

Where's the World?

By Peter Stuart

Tik and Tok looked at the door.

And then at each other.

'Hmmm,' said Tik.

'Humm,' said Tok.

'What does it mean?' said Tik.

'What do you mean?' answered Tok.

'I mean, what's the meaning of it?' Tik replied.

'You're not making sense, Tik,' said Tok.

'Am I not?' said Tik. 'Let me put it this way:

Where is The World?'

'The World?' said Tok.

'Yes, The World,' repeated Tik. 'Where is it?'

'Well,' said Tok, 'it's through that door.'

'Ah, I see,' said Tik thoughtfully.

'Shall we... um...?' offered Tok.

'Yes, I think we will,' smiled Tik.

They turned the handle slowly and stuck their noses round the door.

'It's rather dark in there,' said Tok.

'Yes, that will be due to the lack of light,' replied Tik. 'A match will help.'

'That seems to make it darker,' sniffed Tok.

'Couldn't we just feel our way?'

'Feel?' said Tik, puzzled.

'Yes, feel. With our paws,' suggested Tok.

'Well, there's no telling what you might come across,' said Tik, 'but we can try. After you, dear friend.'

And so in they went, crawling through the darkness to look for The World.

Splash!

'What was that?' asked Tik.

'Water, I think,' said Tok. 'I shall taste it and see.'

'Well?' asked Tik again.

'No. Not water,' replied Tok. 'Milk. Warm milk. A big pond of warm milk.'

'Is that what The World is?' asked Tik.

'Well, it seems like The World to us now,' said Tok, 'but I'm sure there must be more. Shall we go on?'

'Yes, but let's have a drink first, it would be a shame to waste good milk,' said Tik.

So they drank and drank until the pond was gone and then hurried on through the growing light

to look for The World.

Boink!

‘What was that?’ said Tik.

‘That,’ replied Tok, ‘was my head.’

‘Does your head often go Boink?’ asked Tik.

‘No it doesn’t,’ said Tok a little crossly. ‘It goes Boink! when I fall down a hole.’

‘And why would you want to fall down a hole?’ said Tik.

‘I didn’t *want* to fall down a hole. It was an *accident*. Now, are you coming down here or am I going up there?’ asked Tok.

‘I think I’ll come...’ started Tik.

Boink!

‘Does your head often...’ asked Tok.

‘No it does not,’ said Tik very crossly. ‘Where’s my hat?’

‘Over there,’ said Tok, ‘by that green tricycle.’

‘By that what?’ said Tik in high excitement. ‘Tok! I think we’ve found The World!’

‘I don’t think so,’ said Tok, not quite sure if it was or not. ‘I think it’s just a machine for moving through The World, that’s all.’

‘Yes, but it’s... but I... It’s...,’ spluttered Tik. ‘Oh I suppose you’re right. Shall we then?’

‘Yes, I think we will,’ smiled Tok.

And so they set off on the tricycle to look for The World.

Whish!

‘Have you noticed something?’ asked Tik.

‘What?’ said Tok.

‘This tricycle goes Whish!’ answered Tik.

‘For me it’s more of a Whoosh!’ said Tok, ‘but perhaps it depends on which side you’re on.’

‘Nonsense!’ said Tik. ‘It is very definitely a Whish! and not a Whoosh!’

‘Maybe our ears are different,’ suggested Tok.

Tik refused to answer.

‘Have you noticed something else?’ asked Tok.

‘What?’ said Tik grumpily.

‘It’s light,’ said Tok.

No answer.

‘It’s light and we can see.’

Still no answer.

‘It’s light and I can see a big tree.’

‘Where? Where?’ exclaimed Tik.

‘On top of that green hill,’ said Tok.

‘Tok! We’ve found The World! Follow that tree! On the double!’

And so they raced up the hill, which was very hard work, to look for The World.

‘Well,’ said Tik, panting heavily, ‘it’s a yew tree.’

‘A... you... tree...?’ breathed Tok.

‘Yes, a... yew tree,’ said Tik, ‘that’s lost its bark. I would guess that... this one is at least one thousand and four thousand years old.’

‘Crikey,’ said Tok. ‘Is that how old The World is then?’

‘If, and only if,’ said Tik, ‘this tree is The World. Let us look more closely.’

So they did, peering into the cracks and running their hands over the silky wood.

‘What have you noticed, Tok?’ asked Tik.

‘Oh,’ said Tok, ‘it’s as if it has a skin, the fairest and smoothest of skins with little ripples in it and...’

‘No, Tok, not that. Something much more important. Nails.’

‘Nails?’ asked Tok.

‘Nails,’ said Tik. ‘Three nails to be precise.’

‘Is that... important?’ asked Tok.

‘It is *odd*, Tok,’ said Tik.

