

CLAW MARKS 30TH ISSUE MADNESS. BUY IT OR WE'LL DO YOU IN.

30

CLAW MARKS



Children's Books That Never Quite Made It...

Dad's New Wife Robert

Molestation: Your Parents Really Love You

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Thanks to:

The Persian Army. Just because.

Also, for their small role in assisting the Persian Army, everybody else, namely:

Our artists: Michelle “Small Scary Child Specialist” Haward, Michelle “Bikini”

Wiehahn, Alex “The Greek” Miller, Simon “cute factor” Pienaar and Yancke “Mr Y”
Van Tonder

Lots of thanks to everybody who sent in articles on time.

Fewer thanks to everybody who sent articles in slightly late.

No thanks at all to those who didn’t send any articles.

More seriously, this is the first CLAWmarks I’ve been involved in where the articles got in vaguely on time. Obviously, this is largely thanks to our Careful Committee Harrassment Scheme, and hiring of a professional legbreaker. Thanks to those involved in these efforts and to those who cracked under the pressure. We’ll be even worse next time, we promise.

Finally, thanks to the committee: Mike “” Dewar

Michelle “not the middle of the page!” Haward

Ian “I don’t like straight lines” Kitley

Andrea “People should make more mistakes!” Hickman (Please disregard that)

Sean “Where’s my cake?” Finnis

Editorial



Mike Dewar dreamt of Absolute Power over those around him...his dreams shattered, he now consoles himself with Absolut Vodka and complaining a lot...Now with Footnotes For The Somewhat Confused¹

Well, it's here. The new academic year has dawned, and slowly CLAWmembers come back to roost at UCT, complaining about the bright sunlight, the crowds, UCT admin, having to wake up before twelve...and well, everything, actually. But given that a CLAWmember's two natural states are either bitching about something or dead, this is pretty much normal.

And accompanying the new year, with the slow inevitability of a twelve-shot vodka hangover, comes CLAWMarks.

Well, it's a big deal for me, anyway. My first editorial as CLAWthing...hell, first editorial of any kind ever (as you might have guessed from the vague way I'm meandering around the topic).

I scorched my way into the position of CLAWthing, blasting my way past absolutely no competition whatsoever. Some may say this was because I was the only damn fool stupid enough to volunteer, but I view it as the result of my commanding electoral presence. And surveying my new domain, drunk on power (and vodka), I was confident about this new edition of CLAWmarks.

After all, I was CLAWthing, I had the Power, I was Large and In Charge...what could possibly stand in my way? I even hoped to get all articles in by the submission deadline.

Foolish, foolish little man. As it turned out, I had about enough Power to illuminate a light bulb for about 0.2 seconds, and wasn't so much Large as Aggressively Medium. And despite my many venomous threats (and hiring of professional, heavily-armed muscle: see Diary of a CLAW leg-breaker, PAGE NUMBER?), the deadline rapidly became a distant memory. But if we were late, we were late in a scheduled sort of way.

Well, regardless of my own personal struggles...which I suspect no one really cares about anyway, I suppose I need to address the new CLAWmembers reading this. And God, I hope there are some, and that our cunning plan of bribing the masses with beverages was at least moderately successful.

¹ Footnotes For The Somewhat Confused

Welcome to CLAWs. We're an incestuous bunch of ill-mannered, lazy, unprincipled, lecture-skipping, homeless (or at least CLAWroom-less) weirdoes. I'm sure you'll fit right in.

But despite their instinctive hostility to outsiders, fellow CLAWmembers, authority figures, inanimate objects and the Greeks² (Because who really likes those olive-eating freaks, anyway?), CLAWmembers are really quite an immersive bunch. Soon you too will be skipping lectures, insulting your fellow members and trying to stop people calling you "Bob³". This is in fact harder than it looks – pity poor Sean Finnis, who despite two years of CLAWmembership, being on the committee, and PLENTY of lecture-skipping, is still referred to as "Sean-Bob". Of course, this is just one of many reasons to pity Sean...

Newly refreshed by a dose of my favourite hobby (insulting Sean), I return to the topic. Despite all this nonsense, there is still more to CLAWs than random insults and lecture-avoidance. We are a society, and we do stuff. More specifically, role-playing, LARPing, wargaming and Those Damn Card Games. If you're newly signed-up and reading this CLAWmarks, you probably already had a vague idea what these things are, or you have received the Stock CLAWs Recruitment Speech (probably from me, in fact). It's an easy speech to recognise: it starts, "Do you remember those old Choose-Your-Adventure Books..." and then experienced CLAWmembers start to cover their ears and dive for cover. But by way of lengthy analogy, it does get the job done. If by some miracle, you didn't get the Speech (You lucky sod!) then flag down a CLAWmember and ask "What the hell have I gotten myself into?" or turn to our introductory role-playing article later in CLAWmarks (PAGE NO).

Remember, if you're reading this during O-week (which we hope you are, unless you...read...very...slowly), there are still demonstration modules of role-playing games being run, and two exceedingly nifty LARPs being played (newbies play free!). So get involved – it's either that or go to lectures.

Your Loyal Ruler,

Mike Dewar (Dictator-For-A-Few-Months-Until-the-Next-Election)

Pop Goes the Hamster and other fun microwave games

² CLAWs apologizes if anyone feels they are biased against the Greeks. We hate all nations equally, but olives especially.

³ That standard label for new people who we haven't bothered to learn the names of. Nobody knows why, or if they do, they won't tell me.



Letters to the Editor

DISCLAIMER FOR STUPID PEOPLE:

None of these letters are serious. Their topics and the replies to them are all lovingly coated in layer after layer after layer of sarcasm, sufficient to outdo a Dulux commercial.

If you're not a stupid person, our apologies for wasting your valuable time with this disclaimer. Go invent cold fusion or sentient coffeemakers or something, you brainiac you.

