



The Drip

By Rowan le Fay

World renowned archaeologist, Humphrey Miner, believed that he had made the discovery of a lifetime. No one at the archaeological society believed he would be able to do it, because respectable academics all refuted the existence of the Sunken Supermarket. Nobody had ever been able to find it, but Humphrey *had*!

All the experts had, with the information gathered from the legends, concluded that the location of the Sunken Supermarket might possibly be in the area of Lower Early, where the town of Reading used to be. However, after many excavations of this area of wasteland, the archaeologists' efforts had yielded no results. But that was because they were looking in the wrong place. There had been traces of ruins of a supermarket in the Lower Early area, but not the famous one which had supposedly sunk to the bottom of a giant lake.

Humphrey had dedicated his life to finding the location of the Sunken Supermarket. His years of research had led him to theorize that the location of the Sunken Supermarket was indeed in the town of Reading as the legends suggested, just in a different area. Humphrey's tireless work had brought him to the marshes of Tilehurst, a large stinking bog that a long time ago had been populated with people, before the water had claimed it.

In the middle of the Tilehurst marsh was a lake. And it was at the bottom of this lake where Humphrey believed the Sunken Supermarket rested. He took a team of scuba divers to the lake to assist with the excavation. But the lake was vast and deep, even with the high-tech, waterproof cameras, expensive sonar equipment such as they use in the navy, along with his elite team of scuba divers, it took months before they found the first clue of proof that the Sunken Supermarket was real. Many of the people on Humphrey's team were at the point when they wanted to abandon their mission, believing it to be futile. It was then that they discovered the mysterious artifact at the bottom of the lake.

All Humphrey’s experts concluded that it was a shopping trolley, because it had four wheels and would be perfect for carrying groceries. Judging by the rust and water damage the trolley had accumulated, the experts were able to date the artifact to the year 2024 CE – which was the same year that the Supermarket was believed to have sunk. Humphrey and his team were over the moon with their incredible discovery. Once they had fished it out of the lake, they took the customary group photo with the rusty old trolley, to add to the expedition journal. This amazing find was just the boost they needed to continue with their pursuit of the Supermarket.

As Humphrey had expected, after they had found the ancient trolley, it wasn’t long before the Sunken Supermarket itself was discovered. Though it was easy to miss at first as most of the building had eroded away under the lake. All that remained was a great ruin covered in algae, a great green mound under the murky water. Humphrey’s expert translators had only proved it was the Supermarket, by translating the huge sign of strange giant plastic letters from a long-lost language, which they worked out to be the name of the Supermarket. Yet despite this crumbling building being not much to look at, Humphrey at last had been vindicated, he’d achieved the impossible in the face of so much criticism and doubt, here was the proof that the Supermarket wasn’t a legend, it *was* real! He’d no doubt win the highest honour from the Archaeological Society now! He’d be famous for all the right reasons, no one would dare call him a dreamer or mad anymore!

The ruin of the Sunken Supermarket was closely studied for years after its discovery. Every piece of the former building had been catalogued, and more of the lake was excavated around the area, but all that was uncovered was more rusty shopping trollies. The top Archaeologists, Historians, Scientists, and fans of Ancient Supermarkets, all theorized, debated, argued, changed their minds, theorized again and argued a lot more, only to come to the same conclusion. No one had the foggiest idea how this decrepit old supermarket had sunk and ended up at the bottom of a giant lake. The legends all stated that the lake and surrounding marshes had appeared after the sinking. And this was indeed supported by ancient historical records documenting the decline of Reading town ^{*1)}

**1) The decline of Reading town, Historians all agreed, was because the place was a shit hole.*

So, the mystery remained, how did the Sunken Supermarket actually sink? The great conundrum seemed as if it would never be solved, but many, many years ago, it happened like this...

The Conglomerate’s chain of Supermarkets was still reeling from the calamity of the ‘Trolley Dash,’ but none so more than the Tilehurst store where the dreadful event had happened. Cutbacks were inevitable, and there were no funds for maintenance and repairs. So, no one seemed at all surprised by the drip coming from the ceiling in the main aisle. All that happened, when it was noticed was an employee just got a yellow wet floor sign and stuck it over the puddle the drip had caused, until a better solution was found.

