

DJ is a Distinguished Jumping Spider, Lefty is a snail with a left-handed shell. Lefty and DJ are both rare. DJ's a mover, Lefty's a thinker – and they're firm friends. They live in an abandoned allotment with a community of hard-working creatures who are rewilding the old garden. One afternoon, Lefty has a bad dream about their home being flattened . . . and then the council decide to send in the diggers to redevelop it. Gnatasha (the irascible gnat) blames Lefty and expects him and DJ to sort it out. (She's not impressed with either of those two.) Will their lovely world be turned into a bowling green? How can Lefty and DJ stop the diggers wrecking their home?



# “Call this an improvement?”

Written, illustrated and designed by Simon Bell



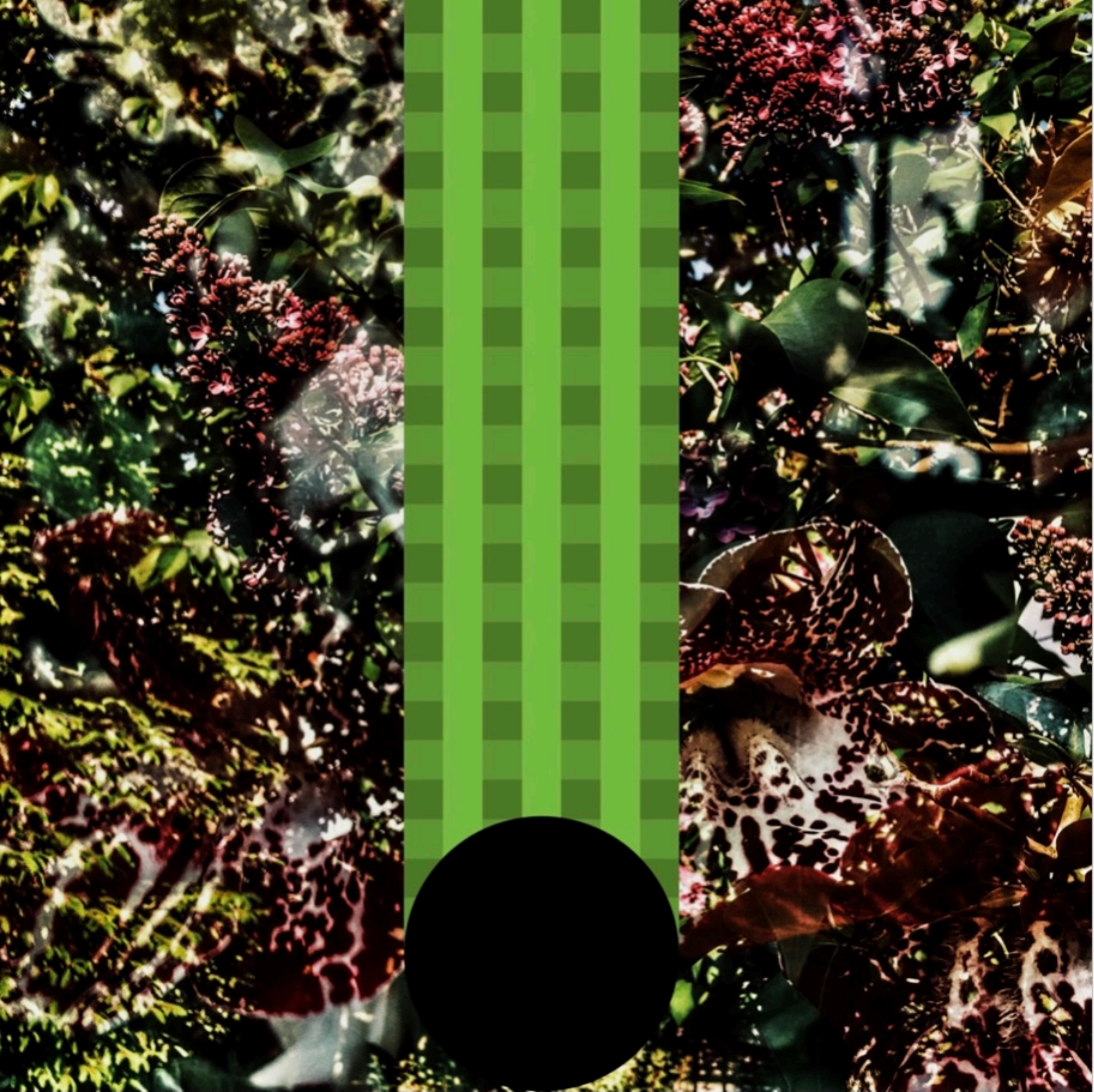


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"RUN!" The terrifying black ball headed straight for Lefty through the lovely garden he lived in, flattening everything in its way. But Lefty couldn't run - he couldn't even move ... he could only watch, fascinated, because behind the ball all the squashed plants and flowers were turning into a neat, green lawn mown in a criss-cross pattern. "Strange," thought Lefty, "that's very strange."

