

BUSTING

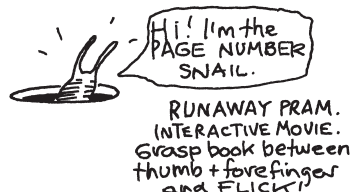
I'm in the supermarket trying to remember what groceries Mum wanted me to pick up, but I can't think. I can't breathe. I can't do anything. I'm busting. And I don't mean busting. I mean BUSTING!

I've got to find a toilet. Fast. Then I can come back and think about the shopping with a clear head. Or not so much a clear head as an empty bladder.

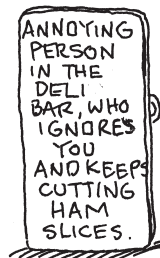
I haven't got a second to lose. I run down the aisle and skid round the corner.

WHAM!

Straight into an old guy with a walking frame. He staggers forward and crashes into a stack of cans. They go rolling all over the floor. The old man is lying in the middle of them.



‘Well, don’t just stand there,’ he says. ‘Help me up!’



I reach down, take hold of his hand and pull him to his feet. Luckily he’s not very heavy. I stand his walking frame up for him. He’s muttering words I don’t understand.

The store manager appears. I can tell he’s the store manager because his pants are too tight. Plus he’s wearing a badge that says Store Manager.

‘What happened?’ he says.

Before I can say anything the old man answers.



‘This silly young boy knocked me over. It wouldn’t have happened in my day. When I was young we respected our elders.’

‘It was an accident!’ I say.

‘Were you running?’ says the store manager.

‘Yes,’ I say, ‘but I’m . . .’



‘There’s no excuse,’ he says. ‘I think you owe this gentleman an apology. Then you can pick up all the cans.’

‘But I’m busting!’

‘You should have thought about that before you started knocking people over and destroying my displays,’ he says.

I get the feeling that I’m going to get out



of here quicker if I just do what he says. I turn to the old man.

'I'm sorry,' I say. 'I shouldn't have been running and I hope you're not hurt.'

He shrugs and mutters something else that I can't understand. I start picking up the cans. I can't believe how far they've rolled. Some have rolled at least two or three aisles away. And the store manager makes me pick up every last one.

By the time I've finished I'm seriously busting.

But I know better than to run out of the store. This time I just walk very quickly.

I get outside the supermarket and into the main shopping centre. I'm looking for a sign pointing to the toilets. I can't see one.

There is a man selling pencils outside the supermarket.

'Excuse me,' he says. 'Want to buy a pencil?'

'No thanks,' I say.

'They're cheap—twenty cents each.'

'No thank you,' I say.

'Just one,' he says. 'One lousy pencil!'

'I haven't got time!' I say.

'You could have bought one by now,' he says.

WHAT IS
THE NEXT
WORD
in this
series?
+ POW!
+ SLAM!
+ FZZZP!
+ ---
Ans: Pg 93





For
information
on HOW TO
WIN A
LIFETIME'S
SUPPLY OF
FREEZER
BAGS,
turn to
Page:186.
→

What kind
of freezer
bags?



'How many times do I have to say it?' I say. 'I don't want—or need—a pencil. What I need is a toilet. I'm busting!'

His shoulders drop. He sighs heavily. He looks like he's going to cry. If he's trying to make me feel bad then he's succeeding.

'Okay,' I say, fumbling for change. 'I'll have a pencil.'

I can't find a twenty-cent piece. All I can find is a two dollar coin.

'Have you got change?' I say.

'No,' he says. 'You're the first one to buy a pencil today.'

'Keep the change then,' I say.

'No, that wouldn't be right,' he says. 'I'm not looking for charity.'

'Fine,' I say, 'give me ten pencils!'

He counts the pencils out really slowly, one by one. He makes a mistake and has to start again. I'm shifting from foot to foot.

Finally he hands the pencils to me.

'Have a great day,' he says.

'I will if I don't bust,' I say. I run off before he figures out another way to waste my time.

I'm running as fast as I can, but I'm not sure where to. I have no idea where the toilets are. This shopping centre is too big.



There are too many levels. Too many people getting in my way. I want to scream.

I trip and stumble. I look down. My shoelaces have come undone. I hate my shoelaces. It doesn't matter how well I tie them up, they just keep coming undone. I can't ignore them, either, because they're extra long laces. Now I have to stop and waste valuable toilet-searching seconds doing them up.

I kneel down. It's not easy. It's putting pressure on a part of my body that's already under too much strain. I grab the laces and pull them tight. I loop them around each other. Then I loop the loops together and pull them tight as well. That should hold it. At least for a little while. I do the other shoe. I try to stand up. It hurts even more than kneeling down. I don't have much time.