Dear Editor,

I have for some time been concerned about my mental state. I don't quite know what's wrong with me, but I secretly suspect that everyone is trying to backstab or plot against me, and that at least half my friends are actually aliens, sorcerers or demons.

I have stopped eating food or drink that I haven't prepared myself – poisoners are everywhere, you know.

I have also begun to carry small cards, which I wave at people whenever I want to do something important. They say things like "You like me a lot," or "I scare you. Do as I say," and people obey them, without acknowledging that they exist.

I am very concerned, especially by my newly-gained nervous twitch of shouting, "DM!" every time something distresses me. Could I be developing Tourette's syndrome?

Yours in paranoia,

Lewis Anthony Richard Pennyworth

Dear Lewis,

There is no need for concern. You're simply a normal LARP player. Everything will be fine when you get to debrief, and I'm actually a giant slug

monster with radioactive eyebeams, shape-shifted to human form.

But don't tell anyone.

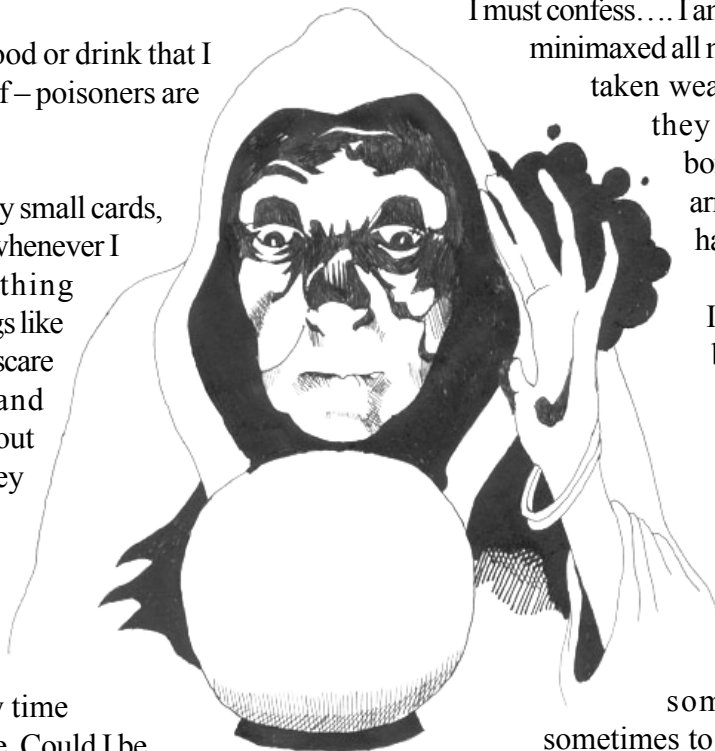
Dear Editor

I must confess... I am a munchkin. I have minmaxed all my characters, I have taken weapons only because they have the highest bonus and I have worn armour only because it has the highest bonus.

I have stabbed my buddies in the back on many an occasion. I have been stabbed by my buddies on a similar amount of occasions. I have interfered with their combats, sometimes to help, sometimes to hinder, but always with my own interests in mind.

I have abused my powers and shown no mercy to the poor innocent creatures of the dungeon. I have hacked and slashed, wade and slayed, killed and filled (my booty bag) and all without remorse.

I have been a low-down, dirty, rotten, conniving, evil, maniacal, despicable, self-centred munchkin all my life. But I have seen the light. I now see the error of my ways. I now know what I must do...



I must be worse then I have ever been before because people are kicking my ass in Munchkin. Man, I thought I was bad, but have you seen the types of people that play that game? Sheesh, they are probably reading this letter now and thinking “That’s not me!” Well, I am here to tell you that “Yes! It is you!”.

Dammit, I need to go now... someone is trying to steal my Pantyhose of Giant Strength and then backstab me with a Siege Weapon!

MinMax von Munchkin

Dear MinMax,

Your situation is unfortunate, and were you not a down-and-dirty gutless munchkin with the emotional depth of pond scum, I would feel sorry for you.

Then again, we have reality.

But my undying contempt for you and all your back-stabbing breed does not preclude me from my duty to aid you. Your only way out is to buy all the Munchkin supplements you can, and hope you can outpace your competitors in rule-lawyering.

Since Munchkin is a Steve Jackson game, you may well end up buying supplements until the end of time. I advise that you should buy up until the ‘Munchkin – Plants, Trees and Smelly Fungi’ expansion (compatible of course with the GURPS expansion of the same name). This should give you a healthy rules advantage, as well as one hell of a fly-swatter.

And for the record, get the Thief class and steal the pantyhose right back, and curse the Siege Weapon, then persuade one of the other players to curse his backpack with a Bag of Holding and ...oh God, I’m so ashamed I play this game...

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am an impressionable, 12 year old boy. I am trying to find a way to sell my soul to Satan (or the highest bidder). I have heard that this can be done through the magic you learn while Roleplaying. I have played the whole of Diablo almost 6 times now, and cannot find where you learn the magic and lose your soul. Can you help me?

Thank you,

John T. Chick (Jr.)

Dear John T. Chick, (Jr.)

Why bother with Satan? The devil always bids low... you think that guy has any idea what the term “current market value” means? Forget Faust – that was just some good PR work.

Go and register in the commerce department, straight away! Why sell your soul for forty measly pieces of silver, when you could be looking at a company car, corporate expense account and Armani wardrobe?

For the small price of your soul, imagination, free will and personality, all that and more can be yours! And if you call now, you’ll also receive the power to bore your friends and enemies (and everyone else in listening range) to death with financial trivia, and “fascinating facts about the JSE”.

PS Tell your Dad hi from us.

Some Kittens Can Fly

The Claws Primer

Tai Steyn, veteran CLAWmember, gives some advice to first-years about CLAWs: Don't Join. If it's too late to take that advice, he's got some more for you...

