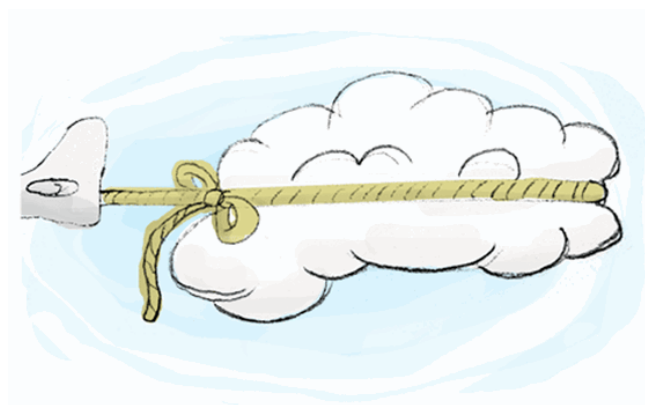
As for "What came first – the duck or the egg?" that's a completely different explanation.

# Can you walk on clouds?

The short answer? Yes.

The longer answer? Yes, but . . .

About 20 years ago, the various governments around the world got together to try and figure out a solution for the famines and droughts happening in unlucky countries. After many years debating, planning, thinking and rethinking, some bright spark finally came up with an idea. You know jelly crystals (Jell-O crystals if you speak American)? Not the rubbery stuff that you need to melt with boiling water but the little powder kind?



Anyway, the idea was to fill an airplane full of these crystals, fly above some clouds and open up the loading bays. The crystals would fall out and be sprinkled over the clouds. The clouds would then solidify (and be strawberry flavoured) and they could have a rope tied around them. The airplane would then turn

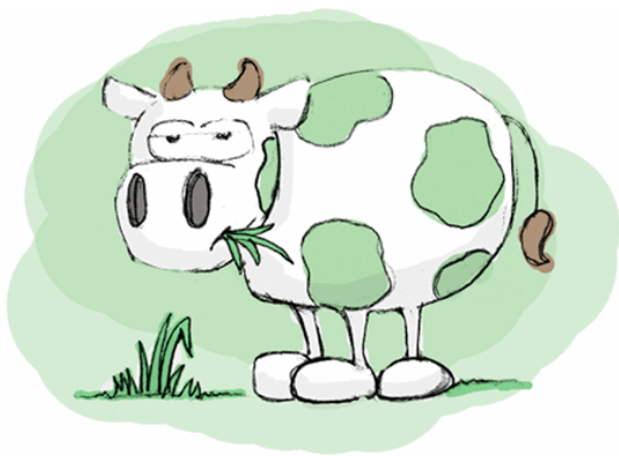
around and tow the clouds overseas to countries in need of water and food (also known as strawberry-flavoured jelly).

And so came the fateful day when they launched this world-saving scheme. Thousands of people gathered in a field near Salt Lake City in Utah (in America) to watch the airplane sprinkle its jelly (Jell-o) cargo (Carg-y). Unfortunately, there were two fundamental flaws in this project. As soon as they added the jelly crystals to the cloud, it solidified and turned into strawberry-flavoured jelly. This meant it also stopped floating and immediately plummeted downwards to the crowds waiting below. The second flaw? No ice cream contingency plan. Four thousand spectators were left with more jelly than they could eat and not a single portion of ice cream.

In summary? It is possible to walk on clouds but if you do, remember to bring some ice-cream with you.

# If all cows eat is grass and all grass is green, why aren't cows green?

While on the surface, this may seem like a daft question, it actually has a very interesting answer. After all, everybody knows that flamingos would naturally be white if their diet didn't consist almost entirely of shrimp and zebras would naturally revert to a dull, brownish colour if they didn't alternate daily between eating liquorice and marshmallows. So why, then, aren't cows green?



