

Barbel – A



LES DARLINGTON

LES DARLINGTON IS A 55-YEAR-OLD BORN-AGAIN ANGLER FOLLOWING A 30-YEAR-PLUS FISHING BREAK DUE TO FAMILY, WORK, AND OTHER DEMANDS ON TIME.

BORN IN YORKSHIRE HE NOW LIVES IN WORCESTER WITH HIS LOVELY WIFE CHERYL. AFTER 28 YEARS THEY ARE CLASSIC EMPTY NESTERS, WITH TWO GROWN UP KIDS SUCCESSFULLY LEADING THEIR OWN LIVES.

THE ELDEST AARON, WORKS AS A GRAPHIC DESIGNER, THEIR DAUGHTER KELLY, GAINED A FIRST CLASS DEGREE IN MODEL MAKING, AND NOW WORKS IN LONDON FOR A LEADING FIRM OF ARCHITECTS.

LES DISCOVERED BARBEL FISHING 3 YEARS AGO, AFTER TWO SEASONS OF CHASING CARP IN MUDDY POOLS.

LIKES - BEING BY THE RIVER. HE SAYS CATCHING BARBEL IS ALWAYS A BONUS; THE FLOW OF THE RIVER ALWAYS MANAGES TO RESTORE THE WORK LIFE BALANCE.

DISLIKES - ANGLERS WHO LEAVE LITTER BEHIND.

She swam with apparent ease, her giant but perfectly streamlined form making the action appear effortless against the power of the rivers current. Driven forward by instinct, by desire, by the need to feed, she dwarfed the others who were already feeding hungrily on the source of the scent trail that had drawn her 100 metres upstream. Shouldering them aside she began to feed, voraciously devouring the pellets, until all that remained were fragments that in turn were quickly snatched by the

smaller fish.

Traversing the river twice first left and then right she allowed the current to push her downstream again and with a flick of her massive tail and a flaring of her pectoral fins she gracefully returned to her station.

At the river surface the water erupted in foam as another deluge topped up the already swollen river, repeating a cycle that continued day in day out.

The year is 2195 and the effects of global warming continue to dominate the headlines as the change

Future Tale



in climate impacts on our environment, its effects increasingly evident.

The Barbel Society has just celebrated its 200th anniversary and welcomed the 5th of its European chapters to its ranks; the interest in barbel fishing has never been higher. The commercialism of angling and in particular barbel fishing has attracted high profile professional anglers dedicated to the pursuit of even bigger and better fish. This in turn has swelled the ranks of the junior membership as youngsters

seek to emulate their angling heroes.

One such hero and professional angler is Jed Coxton a dedicated barbel specialist. Supported by the generosity of his sponsors, Jed has available to him the latest technology to help him track down and target his quarry.

It was the first day of October and Jed had every intention of raising the bar on the current 17kg record, a record that was already his.

One hundred and eighty five years ago the then record for *barbus barbus* stood at

10kg. Many thought that this was a weight that would not be exceeded.

The anglers of the Trent had long thought otherwise, and in 2029 a barbel of 13kg was finally captured and reported from that magnificent river, once again long held opinions were challenged. It seemed that nature had a way of making its own rules.

The Trent had since been the focus for many anglers and whilst the river did not give up its secrets easily, Jed and his team seemed to have the knack of finding very big

barbel indeed. It was here that his record attempt would be centred.

Time in the close and early season, had been spent in meticulous planning and the technical boffins had exceeded all of his expectations when they delivered a prototype MPLV (Multi Purpose Leisure Vehicle) to be fully field tested by him that season.

The vehicle familiarisation course over the following 2 days had been a revelation – it was equipped with the latest

3D satellite navigation system detailing in both plan and real time photo imagery the UK road and water networks. Not that he would need it this time. He knew exactly where he was going and had used the on-line booking service to secure his favoured swim – downstream of the Collingham Weir on the powerful River Trent.

The process of online booking had been established to cope with the increasing angling pressure on the country's rivers, and allowed the Environment Agency to track demand and control access.