He didn't have time to think any more because the ball was still coming for him! "RUN!" Too late! He couldn't get away ... he was going to be flattened and turned into a neat, green lawn mown in a criss-cross pattern too ... nooo!

"All OK?" asked DJ, the garden's resident (and rare!) Distinguished Jumping Spider (aka *Attulus Distinguendus*, the Latin handle that DJ really treasured :) "You've woken from sleep, all in a heap. What can I ... erm ... pie? Umm ... "

("You could try talking properly," thought Lefty grumpily.) DJ was a superb athlete (if rather understaffed in the brains department). He fancied himself as the local rhyming bard, but he often couldn't finish his sentences. This drove Lefty mad, as Lefty was smart but impatient (and a snail, and no athlete at all).

Lefty's shell spiralled anticlockwise, a left-hander. Like DJ, he was rare. So they were both different to the others, mavericks, perhaps - and firm friends.

"I'm OK, thanks," Lefty replied. "I had a bad dream about a huge black ball flattening our garden into a neat, green lawn mown in a criss-cross pattern."





"Most alarming," mused DJ. It was a lovely afternoon, and Lefty suggested a cup of good old-fashioned builders' tea. "What a spiffing idea!" DJ declared.

They took tea in what they called their garden home. It wasn't like the kind of garden most people have ... there were no carefully trimmed shrubs or tidy flower beds or elegant hanging baskets or a neat, green lawn mown in a criss-cross pattern ... in fact, it looked like the surface of the moon with green bits.

It had once been an orderly council allotment, but was abandoned after the lockdown started. Now great tangles of plants and wild flowers and brambles grew like crazy around lumpy piles of brown earth. There were rotting apples around a couple of scraggy trees and the vegetable patch was full of weeds.

