

IT DOESN'T BOTHER me when there are postal strikes, as most of what comes through our front door I'm not in a rush to receive. Gas bills, phone bills, council tax bills, and the thing that fills me with the most dread – wedding invitations. It's like getting summoned for jury service.

You don't want to go, but it's very difficult to get out of, and then it's a long, drawn-out affair that you have to sit through with strangers. You can normally tell it's a wedding invite because the font on the envelope has so many swirls and curls it looks like your address was written out during an earthquake.

I'll check who the invitation is from, and if it's not a relation, I'll try to get it to the shredder before Suzanne gets wind of it. Getting rid of the evidence isn't so easy when the envelope is packed full of bits of glitter and gold hearts that go all over the bloody place when you open it, like a money bag from the bank that's been fitted with an ink bomb.

Then I have to Hoover up the evidence. I did this recently, but Suzanne knew what I'd done when she went to vacuum the stairs and saw the glitter whizzing round inside the Dyson like some kind of Brian Cox CGI universe.



I'm not totally against marriage. If two people want to get married, they should just get on with it. Why all the palaver? I think getting a joint mortgage is a bigger deal, yet you don't have to invite everyone-you-know-plus-one to witness you signing the contract. I might have married Suzanne years ago if we could have done it online.

Just tick a few boxes, agree to the terms and conditions and wait for the automated reply that says it's all gone through and we're now husband and wife. Why has that not been set up? I don't think having a big fancy wedding means you love someone more, it just means you want to show your friends and family how much you love someone.

But I've never been too bothered about what other people think. And there isn't one bit of the traditional wedding that attracts me. I'm a big fan of cake, and yet even wedding cake doesn't tempt me. I don't know anyone who likes it and I don't think I've ever seen anyone eating it either.

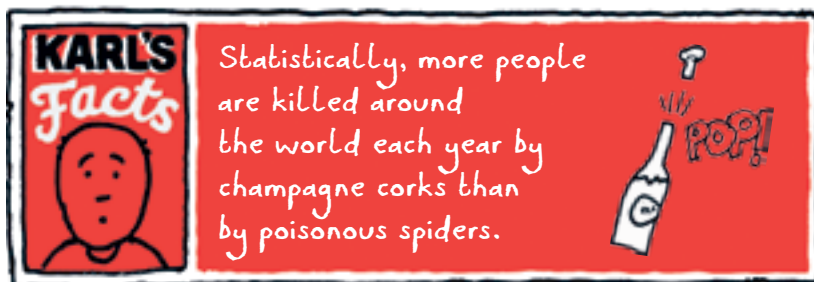
I've watched people scoffing down kangaroo arse and bulls' bollocks on *I'm a Celebrity*, yet I've never witnessed wedding cake being eaten. In fact, wedding cakes sum up the whole thing for me – over the top, unnecessarily complicated, no one really enjoys it, and it's sickly sweet.



THE WEDDING CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

People think it's odd that I hate weddings and don't want to get married to Suzanne, even though we've been together so long. They think getting married and having kids is what life's all about. I don't agree, but I was travelling to the wedding capital of the world to see if I might change my mind.

Over 115,000 people travel to Las Vegas every year to tie the knot. My flight was full of single blokes going there to gamble and couples going to get married, which you could say is a different sort of gamble. The couple sitting in front of me were from Newcastle and they were with their friends and family. That's something else that winds me up about weddings: when the happy couple say they're gonna get married abroad and they seem to think it's reasonable to ask you to take time off work, and pay for flights and a hotel just to see them say 'I do'. Well, 'I won't'. The Geordies were drinking champagne, which is always dragged out at weddings too. I've never been a fan, as it gives me heartburn and I don't like the way it doesn't come with a proper lid. Once the cork is out it has to be drunk. Even Pringles supply you with a proper lid.



I went for the healthiest options on the flight to get some roughage in my system. On my last trip to America I travelled down Route 66 and I ended up feeling fat and bloated after just a few days, as I couldn't find many places that served vegetables. The fact that they call fruit machines slot machines in the US just goes to show that fruit and veg aren't that popular.