The solution was to get a bucket to contain the drip after the drip got worse, falling more steadily, making a bigger puddle and causing customers to complain. One employee was informed ten times in the same day by different customers that the ceiling was leaking, and the floor was wet, as if those customers were the very first people to notice it, and as though the employee had not mopped up the overfill ten times already!

The drip got worse. The solution, a bigger bucket and a few sandbags to absorb the overfill. However, while this slowed down the number of times the bucket needed to be emptied, it did not address the real problem of the drip. And in any case, the big bucket didn’t need to be emptied as frequently because one of the Online Shopping colleagues, whose species was not easily identifiable, though rodent was strongly suspected, kept knocking over the bucket with her collection trolley, spilling the water across the floor. And because the girl, or gerbil, or whatever small vermin creature she might have been, was also a simpleton with a creepy stare, she would leave the spill for other employees to mop up, completely oblivious to the mess she had made.

One of the supervisors suggested bigger wet floor signs. This was met by an outpouring of complaints from the employees, who were all calling for the drip to be fixed properly. The Store Manager reminded the colleagues, with polite arrogance that all managers pick up along with their promotion, as if his colleagues’ opinions were too trivial for him to deal with, that the store did not have the budget for repairs. He told the colleagues that they would just have to work, as they had been already, around the drip.

The store manager soon changed his mind the very next day after a round, older lady failed to notice the large puddle of water, spilling out of the big bucket

across the floor. Nor did she see the bigger wet floor signs, or a rapid drip of water falling from the ceiling. She must have been too distracted by the offer of buy 3 for 2 on the eggs to see the danger. She slipped in all the water, and from that day on was able to do the splits whenever she wanted. But fortunately for the Store Manager, the older woman was a former employee, an old school type of colleague who despite retiring was still loyal to the store she had worked in for nearly 40 years, so she didn’t sue for compensation. They let her keep her discount card after all. After that potentially catastrophic and expensive situation, the Store Manager insisted finding somebody *cheap*, to come in and fix the drip.

A reasonably skilled and very *cheap* maintenance technician came in, and to everyone’s surprise he managed to locate the source of the drip and fix it at a good rate. The store manager and all the colleagues were so relieved, for a short time. This was because, by the time that it took the technician to gather up all his tools and leave, no sooner had he departed that the other drip began.

However, this drip was most strange, as it wasn’t coming down from the ceiling, but was coming up from the floor, defying the laws of gravity and physics. Water was slowly dripping up from the ground and rising up to the ceiling. The puddle of water that formed was suspended in the air above the employees and customers. No one could believe their eyes. The Deputy Manager was about to chase after the repair man and call him back to fix the new drip, but the Store Manager, was an opportunist, and saw this new marvel as a way to boost sales in the store. He could charge customers to see the spectacle of the drip that dripped upwards.

The Store Manager was right, customers were flocking to the store to see the new wonder of the drip. Overcrowding became a big problem; it was impossible for the employees to do their jobs as there was no room to move in the aisles. Everyone was crammed into the store like a can of sardines. But customers could not be deterred from coming into the store to see the drip, it was a day out for some of them, a bit of excitement in their otherwise mundane lives.

But, while the Store Manager was congratulating himself on his novelty money making scheme, somebody should have been monitoring the amount of water building up on the ceiling. The continuous drip was becoming more and more frequent, making the above water levels descend lower. Customers and employees had to crouch down to avoid their hair getting wet as the water got

lower and lower. The Store Manager, despite all the calls of concern, would not call his *cheap* technician back to repair the new drip, not while he was making all this money from tourists. Little did he know that his economic bubble was about to burst.

By the time it became necessary for all the colleagues, who had not resigned due to impossible working conditions, to wear diving equipment and oxygen masks to work, as the water had come down to waist level, the store was getting ready to be declared by the local council, the national science association and the historical conservationists, as natural wonder and monument. The delegates from these committees joined the Store Manager in the large admin office for tea and biscuits, as it was dry in this room, while his own office had begun to flood from the drip. They could never have imagined what was about to transpire.