You are strolling around the plaza itching to sign up for exciting clubs and societies, you've already put your name on the list for yodelling and crochet¹, when a girl dressed in black (or not dressed in black), shoves this magazine in front of your face.

She says, "Sign up for CLAWs, its only R30, and you get a free coke!!!"

You are intrigued, not only by the stylish magazine, but by the fact that she's used three exclamation points. Besides, the price is right, and the coke is cold. You sign up. Now despite the fact that you have now signed away your soul, what does CLAWs offer the new supplicant applicant? CLAWs is not just a way of life, it's an adventure or something to that effect. We give you the chance to be all you can't be. At least, that's what the tagline promises.

Seriously, you've signed up, or are thinking about it, and want to know what you get out of CLAWs.

CLAWs is the Cape Legion of Adventurers and Wargamers, a UCT society that offers a chance for people to get together and explore several interesting hobbies: Firstly Roleplaying, secondly cardgaming, thirdly wargaming, fourthly the fine art of slagging someone off, and fifthly, footnotes².

Most CLAWmembers are roleplayers in some way, there are several roleplaying campaigns going on at any one time, and more start up every week. If you are new to roleplaying ask anyone about it and they will gladly tell you about their character, hit them until they stop. If you like playing collectable card games, CLAWs will be happy to make fun of you. Once we stop, we will sheepishly reveal that we too play games that involve *tapping for mana* (And we all know what that means). If, on the other hand you enjoy collecting, painting and talking to little men, a few CLAWmembers also enjoy this guilty pleasure.

CLAWs isn't just a hobby group; we are quite a social bunch. We hold parties³, we engage in intellectual debate, we have witty repartee. We have a large group of alumni who regularly socialise with, and deride, the younger generation. There are organised sports: *Kaos*⁴, mental gymnastics: *Fuchsia*⁵, social commentary and parties on yachts⁶.

Now to dispel a couple of misconceptions, CLAWs is not:

1. A religious organisation, we welcome people of all denominations and creeds.
2. An excuse to wear black. Those who do, have no excuse, especially during summer. (Black is not slimming, it's just black.)
3. A banana. I don't think this requires an explanation.

And now, brought to you at great expense, a few definitions:

1. Clawthing: a whiney person, who claims to be in charge.
2. Clawroom: a place of mythological significance. We had one, and now we don't. We blame society.
3. Tapping for mana: something that cardgamers do in pairs, we don't ask.
4. Clawmember: everyone in CLAW, as opposed to a
5. Clawgroupie: someone who hasn't actually joined, but enjoys all the benefits.
6. Bob: any first year Clawmember.
7. CLAWs 101: you pass this course if you repeat first year courses because you've been slacking off with other clawmembers.

Enjoy CLAWs, and feel free to ask questions and we will feel free to insult your intelligence

¹ No offence to those who actually practice crochet, but I hate yodellers.

² Like this one.

³ Birthday Parties, Picachu Parties, Midsummer Solstice Parties, Porno Parties, Excuse for a Party Parties.

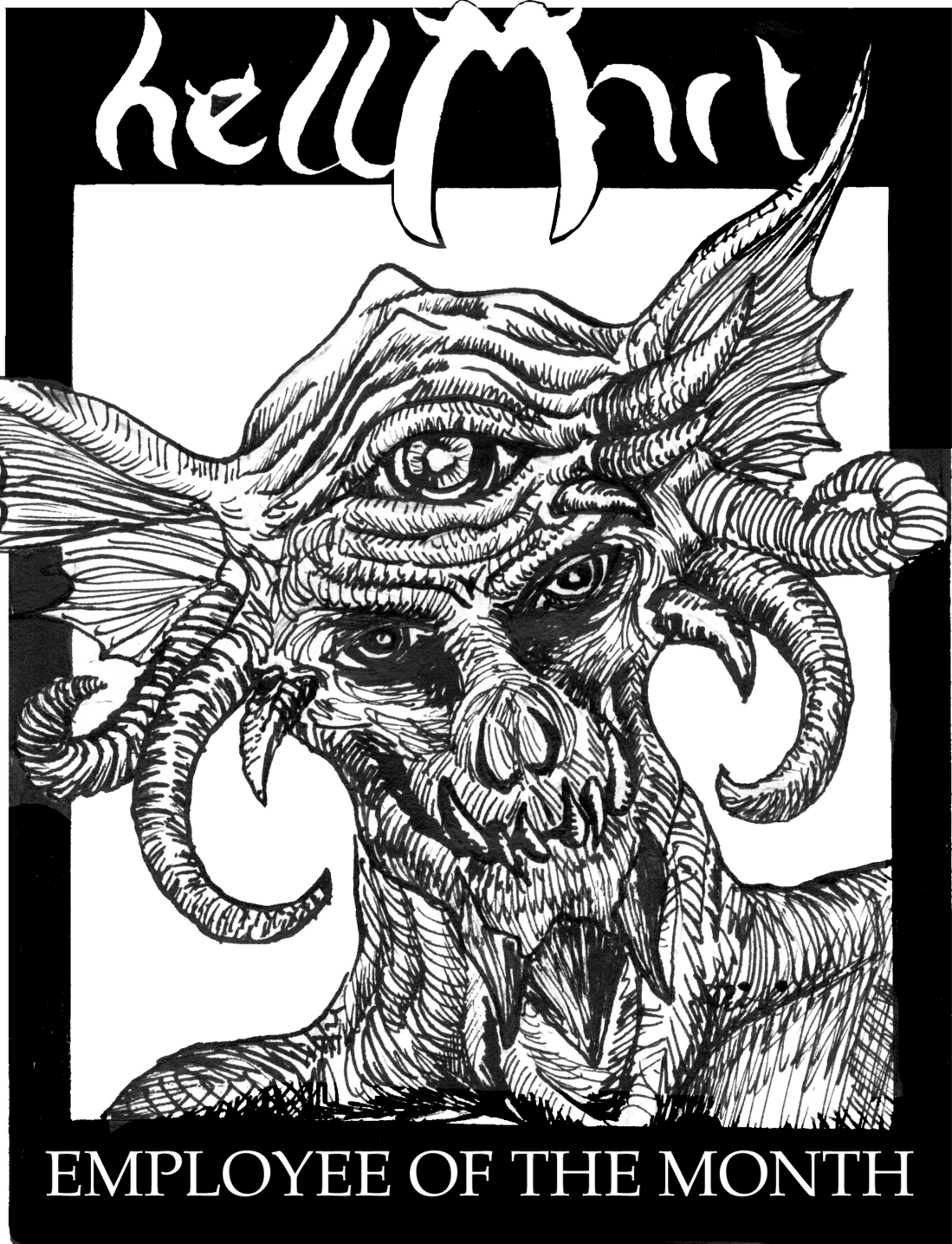
⁴ Killing As an Organised Sport. Ask someone.