Twelve hours later (five bottles of champagne for the Geordie couple) we landed in Vegas, which is said to be the brightest place on Earth from space. We got to the hotel, and it was massive. There was a huge casino on the ground floor. I've heard that these places try all sorts of tricks to keep people gambling. They have no clocks or windows so you don't know what time of day it is, and they pump the place with oxygen to keep everyone awake. At the hotel casino all the machines have comfy chairs in front of them to make people stay longer. I'm not sure how successful this is, though, as my dentist's chair is pretty comfy but I don't stay for extra fillings. As we were checking in I watched as old people sat there, feeding their life's savings into the slots. Some of them looked like they could be in their 90s. The oxygen being pumped into the room was probably the only thing keeping them alive. Maybe they were trying to win enough to pay for a taxi back to their rooms, the place was that big. All the hotels are big here. They boast in Vegas about having seventeen of the world's twenty largest. Even the bellboy who helped carry my luggage to the room seemed a bit lost. The distance he must cover in an evening, he's more of a Sherpa than a bellboy.

After sending him on his way back out into the maze of corridors I made myself a cup of tea. On the tea tray there was a tin labelled 'Intimacy Kit', which contained a condom and some mints. Hardly a 'kit', is it? You get more in a Kinder egg. There was a note in the bathroom asking occupants to re-use towels to help the hotel be more environmentally friendly, which was a bit of a joke considering the amount of energy the bulbs outside were burning up.



The next morning jet lag kicked in and I woke up early. I went down to breakfast and a few people were still trying their luck on the slots. Even though there are no clocks, they must have known it was morning, as the smell of bacon from the restaurant was filling the air. I had the full works – bacon, eggs and a breakfast muffin, which is basically a cake. No wonder obesity is a problem in the US if people are having cake for breakfast.

We drove around Vegas to see what it looks like without all the lights on. It's not half as fancy-looking in the daytime. It's like a Christmas tree – without the lights on, it's just a tree in your lounge during the day. It was pretty quiet too. Vegas is all about the evening; the people are nocturnal. As well as casinos, there are lots of chapels in Vegas. Our first stop was the Little White Wedding Chapel, where they offer a drive thru wedding service.



The sign boasted that Michael Jordan and Joan Collins were married there. I didn't even know they were an item. We pulled in to take a closer look. You have to drive under a hoarding painted with little naked cherubs. I've always found cherubs a bit sinister. The idea of winged babies flying around with no nappies on seems like an accident waiting to happen. There would be shit everywhere. If I saw a cherub flying about in real life it would terrify me, whereas a Cyclops, which is another mythical being, wouldn't scare me at all, as it's just a bloke with one eye. He'd be registered disabled and get a decent parking space in today's world.

I like the idea of a drive thru wedding. Minimum fuss. I don't know why this hasn't made it over to the UK when most things from America do. In the main reception area a woman was tidying up a glass display cabinet. It was full of garters. What are garters, anyway? They featured a lot in *Carry On* films, and I know they are supposed to be sexy, but what are they actually for? I've always presumed they're a sort of sweat band for a fat leg.

The woman who owns the place, Charolette, came into reception. She grabbed me, dragged me into the chapel and started walking me down the aisle. I told her that I wasn't married and wasn't planning on

a
**Little
White Chapel**



*Michael
Jordan*



*Joan
Collins*

**24 HR DRIVE UP
WEDDING WINDOW**

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getting married, but if I was then the drive thru option would appeal to me. She explained how it came about.

CHAROLETTE: I saw so many people coming, and they were handicapped, and they had their little children with them, and the children would be crying, and it was hot, and they just wanted to hurry up and get married.

KARL: Do they use it often?

CHAROLETTE: No, it's for anybody. Now everybody comes and I don't see any handicap people.

I think it's good how something that was designed for the disabled can be used by the able. I got told off by someone in a wheelchair once for using the toilet that was for them. The queue was massive for the loos and my guts were in a bad way, so I didn't see the sense in not using an empty disabled cubicle when all the other toilets were busy. The bloke had a chair to sit in while he waited, so I don't know what his problem was.

