

Mr Mets Episode 5: Dr Ambaum's Impactful Solution

Last time on the Mr Mets...

King Simon, King of Happy Met Land, announced to the Happy Met Landers that the land was officially rich. His plan was to use the money to fill Happy Met Land with as many eminent scientists as he could, so he gave Dr Methven a list and instructed him to fly off in his plane to fetch them. While this was happening, King Simon decided to exile a number of the Happy Metlanders to the distant Sugarland to make space for his new intake. However, on the way to the roof, Dr Methven forgot what he was meant to be doing and decided to cycle home instead. He also kept bringing back the wrong people, and this angered King Simon, causing him to transform into the REF monster. The REF monster then swallowed Prof Lockwood – and his guitar.

As time went by, the population of Happy Met Land continued to grow. Dr Methven was sent off on mission after mission to recruit scientists from around the world. After initially forgetting, he had finally remembered to bring back Dr Watt. Just to be sure, though, he had also brought back Dr Where, Dr When, Dr Why and Dr Who. The REF monster seemed strangely pleased with this, although when the Doctor had to leave, he left behind yet another addition to the Land.

A few months later, the REF monster still reigned supreme. In an attempt to motivate the Happy Met Landers to work harder, he had installed a new vending machine. Prof Harrison was explaining to Dr Methven how it worked.

"So, it's quite simple, actually," said Prof Harrison. "You take a coin out of your pocket, like so, put it in the slot and then you make your selection."

"What's a vending machine?" said Dr Methven.

Prof Harrison gestured towards the words "VENDING MACHINE" written on the machine in large letters. "What do you think this is, a giant radiosonde? Now, what do you want out of it?"

A smile spread across Dr Methven's face as he thought. "A radiosonde!" he said. "I need some to drop on my next intrepid adventure!"

"You can't vend radiosondes!" guffawed Dr Woolnough.

"You couldn't until I modified it," said Prof Harrison. "Look – we press R, S, 9, 2." Prof Harrison held up a radiosonde and grinned.

"That's amazing," said Dr Ambaum.

"Almost as good as my croquet skills," said Dr Woolnough.

As lunchtime approached, more Happy Met Landers gathered near the vending machine. "What are you all doing standing around here?" said Dr Frame. "Come on, it's time for lunch – let's go and sit in the coffee room."

"Good idea," said Prof Clark. "A whole hour when I can talk about me. Hooray!"

"There's nowhere to sit, though," grumbled Dr Ambaum. "Those pesky PhD students have joined all the tables together again. And taken all the chairs."

Their conversation was then interrupted by the arrival of the REF monster. "Lunch?" he roared. "You are planning to have lunch?"

"Well, yes," said Prof Harrison.

"Lunch is for losers!" shouted the REF monster. "In the time you have been stood here chatting, Prof Shepherd has written another six papers, two of which have been accepted for publication in Nature. What have you done? Back to work at once!"

As Prof Shepherd stood in front of them, grinning and waving his hands, the Met Landers reflected on just how hard the last few months had been under the REF monster's rule.

Dr Ambaum was the first to snap. "I'm sick of this!" he snapped. "That's one step too far. It's all publish, publish, publish and impact, impact, impact, but to deny a group of eminent meteorologists their LUNCH? All I want to do is shove my book right up his..."

"Easy!" shouted Dr Van Leeuwen. "There's no need for that. Just give the book to me – I'll drop it on him. From up here, it could easily reach terminal velocity."

"Actually," said Prof Harrison, "I've just written a book too. It's very good."

"We need to have a meeting to sort this out once and for all. Dr Methven – get on your bike and go and fetch the Sugarlanders. We'll need them onside too."

"Right away," said Dr Methven.

"Are you sure that's wise?" asked Dr Frame.

"Good point," said Dr Ambaum. "I'll send them an e-mail. Let's gather in the Synoptic Lab in an hour to hatch a plan. But – not a word to anyone."

"You mean – a SECRET MEETING?" shouted Dr Woolnough.