⁵ Don't Ask. No really, don't ask. You might have to play a game.

⁶ One or more of these may not be true.



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The Dreaded Question

aka What is Role-Playing?

*Every year, some unlucky committee member has to answer this question. This year **Ian Kitley** was just a little too slow...possibly because we handcuffed him to the keyboard.*

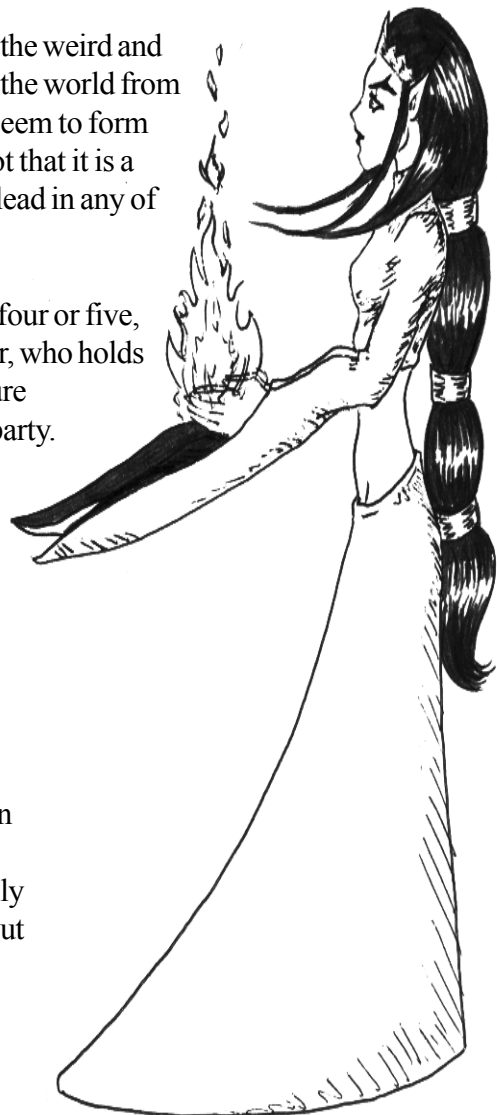
Every year the question gets asked, “What’s role-playing?” And every year we try and fit it into some explanation which changes dependent upon the person and their personal view and whether or not they’ve ever used their imagination or sense of humour. So here goes my ill-advised attempt which will probably be just as confusing and not help matters any.

Well role-playing is sort of like a cross between the make-believe games we use to play during our younger, more carefree, days and the Choose-your-own-adventure books people started to read as they got older. It can also be compared to those puzzle books that many of us loved as kids. Or radio plays. And if you believe certain other societies on campus (we won’t mention names), it is not only similar to, but actually is a demonic ritual – it isn’t. Really. Even on Wednesdays.

Role-playing pulls elements from all those sources as well as the weird and fractured imaginations of authors, and others like us who see the world from a different angle to that proposed by society at large. These seem to form the basis of role-playing and give us a path to work from. Not that it is a path – it’s more of a faint wearing away of foliage that could lead in any of fifty directions.

Table top role-playing involves a group of people, say about four or five, sitting round a table while listening to a power-mad storyteller, who holds your pitiful character’s life in his hands, describing an adventure involving the characters created by you and the rest of your party. He describes the situations you find yourselves in, and then asks you what you wish to do or say given the circumstances. Sometimes, he will ask you to roll a skill or ability to see if you succeed (don’t worry if you don’t understand, I’ll get back to rolling skills later). And sometimes they may even ask you to shut up.

Characters are created according a set of rules, which differ dependent upon the setting and what the storyteller thinks is appropriate. Some systems allow you to be an archer from an honourable samurai clan, a spell casting wizard (with all the possibilities for error), a vampire living in secret, or if you really wish, yourself. All have their own rules and ways for setting out characters. These get used to design a character you wish to play and that fits in with the setting the storyteller wishes to portray. If you want to know all about characters, don’t ask



Fun Games To Play With Your Little Brother and the Blender



anyone unless you have a few hours to spare listening to the intricate details of how their character was clearly the best character ever.

Here comes the confusing part. Dice. No, those little six-sided dice are not all there is. You get anywhere from four- to twenty- to a hundred-sided dice and the ones you use all depend on the type of system being played. Dice are used in conjunction with your character's skills, which indicate how good or bad your character is at doing certain things, like nuclear physics, martial arts, opera or whistling in the shower. The dice are used to roll skill checks (which are affected by your skill – obviously) and this, depending on the system, means rolling higher or lower than a specific target number after adding or subtracting or doing whatever to outcome of the roll. This is used to simulate the random chance of succeeding at a task (after all, you never always get things right). For example, anyone can drive a car through noon-time traffic, but how many people can do so while weaving in and out of the café on the sidewalk's chairs, avoiding cops firing at you and trying to miss the train that's about to pass right in front of you. The more stressful the situation, the more likely you're going to have problems and this is what is simulated by the dice.