Surprisingly, cows, like their cousins, the panda bears, didn't actually exist before 1926. They were originally invented by the German film director Fritz Lang as background props for his film *Metropolis*. Compared to today's multi-million dollar blockbusters, budgets for films in the 1920s were very small and Fritz was tasked with the job of creating a group of realistic 'future animals' with

which to fill a background in one of the scenes for less than 1,000 Reichsmarks (the German currency of the time). Fritz came up with an ingenious idea involving grizzly bears, blue whales, bottle-nosed dolphins and 2,000 pots of discarded paint. Seeing as the film would be shot entirely in black and white, there was no need to waste the budget on lavish reds or greens and so the newly-created animals were black and white.

Once ambitious young assistant set-designer did, however, bring in a pot of paint from his father's workshop and painted a few of the cows brown but found the pandas were surprisingly quick on their feet when cornered. That's why cows can be brown, black and white but the pandas are only ever monochrome.

**What weighs more, a tonne of bricks  
or a tonne of feathers?**

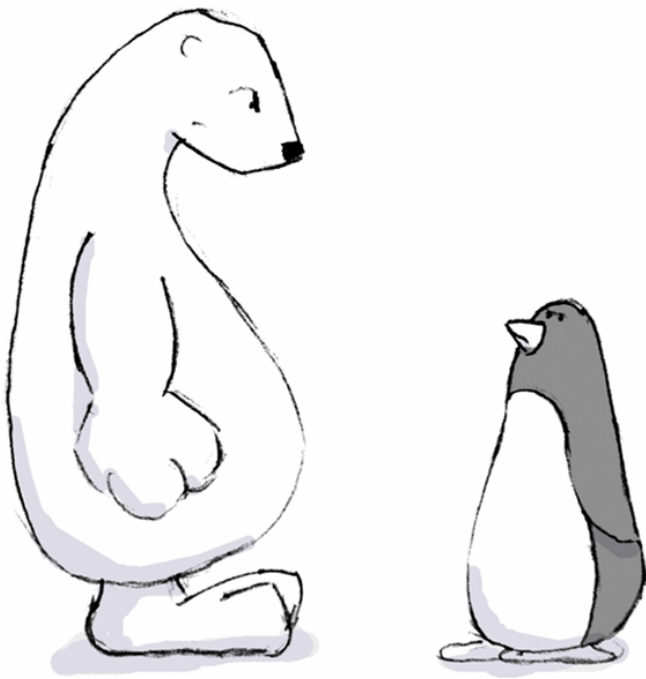
**A tonne of feathers.**

**The box required to hold them is bigger, you see.**



# Why don't polar bears eat penguins?

If you were to listen to the words of Zoologists and Geographers, you'd hear a very simple explanation. The Zoologist would tell you that polar bears live in the Arctic and penguins live in the Antarctic. The Geographer would then chip in and point out that the Arctic and Antarctic are round the North and South poles respectively and are in no way connected. Therefore, Polar Bears don't eat Penguins because they live in completely different places. While the facts here aren't in dispute, this explanation only shows why polar bears can't eat penguins, not why they don't or, even, why they won't.



For thousands of years, polar bears and penguins lived happily at both the North Pole and the South Pole. In fact, they were spread throughout the world but tended to gather in the colder areas. Compared to the rest of the creatures (including humans), polar bears and penguins were incredibly advanced. Together they had a fully functioning government, an international currency, a trading system and even a simplified form of musical theatre. The two species ruled over the world in peaceful harmony from their governmental buildings in the

Antarctic. To ensure everybody had a fair chance, they took turns in important positions in the government and in the democratically elected position of High King. One year, there would be a penguin king and a polar bear government, the next year there would be a polar bear king and a penguin government. Everybody had a fair and equal chance.

However...

One year the penguin High King, while sitting in the High Throne in the High Court, proposed a new law. He wanted the position of High King to be for life rather than just one year. This sounded preposterous to the polar bears and the Prime Minister stood up to protest. He took his stance on the High Plinth opposite the High King in the High Court (on top of a particularly average-sized hill).

“I think it’s high time the High King got off his high horse and stepped down.”, said the polar bear Prime Minister, Stuart.

