



but for the insects, the crabs, the family of pelicans dive-bombing offshore and who knows what in the swamp, I am alone.

Aside from the smuggled food, water and other beverages, my kit list is the same as Gardiner and Ralston's. To wit: a medical pack; a walkie-talkie, horn and flare for emergencies; a machete; another knife; a sleeping bag; a mosquito net; a torch; some plastic bags; a desalination pump; a diving mask and snorkel; a saucepan. All of this had been stashed in two blue stow bags, but is now littered around the area, wet and covered in sand. This offends me — I'm a tidy person — but I seem to lack the wherewithal to get anything remotely shipshape.

The plastic bags are to collect water via a process called transpiration, which involves wrapping the bag around the branch of a tree to capture moisture evaporating from the leaves. Potentially useful in dry weather (although the water does tend to be green), but I did not require transpiration. Instead, I find a dozen washed-up plastic bottles, hack the tops off with the machete and set them out to amass rainwater.

As another part of what turns out to be a short-lived burst of initial activity, I hang my diving mask from a branch. Five minutes later,

It's dull. I start talking to things. I can understand how Tom Hanks struck up that relationship with his volleyball



I glance up through the shimmer above the fire and have a hallucination. A visitor! Skinny guy, looks like a tree, wearing a diving mask and snorkel.

The very moment my colleagues departed on Terence's boat, I set up a clock in my head, counting down in half-hours how much longer I had to stay in this toilet. Call that a failure to embrace the experience if you want, but you weren't there and I was, and I'm betting the one question dominating any other rational person's mental world would have been the same: when can I leave?

Well, not yet is the answer, so I busy myself rigging a tarpaulin in a tree to keep the rain off. Not off me, off my fire, which I want to preserve, partly because it's something to do, partly because it might deter the mozzies, partly because when they collect me the next day I want to have demonstrated some modicum of competence, in this area if no other. I think I overdid the fire, to be honest, built it too big, the result being I couldn't really fit under the tarpaulin and out of the rain without scorching my shins.

Still, the fire keeps me occupied. Aside from sleeping and dozing, the fire is my main focus. Poking it, prodding it, staring into its depths, ➤