CHAROLETTE: I'm not married.

KARL: Why is that then?

CHAROLETTE: Well, because my husband went to heaven.

KARL: Oh, alright.

CHAROLETTE: He was the only man I wanted. When he left this earth, I wasn't the same. But I knew that I never wanted anybody else and I never went out and looked for another man.

If Suzanne left me I don't think I'd bother looking for someone else either. I would drive them up the wall always talking about Suzanne and how she used to do things a certain way. Charolette said it took around ten minutes to do a drive thru wedding. You wouldn't even have

to turn the engine off. You can wait for a Filet-O-Fish for longer than that at McDonald's. Normal weddings can go on forever, and there's so much talk and planning that go into them too. And I've no idea why people get engaged. Either get married or don't. What's the point of celebrating the idea of possibly getting married? It's just another card you have to buy someone. So many things are dragged out these days, not just weddings. Even though we're living longer I'm convinced we're not actually doing more, we're just waiting longer. It annoys me that when you buy a sofa these days, you have to wait six weeks for it to arrive. Why does it need to be made to order? They should have more than one in stock – make three, sell one, get another in. It's not a kidney I'm looking for, it's a sofa!

Charolette took me through the procedure as we stood by the drive thru hatch.

CHAROLETTE: We're gathered here today at the Little White Chapel Drive Thru Wedding of Love. Karl, will you take Suzanne to be your wife, and will you promise to love her, and honour her, and respect her, and keep her all the days of your life?

KARL: Okay.

CHAROLETTE: And, Suzanne, will you take Karl for your husband?

KARL: Yeah.

CHAROLETTE: Will you promise to love him and honour him and respect him and keep him all the days of your life?

KARL: Yeah.

CHAROLETTE: Love is a choice. You have chosen this beautiful lady because you want to be with her. She's on your mind, she's in your ears, she's in your eyes, she's on your lips, and she's in your heart. And she's in your arms. She wants to be loved by you. And you want to be loved by her. It's no accident that you met. It's no accident that you're together. God doesn't make mistakes. God has a purpose for your life to be with her. Not to be angry with her, not to be upset with her, to love her, to understand her, to hold her if she ever has a temper or something . . .



*The Little White Wedding Chapel
Drive Thru Window*



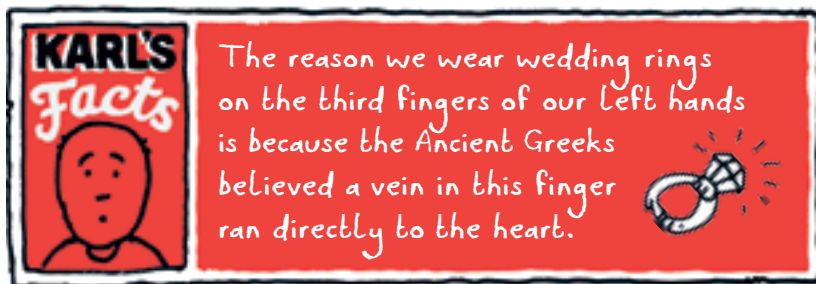
KARL: Is this still the speech?

CHAROLETTE: Yes. Just hold her, and love her, and just tell her you want her. And the wedding ring . . .

KARL: Oh, you still do the ring?

CHAROLETTE: Oh yes. The wedding ring is a symbol of marriage, it's a circle that is endless, to represent your endless love.

I find it odd that we've named a finger the 'ring finger'. It just goes to show that we have too many fingers. I reckon we'd get by okay if we had lobster hands. People say it's good to wear a wedding ring, as it reminds you of your partner, but you should remember them without that. The rapper Nelly went through a phase of wearing a plaster on his face, and people said it was supposed to be a reminder of his brother who was in prison. He stopped wearing it after a while, so either he invested in some Post-it notes or it fell off in the shower and he forgot all about his brother.