Suddenly, hanging overhead, I find the sign I've been looking for. A picture of a man, a woman, a wheelchair and an arrow pointing to the left. I turn and sprint down a little corridor. I can see the toilets up ahead of me.

Oh no. I don't believe it. There's a yellow plastic pyramid outside the toilet.

Closed for cleaning!

THIS IS TOO LONG PAGE.



SHOPPING HINTS.

- Go into the butcher's shop.
- Ask them if they sell meat.
- Ask them how much it is.
- Do they have any Friesian?
- Does it come with chips?
- Can you have it in a cone?





Of all the times to clean a toilet, why now?
Why not at night when there's nobody here?
Should I try to find another toilet or just wait?

I'll wait.

But I'm busting.

I can't wait.

But I can't not wait.

I have to go. Right now.

Why does life have to be so difficult?

Hang on! The handicapped toilet is not closed.



Can you go to jail for using a handicapped person's toilet when you're not really handicapped? Surely not. I'm sure nobody would mind. I'm busting so bad I'm practically handicapped anyway.

I hobble up to the door and push it open. It's vacant. I want to go in but something is stopping me. It would be so easy to just slip in here, and yet, so wrong.

If I get away with using this toilet, who's to say where or when it will stop? I could be taking the first step towards a life of crime. Today the handicapped toilets—tomorrow I'll be leaving my bike in the spaces reserved for handicapped drivers and walking up disabled



access ramps instead of taking the stairs.

I can't do it. I let go of the door. I might be busting, but I'm not a criminal.

'Hey!' yells a voice. 'You can't use that toilet! You're not handicapped!'

I turn around. Oh no. It's the old guy with the walking frame. He's hobbling up the corridor towards me.

'I'm not going to use it,' I say, backing away from the door.

'Then why did you have the door open?' he says.

'Well, I *was* going to use it but . . .'

'A-ha! I thought so,' he says. 'Tearing around the supermarket and knocking people over. Using the handicapped people's toilets and stopping the truly handicapped from using them. You're a menace to society. I'm going to call a security guard!'

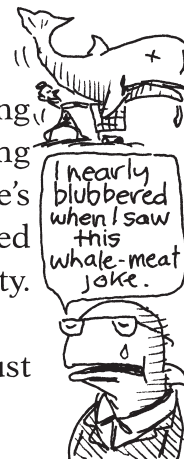
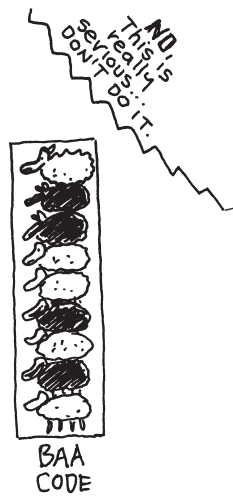
'No!' I say. 'I'm not a menace—I'm just busting!'

But the old man is not listening.

'Help! Guards! Arrest this boy!'

He's crazy. I've got to get out of here. He's creating such a racket you'd think he was being murdered or something.

I run down the corridor and back into the



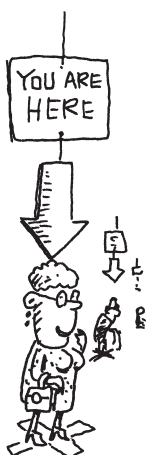
shopping centre. I'm not sure where I'm going. I need to find a location map.



I pass a shop with an enormous poster of a river in the front window. It's an ad for a video called *Great Rivers of the World*. If I don't find a toilet fast there'll be one more great river in the world. Right here in the shopping centre.

I can't hold out much longer. I can hear splashing. Uh-oh. I look down.

No, it's not coming from me. That's a relief. Well, sort of.



I look around. It's coming from the indoor fountain. There are about fifty thousand jets of water spraying in every direction. The sound of all that water is excruciating, but it does give me an idea. Maybe I could go in the fountain. I could get in, stand in the middle and pretend to be a statue. I could squirt water out of my mouth at the same time. Nobody will even realise.

But hang on! In front of the fountain is a map of the shopping centre. Fantastic!

I hobble over to the map. Hmmm. There are about half a million shops spread across three levels. So there are actually three maps. Lower, middle and upper with letters and



numbers around the border of each one. It's very complicated.

And the sound of all that splashing is not making it any easier to concentrate. Whose idea was it to put a fountain inside a shopping centre anyway? I'd like to find that person and tell them they made a big mistake. And I'd like to find the person who made the shopping centre. I think they made the biggest mistake of all.

This shopping centre is way too big. I mean do we really need button shops? Or shops that sell nothing except stuff made out of cane? And as if there aren't already more than enough shops to buy gifts in, some genius comes up with the idea of a gift shop. As far as I'm concerned, the only thing more stupid than a gift shop is a shop that sells nothing but cat ornaments—and there's one of those here as well.

