

Volume III
of the MUD Trilogy

The Green-Face Virus

A Classic Words Novel

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CHAPTER ONE

A Pretty Nice Beach

Mud stood straight, looked up and down the beach, put his fins on his hips, and smiled with satisfaction at all he saw.

“This is a pretty nice beach I have here,” he announced.

“It’s not your beach, get it?” Fidget, his cricket pal, chirped. Fidget shook his head, except that his head was connected to his body, so his tail shook too.

“Oh, I got carried away. I only mean that I love it here,” Mud said. “I’m proud of it, proud of Sentence Island.”

“I know,” said Fidget. “I am too, but I am worried about your sentence.”

“What?” asked Mud, thinking to himself that Fidget would argue with a seashell.

“Well, you called it a pretty nice beach. Do you have a comma after your word *pretty*?”

“A comma?” asked Mud, incredulous. “There are no commas in speaking—only in writing.”

“I know,” said Fidget, “but do you have a comma in your mind? Do you mean that it is a pretty nice beach, with *pretty* as an adverb modifying the adjective *nice*? It is pretty nice? Or do you mean that it is a pretty, nice beach, so that *pretty* is an adjective, and the beach is both pretty and nice?”

Mud stopped and looked straight at Fidget. Sometimes this smart cricket could be disturbingly profound. You had to be precise in everything you said.

“No comma,” Mud said. “I mean the beach is pretty nice.” He started walking again.

profound: adj. deep

“Not me,” said Fidget. “I think it is extremely nice. Get it?”

Mud stopped again. He looked at Fidget, a trace of frustration in his fishy countenance.

“I did not mean that Sentence Island is not extremely nice,” he said. “Pretty nice is just a way of speaking. It is understatement.” He started walking again.

“I think you are pretty smart,” said Fidget, looking out to sea as though Mud were not there.

“Right,” said Mud. “I think you are pretty funny.”

“I have a pretty idea,” said Fidget.

“Yes?”

“Let us avoid using *pretty* as an adverb. It is not clear enough, get it?”

Mud got it, and the fish and the cricket walked on down the pretty beach, leaving lines of two finprints and six footprints, side

countenance: n. facial expression

by side, in the wet sand.

“This,” Mud thought, “is how a day should be.” There was a vivacious morning sun, a sprinkle of sparkles on the splashes, and a cool breeze brushing in over the waves. The palm trees were doing their swishy morning exercises in the wind, their voices in unison like a chorus of whispers. During the night, the ocean had placed its prettiest seashells on the water’s edge; the ocean was a talented artist, and the shells were perfectly arranged.

“This is a pretty nice beach we have here,” Mud thought, adding, “*We* is an important pronoun.”

After the distressing events of Fragment Crag and the calamities that had befallen the animals on Sentence Island, life had finally returned to normal. It was a good time for everyone. Everyone got along, everyone stuck

vivacious: adj. lively

unison: n. at the same time, simultaneous

together, and everyone returned his or her attention to the important research about sentences, to which everyone was devoted. Everyone behaved in a helpful way.

Well, almost everyone.

There were a few cases of animal oddness that must be reported, in the interest of history.

As you know, Click the sandpiper was a poet, and a fine one, and he was a specialist in ballads, writing fine lines in the spirit of Lobster Burns, Clack's great grandlobster. All of the animals loved Click's tweety ballads and could recite some of them by heart, especially Click's epic ballad of the great year of calamities, which began with this impressive stanza:

Eet SWEEK eet MEEP eet CLICK eet MEET,
Eet PEET, eet CLACK red TIDE,
Eet WEET eet TWEET tsu-NA-mi DOOT,
Eet DEET eet MALL-ace HIDE.

Language: A ballad stanza has four lines. One and three are iambic tetrameter, and two and four are iambic trimeter.

There were seventy-two of these ballad stanzas in the poem, but this one was everyone's favorite, as you can well imagine.

For several months, Click had been studying very old ballads and very old plays, and he began reading very good passages of them aloud to the other animals. Click gave particular attention to the sublime poems and plays of William Shalobster, the poetic genius of four centuries past, whose language—called Old Animal—truly sounded like the language of an earlier time. Not only were Shalobster's nouns different, his verbs were different also.

