

Sol's First Day

“Sol, up and at em’. You’ve got to do your chores before the bus comes,” I hear mama holler from the kitchen. I pull the bed covers tighter around me. I need to gather my courage. Today is momentous. Ginormous. I’m a little scared. Today I start 6th grade. This morning I’m beaming aboard the school bus to zip to my new school on planet Unis. I’ve never even ever left Guernsey and today I’m rocketing to Unis!

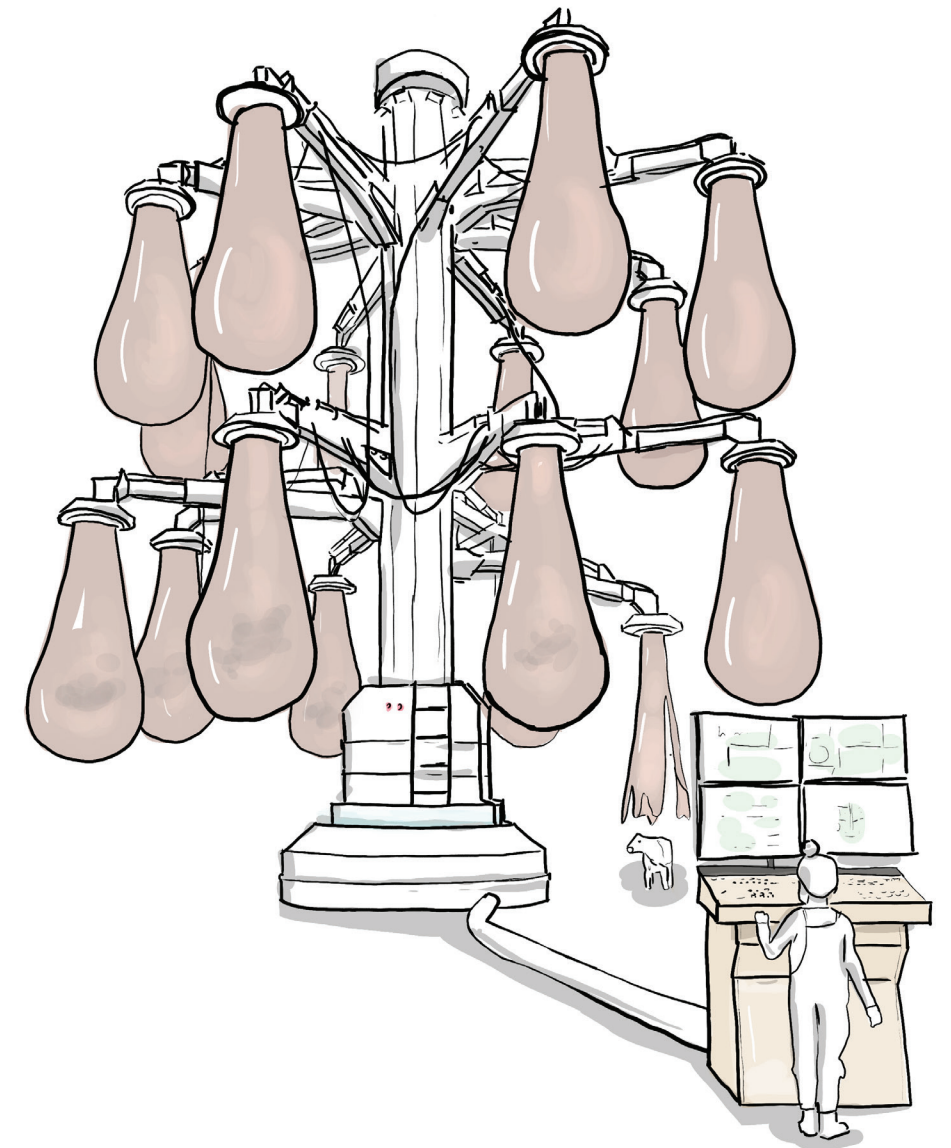
You should know, us kids on Guernsey are known as the hicks of the galaxy. We’re way out beyond the asteroid fields. I bet most folks couldn’t find us on a map of the galaxy if their lives depended on it. We don’t see many outsiders and daddy says there’s no reason to go anywhere ‘cause we have everything we need right here on Guernsey. Except schools, I guess.