It doesn't help that the front of the map is suddenly smeared with water. I turn around. Two little kids are squirting each other with water pistols.

'Quit it!' I say.

They don't reply. They just squirt me. Right in the front of my pants.





There's a guy wearing a rainbow-coloured shirt standing next to me. He looks like a hippie but I'll ask him anyway. That's how desperate I am.

'Excuse me,' I say.

He turns towards me. His eyes are half-closed. He looks like he hasn't slept for about three weeks.

'Can you help me find the toilets?' I say.

'Looks like it's a bit late,' he says in a slow voice.

'What do you mean?' I say.

He points to the front of my pants.

'That's not what you think it is,' I say. 'But it will be if you don't help me find the toilets.'

'Chill out, man,' says the hippie. He turns back to the map and studies it carefully. 'Says here the toilets are at M 16 on level two.'

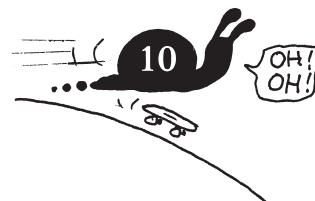
'What level are we on now?' I say.

'Ummm, level three,' he says, squinting at the map. 'No, hang on . . . level one . . . oops—make that level four.'

'Level four?' I say. 'There's no such level!'

'Hey, man,' says the hippie, 'open your mind. There are many levels. More levels than you ever dreamed of.'

'Are you insane?' I say.



'Relax,' he says. 'Take it easy.'

'I can't!' I yell. 'I'm busting! I've got to get to a toilet! Quick!'

'No man, you're missing the point,' he says. 'The destination's not important. The journey is where it's at.'

'Not when you're busting it's not,' I say.

I can't stand still any longer. I start running. I see an escalator going up. I jump on.

I don't believe it. It's almost too good to be true. At the top of the escalator is a sign. A man, a woman and a wheelchair.

I bound up the last few steps and leap off the escalator. Suddenly my leg is jerked backwards.

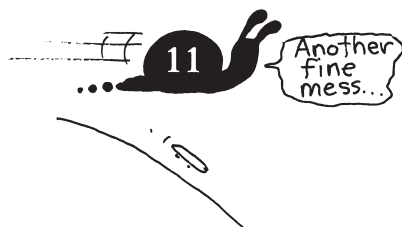
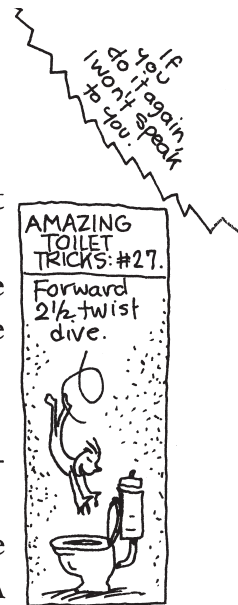
I look behind me.

My shoelace is caught in the top of the escalator! I try to pull my foot away, but I can't. The lace is in too deep.

I have to unlace my shoe.

I bend down and poke my finger in between the tongue and the lace. But I can't pull the lace out because the escalator has grabbed the other end of it as well. My finger is trapped.

The laces are being pulled tighter and tighter. My finger is going bright red. It's throbbing.



Great! Now I'm busting *and* I've got my shoelace stuck in an escalator *and* my finger stuck in my shoe.

I have to get my shoe off. I don't care about my shoe. All I care about is . . . well you know what I care about.

I put the index finger of my other hand into the back of my shoe to try to lever my heel out.

Oh no.

I don't believe it.

I can't get my finger out of the back of the shoe. The shoe is getting tighter. And tighter. And tighter.

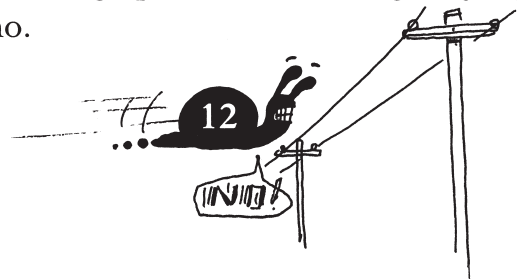
The escalator is sucking. And sucking. And sucking.

There's nothing I can do, apart from chew my foot off. That's it! Chewing! Only I don't have to chew through my ankle . . . just my shoelace.

I bend right down. I'm trying to get close enough to the lace to take a good bite. All of a sudden my scalp starts burning. My hair is caught in the escalator!

This is like the most impossible and painful game of Twister ever. I'm bent over double, looking upside down through my legs.

Oh no.



The old man is coming up the escalator. He's got his walking frame held out in front of him. He's coming right for me.

He hits me fair and square in the bum.

I tumble forward. The shoelace has snapped and a huge chunk of my hair has been ripped out, but I don't care. I'm free!

'Now we're even!' shouts the old man.