It was a system Jed liked as his status afforded easier access to the service than most others. It reminded him of one of the entries he had read in the angling archives. Professional anglers back in the 1800's reserved swims by means of a sack of rye. The process now replaced by e-codes and satellite tracking.

The vehicle was packed with a host of features but what he looked forward to the most, was the ability of the vehicle to deploy a fishing platform to ensure

optimum position on the riverbank and easy access to his chosen swim.

This made the effect of any rise or fall of river levels much easier to deal with as the platform would maintain optimum position at all times.

Along with the other high tech equipment on board he was confident he would achieve his goal.

He eased himself into the single leather seat centred on the console of the MPLV parked on the driveway at the base of his apartment block – his apartment, the penthouse, overlooked the Royalty Fishery on the Hampshire Avon. His highly desirable home the trappings of his phenomenal success as a professional angler.

Pressing his palm against the screen to the right of him, a strip of light scrolled up and down scanning his palm before the vehicle controls flickered in to life. As he spoke in normal voice tones the voice recognition system responded to his destination instructions and the satellite navigation plotted the course.

It was a little before 5.00am he would be there

by 8.00am. With auto-drive engaged the vehicle moved toward the electric gate and as it slid open the vehicle powered forward.

Reclining the seat as far back as the controls would allow Jed was asleep before the vehicle began to speed along the first of the motorway networks.

Three hours later, he was woken by the soft tones of the on board computer announcing that they were five minutes from their final destination.

The electric motor hummed as he raised his seat from the reclining position, through the windscreen the river came into view.

What a view it was, the river coloured and swollen by the monsoon like downpours that you could virtually set your watch by at this time of year.

A 20 minute deluge every 4 hours served to keep the river in a state of almost constant flood.

These were ideal conditions for barbus barbus and his confidence level ratcheted up another notch.

Taking the vehicle controls to manual Jed manoeuvred the MPLV off

the main road and on to a track that first ran at a 90-degree angle to the river and then turned sharp right at the rivers edge to run in parallel with it.

As the track deteriorated the MPLV's all wheel drive automatically engaged, he was surprised at the vehicles agility given its size.

He knew exactly where the swim was and an out of season pre-baiting schedule by the support team had ensured the spot was primed.

Arriving at his chosen swim he backed the vehicle to the top of the bank engaging the parking brake by voice command, the vehicle stopped. Stabilizers corkscrewed into the ground at each corner of the vehicle. Jed spoke again, "engine off" the computer cut the main power and switched to auxiliary.

Sitting in relative silence Jed swivelled in his seat and looked out at the river, the sheer volume of water rushing to the Humber estuary never ceasing to amaze him.

Jed's thoughts were interrupted as the MPLV's console lit up with an incoming message confirming his location and online booking. The virtual bailiff wished him "Tight lines" and firmly reminded him that "the fishery closed at sunset".

Stepping out of the vehicle the humidity struck him, it had only just finished raining and he knew that he had every chance it would remain dry apart from the stickiness of the humidity for the next few hours, almost on cue the sun appeared and the clouds quickly cleared.

Approaching the rear of the vehicle he pressed his palm against a small panel and a control pad appeared, he touched the green deploy button and the rear step to the vehicle began to extend, then lower and swivel until the platform he would fish



from was fully deployed.

He smiled, those technical boys had come up trumps this was one innovation he welcomed.

Climbing into the vehicle he eased his made up rod from the side panel and the rod clips slid effortlessly to one side as he pulled the rod toward him.

Bait tub and essential tackle followed and he turned and walked down the steps created by the deployed platform.

As he stepped off the last two steps and on to the platform the steps turned, rotated and became a seat. Telescopic rod rests silently appeared out of the base of the platform.

Sitting down Jed placed the rod in the rests.

As he took a few minutes to take in the river flowing past centimetres from his feet, he became conscious of the drone of two robo-cams, automatically deployed by the vehicle and monitored by his sponsors back at central.