Another aspect of role-playing is LARPing. This stands for live action role-playing and generally takes place once a month. LARPs can be most closely linked to performing in a play where you know who you are, who some of the others are, knowing only a little bit of the plot, and then being asked to perform without any rehearsals. Except without an audience. It sounds daunting but isn't really. Think of it more as Theatre Sports or an advanced form of Cops and Robbers that actually has rules. LARPs are like a big role-playing game that gets run for a few hours and then ends. You get given a character sheet detailing who you are, your history and how you feel about some of the other players a few days before. Or a few hours before, but that only happens when you're Erica or an unfortunate last minute replacement. Actually, it'll happen at least once in your first year. Not often, we promise. You also get to dress up as your character, the costumes can vary from elegant evening wear to modified black bags to a various assortment of borrowed bits and creatively used glue, jewellery and hair spray that you've had 10 minutes to use because you are a last minute replacement. Almost anything goes really.

The character sheet also details the circumstances or back story surrounding the LARP so that they players are not in the dark when things start. Briefings are given, where players can ask questions and check details with the DMs, one or two people who will be running the LARP and know all the details, and then the LARP starts. You then play out the evening as your character, scheming, schmoozing and generally doing your best to accomplish the goals of your character. If you wish to do something and think you may need the DMs help or may need to check something with them, they'll be wandering around, checking things are running smoothly. Watching it is a bit silly (unless you're a DM) because it's like trying to start watching a very complicated television series half-way through and you have no idea what the plot was or who any of the characters are.

The one last permutation of role-playing is the module. These are three to four hour stories in which you get given a pre-generated character and you follow the story to its conclusion using all the normal rules surrounding a role-playing game. Just as fun, but with a finality and relative quickness to it that allows everyone to walk away without worrying about what's going to happen to the character next.

So that's role-playing, in a nutshell. But to really understand it, you actually have to try it. No explanation is as good and all-encompassing as actually experiencing it. And don't worry if you've never role-played before and everyone else has – everyone was a beginner at some point. But that's just my opinion. Its not as if anyone reads this shit, especially from some old, washed up hack with no future, blathering on about some . . .



Larp Costuming 101

Mommy and Daddy's Divorce Is All Your Fault

Adrianna Pinska gives fashion advice for the temporally-confused among us and explains how to dress for an occasion – even if it's an occasion in 16th century France.

To the uninitiated newcomer, costuming for LARPs may appear to be a daunting, even impossible task. How can the average person assemble an outfit appropriate for an 18th century gentleman, a mediaeval princess or a twenties mafioso, on less than a week's notice? Costume rental is prohibitively expensive for most students, and those who have just moved into a residence often have a very limited wardrobe at their disposal.

These difficulties are often seen as insurmountable, and there has been an unfortunate trend in recent years for newbies not to make any sort of effort at all to costume, and to show up at LARPs in jeans and a t-shirt, or (even worse) in t-shirt and shorts. This has led to some less-than-stellar LARPing experiences, since it's very difficult to pretend that you're talking to a wizard from a high fantasy world if he's wearing khaki cargo pants and a vividly orange t-shirt emblazoned with a well-known sports logo.

There is a misconception at work here. The point of costuming for a LARP is to create a believable atmosphere of the era in which the LARP is set *to the satisfaction the people who are playing in it*. Now, most of us are not experts in the precise evolution of clothing throughout the history of human civilisation. We merely have a vague idea in our heads of what clothing shapes and styles are appropriate for which eras.

So nobody is in fact expecting you to pitch up at a LARP in a perfect reconstruction of an Elizabethan ballgown. What is expected, however, is that you make an effort to wear something which is approximately the right *shape* and *style* to be an Elizabethan ballgown in the minds of your fellow players.

First find the blueprint. There are many costuming resources on the web, and they can help you to research unfamiliar periods. Find some illustrations or photographs of people from the appropriate era to get a general idea of what was worn. Then try to recreate the feel of the period as best you can using clothing that you have. You can achieve this amazingly well simply by combining appropriate tops and bottoms, and adding good accessories.

If the LARP has a fantasy setting, you can get away with shameless anachronism, mixing and matching ancient, mediaeval and renaissance elements to your heart's content.

The purpose of this article is to give you some tips on how to accumulate a versatile LARPing wardrobe - one which will allow you to turn into a variety of characters at a moment's notice.

Assembling a good wardrobe takes some time. If you are completely new to this costuming thing, it is very likely that your first attempt will suck - especially in retrospect, when you look at the photographs five years from now. Mine did. Don't worry; this is completely normal.

For your first LARP, aim *not* to wear anything horribly modern and inappropriate. Eliminate all your t-shirts, jeans and shorts, anything that has writing on it, and anything that is fluorescent or some other

