

## **A Modern Pied Piper**

Once upon a time in a land not far from here all the children were bewitched. A powerful spell was cast on them by an evil giant, Iphonius, from the valley of Silicon. Like mindless zombies the children compelled their unsuspecting and compliant parents to buy strange new hand-held devices and continue to replace these with newer and ever-increasingly expensive models.

Soon an eerie quiet descended on the land save for the tapping of miniature keyboards and the insistent beeping of the mobile devices alerting the children to new games or images. Normal conversations ceased as the children communicated through their impersonal media. At mealtimes they were transfixed, staring into their screens. Their behaviour was soon adopted by their parents. It was not unusual for families to sit in restaurants without uttering a single word. Even ordering a meal was done by selecting items from the menu on the screen to limit personal interaction with the server.

Shunning exercise, staying indoors glued to their devices, the children became pasty-faced, introverted and obese with thumbs which grew to twice their normal size. They craved constant novelty and instant gratification. Their attention span became infinitesimal. Their grasp of grammar and vocabulary declined as they were encouraged to reduce communication to a stream of sound-bites. They lost the ability to form real, flesh and blood friendships and came to rely on phony virtual relationships. The children could not be separated from these mesmerising devices for more than a few minutes without suffering withdrawal symptoms.

Iphonius rubbed his hands with glee when he saw how his hypnotic invention was damaging the very fabric of society and the health and wellbeing of future citizens. He applauded the unstoppable torrent of cowardly, anonymous hatred transmitted through the devices. He revelled in the corrupting impact on young minds of hard-core pornography and the objectification of women. He cackled with delight at the secret time bomb he had lobbed into society. He knew the long term impact of the radiation emitted from his devices would wreak havoc on the reproductive potency of future generations.

Iphonius thought he had crippled the healthy culture of the land. But then his mortal enemy from the East, Vlad the Bare-Chested unleashed a devastating barrage of electronic thunderbolts. Suddenly all the mobile devices went dead

never to be revived. But bad Vlad was furious when his sabotaging plan failed to cause total societal collapse

At first there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth as the children acclimatised to this strange new landscape. But as time went by they emerged blinking from their isolated lives indoors. They rediscovered the joy of communal play, with games which needed no more than a bat and ball or a skipping rope. The dark shadows under their eyes disappeared. They started to read books made of paper rather than by scanning a silver screen. Family relationships and personal friendships blossomed again.

The spell was broken and the children lived happily ever after in their brave old world.