

This short story has been especially written  
by Alan Reynolds in celebration of the  
opening of Boots latest store, in Leeds, 29<sup>th</sup>  
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*Alan Reynolds writes mainly for an  
adult audience, his titles include:*

Flying With Kites

Taskers End

Breaking the Bank

The Sixth Pillar

The Tinker

## Daniel and the Phone

'Daniel, put that phone away and come and get your tea!'

'Aw Mum, just texting Jack. Won't be a minute.'

'Never mind won't be a minute,' get up to this table NOW!'

'That's not fair,' said Daniel, climbing off the sofa and walking to the dining table where his sister and mother were starting to distribute salad from a wooden bowl. His face screwed up in frustration at being disturbed from his messaging.

'Life isn't fair,' said his mother. 'You can finish that after you've eaten... it's all you seem to be thinking about these days... you've always got that phone in your hands.'

'I have not,' said Daniel.

'Yes you have,' said his sister Leanne, who, at fourteen, was a year older than her brother.

'What do you know?' said Daniel to her sister as he took his seat.

'You've always got your phone in your hands or stuck to your ear... It's like an extension of your body,' said Leanne.

'That's not true,' said Daniel.

'Yes it is... I bet you can't go a whole day without using your phone,' said Leanne.

'Of course I can,' said Daniel.

'Ok, prove it,' said Leanne. 'Give me your phone now and I'll give it back to you tomorrow tea time.'

'No, why should I?' said Daniel.

'Just to prove a point... and it will do you good to speak to people rather than play with that phone,' said Leanne.

'But I *do* speak to people... all the time,' said Daniel.

'No you don't. You speak to a machine... and when you're not, you're playing games. You don't connect with anybody, not properly.'

'That's rubbish,' said Daniel who was getting angry and was ready for a fight.

Mother could tell the signs and intervened to calm them down. 'Hey you two, stop arguing and eat your tea.'

Daniel, sulking, scooped up a large helping of salad with a serving spoon and dropped it unceremoniously onto his plate scattering lettuce and cucumber over the table.

'Hey mind what you're doing, Daniel, that table cloth was clean on today,' said his mother.

Ignoring his mother's words he picked up the offending items with his fingers and plonked them on his plate, then, using his knife and fork he started to eat. An eerie quietness descended on the proceedings.

'What time are you going out tonight, Mum?' asked Leanne, breaking the silence.

'Not until about eight,' replied mother.

Daniel pricked up his ears. 'You going out again?' he said, beginning to cheer up from his earlier altercation with his sister; his mother going out would give him plenty of chances to do what he wanted without being told off.

'Yes,' said mother, 'but I won't be too late... Have you done your homework, both of you?' she added looking at the two children.

'Yes,' said Leanne. 'As soon as I got back from school.'

'Daniel?' said mother looking at her son quizzically.

'Not yet... but it won't take long. I'll soon finish it after tea.'

'Well make sure you do or you'll be in trouble again,' said mother.

'Whatever,' said Daniel.

The family finished their tea and Leanne and mother cleared the dishes while Daniel went back to the sofa and continued the message he was trying to send before being interrupted for tea.

Leanne entered the room from the kitchen where mother was washing up.

'Back on your phone I see,' said Leanne.

'Get lost,' said Daniel and headed upstairs to his bedroom.

He jumped on his bed with his phone still in his hands playing his favourite computer game, 'The Villagers'. Concentration was total. Dexterously, he moved the figures, his thumbs skating across the controls at incredible speed; he was a top level player.

Then, completely out of the blue, something strange happened.

Daniel stared at the screen and couldn't believe what he was seeing. A weird phenomenon was taking place... right in front of him. Tryon, the head of the Icenii tribe, his favourite character and alter-ego in the game... he... he was calling him.

Daniel blinked and rubbed his eyes... definitely, no mistake.

'What's happening?' he said to himself staring deeply into the small picture in front of him.

'Daniel, we've been waiting for you. Why don't you join us?' said a deep gravelly voice.

'How can I?' said Daniel.

'Just put your hand on your screen,' said the voice.

Daniel obeyed and placed the palm of his hand flat on the screen... he couldn't believe his eyes. His hand shrunk and disappeared into the void behind the glass. Then his arm then suddenly... whoosh, he was there, in the game. He could see the thatched huts, the horses. Chickens scooted out of the way as he walked towards his hero.

'Daniel, welcome to Icenii,' said the man.