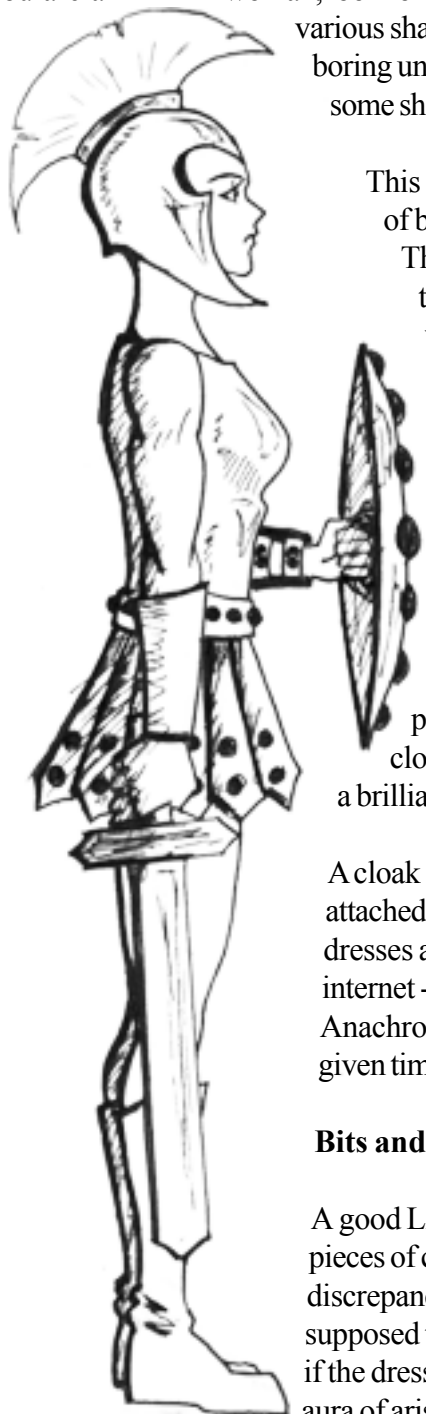


unnatural colour or pattern (like hawaiian print). If this leaves you in your socks and underwear, *borrow* something from a friend.

Styles and Shapes

With a little imagination, modern shirts, pants and skirts can be transformed into a wide range of period costumes. They form the basic components of a LARPer's bag of tricks. The first two things that you should acquire, if you have decided that you like LARPing, is a long-sleeved shirt and a long skirt (for women) or pair of long pants (for men). Each of these items should be one colour and free of blatantly modern decorations. The more plain and neutral the colour, the more versatile the item will be - a white shirt and black skirt or pants are a very good start.

After that, you should expand your collection to other shapes and styles of plainly coloured clothing. If you are a woman, look for shirts with different sleeve lengths and necklines, and skirts of various shapes and lengths. Male clothing is undergoing a period of severely boring uniformity at the moment, but male LARPers should be able to find some shirts with interesting collars.



This extended shopping spree is less expensive than it sounds. Stay out of big-name department stores, and forage in factory shops instead.

The Golden Acre underground in central Cape Town is filled with them - you can easily pick up a shirt for twenty bucks there. Shops with imported Indian clothing are a treasure-trove of relatively inexpensive embroidered dresses and blouses.

The Sewing Machine Is Your Friend

If you haven't got a sewing machine, make friends with someone who does. If you can't use a sewing machine, try to bribe or otherwise persuade your friend to help you out with it. There are some things which are nice to have in your cupboard which you just can't find in a modern clothing store. For instance, at some point in your LARPing career you will begin to covet a mediaeval cloak of your very own - nothing transforms a mediocre costume into a brilliant costume like the addition of a cloak.

A cloak is very easy to make - it's basically a semicircle with some bits attached. Only slightly more difficult are other items of mediaeval garb, like dresses and tunics. Patterns for all these things can be obtained on the internet - or from friendly members of the Society for Creative Anachronism, who are also likely to know the best place to get fabric at any given time (I recommend the Oriental Plaza in Zonnebloem).

Bits and Bobs

A good LARP wardrobe includes a stash of props, jewellery and odd little pieces of clothing. Well-chosen accessories divert attention from any minor discrepancies between what you are actually wearing and what you are supposed to be wearing. A string of pearls instantly screams "twenties!" even if the dress they're worn with isn't quite right. A cravat and a pin weave an aura of aristocracy over an ordinary white shirt.

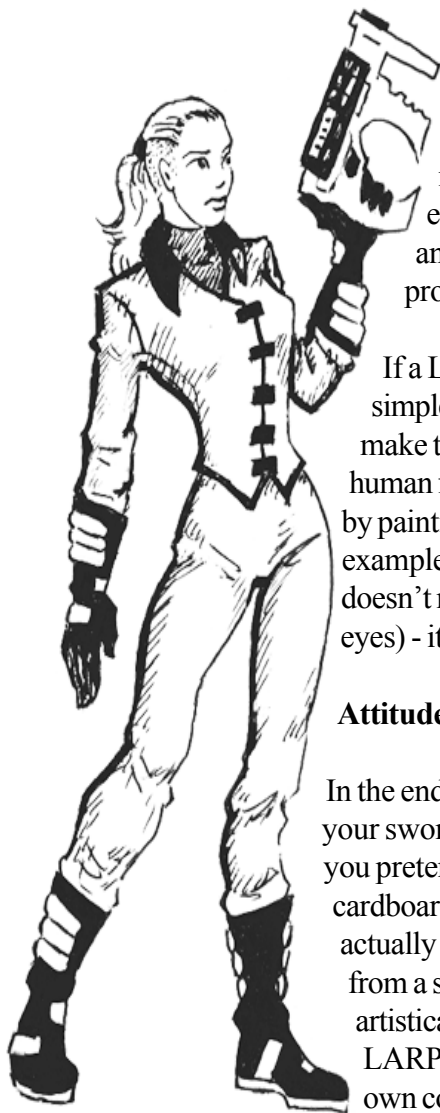


In Grand Central there is a factory toy shop where you can pick up cheap plastic guns and swords. The swords are usually very tacky, but occasionally something merely slightly tacky turns up... and you can make your own sword out of cardboard or wood, if you have the skill and the patience.

The Paarden Eiland fleamarket is a good place to find cheap old costume jewellery such as cufflinks, hatpins, brooches, and necklaces of various shapes (it is also generally a good resource for all manner of Old Stuff). You can also make your own bead jewellery from raw materials purchased at the Bead Shop in Long Street.

Scarves and cravats are everywhere (and, being nothing more than edged rectangles, should pose no problem to anyone who has made friends with a sewing machine). Something like a waistcoat or a long pair of lace gloves may be more difficult to find. There are shops that sell very old clothing, but it's usually called "antique", and therefore expensive. It's worth looking through them anyway - you may have an unexpected bit of luck.

