

# The Telegraph Magazine

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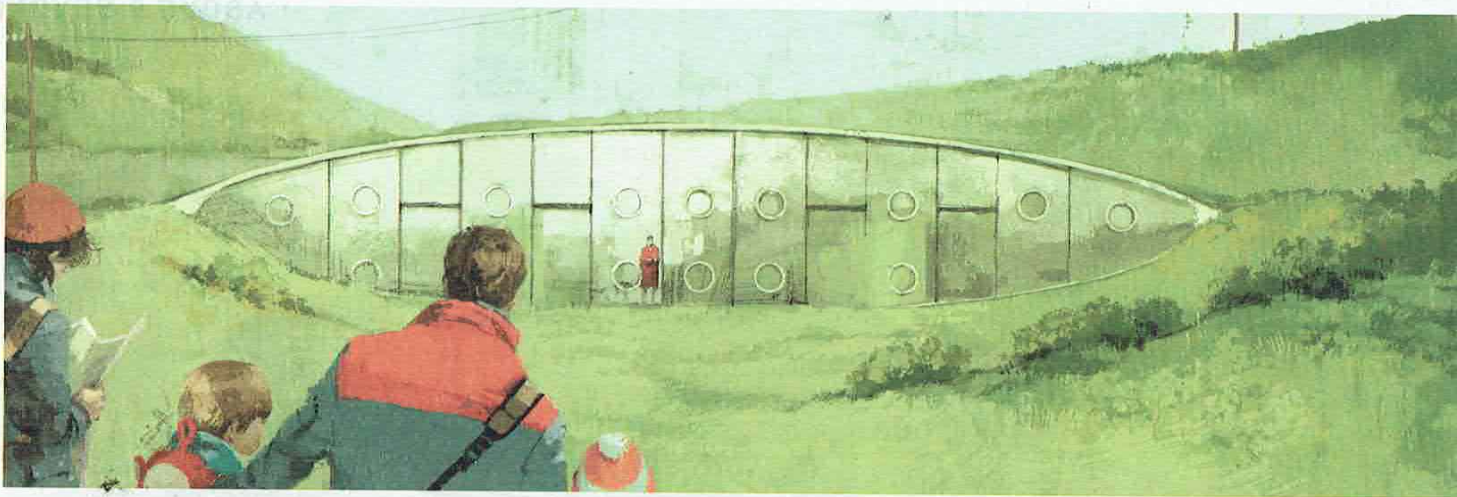
## PLASTIC FANTASTIC

A grand day out with Aardman

EMMANUEL MACRON: THE GREAT SEDUCER | BEHIND THE SCENES OF A MURDER IN MALTA

# Life and Times

## Bob Marshall-Andrews



# Living in Laa-Laa land

The novelist and retired politician has trouble with Teletubbies – and takes on Trump

I SEE IN 2018 happily ensconced in my underground house on the Pembrokeshire cliffs. It is widely known as 'the Teletubby house' and, from the land side, it *does* bear a striking resemblance. This can be a little dangerous as children are told, unwisely, by well-meaning parents that this is indeed the real seaside home of Tinky Winky, Laa-Laa and co. This understandably leads to demands that they should be allowed to visit and meet the inhabitants for tea.

Occasionally parents give in and the whole family arrive unannounced at our underground door. The children expect to be greeted by happy, roly-poly figures in onesies with television tummies and aerials coming out of their heads, and are patently disappointed by the actual residents, not infrequently enjoying a good lunch. I have, on a couple of occasions, tried to persuade children that I am the real Dipsy and even attempted to roll from side to side, raising my wine glass and emitting squeaks of welcome. This has always been found unconvincing and I am regarded with deep suspicion as an absurd imposter.

ISCAN THE NEW YEAR'S Honours List for deserving recipients of gongs. There

are always a few. These included some years back my great old friend Tony Fitzjohn, awarded the OBE for services to conservation. Tony is field director of the George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust, which does fantastic work conserving the elephant, the rhino and other endangered species in East Africa. I was one of the party who went with him to Buckingham Palace to see him be invested. I was an MP at the time and arranged for a celebratory lunch for 12 people in the Strangers' Dining Room at the House of Commons. We were all in full morning suits as required by Palace protocol. When we arrived at the Commons, I showed Tony and my guests on to the terrace while I went to check on the table. The dining room was full and included a table booked by a friendly Tory junior minister whose guests were already enjoying their meal. He himself had been temporarily called away on business. As I checked our table, I was aware that one of his guests was signalling to me across

**'Please, don't interrupt – I am serving your guests. We Labour chaps must know our place'**

the room. She waved me over. Walking across, I realised that I was wearing a morning suit identical to those worn by House of Commons waiters. When I arrived, she politely asked if I could fetch another bottle of wine and some sparkling water.

'Certainly,' I replied. I went to Cathy, the wonderful manager of the dining room, and asked for wine, corkscrew, water and a white napkin. After a little hesitation, she agreed. I returned to the table, proffered the wine, uncorked it and was in the process of pouring it for tasting when the junior minister returned. 'Bob!' he said. 'What are you doing?' 'Please,' I said, 'don't interrupt. I am simply serving your delightful guests. We Labour chaps must know our place.'

MY NEW NOVEL, *Dump*, is set on the shores of Lake Tanganyika in Tanzania. It had its genesis during our stay in 2016 at the Greystoke Mahale lodge, one of the most civilised places on earth and the best spot to study chimpanzees. While there, we learned the legend of a grossly violent, sexually aberrant, psychopathic alpha male who was so awful he was murdered by the rest of the troupe. The following day, we heard the result of the American election. The allegory leapt on to the page. The book's launch party is the anniversary of the inauguration of Donald Trump. He has been invited. My publishers tell me he is unlikely to attend.

*Dump*, published by Whitefox Publishing, (£8.99) is out now

### THE LIST

**Reading**  
*Conclave* by Robert Harris.  
A riveting political read.

**Watching**  
*The Good Wife*. Utterly compelling legal fantasy.

**Loving**  
Rare but wonderful British winter days that are crisp and ice-blue.

**Hating**  
Football commentators (heard in short unavoidable bursts navigating impenetrable TV channels).