Our family, including daddy’s relations from way back, has raised cattle on our 93,000 acre patch on Guernsey for a quarter of a millennium. Daddy likes to say, “Sol, if it weren’t for Guernsey, none of the yahoos in the galaxy’d have any burgers.” I know that’s true. Everybody likes a good burger. Everyone knows that cattle from Guernsey produce the best milk, cream and beef.

“Sol! Your chores aren’t going to do themselves,” mama shouts. Mama’s got a mighty persuasive voice so I get crack-a-lackin’! My job is to tend to the calf embryos.

The path to the calf embryo barn isn’t within the gravity shield, so after I pull on my new pink and grey Unis school jersey and leggings, I slip my feet into the gravity boots that mama wore when she was my age. I’ve got bruises to show what happens when I forget to wear mama’s boots. Last time, I whacked my elbow on the incubator, but good. Luckily I’m getting bigger. Once I’m a hundred pounds, I won’t need the boots no more. When I was seven, mama had to zap my head when I hit it on the auger in the barn ceiling. It was a bloody mess!

INCU-TECH BEEF GENERATION PODS V2.31





I love taking care of calf embryos. My job is to measure the manna (its chock full of good stuff for babies) into the nutrient mixer. I watch carefully as milky green sludgy stuff is pumped into the fetuses through connecting umbilical tubes. Mama is a stickler. The amount of manna for the embryos better be right, or I'll hear about it. I check the fetus density monitors. I'm especially careful when I feed the density numbers into the nutrient mixer. I watch to make sure the manna mixes and flows through the umbilical tubes in a nice even stream with no bubbles.

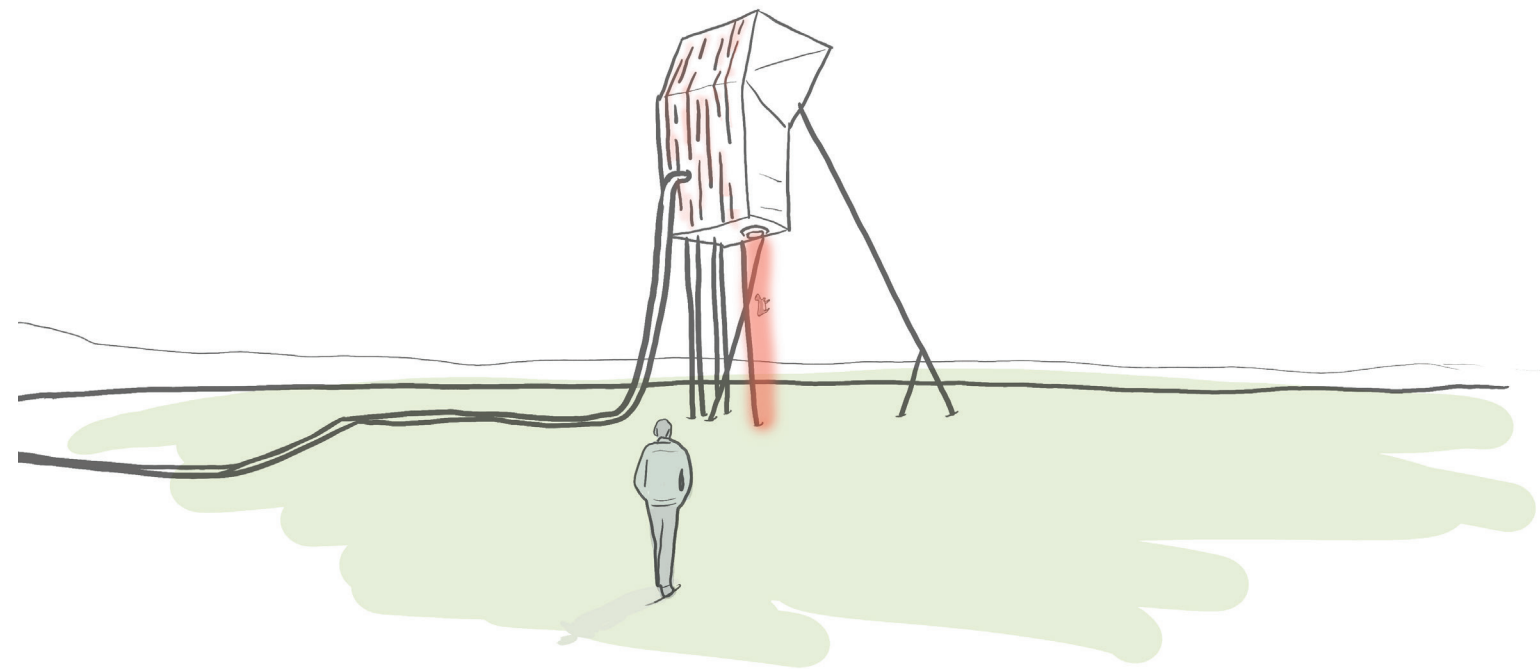
Mama put me in charge of the babies that are in their last 45 days of gestation. (By the way, I know a lot of big words like gestation, insemination and incubation, so if you have a question, just ask me.) In a way, I'm mama to 230 baby calves. I only name embryo #1. I always call her Bessie. It's funny, once the babies are done incubating and daddy moves them from the pens to the pastures, I can hardly tell one from another. I like to tell Bessie #1 she's a pretty girl. She blinks her big brown eyes at me through that waxy slime and I think she's saying, "GET ME OUT OF HERE!"