‘Ah, I see. Do you suppose it hurts?’ asked Tok.

‘It may once have hurt,’ replied Tik, ‘but presumably doesn’t any more. The tree is dead, Tok.’

‘Dead? Really? It’s still very lovely,’ said Tok.

‘Yes, yes,’ said Tik, ‘but it means that it can’t be The World.’

‘Does it?’ queried Tok.

‘It does,’ confirmed Tik. ‘The World must be alive.’

‘Oh,’ said Tok.

And with that they hurtled down the other side of the hill to look for The World.

They came to the top of a steep slope with a little stream at the bottom and another steep slope rising on the opposite side.

‘This,’ said Tik, ‘is a valley, Tok.’

‘Ah,’ said Tok. ‘Do you suppose The World might be down there?’

‘It very well might,’ said Tik, ‘but I think we should walk. I don’t fancy riding uphill again.’

So they left their tricycle at the top of the slope and walked slowly down the hill. At the bottom they sat down and cooled their feet in the stream. Bees buzzed around the flowers and a light breeze made waves in the long grass.

‘Tik?’ said Tok.

‘Mmmm?’ said Tik staring into the water.

‘Would you say that this stream is alive?’

‘Hum,’ said Tik looking thoughtful. ‘It is certainly a lively little stream, and lots of small creatures appear to be living *in* it and *around* it, but... I would have to say that the stream itself is not alive.’

‘Ah,’ said Tok a little sadly, ‘so it can’t be The World then.’

'No, I suppose not,' said Tik.

A dragonfly went by.

'What if...?' began Tok.

'What if what?' asked Tik.

'What if it were... part of The World?' suggested Tok.

'Do you mean The World might have dead bits and living bits, Tok?' said Tik.

'Well yes, I suppose I do,' said Tok.

'What a clever idea, Tok,' said Tik.

'There's more,' said Tok.

'More? What more?' asked Tik.

'Well, stop me if I'm being silly,' said Tok, 'but if the stream is part of The World that might mean that... that it's joined to The World and if... if we followed it... we might... perhaps...'

'But we can't follow it,' said Tik. 'Our tricycle won't work in the water, will it?'

'I thought,' said Tok hesitantly, 'I thought we might go in that boat.'

'Which boat, Tok?' exclaimed Tik. 'Which boat?'

'That blue one over there, with the fishing net,' answered Tok.

'My, my!' exploded Tik. 'We're onto something here, dear friend!'

And with that they jumped into the little boat and pushed off to look for The World.

They drifted gently down the stream, passing families of ducks on the water and songbirds in the bushes on the bank. Dragonflies settled on the prow of the boat.

'It is lovely,' said Tok dreamily.

'Hmmm,' said Tik. 'There is certainly a great variety of things that fly and many kinds of plants too. I shall have to give them names and list them in a book.'

'Yes, I suppose you will have to,' answered Tok sleepily.

The sun was warm and the current getting stronger and before long the two adventurers were sound asleep, the little boat gliding through the clear water to look for The World.

'Have you noticed something?' asked Tik.

Tok snored.

'Tok! Wake up! There's something you should see,' said Tik.

Tok rubbed his eyes, looked around and wondered, 'Where on earth are we?'

All around them was nothing but water stretching as far as the eye could see.

'According to you, we're in The World,' said Tik.

'But this can't be it,' said Tok. 'There's nothing here, nothing but water and sky. Surely that can't be The World.'

'Well, whatever it is, what I want to know is how we're going to get out of it,' said Tik grimly.

'I'm getting hungry.'

'We could catch some fish,' offered Tok.

'Of course!' said Tik. 'Quick, get the net over the side.'

But there weren't any fish.

‘Try the other side,’ said Tok.

‘It doesn’t make any difference which side,’ insisted Tik. ‘It’s the...’

‘Try,’ said Tok.

So they did, and before you could say ‘Lickety-split’ they had caught one handsome fish. They were about to make it into supper when something odd happened.

‘Don’t eat me,’ said the fish. ‘I’ll tell you what you want to know if you’ll throw me back into the sea.’

Tik and Tok stared at each other.

‘Most odd,’ said Tik. ‘I thought the fish spoke.’

‘I did, I did!’ the fish spluttered.

‘Did you hear that, Tok?’ asked Tik.

‘I did,’ said Tok. ‘It said, “I did, I did!”’

‘So we are agreed,’ Tik said. ‘Remember that, Tok, for I am now going to talk to the fish.’

‘My good fish,’ Tik began somewhat formally, ‘am I to understand that if we throw you back into the... the sea... was that what you called it? If we throw you back into the sea, you will tell us what we want to know. Is that correct?’

‘Yup,’ said the fish.

