

## Yoof by Mike Waugh

Camels today are exalted as semi-gods, but years ago, they used to be treated as man's modern day slaves. Back in 2030, some hippie actually rode on one, and he stumbled across an Arab tribe that used camel bile to bring about spiritual euphoria. And that's how it began. Gap-year kids, crusty stoners and the tantric types soon got wind of it. And from there it took less than ten years to go from illegal class A to knocking out licenses to peddle it wherever the hell you pleased. Everyone took it. Kids, grannies, vicars and prostitutes. The highs... well they were magnificent, but the lows left you with a hollow ache and an emptiness I can't quite describe.

Anyway, it didn't take long before people started to look at camels as the gateway to the gods. Charities grew up around them and the latest ruse was retirement villages for camels too old to produce Yoof - short for euphoria I guess. That's how I came to be found face to face with the business end of a worn-out humpback at the Camel Conservation Centre in Crawley. Crawley, I swear they just chose it for the alliteration.

Well, that wasn't the only reason. I was an ice-cream man by trade. You know why they call it ice-cream? Well, back in the olden days, they served up sugary cold poison made out of milk to the kids and hoped their teeth wouldn't fall out. Nowadays, I sold Yoof wrapped up in wholesome, organic, sugar-free vegetable wrappings. And we hope their brain doesn't fall out. Evolution of a kind.

Trade had been brisk all summer, until one day, one of the kids starting going ape-shit. The eye-rolls, which usually preceded the big rush, weren't quite right. I was serving, but I caught the kid coughing, staring at his shoes. And that's when it happened. He picked up a rock and started smashing this boy's head, repeatedly. I found out later, it was his baby brother. He later died from a brain haemorrhage and the little psycho... well, he's under surveillance now at a mental institute. I thought I might be in the firing line too, but the Drug Agency cleared me so fast, it was almost like the billions they received in tax revenue from the phenomenal sales of Yoof was a factor. But it bothered me you know?

What I was selling wasn't hookie. It wasn't cut with anything - it was just a bit old. I bought three gallons of it as a grey import for less than it would cost to fill my car with a mark-up big enough to buy a new one. After the kid went loopy I traced the batch code to a clapped out camel that was now spending its days watching daytime TV, and I wanted to get it tested. And you know, people say that traders like me have no morals. Well, that flat out hurts - I had been cleared of any wrongdoing, and I was paying out of my own pocket to make things good.

Actually, there was more. A couple more kids in the area had gone nuts too. Two weeks ago one kid strangled his mum with a Hoover cord, and just last week another decided to carve some choice Bible quotes into his arm with a Stanley knife. Ordinarily, that stuff washes over me, but I recognised their names. They were from my patch.

A funny thing about Yoof. Eight years ago, I met a funny little backward Arab guy, before Yoof took off. And you know he was banging on about we were all too immature to take this

stuff and why they've got the death penalty for consuming it over there, you know, proper caveman thinking. And he said to me - never give it to children, only harvest it from baby camels and always - and he leant in with his stinky breath to whisper this - always chase it with lemon juice. Like it was life or death or something! Apparently the Yuhanis tribe where it all kicked off had been doing this since time immemorial and they swore by it. He even told me what they called it... I struggle to remember but it'll come to me. Thing is though, sure, half the West are running around necking Yoof like smarties but you got to look at where the advice comes from. I mean look - we've got central heating, TVs and smartphones. Them - fires, chants and a bit of camel bile to pass the time. Don't take advice from an idiot is my motto.

Whatever, I was in this retirement home, under the cover of a story about being a camel herder who wanted to see one of his old girls. I'd sedated this beast called Nora, and I rammed in a needle to extract some bile to get some tests run and who should walk in? The same little Arab guy. And he carries on talking to me as if the last eight years never happened. Except this time, the guy looks crestfallen. It gets worse though. I share with him what's happened and he then breaks down into floods of tears. I mean, properly crying as if his own family had been affected! Seriously, these backward types, what's wrong with them? That's not all, he started to push me, then punch me, raining down his little puny fists on my chest. Like I could drop the guy in seconds so I just left him there yelling and screaming as he spiralled into despair.

The tests come back, and the stuff is kosher, but a little odd like I knew. I breathed a sigh of relief. But in the past week, I've noticed a few more really odd melt-downs. Some middle-aged girl with a Samurai sword in her local church decided to chop up her congregation. Well she would have done had she not had a heart-attack in the middle of her meltdown. And at that concert last night some guy went on the rampage trying to cave everyone's skulls in which might have been standard practice at a metal gig. But this was folk for crying out loud. Gentle, pappy folk music.

I don't know, but the main thing is I'm in the clear. And yeah, I remember the name now - the Yuhanis tribe. They only gave the stuff to the elders approaching death, and they called it Trojan. That's it, Trojan.