"Daddy, Bessie's ready to pop tonight," I say as I kick off my gravity boots and sit down to breakfast. Mama gives me a pink pancake shaped like a "U", for Unis I guess. I don't think it looks too appetizing, but say "Thanks, Mama," anyway. "Daddy, can I help move the calves out?" I ask.

Daddy says, "Mmmm." There's no interrupting him when he's watching the screen on his cap visor. "Looks like the market for methane is up again today," he says. "I look like a friggin' genius for hooking up with Nature's Gas."

"We look like friggin' geniuses," mama says, as she refills daddy's coffee cup. I remember when I was just a little kid – about the time when I hit my head on the auger – mama and daddy sitting at the breakfast table, talking about buying methane vacuums. The first generation had come out in 3447, but the methane storage unit needed more height for Nature's Gas collector drones. The Methane Vacuum Tall2 came into the Guernsey implement shop in 3451. Daddy was the first on Guernsey to buy in.

TALL(2) METHANE COLLECTION & CONDENSING TOWER





Of course some old-timers on Guernsey didn't much like Tall2s peppered across a landscape that hadn't changed in ages. They were used to seeing vistas of cows chewing their cud in meadows of green grass with a few Shepherds crawling about here and there. Some business folks said the Tall2s would keep tourists from coming to Guernsey. That's a laugh. I've never heard of a tourist in our territory. Mama and Daddy say that by the time I graduate high school they'll have enough money from selling methane gas that I can go to any university in the galaxy. I already know a lot of big words and I'm a hard worker.

In 4th grade we studied cow farts, cow burps and methane. Of course, my teacher didn't talk about "farts and burps," she said we were studying ozone layers and methane gas produced by cows. It's ancient history, but that's why Guernsey was established in the first place. Guernsey has the thickest ozone layer of any inhabitable planet – more than 300 miles of ozone -- so it became the planet for beef production: And cow farts! Now, Guernsey is going to be known throughout the galaxy for methane gas and heating houses of yahoos. Ha! If the yahoos only knew that burping and farting cows are keeping them from freezing.

Daddy beamed me up into a Tall2 three half days ago. I thought the methane pipes might blind me, even though I was wearing goggles. The pipes were friggin' bright! I hope Nature's Gas knows what it's doing, 'cause Tall2s are a work of complexity and confusion. It makes a person feel downright small standing under masses of plumbing with whooshings, blinkings and pingings coming from all directions.