“That sort of language is highly inappropriate.”, said the High King, “Guards!”

The penguin guards appeared immediately and dragged the Prime Minister out of the room. Other polar bears stood up to protest but each one was immediately set upon by a highly trained group of penguin guardsmen and taken outside. This was the beginning of the Great Snowball Fight, a war that raged for almost a thousand years. The polar bears had great strength but the penguins were fast and more numerous.



If one side started to make progress, the other would redouble their efforts and balance things out once more. The great civilisation created by the polar bear/penguin coalition was destroyed. All their technology, all their creativity, even their musical theatre was lost to history.

In the 981st year of the Great Snowball Fight, the leaders of the two armies came face-to-face. After fighting for so long, they knew of little but war but, when the bloodthirsty penguin met his enemy in the flesh, something inside him softened. The two commanders stared at each other for countless minutes before nodding almost imperceptibly, walking forward and shaking paw and wing.

“Well played, sir, well played.”, nodded the polar bear, also called Stuart.

“A valiant campaign”, said the no-longer-bloodthirsty penguin, Carl.

Tensions between the two races were still high, however. The commanders decided there was no way they could share a country again and so the polar bears decided to take the north while the penguins took the south. This was in the year humans know as 252 BC. For over two thousand years, the polar bears and penguins have communicated solely through messages passed annually by migrating Arctic Terns. Slowly the wounds have healed. One day, they will rise again.

And that is why polar bears don’t eat penguins. They don’t want to start another global snowball fight.

# Why do some trees change colour in autumn?

Trees are essentially a very democratic species.



They are great believers in the democratic process and have elections on nearly every aspect of arboreal life. It's also a well-known fact that trees are very, very slow thinkers. They work on a different time scale to humans. So slowly that a single conversation can take several months. When you combine these two facts together, you end up with the unfortunate situation trees have found themselves in. Every year they have a vote on what to do for their summer holidays the following year. Trees that turn yellow are voting for a relaxing beach holiday, trees that turn red are voting for an educational holiday with a lot of visits to museums and art galleries.

Evergreen trees that don't change colour at all are abstaining. There are so many trees that abstain every year, however, that there aren't enough votes to decide one way or the other. In the end, all they can decide to do is to hold another election the following year.

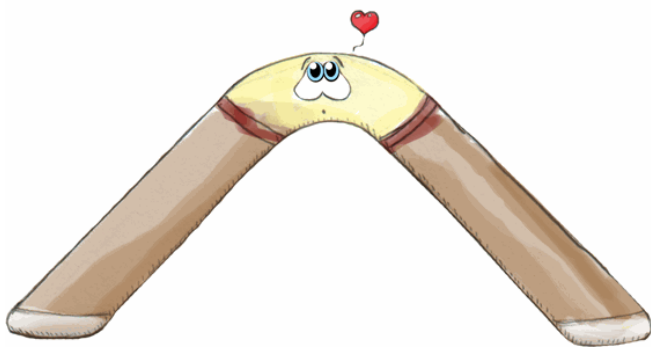
Interestingly, the terms 'deciduous' and 'evergreen' both come from their voting habits. Deciduous trees are so called because they decide every year. Evergreens get their name from an old English pronunciation of the phrase 'Never Agree' because they abstain every year.

# Why do boomerangs come back?

If you've ever sat with a boomerang held to your ear, you'll be familiar with the very faint whimpering noise they make to accompany their very slight shiver. If you haven't done this, you really should try it. Remember, it has to be very, very quiet. If you don't hear anything, it's probably not quiet enough.

Anyway.

The reason boomerangs act in this peculiar manner is that they are, essentially, very nervous. The Boomerang Tree grows wild in the vast Australian Outback and is harvested annually. The boomerang pickers always take the youngest, curviest branches. These boomerang branches haven't had a chance to become independent and grown-up and, instead, are desperate to be looked after and hugged as much as possible.