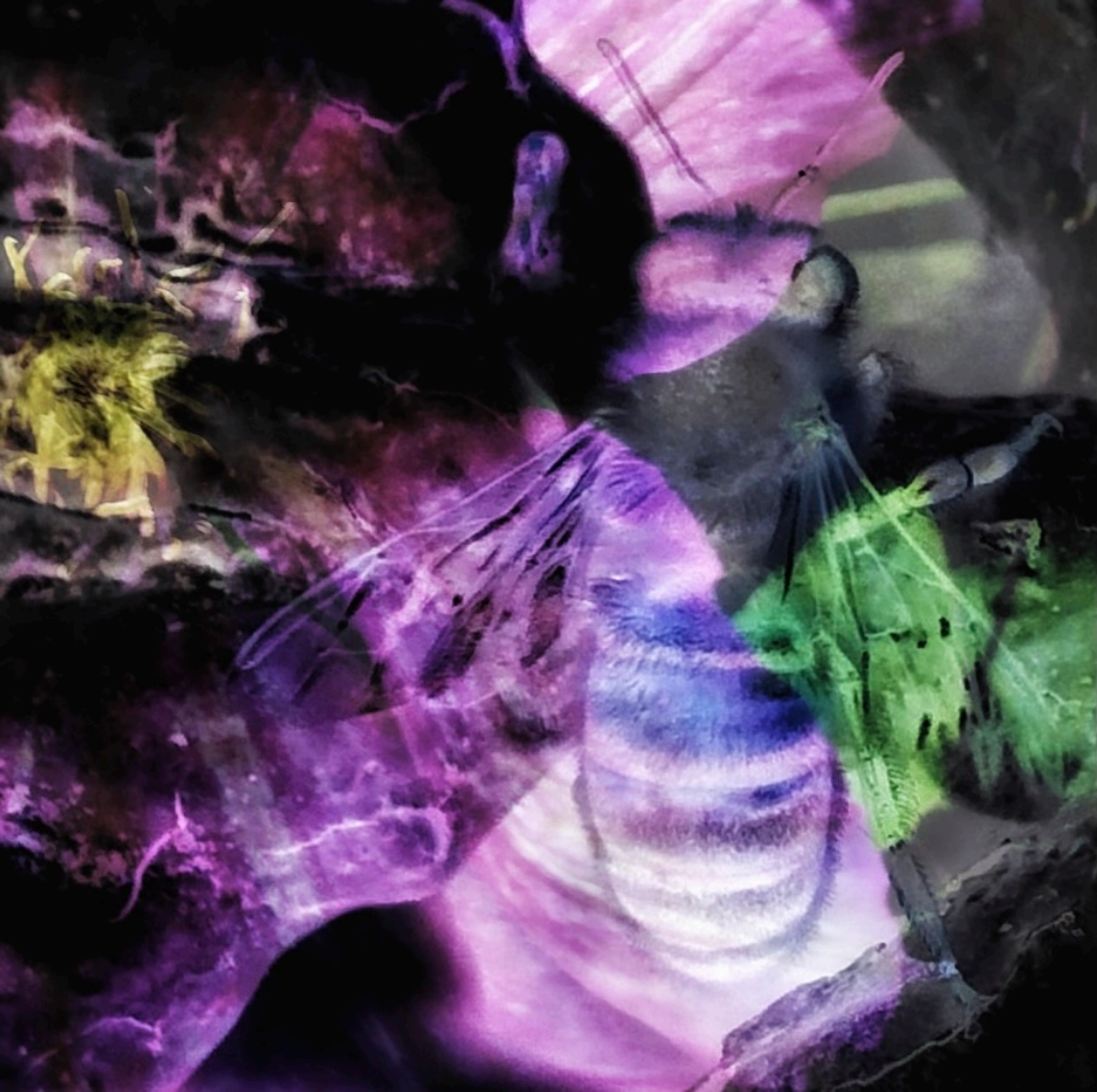
But the garden was really coming alive in a special way. Industrious insects worked the land, while birds sang happily in the trees and down by the pond a frog belched noisily ("Pardon me!"). The old garden may have looked like a wild, chaotic mess, but it was being returned to nature in perfect order now.

"But, soft! What light through yonder winder breaks?" misquoted DJ, "there's a man over there." And so there was ... but who could this man possibly be?

"I'm Mr Joynks. I'm from the council. And I've got a clipboard," said the man, looking at the two friends coldly. "The lockdown's easing, and on Monday this derelict dump is to be turned into a nice municipal lawn and bowling green."







Lefty froze ... the ball, the criss-cross lawn ... his bad dream was coming true! "Dump?" he spluttered, once he'd pulled himself together. "Derelict dump?"

"We've been here since the spring of this year —" intoned DJ. "Not now, DJ, not now, please," interrupted Lefty (a tad irritably), "this is serious." "So's my verse and trust me I've heard worse," said DJ (a tad hurt). But Lefty ignored him and turned to Mr Joynks, the man from the council (who had a clipboard).

"Now look Jonks — " "Joy**nk**s," Joynks corrected him. "Now look Joy**nk**s —" "Mr Joynks," Mr Joynks corrected him again. "Now look **Mr** Joynks," said an exasperated Lefty, "you clearly don't know the first thing about rewilding, but that's what we're doing. Rewilding helps reverse climate change. It's brilliant!"

"Yes, yes, I've heard all about rewilding and all that trendy stuff," sneered Mr Joynks, looking bored. "Let wolves run free and save each and every bee."

("Not a bad rhyme," thought DJ.) "We're improving the place," argued Lefty. "Really? REALLY?" snorted Mr Joynks. "Call this an improvement? Stroll on!"

"If only you could understand that good gardens aren't bland," replied Lefty. ("That's another good 'un," thought DJ.) "You all stayed away. We moved in. Not unreasonable. It's our home now. Everyone's got to live somewhere. The garden may look tatty to you, but we keep the food chain going here," Lefty continued. "We should be thanked, not evicted (by a man with a clipboard)."





"La-la-la!" rejoined Joynks. "You'll be telling me next that you lot can manage perfectly well without human beings, but that humans can't manage without a bunch of disorderly creepy crawlies running wild all over the landscape."

