

Rip Van George

a short story by

Colin Owen

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"Did you feel that rumble last night George?" "Nope, once my head hits the pillow I'm gone. What was it?" Eric shrugged his shoulders. "Don't know what it was George, I just felt it. Could have been a quake, but it sure didn't sound like one." "What do you mean 'sound like one' Eric, Quakes just rumble don't they?" Eric scratched his head and looked puzzled. "I know that George, but this one played a tune." George's face was a picture. "A tune eh? Wasn't Elvis was it, he's been missing for a while you know." Eric had to smile. George had a singular wit which was one of the reasons why Eric liked him so much. "It wasn't that kind of tune George, it was more like a whining sound. It sort of came and went a bit, like someone was opening a door and then closing it again." "Well, whatever it was," George butted in, "I didn't hear it."

At that point, Maisie came in and opened up with, "Didn't sleep a wink for that infernal noise. Did either of you guys hear it?" Eric gave George the 'I told you so look' and left for work. "So what was it like Mais'? Eric said he heard a whining sound." "I heard the whining and felt the shaking, kept me awake for hours. How could you not have heard it?" George shrugged and said, "I'm a deep sleeper." "Lucky you," she replied, "a mouse runnin' across the carpet wakes me." George chuckled at the thought of it. "I'm beginning to feel left out here Mais' Am I the only guy around here that can sleep?" "Oh no," Maisie came back with a squeal, "old Mrs. Cornmeadow didn't hear it either." "MRS. CORNMEADOW!" George bellowed, "but she's three parts deaf, she has to be living so close to the railway. She could sleep through an F5 tornado, even if it took the house from under her!" Maisie smiled, it was true.

Later that evening, when the factory let out, they all met up in the pub for a drink and a relax after the days work. Talk of the happening had been rife throughout the little town all day, even the shop foreman had taken time to chat about it, something he never normally did. It was Eric's round, so he left the table to get them in. Maisie said, "Some folk are saying they saw lights as well. Bright green lights." "Probably too much beer," George answered, "you know what they're like round here." "Yes, I do George, they're just like us," she said swilling down the last of her pint of brown ale. They both laughed. This was how Eric found them on his return to the table with the tray of drinks. "Having a good time are we?" He said, joining in as he sat down. "It was the green lights that did it Eric," George said. "Seems that some folk saw green lights. You didn't see any green lights did you?" Eric ignored the dig and turned to Maisie. "It sounded to me like it was under ground somewhere. The sound seemed to come from below." "Funny you should say that Eric, cos word is, that the lights came from underground too." George's head was going to and fro as each spoke. "It's like watchin' a blummin' tennis match listening to you lot..." "Cheers," Maisie interrupted. They stayed another half an hour to finish their drinks, and then left.

George had farthest to go, living on the edge of town. It was a chilly night so his collar

was turned up against the cold. The extra pint was making its presence felt, so George wasn't exactly walking in a straight line, but it was nothing he couldn't handle. He got home Okay and went straight to bed. George wasn't much for watching TV, and he knew there was a pile of dishes waiting for him in the kitchen, so bed it was. As usual, he went through his little ritual of teeth cleaning, bed making and pillow fluffing. Once done, George's head hit the pillow and he was gone.

Several hours later, the ground began to shake. Lightly at first, but it soon built up into a sizeable quake. The whine was high pitched and came and went as it had the night before. George slept on. The green lights penetrated the curtains, and everything on the dressing table began to vibrate, making a chinking sound. As everything built up in intensity, things began to fall over. Just the little things to start with, but bed side lamps soon followed. By now, people were gathering in the street waiting for their houses to fall down. There was a lot of noise going on out there, one lady was screaming loudly until some brave soul slapped her face to shut her up. George, oblivious to it all, slept on.

An hour later, there was a panic in the street outside George's house. The ground began to rise up and fall back again. And each time it rose, the whine got louder, and green light poked its way through the soil. Almost every woman was screaming now, and some of the men too. Everyone started running in what ever direction they thought was away from the happening. The ground rose again, and this time it kept rising. Higher and higher it went until the soil at the top broke and began to fall back down the sides. A shaft of green light shot straight up into the air and lit up the clouds far above. The whine grew into a roar as more and more of the soil cleared from the top of the mound. An enormous silver spike appeared at the centre of the mound pushing upwards. At about a hundred feet, the mound stopped rising as though it was being restrained by something. Slowly, painfully slowly, it started rising again, only this time, some of the surrounding houses began to go up with it, including George's.

All the towns folk were long gone by now, just George remained sleeping soundly. His house rose up about 50 feet before it began to slide back down the slope of the mound. The huge ship finally broke free of it's burden and lifted clear of the ground for the first time in several thousand years. The roar became deafening as it climbed slowly up towards the clouds, eventually passing through them on its journey to who knows where. For miles around, the sky was lit up a bright green which made the country side look decidedly eerie. Several of the local houses fell into the huge hole in the ground that had been left by the ship. George's house was more fortunate and somehow managed to slip back to virtually its original position. The road was gone, as was his front garden, but the house itself was seemingly unharmed.

The alarm went off at its appointed time, and George awoke instantly and got out of bed. His usual routine kicked in and George was on auto pilot for the next half an hour. Breakfast consisted of toast and tea, as usual, followed by packing his lunch. George checked the house before leaving. On stepping through his front door, George fell headlong down the side of the crater stopping only at the bottom. He was unhurt, but totally bewildered. He had ended up in a sitting position with his lunch still under his arm. The sound of a voice high above him caused him to look upwards. "Hi George," it

was Maisie, "I suppose you slept through that one as well." George just looked up at her not saying a word. He hadn't a clue what she was talking about.