Daniel just stared at him. Tryon's golden locks of hair draped around his shoulders, his muscles glistened in the light of the camp fire. He held a long handled axe in his hand. Other villagers came out to welcome Daniel, staring at his strange clothes. Old women stroked his hoodie-top; he could see their haggard faces, their yellow teeth. They cackled like old crows to each other, speaking in a tongue that Daniel couldn't interpret.

Then two boys about the same age as Daniel approached him and straightaway were intrigued by his trainers. They both dropped to Daniel's feet as if in subservience and started feeling the material of his footwear. An argument broke out as they tried to wrench the shoes from Daniel's feet. Tryon laughed before knocking one of the lads sideways with his hand landing him in a pile of chicken droppings. He shouted something which again Daniel couldn't understand and the two boys skulked back to one of the huts.

Then Daniel saw her and his heart skipped a beat. It was Audrina,

Tryon's daughter. Daniel recognised her straightaway. He had always protected her in the game and secretly he loved her.

'Daniel,' she said as she walked towards him.

'How do you know my name?' said Daniel.

'I know everything about you,' said Audrina. 'Thank you for saving me. You are my hero.'

Daniel looked at her. She was even more beautiful than he remembered from the game; slight and delicate in stature but clearly strong in spirit. Tryon looked on approvingly as Daniel and Audrina hugged.

Their passion was broken by the sound of a distant horn echoing through the forest, a terrifying noise like the rumble of a million thunderclaps. Villagers looked at each other, their faces etched with fear. One or two ran into their huts, others just stood frozen to the spot.

Daniel recognised straightaway what it was.

'The Trinovantes!' he shouted.

'Yes,' said Tryon.

Daniel knew they were in great danger. The Trinovantes were a brutal tribe from the south and would randomly try to attack the Icenis to steal their land and animals. It was Daniel who would save the day by building ramparts and providing bows and arrows for the villagers to protect themselves; but how could he do that now?

'Quick, everyone take your positions,' shouted Tryon as the villagers ran hither and thither trying to find weapons to protect themselves.

'Here, take this,' bellowed Tryon as he handed Daniel a huge sword. Daniel could barely lift it, never mind use it as some form of protection.

Audrina was holding onto Daniel.

'You *will* protect me, Daniel. I know you will save me,' she said. 'You always save me.'

Daniel felt a wave of responsibility on his shoulders. He watched as Tryon marshalled his meagre forces into some kind of order.

'Daniel, where are the bows and arrows?' Tryon shouted.

Daniel had no idea. He would normally just press a few buttons and earn weapons for the village but here, he couldn't.

'I haven't got any,' he replied. Tryon's expression was one of despair. 'Then we are doomed,' he said.

There was movement in the bushes ahead of them. Then they came, wave after wave, short, hairy creatures, communicating by grunting and pointing, carrying all manner of weapons. Daniel would normally kill them all with an arrow strike but there was nothing he could do to protect his precious village.

The Trinovantes swarmed through, killing everything in their path. He watched helplessly as Tryon was surrounded. The great man swung his mighty sword time after time but he was soon enveloped in bodies of Trinovantes hacking at him. He didn't stand a chance.

Then it all went quiet. Audrina was cowering behind Daniel. 'Save me Daniel, save me,' she shouted. The pair moved further back as the hordes of savages circled them. There were bodies everywhere. No-one had survived.

There was a dominant character who seemed to be the leader of the attackers and he moved to the head of the pack. He howled like a wolf and in an instant the group descended on Daniel and Audrina.

'Daniel... Daniel, help me Daniel,' he could hear Audrina shouting.

'Daniel... Daniel...'

'Daniel... Daniel, I'm off now. Have you done your homework?'

'Urgh... eh? what?' said Daniel, trying to re-orientate himself.

'I said I'm off now... I'll be back about eleven,' said his mother.

'Are you ok?' she asked.

'Yeah... I must have fallen asleep,' he said and shook his head forcing himself back to reality.

'Well mind what you're doing and don't spend all night on that blooming phone,' she said as she left the bedroom.

Daniel was trying to clear his mind. He looked at his phone. The battery was dead, it would need a re-charge, but he made a decision and walked along the corridor to his sister's room and knocked on the door.

'Leanne, can I come in?' he said.

Leanne opened the door.

'Can you look after this...? You were right, I really do need to have a break from phones.'

Leanne looked at the phone then at Daniel. 'Are you ill or something?' she said, puzzled by her brothers sudden change of mind.

Daniel smiled, 'No, I'm fine. Let's just say I've woken up.'

'Yeah ok,' she said. 'Maybe you have.'

THE END

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