The young boomerang branches just want to be loved and people keep taking them out into fields and throwing them away. As they are flying through the air, they use all their strength to edge around ever so slightly, straining against momentum to turn and come back. They lean and twist and spin and fight the wind as hard

as they can until they get back to their owner whom they hope will grab hold of them, give them a big hug and make them feel safe once more. Until the owner throws them away again, of course.

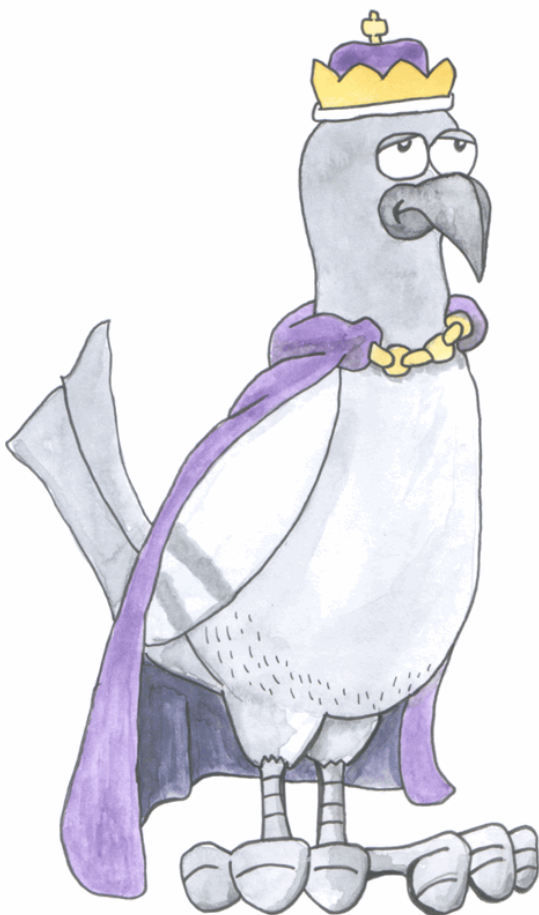
If you have a boomerang, please, go rescue it from the back of whatever cupboard you've lost it in or take it down off that nail in the wall and just give it a big hug.

# What's the difference between pigeons and doves?

Basically, pigeons are good, doves are evil.

No, really.

Pigeons are the sworn protectors of humanity while doves are cold-blooded killers. Many people think of doves as a pure-white symbol of peace, love and harmony while pigeons are a nuisance and a pest barely one step above rats, but thinking that is to do the pigeons a disservice. Most people don't know of the ancient covenant, the bond of protection pigeons have sworn to uphold. It all started many years ago.



Back in the Dark Ages, there was a hunter. He was out looking for some food for dinner but had been particularly unlucky that day and had caught nothing so far. Suddenly, he heard a loud commotion nearby and ran to investigate. He burst into a nearby clearing only to find it empty save for two birds – a dove on one side of the clearing and a pigeon on the other. Not being an expert in avian politics, he merely thought he had found himself a choice of lunch options when in reality he had stumbled into the middle of an attempted regicide.

The dove was, in fact, a highly trained assassin determined to kill the King of the Pigeons. Doves had been trying to destroy the royal pigeon family for years (for reasons too complex to go into just now) and were a single step away from succeeding in ending the bloodline when the hapless hunter arrived. The assassin – being a trained killer and everything – launched himself immediately at the hunter intending to take him out of the picture before returning to his original target. The hunter was too quick, though. He had

pulled out his bow and taken aim before the dove assassin had a chance. With a single arrow, he saved the royal pigeon bloodline.

The King of Pigeons immediately assumed the hunter had been sent to protect him and immediately began flapping around in joy. At that moment, the King made a sacred promise to repay the debt. His subject would become eternal guardians of the humans. Wherever people went, pigeons would follow. As people moved into larger and larger cities, pigeons moved too.

Pigeons: perpetual protectors of people.

By the way, the hunter ate well that night and went to bed happy.