Modern and Sci-Fi LARPs



Costuming for LARPs which are set in our present or future is of course much easier. In the case of the modern LARP, it is usually easy to find appropriate modern clothing for the occasion. In the case of the science fiction setting, unless a clothing look-and-feel is specified, you can make up absolutely anything you like - and even if there are restrictions, you still have far more leeway than in any historical LARP. Mostly you will need a different selection of props - guns of various descriptions, for example.

If a LARP has characters belonging to an alien race, face paint is a simple yet effective way to distinguish them from the human beings *and* make them all resemble each other. You can drastically change the way a human face looks by removing lines which are usually there (for example, by painting over the eyebrows) and adding lines in unexpected places (for example, painting the eyebrows back on a few centimetres up). The paint doesn't necessarily have to represent strange facial features (like extra eyes) - it can just be a bizarrely alien way of applying face makeup.

Attitude

In the end, just as important as what you wear is *how* you wear it. Although your sword is a cheap piece of plastic, you can make it look a lot better if you pretend at all times that it is a heavy, razor-sharp deadly weapon. Your cardboard-and-tinfoil crown will seem more majestic if you act as if it were actually a fine piece of ancient craftsmanship. The cloak you have made from a sheet will look more impressive if you swish it around and drape it artistically over your arm, rather than letting it drag limply behind you.

LARPs depend on a mass suspension of disbelief. If you believe in your own costume, you will make it more believable to everyone around you.

And now for something completely different

Just as players should make an effort to costume, LARP DMs should make an effort to make the LARP venue appropriately atmospheric.

There isn't usually much you can do with the venue itself. We are limited to a choice between various large rooms and other open areas on campus. We have to use the furniture which is there to demarcate in-game areas. We are all used to pretending that a row of chairs is in fact a wall, and that although you can see people on the other side in real life, you can't see them in-game.

Some nice effects can be achieved with lighting and background music. The main way in which DMs can build atmosphere, however, is the LARP food.

Even the most meticulously costumed LARP loses some of its ambience if all the mediaeval lords and ladies are eating potato chips off paper plates and drinking coke and fanta out of styrofoam cups.

It takes only slightly more effort to organise real food, and it doesn't have to be expensive. Sandwiches with some assembly required (like bread and cheese, or cheese and crackers) are better than bags of chips. Fruit juice is better than coke.

Unless you're running a dinner LARP, it isn't necessary to get anything more complicated than finger food. How much you get and how fancy it is obviously depends on your budget - if you have more money to spend, you can get a roast chicken (or pizza), and perhaps a box of wine. If you're going to provide tea and coffee, you could also get some biscuits.

Presentation is also important. Fruit juice looks better if it is poured out of a jug rather than the luridly coloured container that it comes in. Pizza looks less obviously modern if it is arranged on a serving tray.

At some point, the committee purchased some silver (well, silver-plated) serving trays and a lot of plastic cups (which are admittedly bright yellow and bright peach, but still a bit more classy than styrofoam). They are presumably still around, in a box, at Ian's place, along with the other CLAWroom loot. It would be nice if we found them and dusted them off - they've been very useful to LARP organisers in the past.



Call of Cthulhu Word Search

Recently, a new and distressing form of addiction has swept CLAWs, replacing the wholesome alcoholism and habitual hostility that characterises the average university student.

This new threat: word searches. **Michelle Haward** offers you a first taste - and remember, it's free...

When Uncle John Puts His Hand In Your Lap, He's Just Being Friendly

Call of Cthulhu is one of the classic roleplaying games (albeit being much better than D&D), but can easily be one of the most confusing, especially when the large assortment of creatures, 'gods' and other-worldly beings have names that a two-year old came up with when asked to spell 'guacamole'. But that's the risk you run when you base something off the mythos created by a 1920s horror writer (H.P. Lovecraft). I could say that this word search is to help you familiarise yourself with these names – but let's be honest. It's something to do when the lectures are just a tad too boring and you want to look like there's a slight possibility that you are taking notes or working. That being said – have fun.

A C T H U L G H I U F S K A T N A H S T S A H G C H T A G N
G H T H U G D U A S A W G A H X N G G O K A Y G S T O T H A
O O T B O S E H G S T N U A G T H G I N K A A L G U H H R L
Y E H G C T E H G S U A A O H T O N A T A H G L N H T U U F
H T A G O N P X A F H T R A G U H T O L O A D D I O O N X Q
E R L Y U Y O B H H N E H V T H N G L A A C I O H O H L U F
T S E R V A N T S O F G L A A K I T H A G M O T T N T X A L
A T D A R K E Z I F A L A Z I M F X I T E H O E R N A E C R
O A A O N O S D A R K Y O U N G P M I N C S O N E Q Z H P L
O R R V G O M M O H T O Z E C R A I S F G T X T D H A E C A
L S C G L R O L L E M E D D U H S I R O F H C S L H T H U L
H P U H H Q E P A S I S Y O U R O I Y E S A O E E N R N O L
L A O R T O L H S P Y L O P G N I Y L F S L O R S E Y W O I
U W R S A H U A T N H Y D R A I T Y A C A N D P R B E A L K
O N S T R T U L R O G I O L L O T H H D B E M E A O D P N A
E O S S U Q B L S E E T S A W A G T N A H R E N T H R S E A
C F U L G N O P H K E H H T I S H I T U O S A T N D T S H L
I C R P G R I L E U A C T S T O T S Y Q T X T P T H E S Y G
W T C O I R S T H M A I P F N F T H E A H S S E I R I E N S
A H A N N I T O B N Y Q C I O S L A S H A E A O D H O L S I
C U N T B W E L H N T I A S H S E S H T R O N P R A R M O D
R L O Z U G E C R E A N D T T C R H H I Y T D L H U G R H L
U H L U H R A I L I S N O E S A S O P L N O D E N S E O E P
H U O N S L B X B L U G A C K R G M T L Y E W A H B L F N E
L E G A T T Y H H O G H T H E G A E T I E R E N H E A L S E
U N Y A R L A T H O T E P X U V Z S H A V L L O S G O D O R
H O V E R S K I H N N C Y A E G H A S M O R L U T H U X A Q
T T T H T E H S M S D O G R E H T O R E S S E L O U N H T A
C N S U O F E M A D N E I S S Z I A M I N R R S C R Z E T D
I B R L Y B E O R E D F G O M M O O N B E A S T S N O W X C