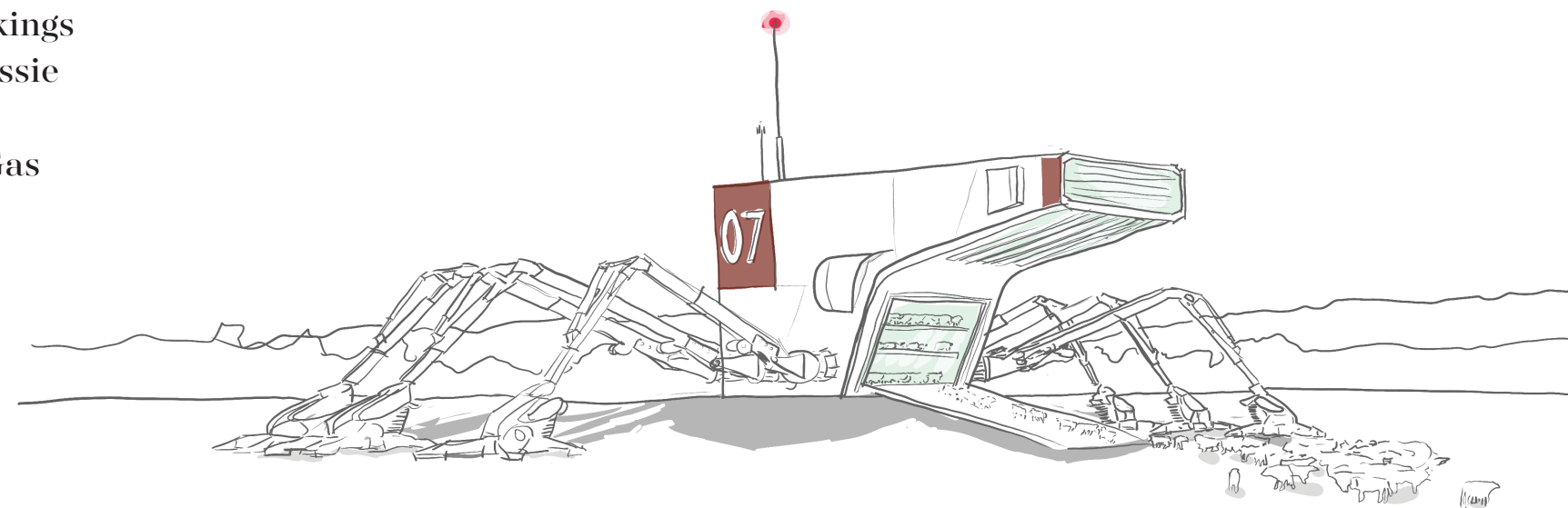


Daddy and I went straight up to Tall2's top lookout. Holy smokes! From that high up I could see clear to the Otium Mountains and the cow meadow where we pitched our tent last solstice. Of course finding a clear spot for our tent wasn't easy. Cow pies everywhere!

Every spring Shepherds transport the cows to the mountain meadows and we camp up there for five full days. The roundup is exciting to see as Shepherds creep through pastures like steely white spiders collecting cows in their webs. Those silly cows amble up the collector ramps as easy as one, two, three. It was my idea to have the Shepherds broadcast mama's voice calling, "Here Bessie. Here Bessie." Mama has a powerful voice that's impossible to ignore... even if you're a cow.

Speaking of Tall2... we had an adventure about 9 full-days ago. We'd released some of the Bessies from the pens into the pasture and danged if one of the Bessies didn't amble straight to a Tall2. She thought the legs would make good back scratchers, I guess. She was rubbing up against a leg and next thing our sweet Bessie knew she was beamed up into the workings of the Tall2! You've heard the saying "a bull in a china shop?" Well, Bessie ain't no bull, but she went plumb crazy. It took some doing to get her beamed back down to the ground. Daddy's negotiating with Nature's Gas about damages. Clearly, they've got a glitch in their giddy-up.