The cams were dragonfly like in both appearance and flight, zipping around streaming live video back to centre via the MPLV's on board satellite dish.

At the beginning of his sponsorship these things annoyed the hell out of Jed, a necessary evil; they would boost his earnings and those of his employers, so by virtue of necessity he had become accustomed to dealing with them.

He opened his bait tub and picked up one of the cylindrical pellets turning it between his thumb and fingers. In circumference it was the thickness of a standard rod handle, and 5cm long, it was adorned with the impression of his sponsor's logo. "What next", he thought to himself, having long realised that it was not always wise to express himself vocally with the robo-cams streaming everything, including sound back to centre.



He picked up the rod from the rests and for a brief second admired what he held. The rod was the latest in a blend of organic and carbon fibres, it was light, very light and at 12' was incredibly powerful.

The test curves of yesteryear had long become obsolete, instead rod technology relied on the intelligent materials that enabled the rod to perform anything from delicate underarm casts to serious lead chucking, and yet still respond to increasing pressure from a fighting fish without locking up.

The reel was a marvel of modern materials, even lighter than the rod itself it was manufactured from a composite plastic-alloy originally developed for the aerospace industry. The really clever bit though was the electronic clutch, this ensured that the optimum pressure was maintained at all times and the millisecond response rate to changes in tension, caused by a running or lunging fish, ensured that these were handled with ease.

Its only design fault in

Jed's view was the pseudo digitally created noise it emitted to simulate the sound of a spinning clutch.

He began his running commentary – a small microphone automatically flipping down from his hat to pick up his every word.

Taking the pellet he had been rolling through his fingers he embedded the hook turning it 90 degrees pulling the hook point into the pellet, Jed was ready to fish.

Explaining in to the microphone that he had pre-baited the swim over the past few weeks, he picked his spot, cast and dropped the bait bang on the money.

Setting the rod into the rests he tensioned the line and sat back in silence. Centre would use archive recordings of pre-recorded commentary and splice these into the images that the robo-cams continued to stream.

It was just too much to ask even a professional angler to keep up a running commentary without repetition for anything over 20 minutes.

Six thousand miles away

the editing suite team at central were already working on the video; all Jed had to do was catch a barbel, a record breaking barbel to be precise.

Ninety minutes had passed, and other than the gentle nodding of the rod tip in the rivers flow he had not had so much as a knock.

Jed had left the bait in position; he knew it would still be on the hook, the pellet had been designed to do just that. Composed from the same proteins and amino acids as the natural organisms found in the river, this exceptional designer bait was created to leach an irresistible scent trail down river pulling the barbel into his swim.

Or at least that's what the technical boys had told him. He was though, beginning to doubt their very words.

As the thought flashed across his mind the tip of the rod twitched, once, twice and wrenched around, Jed grabbed the rod re-starting his commentary in an instant.

"Here we go".

As he firmly swept the rod back, setting the hook,

the rod took on a beautiful parabolic curve. Jed knew this was a big fish at the outset; the strength of the fish was unbelievable.

He recalled that anglers of old had followed a hooked Indian mahseer 100 yards down river, scrambling over rocks in an attempt to halt its run. That would not be the case here though.

The rod and reel worked in perfect harmony and he had no doubts whatsoever about the efficiency of the line he was using. Made from his sponsor's secret blend of braid, the line had zero stretch, no memory and had the same refraction index as water, rendering it invisible.

Jude paused for thought, not much need for that in a swollen coloured river, but that didn't stop the marketing boys using it as a key selling point.

That should keep the sponsors happy he smiled inwardly, he had vocalised the merits of the line into his microphone, his thoughts though were kept to himself. The robo-cams where now less frenetic, focusing instead on making sure that every detail of the ensuing battle was captured, each of their single unblinking eyes zoomed in on Jed, the

rod and the water all in harmony. The editing suite at centre was alive with activity and anticipation.

During the next 15 minutes Jed described the action, vocalising the power of the fish and the growing tension in his arms, almost as if this were being done for an audio pod cast rather than a video.