'No we're not,' I say, scrambling to my feet, 'because you just did me a big favour!'

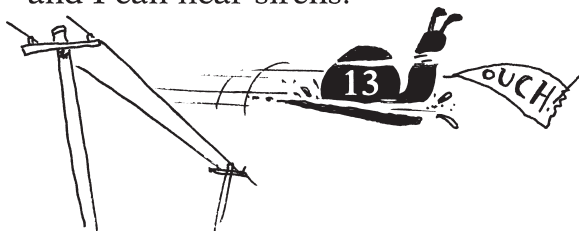
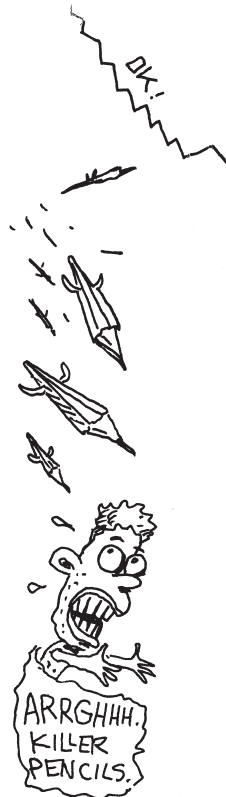
He looks dumbfounded.

I start running.

I'm almost there. Only a few metres more. Something is stabbing me in the leg. What is that? I put my hand into my pocket.

Aaaggh! Something jabs me in the thumb. It's those stupid pencils. They're too sharp. Like little spears. They could do me a serious injury in there. As I pull them out of my pocket they spill onto the ground in front of me. Uh-oh. Bad move. I'm going too fast to stop. I slip up on them and fall backwards. I whack my head.

Next thing I know I'm being shaken awake. I open my eyes. A fireman is kneeling beside me. The corridor is filled with smoke and I can hear sirens.



IN CASE
OF FIRE:



TAKE PROPER
PRECAUTIONS



AVOID
PANIC



ASSIST
OTHERS



PADDLE
CALMLY TO
THE EXITS



'Wake up!' says the fireman. 'Are you okay?'

'What?' I say. 'What's happening?'

He lifts me to my feet. I slip on a pencil and fall back down.

'You have to get out of here,' he says. 'Fire!'

He lifts me up again and starts shepherding me towards the exit. Away from the toilet!

I try to head back towards the toilet but he grabs me.

'Wrong way,' he says, pointing towards the exit. 'That way.'

'But I have to go to the toilet,' I say, 'I'm busting!'

'You'll have to wait,' says the fireman. 'It's not safe! You have to get out of the building.'

'Not safe?!' I say. 'If I don't get to the toilet soon, nobody will be safe. This shopping centre will be flooded!'

But he's not listening. He's escorting me to the exit.

Outside there are four fire trucks in a row. The firemen are spraying enormous arcs of water onto the building. It might be helping to extinguish the fire but it's definitely not helping me.



I overhear the fire chief talking on his walkie-talkie.

'All we know is that the fire appears to have started in one of the escalators,' he says. 'Some foreign material may have got in there and shorted the system. Until we can put the fire out we can't be sure. But to do that we're going to need back-up units . . . as many as you've got.'

He wipes the sweat off his brow.

Suddenly I know what I have to do. I can solve my problem and be a hero at the same time.

'Excuse me,' I say, 'you're not going to need those back-up units.'

'What are you talking about?' he says.

'You've got me,' I say.

'Huh?'

'Watch this!' I say.

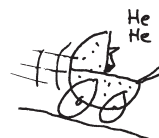
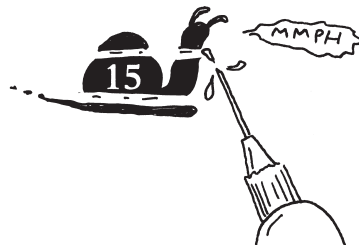
I go as close to the burning building as I can. I grab hold of my fly. I take aim.

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh. Relief! Beautiful relief. The fire is powerless against me. It disappears in clouds of steam. People are gathered around applauding. The supermarket manager is there. And the pencil seller. And the hippie. Even the old man. Cheering.

AS A
CHIEF
FIRE
OFFICER
I object to
this STUPID
and unreal-
istic attempt
at FIRE
CONTROL.
The author's
just being
Stupid!!



I'm
JUST
STUPIDER





Chanting my name. I don't know how they know my name but I don't care about that right now. All I care about is how good this feels. And how warm. It's so warm.

I roll over and snuggle down deeper into my blankets. My blankets? What are my blankets doing here? And why am I wearing pyjamas?

I blink a few times. I rub my eyes.

There's no shopping centre. There are no fire trucks. No people.

I'm in my bedroom. In my bed. Wrapped in my blankets. Putting out a fire. Only there's no fire either.

I hate that.

