

Regrettably, we begin this episode of the Mr Mets once more with an apology. For the last few years, it appears that we may have been attempting to influence Prof Clark's actions in the real world by portraying him in the Mr Mets as always doing silly things – such as hitting himself on the head with a plastic bottle; standing on one leg, hopping up and down and shouting, “Biblbblblblblblah!”, and talking about himself all the time. The creators of Mr Mets apologise and would like to assure that Prof Clark will not be parodied in such a way in this episode of Mr Mets. Well, not much...

And now, we begin **The Adventures of the Mr Mets. Episode 8: “Prof Clark Solves a Problem”**.

It had been a great year in Happy Met Land. Under the support of Prof Highwood, Happy Met Land had been presented with an Athena Swan Silver award – a highly prestigious award recognising the Land's commitment to gender equality. The only down side to the award was the large silver swan called Athena that had been living on the croquet lawn ever since, making this year's Golden Mallet tournament a real challenge. Some say a swan can break a man's arm. Well, the Athena Swan is so committed to gender equality that, after breaking a man's arm, it will be sure to break a woman's arm too. Happy Met Land was also working towards a Stonewall award for diversity in the hope to be able to use the stone wall to build a sort of pen to keep the swan from attacking people.

But not everyone was quite so happy in Happy Met Land that day. In his office, Prof van Leeuwen was feeling out of sorts. Something was niggling at the back of his head. Only this time, it wasn't the challenges of applying 4D-Var to data on a non-Gaussian pseudo-trapezoidal grid. It wasn't the complexities of solving a six-dimensional underconstrained matrix inversion problem using differential calculus and Edam cheese. And it certainly wasn't a flea.

“What's wrong?” said Prof Ambaum, popping his head round the door. “I've not seen you in a seminar for weeks.”

“Oh, I don't know,” said Prof van Leeuwen. “I've been feeling a bit strange for a while now. It's a weird mixture of emotions.”

“Have you been marking student lab reports again?” said Prof Ambaum.

“No, no,” said Prof van Leeuwen. “I am getting the occasional urge to be... villainous. I've been feeling like this for a while now. Since last December. The eighth of December to be exact. But I cannot remember what happened on that day, or why it would make me feel like being... villainous.”

“I know what it is,” said Dr Thompson, appearing in the doorway. “And both Prof Ambaum and me have suffered it in the past. Think about it, it's obvious. Eighth of December; mixed emotions; feelings of villainy. It's clearly the strange feeling you get when you end up being cast as the villain in the Panto. Prof van Leeuwen – you were last year's villain, and you are now suffering from Panto-Parody-Itis. There's no easy way of saying it – you have PPI.”

“So that's why I keep getting phoned in my office by automated phone numbers!” said Prof van Leeuwen.

“I suffered that too,” said Prof Ambaum. “I've been the panto villain in the past. Some say it triggered me to write my book.”

“I have been the panto villain more times than anyone else,” said Dr Thompson. “I find that PPI still surfaces today – mostly... when people start getting their statistics calculations wrong and present results that are misleading.”

“You mean, like... when they use a Student's T-test when the underlying distribution is nowhere near Gaussian?” said Prof van Leeuwen, chuckling.

“And when they blindly use a paired T-test in place of an unpaired T-test!” said Prof Ambaum.

“And when they cannot grasp the very simple principle that, in significance testing, a failed test is not disproving what you were hypothesising, but not proving what you were trying to disprove by testing the opposite of what you wanted to prove in the first place,” added Dr Tailleux.

“We need to teach those pesky PhD students a lesson,” said Prof Ambaum. “They are the worst culprits. Listen – it's Quo Vadis next week. Dr Thompson – are you thinking what I'm thinking?”

“I think so – and it's a plan that is as genius as my recent idea of recalibrating the Chilbolton radar and using it to track Pokemon!”

Quo Vadis came around – the annual series of obligatory presentations given by the PhD students about their work. The students waited outside the Synoptic Laboratory, looking nervous.

“So, let me get this straight,” said Prof van Leeuwen. “We listen to the presentation. The moment they say something we don’t like, we hit the buzzer.”

“That’s right,” said Prof Ambaum. “And if all four of us buzz, the student falls through a trapdoor in the floor.”

“That sounds a bit harsh to me,” said Prof Clark, bouncing into the room.

“Is Health and Safety OK with us dropping people through the floor?” asked Dr Tailleux.

“It’s fine,” said Prof Ambaum. “There’s a crash-mat for them to land on downstairs. Obviously we needed it put in place by someone reliable, dependable and who never gets anything wrong. So we got Prof Methven to do it.”

Quo Vadis began in earnest. First up was Mr Beverley, discussing his project that fused the Asian Summer Monsoon with cricket. However, the panel was not impressed. One by one, the PhDs came along and, one by one, their work was deemed unacceptable by the panel and they were relegated to the labs via the trapdoor and Prof Methven’s poorly sited crash mat. The fifteen-minute presentations the PhD students had prepared were being heartlessly cut short – in some cases, to as little as fifteen seconds as the apparent villainy of the panel grew and grew.

Meanwhile, downstairs in the labs, the PhD students were commiserating with Prof Clark.

“What’s going on up there?” asked Mr Johnston.

“I’ve never seen them that villainous before,” said Mr Beverley.

“The answer to that is simple,” said Prof Clark. “They are both suffering from Panto-Parody-Itis.”

“Panto-Parody-Itis?” asked Miss Harris.

“That’s right,” said Prof Clark. “Sometimes when you represent someone in a panto with certain personality traits or certain mannerisms, there is a deep psychological urge to be that character – to do those things in real life. But, you will be pleased to hear, I have never adopted any mannerisms from a panto – in other words, I have never claimed PPI. In reality, I have never spent a lunch break talking about myself, never bashed myself on the head with a plastic bottle, or indeed stood on one leg, hopped up and down and shouted “Biblbblblblblblah!” Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to go up and talk to them and stop this stupid PPI thing once and for all.” With that, Prof Clark walked confidently out of the lab and made his way upstairs to the Synoptic Lab.

“Didn’t work that time, but I’ll try again.”

“How about not standing on the trapdoor when you talk to them?” said Mr Talib.

“Good idea.”

Within half an hour, Prof Clark’s method of sorting out everyone’s PPI had worked. No one knew exactly what he did, although based on the way Prof Ambaum, Prof van Leeuwen, Dr Thompson and Dr Tailleux were behaving afterwards, it seemed to have done the trick.