There was a real need to; there wasn't much to see except for the "V" of the line as it cut through the water, the fish remained deep.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly the fish yielded to the power of the rod and line and Jed began to work the fish toward the platform. 15 metres out, the barbel broke surface and for the first time he caught a glimpse of its enormous flank, the golden scales shimmering in the sunlight.

The robo-cams captured every second and both Jed and the editing suite realised simultaneously that they were looking at a potential record breaker. At that moment the fish lunged, slapping its rudder like tail hard on the water, the rod, reel and line all absorbed the sudden change in pressure and the extra 10 metres it had gained were

soon recovered.

The fight was almost at an end and as the fish broke the surface again it rolled to show the creamy white of its underbelly, it was now only 5 metres out from the platform.

Jed touched a pad with his left foot and from underneath the platform a capacious landing net unfolded in the water extending outward as it did.

The net hung a metre below the surface and as Jed drew the barbel toward him, the net automatically rose enveloping the fish in its mesh, the top of the net drew together and the barbel was safely enclosed within it.

The electronic clutch of the reel sensed the lessening of tension and Jed was able to ease line from the reel and lay the rod in the rests.

Resting the fish, and at the same time the tension that he was now acutely aware of in his arms, Jed reflected on the fight.

"Clinical" he thought, the barbel once hooked had no chance. The equipment technology available to him had overcome every element of risk.

Before his mind could continue that particular train of thought, he was abruptly

returned to reality as the robo-cams fizzed around him.

Depressing the pad again, the net was raised from the water and the barbel was lowered on to an unhooking mat that resembled a child's paddling pool, apart from the muddy brown colour of the fabric.

Swiftly removing the hook, the net was raised again sufficiently enough to clear the mat. As the excess water ran off the net the integral digital scales blinked, zeroed and then registered 17.75kg.

Jed clenched his fist, punching the air, as much for the rob-cams benefit as it was for his own. "Yes!" he exclaimed.

The digital readout changed from red to green, blinking all the while. Jed knew the details were being transmitted to the BRFC and 15 seconds later the readout blinked for the last time, stayed solid green and the words "New British Rod Caught Record – barbus barbus – 17.75kg – Jed Coxtan - Confirmed" scrolled left to right across the screen.

A quick trophy shot and the barbel was returned to the net and lowered into the



Gonna need a bigger boat!

water to rest and recover.

Five minutes later the barbel had regained its strength and had been returned to the river. Jed, with rod, bait tub and tackle in hand turned to climb the steps back up to the rear of the vehicle. As he did so the rod rests retracted and the seat from which he had fished stowed itself away.

As he returned his gear to its respective places he reached around and placed his palm on the panel, pressing the red retract button and the platform reversed its original operation, disappearing almost silently in to the rear base of the MPLV.

As the rear door closed behind him, Jed eased into the driving seat placing his palm on the console again, the strip of light scrolled up and down and the vehicle controls once again sprang into life.

Touching the console with his forefinger a video

screen silently lowered from the roof panel.

Voicing his access code the screen came alive with images, and within minutes he was watching the finished edit of his record capture.

Scrolling through two more screens he reached the sales status page and read with astonishment that the site had already received 400,000 hits and over 100,000 had already downloaded the video to the hard drives of their home entertainment systems.

A graph from the sales office was already charting the videos success, and based on historical data from earlier releases the video was forecast to exceed 4 million downloads, earning the sponsor and its star, Jed, a tidy sum.

He spoke and the video

screen switched off and slid back into its housing.

Briefly reflecting on the day's events he returned to the present moment and with his instructions delivered in conversational tone, the satellite navigation charted the course back to his home in Christchurch. The stabilisers corkscrewed from the ground and Jed steered the vehicle back

on to the main road before engaging auto drive.

Jed relaxed, this time though he couldn't sleep, his thoughts, not just on his new record capture but on the fact that he was getting paid to do this. Claspings his hands behind his head he leaned back in his seat smiling.

It's a hard life but someone's got to do it.