In Shalobster's day, lobsters and other animals said *doth* for *does*, and *hath* for *has*, and *liketh* for *likes*, and *sayeth* for *says*. They said *art* for *are* and *hark* for *listen*. They said *hither and thither* for *here and there*, *prithee* for *I pray you*, *thee* or *thou* for *you*, and *thyselvf* for *yourself*. They said *goeth* for *goes* and *'tis* for *it*

sublime: adj. extremely excellent

is. There were many other differences, and it took the animals of Sentence Island days to adjust to this antique form of their language, but every animal loved hearing and learning it. They were charmed by the beautiful old words, and all of them began to use the old words for the sheer joy of it.

One animal, however, went overboard, using the Old Animal words and grammar in all conversations and behaving like the dramatic characters in Shalobster's plays. You can imagine the animals' faces when one day Baldwin, the big-horned beetle, appeared among them, speaking in Shalobster-voice.

It happened this way. The animals had formed a fine discussion group to explore how putting words in the wrong places can change the meaning of a sentence, and they were discussing the profound difference between *Losing its feathers, the frog saw the bird*,

Language: *Losing its feathers, the frog saw the bird* contains a misplaced modifier; it means that frogs have feathers.

and *The frog saw the bird losing its feathers*, when suddenly there was a crash at a nearby palm tree, and Baldwin landed on the ground with a thud.

“What buffoons thou art! What scurvy knaves!” he cried.

“What?” asked Mud, and all of the animals turned toward Baldwin, their countenances full of astonishment.

“Get thee to a sand dune, villains!” yelled Baldwin, and he came clomping toward them, leaning first left, then right, with three left feet landing, clump, followed by three right feet landing, clump.

No one knew what was happening.

“Baldwin,” said Mud, “we are your friends. It is I, Mud the fish!”

“Your friends,” added Clack, waving a large, amiable claw in Baldwin’s direction.

“To a dune, thou loud-clawed villain, thou

scurvy: adj. worthless
knave: n. dishonest person
amiable: adj. pleasantly friendly

knave, I say,” cried Baldwin, staring at Clack. “Prithee take thyself to a derelict dune and darken bright day no more! In thy infernal presence, the shining sun hath no face of gladness. Come hither no more! Get thee to a dunery!” He came clomping even faster.

“Dunery?” thought Mud. There was no such word, only *dune*.

It was the most singular scene the animals had ever witnessed. They began to worry about Baldwin’s state of mind.

“Baldwin,” said Mud gently, “come over here and sit with us. Join us in our conversation.”

Baldwin tried to blink, but having no eyelids made it difficult, so he wiggled his head ever so slightly. “Oh, all right, good Mud, gentle Mud,” he said, “and I thank thee for thy fair invite, but I long to practice my Shalobster talk. ’Tis hither I shall sit, not

derelict: adj. neglected, in poor repair

hither: adv. here

singular: adj. unique, remarkable

thither on yon burning sand. Prithee make place, thou loon-faced knaves, thou buffoons. Thou know'st 'tis my right in this discourse to participate.”

All of the knaves—I mean animals—heaved a tolerant sigh, and then another, and scooted over for him. Baldwin was not crazy after all; this was only Baldwin being Baldwin, overdoing something, yet again, in his Baldwin-like superfluous enthusiasm. He took his place in the circle, and they continued to talk about putting words in the right places.

Baldwin's eccentric Shalobster talk was dismaying, but the animals were able to accept it with patience until he moved on to his next strange obsession—and no one could guess what that might be. They even enjoyed his Shalobsterisms, after a while.

But they could not accept the odd behavior

superfluous: adj. excess

that Cow Loon adopted. Not one bit.

“This,” Mud thought, “is how a day should be.” There was a vivacious morning sun, a sprinkle of sparkles on the splashes, and a cool breeze brushing in over the waves. Page 10.

The description of the waves is filled with washy sounds. Notice the *sh* sound hidden in *vivacious*—vivaSHous. We see alliteration in *sun*, *sprinkle*, *sparkles*, and *splashes*, and we also see alliteration in *breeze* and *brushing*. All of these sounds combine to give the passage a sparkly, washy sound that captures the experience of the water and sun.