‘Good,’ said Tik. ‘We will throw you back. Now, where is The World?’

The sound of a fish giggling is a very unusual sound and impossible to write down but on this occasion it went something like this: *Sd btnjhb srjk*.

‘I beg your pardon?’ said Tik. ‘What was that?’

‘*Vbsssoifvbgah*,’ said the fish.

‘Ah, I see,’ said Tik, looking at Tok. ‘Of course, yes, of course.’

And with that, the fish leapt out of the boat back into the water where it splashed about happily and disappeared into the deep.

‘Hmmm. There goes supper,’ said Tik mournfully.

He was interrupted by the fish poking its nose above the water. ‘Come on then,’ it said. ‘Follow me if you want to find The World. *Bvrgbv!*’

‘What, down there?’ said Tik. ‘But we’ll get all wet.’

‘Come on, Tik,’ said Tok. ‘Maybe the fish knows.’

So over the side they went with a Splish! and a Splosh! to look for The World.

About half a minute later Tik and Tok looked at each other through the green water, pointed to the light and kicked fiercely upwards, breaking the surface with a lot of splashing and spluttering.

‘Well, well,’ heaved Tik, grasping for breath, ‘it’s all very well to say “Follow me”, but some of us are obviously not made for The World.’

‘Maybe the fish is part of The World too,’ suggested Tok, ‘like the stream, and so it’s quite happy down there.’

‘Very clever, Tok, but how can it be The World if we can’t get into it?’ spouted Tik.

‘But we can get into it.’ Said Tok. ‘It’s just that we can only visit in short bursts. It does look very beautiful down there, doesn’t it? All blue and green with shadows and silvery fish.’

‘No, Tok, it won’t do. The World is somewhere where we can stay as long as we like,’ stated Tik.

‘Oh,’ said Tok.

A gull flew by.

‘By the way,’ mumbled Tok, ‘where’s the boat?’

‘The bo...?’ gasped Tik. ‘Oh dear me, it’s gone! Whatever shall we do now?’

‘Um,’ said Tok, ‘we could try that seaplane.’

‘That red one, behind you over there,’ said Tok.

‘Marvellous!’ cried Tik. ‘Why, don’t you see? It follows that if The World isn’t underwater (which we have proved) and it isn’t here (which is obvious)... it must be up there! There’s nowhere else it could possibly be!’

And so they scrambled into the plane and took off into the air to look for The World.

‘It’s very big down there,’ shouted Tok, the engine making a terrible noise.

‘What? What did you say?’ bellowed Tik, the wind whistling and rushing around him.

‘I said,’ said Tok, ‘it’s-ve-ry-big-down-there.’

‘Yes. Big,’ agreed Tik.

‘In fact so big,’ said Tok, ‘that although I’m sure you must be right and The World is up here, now that we’re up here it rather seems to be down there.’

‘What was that?’ hollered Tik.

‘Never mind,’ shouted Tok. ‘You can’t hear me up here.’

‘You can’t what?’

‘I said... oh, never mind,’ said Tok.

‘I’ve just had a thought,’ yelled Tik. ‘Suppose that everything down there is part of The World – the fish, the boat, the sea, the stream, the bees, the tricycle, the tree, the nails, the milk – everything!’

‘Who’d have thought it,’ shouted Tok.

‘You’d have what?’ said Tik.

‘Yes, yes, yes,’ screamed Tok. ‘That must be The World down there, but why can you only see it when you’re not in it? Hmmm?’

‘The thing is that you can only see it when you’re not in it,’ said Tik, ‘do you see? It’s most important that you see that.’

Tok decided that it was better not to talk and looked around him, above and below, left and right, front and back. The sky was huge with great puffy clouds going pink and violet and golden in the light of the setting sun and the land below was dusky with flashes of silvery-gold in the river. And then a very small and simple thought came to him and grew and grew until he was quite sure and simply had to tell Tik.

‘It’s not just down there,’ he shouted over the engine noise. ‘It’s up here too. It’s everywhere...

everywhere!’

‘A furry bear?’ queried Tik horsely.

‘No, no!’ laughed Tok. ‘*Everywhere*, The World is *everything*!’

And then Tik understood as well and was so happy that he started doing barrel turns and loop-the-loops for joy.

‘But then don’t you see?’ he shouted. ‘If The World is everywhere that means that wherever we are we’re in it, we’re part of it, we belong in it, and the only reason that we couldn’t find it was that we went looking for it! Do you see?’

‘Yes, I see!’ laughed Tok. ‘Funny, isn’t it?’

And just at that moment the plane ran out of fuel and they crash-landed right at the spot where they’d started.

Tik and Tok stared at the door, and at the plane.

And then at each other.

‘Hmmm,’ said Tik.

‘Humm,’ said Tok.