"But that's true! If only you ... umm ..." chipped in DJ, passionately, "realised that this kind of work will save the planet," Lefty picked up where DJ had left off. "Every single one of us here, it doesn't matter who, has got a special job to do, and everything is in harmony, and everyone is respected and equal. We obey only the Laws of Nature." concluded Lefty, (somewhat majestically).

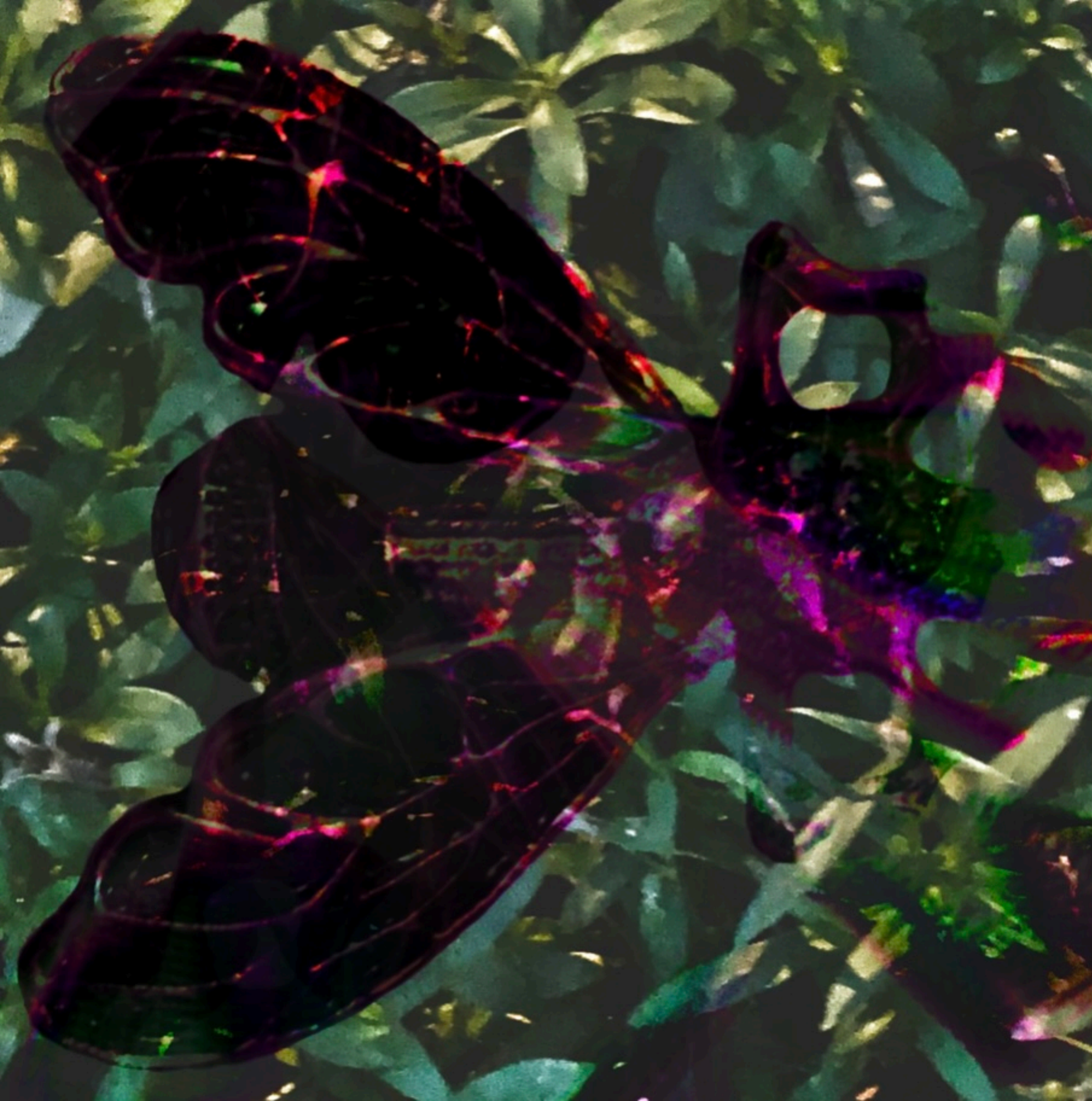
"You're on council land and you obey my laws," snarled Joynks, "never mind the Laws of Nature and all that baloney. The diggers are due on Monday and the only harmony round here will be when this place is all flat and tidy. Go and be respected and equal elsewhere!" And off he went (with his clipboard).