What I like about the drive thru wedding is it's not about showing off. Take wedding bells: they only exist to show off. People who need to know you're getting married will know about it, so why make a load of noise? It's noise pollution, and there's no need for it. I've never understood why people on *Relocation, Relocation* won't buy a house near a main road cos they don't like the sound of traffic, but think living near a church in a village is idyllic. Virtually every weekend in the summer those bells are gonna be ringing. If it was a car alarm people would complain.

Charolette gave me a quick tour of her selection of wedding dresses before we left. That's another thing that puzzles me – why buy a wedding dress instead of hiring one? You won't need it again, and it'll just end up being shoved in the loft. I'm sure that's why wedding dresses have got ridiculously big over the years – if it's gonna be stuck up in the loft it may as well double up as insulation. I saw a wedding dress in the *Guinness Book of Records* where the train was 1.85 miles long! The bridesmaids could hardly say they were invited, as they were almost two miles away.



When I left I thought back to what Charolette was saying about how she lost the man in her life and hasn't bothered to replace him. If something happened to Suzanne I don't think I would want to go through with finding somebody else either. I'd feel quite lost without her. It would be like separating Siamese twins, as we've been through everything together. Which can also be handy, as my memory isn't what it used to be, so I use hers as my back-up memory drive. I suppose a little bit of it comes down to laziness too. Meeting someone new would be like getting a new phone. You have to start again, input all of your information into them while trying to get to know their functions. But if I did want to try and find somebody new I don't even know how I'd go about it. I've never been one for chatting up women. It's not so complicated for animals. I've heard male pandas attract the female by showing off how high they can piss up a bamboo shoot! It's like some sort of challenge blokes would do on a stag do. The problem is, I'm not the romantic type and I don't agree with trying to charm people. That isn't the real me, so they'll only end up disappointed. I blame romantic films. They set women's expectations too high. In films, when the man puts a coat on a puddle for a woman to walk over – why would you do that? Especially with the way the weather is these days; the rain never bloody stops. Add to that the amount of potholes, I'd be working day and night just to pay my dry-cleaning bills for my wet, muddy coat. And why is the woman walking in puddles all the time anyway? Am I dating a woman or a frog?



THE ART OF PICKING UP WOMEN

I went to meet Vinnie, a professional pick-up artist who was supposed to help me learn how to approach women, should the need ever arise. He runs a boot camp for people who lack confidence to teach them how to do it. The boot camp was in Nipton, a small town in the Mojave Desert about an hour away from Vegas. There's not much to say about Nipton other than it has a population of sixty, one café and a few desert tortoises. Even though tortoises live for a hundred years, I doubt they've seen much change around Nipton.

By the time I got there Vinnie was already in full swing. Vinnie was a forty-five-year-old Italian fella. Not your stereotypical tall and dark Italian, Vinnie was small, dark and pink. If his neon pink hair didn't grab your attention, his earrings, eyebrow ring, chin ring or tattoos might. He explained how his look is carefully put together to attract women and is known as 'peacocking', which is basically making yourself stand out from the crowd like a peacock showing off its feathers. I've always thought of them as earth's natural drag queens.

There were five other blokes at the boot camp. I got in line.

VINNIE: In the 50s the rules of dating were well defined. You would go to a dance, approach a woman and dance with her. Then came the 60s, and women realised that they had a form of power. We call it **PUSSY POWER**. Right, grab yourselves. (*grabs crotch*) This is your social workout. If you don't exercise it now, it's probably not going to happen, because, gentlemen, remember, we are real men here. **IT'S NOT GONNA SUCK ITSELF!**

BOOT CAMP MEMBERS: It's not gonna suck itself!

VINNIE: Come on, grab it! **IT'S NOT GONNA SUCK ITSELF!**

BOOT CAMP MEMBERS AND KARL: It's not gonna suck itself!

VINNIE: If you wait for it to happen, it's probably not going to happen. When was the last time you heard a knock at the door, and they say, 'We have girls here, they want to talk to you'? No. If you want it, you got to go get it.