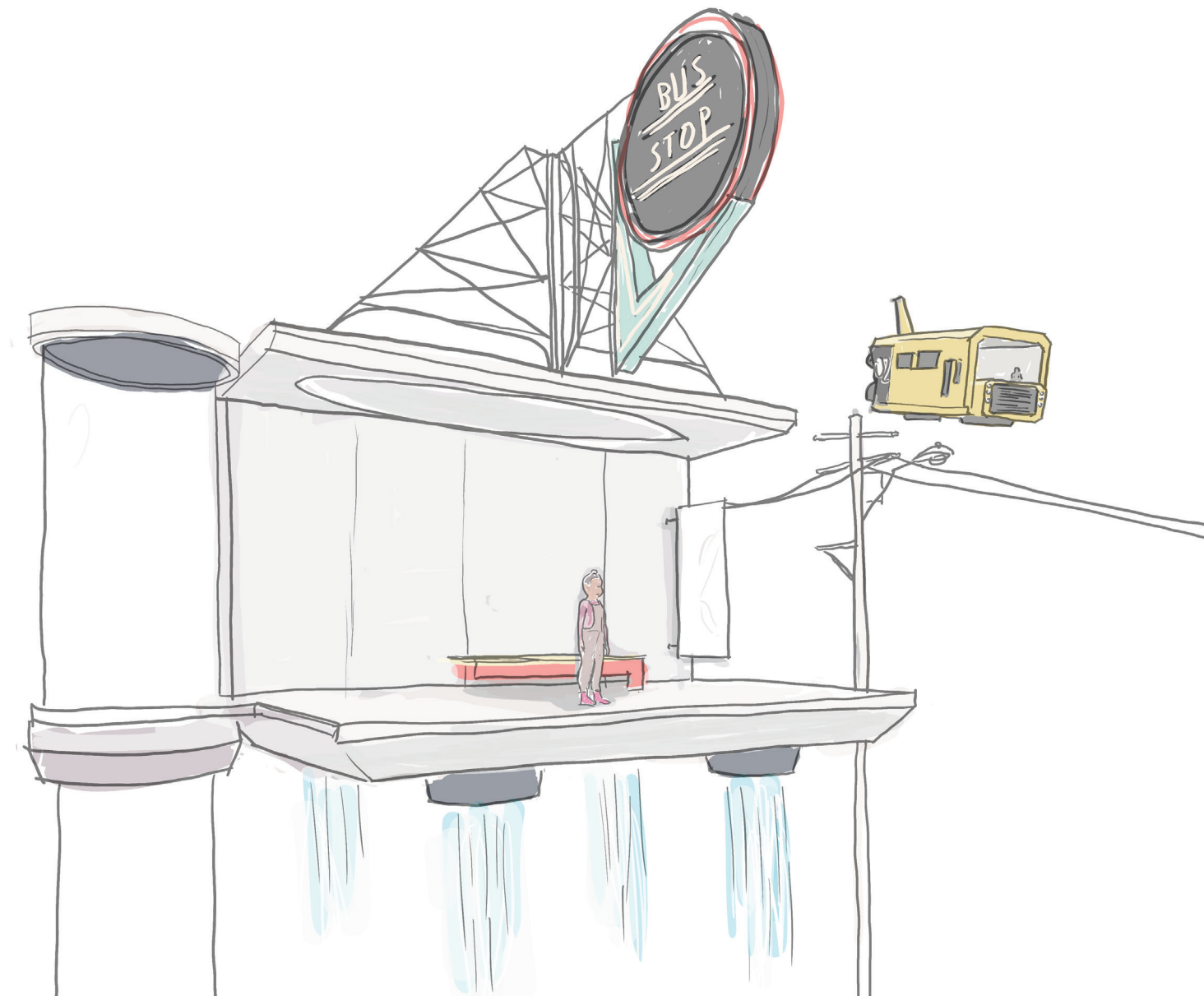
SHEPHERD - 500PC TRANSPORT: UNIT 07





G.G.I. TS(LG)
GALACTIC GENERAL ISSUE
TRANSIT STATION
(LOW GRAVITY PLANET USE ONLY)

Mama looked at the distance screen and said, “Finish up, Sol. The bus is here.”
“I’ll be back at half-day,” I say. I tap daddy’s cap and he looks up and says,
“You’ll do great, Sol. Have a good day.”
I hop on the beamer and think, “Hi ho, hi ho, it’s off to school I go.”





BUS
STOP

02
BUS

The End