DJ and Lefty watched him leave, and looked at each other in dismay. "What'll we do? What'll we do?" wailed DJ. "We'll make a plan, that's what we'll do," Lefty reassured him. "Nil desperandum! But first - we have to tell Gnatasha."

"It's your fault!" shrieked Gnatasha the gnat when Lefty and DJ told her about the diggers and the dream. "You had the dream so you brought this on us subcutaneously." "Subconsciously, you mean," Lefty corrected her. This was unwise because Gnatasha, who chaired the garden committee with blistering abruptness, was in no mood for niceties of language (or dealing with dreams).







"Right!" she bellowed. "I'm going to call an all-garden meeting instanter, and you two jokers had better be there. *I'm* going to sort this out ... men ... hah!"

"Anyone got any bright ideas?" Gnatasha glared at the assembled crew once she'd told them what was going on. They all wanted to do something, and an ant piped up "we could dig a trench and the diggers would fall in and then we'd be saved." Everyone cheered and patted her on the back. Great idea!

But Lefty pointed out that the trench would have to be as deep as the apple trees were high and it wouldn't get dug in time, not even with ants digging it.

"What if we bite the digger drivers all over?" asked a fist-pumping mosquito. "Then they'd be too itchy to drive straight and they'd crash into each other." But Lefty pointed out that mosquitos already spent their whole lives biting people all over, and you never saw any diggers crashing into each other.

"We could hold hands and form a chain and sing a song and then they'd go away and leave us in peace!" suggested a cricket at the back. More cheers! But Lefty pointed out that the digger drivers wouldn't hear them over the din of their engines and they'd all be squashed as flat as pancakes - flatter even.

"Look, Lefty," said Gnatasha sharply. "You think of something then, instead of trashing everybody else's ideas. You and DJ seem to think it's OK just sitting around being oddballs, but it's not. Make yourselves useful for once." (Ouch!)





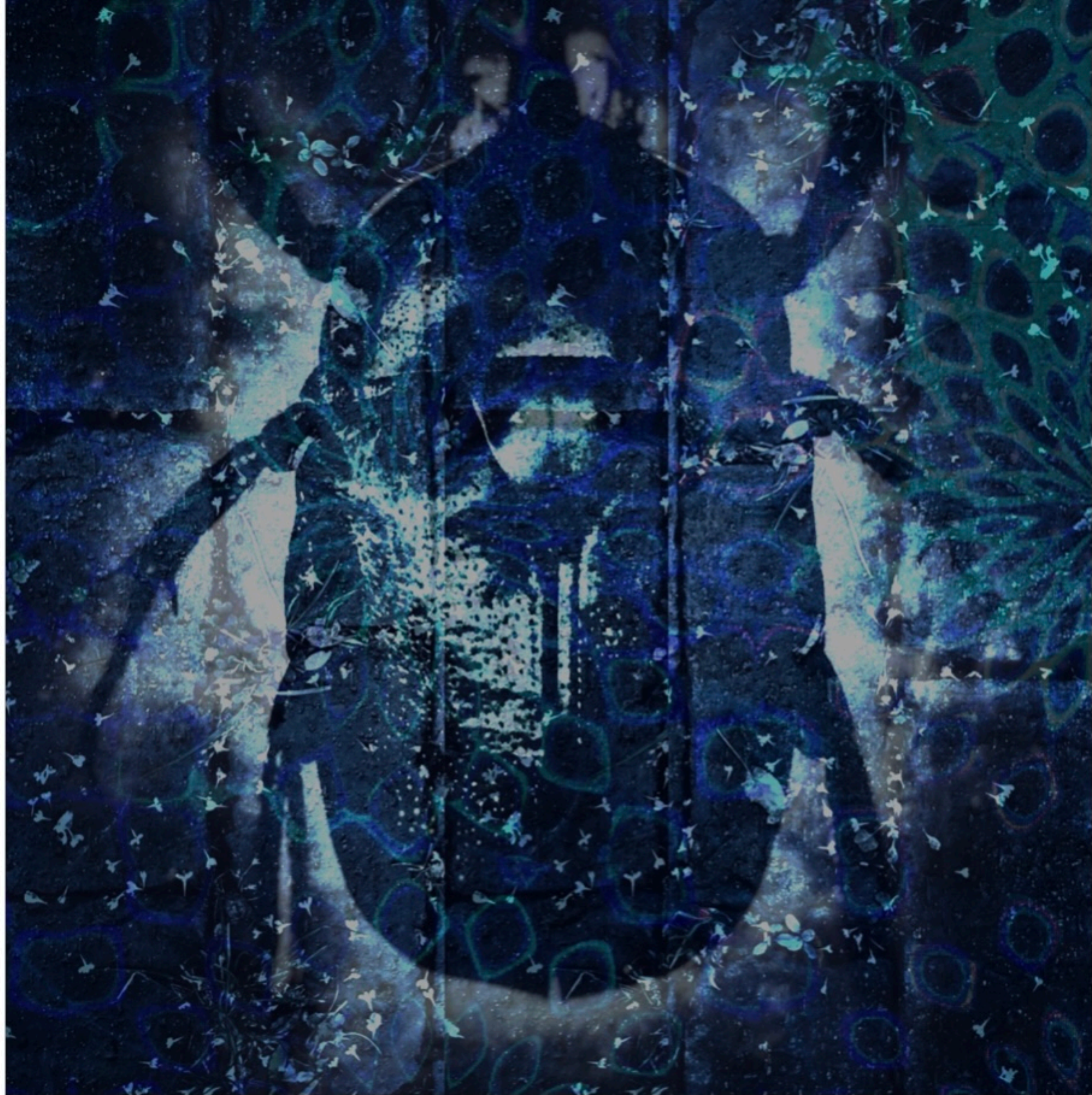
"Now, wait a minute!" DJ started, "that's not fair -", but Lefty growled in his ear "I wouldn't if I were you. Leave it. WE have to fix this." Lefty sat very still and racked his brains. Then he racked them again. Then "I've got it! Eureka!"