The workday was proceeding the best it could with a skeleton crew of employees wearing scuba-diving gear, and wading through the lowering water, and groups of tourists also wearing scuba gear. The store did not get many customers now, partly because of the water, but mostly because stock was limited, as only the bottom shelves were dry enough to fill with products. But a few customers were still shopping online, which required a staff of Online Shoppers. However, the only Online Shopping colleague still willing and daft enough to work, was the creepy girl with rodent features. Her former colleagues from the Online Shopping department refused to work with both her and the drip, as one hinderance was more than enough!

The Online Shopping employee was in the middle of collecting her first order, despite her shift starting three hours prior and collections typically taking a *competent* colleague anywhere between ten to forty-five minutes - though this statistic was increased by an extra twenty minutes to allow for the drip, a gift from management. Part of the reason why it took the Online Shopper so long to complete her orders was because she spent most of her shifts listening to other people’s conversations, or fixing people with long uncomfortable stares, and taking longer and more breaks than she was entitled to. Was it any wonder that her former colleagues had all resigned? They could not stand working with her for another second and all walked out together in solidarity. It was a good thing that they did too after what happened next.

She was too preoccupied with spying on a conversation between a group of tourists, and not paying attention to the direction she was pushing her collection

trolley, to notice that she was on a collision with the barrier of wet floor signs set up between the tourists and the area of the drip. Too late! Her trolley ran through the wet floor signs, which closed with a final snap as they hit the floor, echoing within a three-aisle radius. Her trolley went across the barrier, but because the floor had softened with water damage from the continuous drip, it crumbled away beneath the weight taking the trolley and the employee with it.

The Online Shopper plunged into the deep, cold lake of water that had sprang up beneath the Supermarket. She was buried under her collection trolley and the falling chunks of the floor and was unable to overcome the sheer pressure of all that crushing water. She would irritate people and stare at them no longer. Her former colleagues from the Online Shopping department were devastated that they were not there to see her drown. That said, they were all thanking their lucky stars that they were not there to see what followed.

A hole opened up around the area of the drip where the Online Shopper fell in. More and more sections of the softened floor began crumbling away, expanding the hole, hurling pieces of floor into the turbulent waters below. This made the drip, turn into a leak, turn into a stream, turn into a flow, turn into a spout, turn into a great gush of water that spewed over the edges of the hole, flooding the floor and consuming the supermarket and anything else in its path.

The silly tourists were too busy taking photos of the gushing stream of water to pay any attention to the imminent danger they were in. The floor cracked beneath them, a gapping wound in the ground and by the time they realised, they too were falling into the chasm and the lake beneath the Supermarket. The crashing water drowned out the sound of their screams, drowning them as well.

All the remaining colleagues managed to get out of the store in time before the entire shop floor was underwater. However, the Store Manager and delegates of the committee were still in the admin office completely unaware of what was happening on the other side of the building as the waves of water flooded it, until they felt the tremor that shook the whole store, knocking over the tray of tea and biscuits. The Supermarket could not withstand the rushing water beneath it seeping into the foundations, eroding them away, as well as the tremendous pressure from the water above caused by the drip. The Store Manager and the delegates could not get out of the building before the Supermarket sunk like a stone beneath the water of the lake. The colleagues all

watched from the safety at the top of the carpark, wondering if they still had to go into work the next day. *2)

**2) They did have to. They were transferred to the Lower Early branch.*

News of the disaster spread, fuelled further by rumour and gossip. In time it became history, which then turned into myth and legend. No one would ever know the true reason why the Supermarket sunk. The drip would always remain a mystery, while experts argued and came up with all sorts of ridiculous theories. Whatever the cause, it didn't matter to Humphrey Miner, he basked in the fame and fortune he had acquired from his amazing discovery, spending the rest of his days living in luxury on a tropical island in the Caribbean. And on his front lawn, he had commissioned a replica of the shopping trolley he found at the bottom of the lake, be built out of solid gold. He set it onto a plinth as a monument to his great achievement.