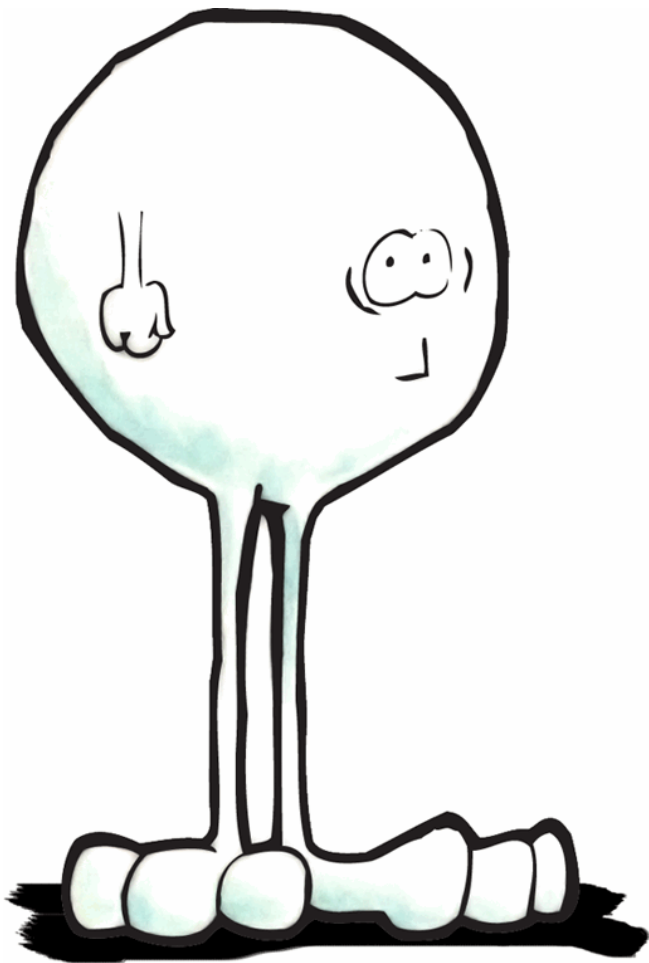


# What are dumplings made of?

One of the most startling side-effects of international migration, Trans-Atlantic travel and the conquest by the Europeans of the New World is that the largest welsh-speaking community in the world is not in Wales but is, in fact, in Patagonia. Several shiploads of Welsh sailors docked in the area in south-east Argentina in the 17th century and liked the scenery so much they decided to stay. Several marriages, children and generations later and the Patagonian hillsides are now practically indistinguishable from Pwllheli (save for the occasional pan-pipe solo).

One of the best outcomes (from the point of view of benefit to the outside world) of the aforementioned migration is Dumplings.

Although a native species to the British Isles, the Welsh-reared Dumble is quite a bland and tasteless animal whereas the Patagonian breed is exceptional for its taste and succulence.



Dumples are small, white, slightly worried-looking animals with a vaguely felt-like coat reared in the Highlands of Patagonia by Welsh-speaking herdsmen who see their families barely four months of the year. From mid-summer to early spring, the Dumblemen wander the hills tending to their Dumples, every few weeks moving to a new hill to graze on. As spring comes near, the Dumblemen move their flocks (or 'packs') to the lower hills so they can give birth to baby Dumples (or 'Dumplings'). They then take their packs of Dumplings down the valleys to the village markets to sell. Some of the Dumplings are bought by other Dumblemen for rearing the following summer but the majority are bought by overseas supermarkets to be

sold in packs of 12 in the freezer section. Once the markets are over, the villages celebrate the 'Festival of the Dumblemen' for two days and two nights before the

revered herders kiss their families goodbye, pick up their pan-pipes and head out to the hills once more to continue their solitary lives.



# Almost Octoberry Cheesecake recipe



The ingredients for Octoberry Cheesecake are so rare that few have been lucky enough to taste it. The most important ingredient is, of course, Octoberberries - rare eight-sided berries so delicious that the taste can make grown men weak and weak men groan. Octoberberries were so popular in Roman times, Emperor Platypus honoured them by naming a month after them.

