

# WAR OF THE ROSES

*The high price of fashion.*

BY POLENTH BLAKE

This year, it was cottages. Chrome cube houses had been all the rage last year, but after the success of the Back-to-Nature gene mod range, everyone wanted an idyllic cottage.

Dave McKillen was one of the few who managed to get one. The building was a timber-framed construction and came with a rose garden. It was even on the top level of the city, so Dave could sit in the garden and photosynthesize on clear days. Most people with Back-to-Nature leaf skin had to rely on UV lamps. Sunlight was real nature.

Dave stood on the garden path and breathed in the scent of roses. He was fashionable again.

"Can I play?" Little D tugged at Dave's jeans.

Dave smiled down at his young clone. "Sure. Mind the thorns."

Little D tottered towards the rose bushes. Dave turned back to the workers, who were lurking around the removal van. "Get a move on."

Most of the furniture was inside when Little D came back. "They is plain."

"Are plain," Dave corrected. Sometimes he wondered if the lab had stiffed him on the intelligence upgrades for Little D. A one-year-old shouldn't be making those kinds of mistakes.

"No glowies either." The child looked at his shoes sadly.

"How about we log on to the market and find some?"

Little D brightened immediately.

The garden transformed over the next few weeks. There weren't many roses on the market the first time Dave looked. Hickly Labs produced a few patterned varieties, such as the zany zebra and pink polka, but that was all.

J&D Genetics had their rose out the next day, claiming their furry flower was 'like planting a kitten in your garden'.

The moonglow rose, 'the rose that glows', was Mythic Gene's first attack on the market. The adverts went out hours after J&D's announcement.

The market war had begun.

Dave collected seeds from the old roses before digging them up. He didn't get rich by being wasteful — traditional varieties might be in next year. Once the bushes were gone, the garden was ready for its makeover.

Hundreds of new varieties were out by

the time the garden was clear. Dave chose the trendiest, although he did make some concessions for Little D. Jingle jigglers weren't high fashion, but the boy loved the way they trembled whenever someone was near. Once the flowers opened, each bloom jingled like a bell.

"Fairies live inside," said Little D, prodding the juggler bloom to hear it ring.

"Fairies aren't real yet." Dave made a note to get Little D a fairy, if Mythic Gene ever managed to get them approved. After the unfortunate incident with the first dragon pet, the government wasn't too enthusiastic about licensing any more mythical creatures.

Dave settled on a sun lounger to doze as Little D explored.

He was woken by Little D tapping him. "I find something."

"Daddy's photosynthesizing."

"It's important," said Little D.

Dave followed the boy around the side of the house. Little D crouched down by a small zany zebra bush. He prodded a flower and it jingled.

It took a moment for Dave to realize what had happened: the roses must have reproduced the old-fashioned way.

"That's some find. Well done."

Little D beamed. "Can I name him?"

"Sure."

"I call him Stinkyface."

Stinkyface was soon joined by other hybrids. Jilly was a moonglow rose with jiggling flowers. Plop had zany zebra stripes and polka spots. A new hybrid seemed to pop up every day, until Little D found Sally.

She was an odd-looking rose. Her petals were shrivelled and she smelt faintly of rotten fish. Dave wouldn't have thought she was a rose, apart from a hint of moonglow light after dark.

The other roses were dead by the end of the week.

"Nothing wrong with the soil," the plant doctor said.

Dave looked at the rows of dead bushes. "Maybe the roses are faulty?"

"No one else's have died." There was an edge to the doctor's voice. Dave knew who paid her wages.

"What if they're dangerous...?"

"Sir, moonglow roses have been fed to mice with no ill effects. Jingle jigglers were crossed with 23 cultivated varieties of rose to ensure they wouldn't harm the wild populations.



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They're safe for everyone, plant, animal or otherwise."

She gave a pointed look at his green skin at 'otherwise'.

"There must be something," he said.

"I've taken a sample from the survivor. We'll let you know in a week." She packed her testing kit away in a briefcase and strode out of the garden.

The lab report's only caution was legal. They'd found 32 patented genes in Sally's genome, so it wouldn't be legal to resell her.

Other than that, she was healthy and completely harmless.

Within a month, there were no roses left on the top level, apart from a few Sally bushes here and there.

The news feeds exploded. The gene companies blamed it on an unknown disease. Dave knew better. He'd been watching the bees. Normal bees wouldn't go near Sally, but the modded city bees weren't so picky about scent. Every time a non-Sally flowered, it was only a matter of time before the poisoned pollen reached it.

Dave went out and joined Little D in the garden. The child sat crying by a dead jingle juggler.

"Hey," said Dave. "I've got something for you."

Little D looked up through his tears.

Dave handed him the box of old rose seeds.

"I plant them?" said Little D.

"Not yet, but one day."

The day Sally died. ■

**Polenth Blake** (<http://www.polenthblake.com>) enjoys a spot of gardening, as long as the plants leave each other alone.