"You reeker?" asked DJ, confused. "No! It's ... oh, look, never mind, but I've got a plan!" said Lefty. "Here, Gnatasha, listen to this and then let's all vote." She listened, everyone voted "YES" and that night the plan became action ...

All was quiet and peaceful in the town - all the people were asleep and all the houses were dark ... but DJ was alert and watching, and on his signal an army of grim and determined insects marched in step out of the garden. Alongside bugs, beetles, flies, fleas, ants, earwigs, wasps and all the others were feared comrades-in-arms: the spiders and the cockroaches with antennae bristling ... Where were they headed? Joynks's house! And what was the plan? Invasion!

In a continuous line they swarmed up Joynks's garden path and disappeared into his house. DJ was in charge of the operation and he didn't have long to wait ... lights suddenly came on, and you could hear the shrieks across town!

Lefty didn't go with them (action wasn't his thing), and so he was desperate to get the news when DJ made it back to the garden next day. "How did it go?" "Result!" beamed DJ, and Gnatasha cut in warmly "Lefty, you should've been there. DJ was just awesome!" "Oh, mate! How you exaggerate!" blushed DJ. "Anyway, everyone's in position at Joynks's. Hello ... here's the man himself."







"Can I have a word?" Joynks called out, wearily. "Look, your lot invaded and infested every inch of my house last night ... what's more, they won't leave!"

"Well, what d'you expect?" retorted Lefty, angrily. "You threaten to turf us out of our home, an abandoned garden we've rescued and cultivated. We've got to live somewhere, haven't we? Your place is nice. It suits us, don'tcha know!"

"But maybe we could do some sort of deal," pleaded Joynks. "I mean, some of my best friends are insects ("Yeah, right!" muttered Gnatasha), but surely you can see that we'd never all get on together at mine. All those legs ..."

"There's no deal unless you call off the diggers and leave us in peace. You do that and I'll see about pulling our boys out," replied Lefty. Joynks thought for a moment ... "OK, deal! Call off your bugs. I mean your boys, sorry. Keep the garden. Rewild it into a perfect mess. Save the planet! Save us all yeah!"

"There's no need for sarcasm. We're not like you, and we don't do things like you do, but we're part of this world too. We all do our bit, in our own way ... even you," Lefty said firmly. "So ... no neat, green lawn mown in a criss-cross pattern? No black bowling balls?" "Definitely not!" "Definitely deal!" Hooray!

Gnatasha turned to DJ and Lefty. "You did us proud. I was hard on you earlier. But you've shown us that you can be special as well as different. Thank you."

"It is time, for a celebratory rhyme" started DJ, "but ... Oi! ... come back!" :)







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