"Sssshhh!" hissed Dr Frame.

"I can distract the REF monster, if you like," said Prof Clark. "I'll go to his office and talk to him. There's no way he'll be able to escape."

So they met in the Synoptic Laboratory and discussed how best to defeat the REF monster. Dr Ambaum had many good suggestions. However, for every good idea that the Happy Met Landers liked, Mr Gill vetoed it on health and safety grounds. Plan after plan was put before the Happy Met Landers, but every time Mr Gill said no. Until Dr Ambaum came up with one final plan that everyone agreed was totally awesome...

With help, Dr Ambaum set off to the coffee room to set up the plan. As the trigger rope was lowered into place, he couldn't resist the opportunity to let out a slightly evil cackle. But it was interrupted by the arrival of Prof Highwood.

"Sorry we're late," said Prof Highwood. "The journey over was terrible. The lift was broken again and the stairwell was out of order, so we had to abseil down the building. Prof Illingworth fell off and landed in a bamboo bush. Prof Shine got stuck in the mud on the way over. And Dr Charlton-Perez wouldn't stop tweeting. Then, we found the FAAM aircraft stuck in the mud. So what's the plan?"

Dr Ambaum chuckled. "The REF monster will address us all today at 12:00. One sharp tug on this rope, and the monster will get a surprise he will never forget."

"Where is everyone?" said Prof Highwood. With one whistle, the coffee room filled with Happy Met Landers – just in time for the arrival of... King Simon and Prof Lockwood.

"Good news!" declared King Simon. "The REF report has now been submitted!"

The Happy Met Landers were so surprised, all they could do was stare.

"What's happened to all of you?" said King Simon.

"You're safe!" said Dr Ambaum. "When you transformed into the REF monster, we thought that was it!"

"You ate Prof Lockwood!" said Prof Highwood. "Yet he is alive and well!"

"I think you have some explaining to do!" shouted Dr Woolnough.

"Well," began King Simon. "With REF was on the way, I could see that we needed to do was to write as many papers in high-impact journals as possible. It didn't matter if they were terrible – as long as they were out there. So I figured that the only way to make this happen was to transform myself."

"What?" said Dr Ambaum.

"Don't forget that, while I am your King, I am actually a Mathematician and we have many powers that mere Meteorologists are unaware of. For a start, we have the power to turn green and appear evil. All mathematicians have the power to turn themselves green – it's just that most don't know it. So I figured the best way to succeed at REF was to become the evil, green REF monster and terrorise you all into writing papers."

"What?" said Prof Highwood.

"I also knew that, even in my green state, I needed a little more power to motivate you to write papers. That's why Prof Lockwood had to help me out. And – to clarify – I did not eat him. Mathematicians don't eat people, they merely assimilate them. A simple plan."

"WHAT?!" shouted Dr Ambaum and Prof Highwood in unison.

"So you see? All your hard work over the last few months has paid off. Now I look like the awesome person that made Happy Met Land even greater than ever."

Dr Ambaum did not respond. He merely pulled the rope.

In walked King Simon and Prof Lockwood. "Hello, Metlanders!" said King Simon.

King Simon laughed loudly. "That was me," he said. "You see, REF is very important to this Land. We need to succeed in it to stand a chance. Money doesn't grow on trees, you know. For all riches, there must be a cost."

"But what about Prof Lockwood?" asked Prof Highwood. "You ate him! How can we trust you?"

King Simon laughed loudly again. "No, no, no," said King Simon. "I'm a mathematician. I don't eat people – I merely assimilate them. With my REF alter-ego, I was not strong enough to work you to the level needed to pass the REF. With Prof Lockwood on board, we are sure to succeed."

Prof Lockwood walked in looking dishevelled. "Look at him!" said Dr Ambaum. "You've ruined him!"

"He'll be fine," said King Simon. "And now we can all get back to normal, working hard to produce as much impact as we can."

"Impact?" said Dr Ambaum. "Impact this." He reached across and pulled the string.