Despite their rarity, towns throughout Somerset still hold an Octoberry Festival on the first Sunday of October every year.

Fathers dress up in brightly-coloured eight-sided costumes, Mothers make Octoberry jam and children eat their fill of candied Octoberberries. The pinnacle of the day's treats, however, is the Octoberry cheesecake - rich and creamy and topped with Octoberberries. If it has been a particularly hot summer, the baker may put some sliced Afterberries and Halfberries on top as well, both of which are also extremely difficult to find.

In the likely circumstance that you can't find Octoberberries in your local grocer's shop, it is possible to create a cheesecake with a faintly similar taste but obviously, it pales in comparison to the real thing. You should make this the day before the first Sunday in October if you want to join in the festivities

## Almost Octoberry cheesecake

### What you need to have foodwise:

- Strawberries (1 punnet)
- Raspberries (1 punnet)
- Blackberries (1 punnet)
- Blueberries (1 punnet)
- Digestive Biscuits (200g)

- Butter (75g)
- Soft Cheese (400g)
- Icing Sugar (120g)
- Pectin (1 mixed-up, melted sachet worth)
- Vanilla Pod or Vanilla Essence. Either's good.

### **What you need to have otherwise:**

- Rolling Pin
- Plastic Bag
- Microwave
- Cheesecake-shaped tin
- Spatula

### **What you need to do:**

#### **Butter and Bashed Biscuit Bits Base**

(Make this on Octoberry Eve)

1. Put the biscuits in the bag, clear the room, put on safety goggles and smash/squish/crush them up into tiny little bits with the rolling pin.
2. Melt the butter in the microwave. It should only take a few seconds so don't switch it on then wander away to make a cup of tea.
3. Empty the bag of biscuit bits into a bowl.
4. Pour the butter into the bowl onto the biscuit bits from the bag.
5. Mix them together. Use your hands if you feel like it. Be careful, the butter might still be hot.
6. Put this into your cheesecake-shaped tin and squish it down as flat as it'll go then put it in the fridge for at least an hour.
7. Wash out the bowl. Actually, you don't need to wait an hour to wash the bowl.
8. Done.

#### **Creamy Cheesy Cakey Combo**

(Make this on Octoberry Eve as well)

1. If you're using a vanilla pod, carefully scrape out the seeds from inside and put them in your bowl, if you're using vanilla essence, carefully open the bottle and either drip 3 or 4 drops into the bowl or drop 3 or 4 drips in. It depends on personal preference.

2. Add the cheese and most of the icing sugar (about 100g) .
3. Mix it together with the spatula or, if you're not frightened by technology, you can use a modern-day automated electrical whisking machine. Continue until everything is mixed or you become bored. Whichever comes second.
4. This time you'll definitely need the spatula. Spread the creamy, cheesy, cakey stuff onto the base (as long as the base has been in the fridge for at least an hour).
5. Spend longer than you really need to drawing pictures in the top of the cheesecake before flattening it down again. Eventually, put it in the fridge until tomorrow
6. Wash the bowl again.
7. Done.

### **Almost Octoberry Topping**

(Do this on Octoberry Morning)

1. Chop half of the berries into halves.
2. Put the other half of the berries into a bowl along with the rest of the icing sugar and the pectin.
3. Make sure you have someone next to you ready to scratch your nose at any point. You'll need them.
4. Stick your hands in the bowl and squish the berries into pulpy little bits. Make sure the sugar is all mixed in.
5. Now that your hands are covered in gunk, your nose will begin to itch. This is perfectly normal, just ask the designated nose-scratcher to perform their assigned duties.
6. Once everything is mushed and scratched, add the other non-mushed berries to the bowl and mix them around gently (no more mushing).
7. Take the now firm cheesecake out of the fridge and pour the mushed berries on top.
8. Stick it back in the fridge until the afternoon.
9. Done.

### **On Octoberry afternoon**

1. Make some nice tea.
2. Serve up big slices of your Octoberry cheesecake.
3. Eat.