List of Deities and Creatures from *Call of Cthulhu*

Abhoth
Atlach-Nacha
Azathoth
Bast
Byakhee
Chthonians
Cthugha
Cthulhu
Cyaegha
Daoloth
Father **Dagon**
Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath
Deep Ones
Dholes
Dimensional Shamblers
Elder Things
Fire Vampires
Flying Polyyps
Formless Spawn of Tsathoggua
Ghasts
Ghatanothoa
Ghouls
Glaaki
Gnoph-Keh
Gugs
Hastur
Hounds of Tindalos
Hunting Horrors
Mother **Hydra**

Your Hamster Can Breathe Underwater

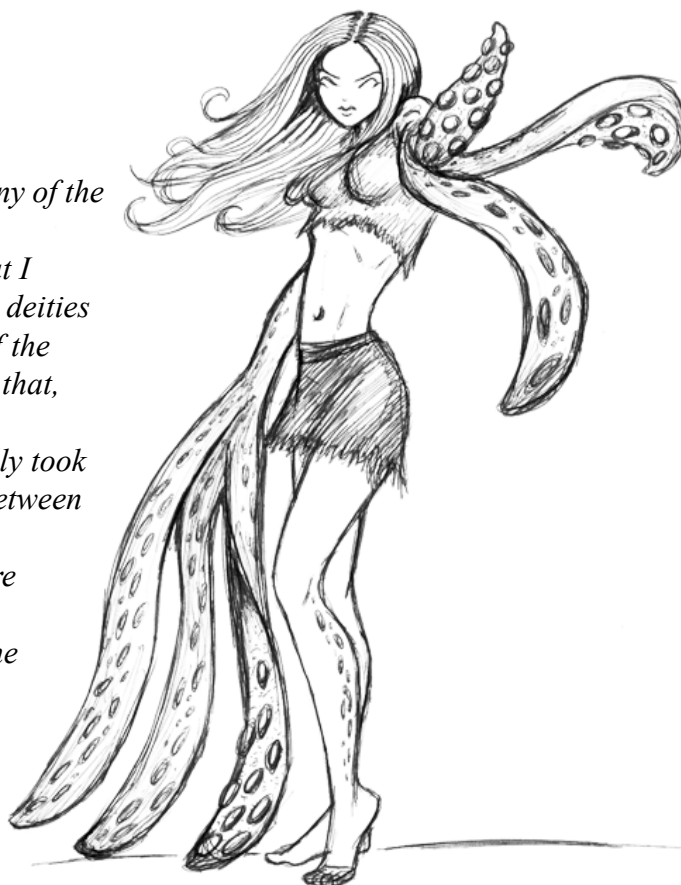
Ithaqua
Lesser Other Gods
Lloigor
Mi-Go
Moon Beasts
Nightgaunts
Nodens
Nyarlathotep
Nyogtha
Sand-Dwellers
Serpent People
Servants of Glaaki
Servitors of the Other Gods
Insects from **Shaggai**
Shantaks
Shoggoths
Shub-Niggurath
Shudde Me'Il
Star-spawn of Cthulhu
Star Vampires
Tsathoggua
Beings from **Xiclotl**
Y'gonolac
Yig
Great Race of **Yith**
Yog-Sothoth
Zhar
Zoth-Ommog

Find the words in bold in the word search. Words can cross other words, but (for example) Glaaki is NOT 5the 'Glaaki' within 'Servants of Glaaki'.

Disclaimer

I take absolutely no responsibility should any of the following occur:

- 1. You have no imagination and believe that I believe that any of the above creatures and deities exist or that I am promoting the worship of the above creatures and deities. If you believe that, may Great Cthulhu rise up and smite you!*
- 2. You have no sense of humour and actually took that last bit seriously or can't distinguish between fiction and reality.*
- 3. You miss something important in a lecture because of this.*
- 4. You lose sanity because you attempted the word search and failed your san check.*
- 5. You lose more sanity because you couldn't complete the word search.*



CL@WZ ONLINE3

*Michelle Wiehahn reveals (to the surprise of many) that there is more to the internet than simply cheap porn. There's **expensive** porn, too. And Claws Online, where porn remains at a all-time low, despite Duncan's entrepreneurial efforts.*

For those of you who have only just discovered this society (whether it be because you are genuinely interested or because someone with a lasso dragged you over to the table and wouldn't let you go until you joined - don't laugh, it's happened before), here's the skinny:

We had a room.
It was good.
Then UCT took the room away.
Now we have a table.
In CafeNesCafe.
But all is not lost.
For we have the Wiki.
And #claws.

Why God Lets Bad Things Happen To Ugly People

Many of us still remember the hallowed days of the CLAWRoom. While I might wax lyrical about the couches, the balcony, and the bemused passers-by, what I really miss is the sense of a CLAWMunity. I have been to CafeNesCafe. I have sat at the table. Yea and verily, I have discovered it to be a poor substitute. What is mostly missing is the constancy of a room: when there are no CLAWMembers in CafeNesCafe, it is just another table in another over-priced UCT trough. The CLAWRoom was almost never empty, and when it was, it was easy to break into. It was always ours, and even if you couldn't find another CLAWMember there, you could find a stash of 2000 AD, or someone's lunch.

Don't get me wrong: this isn't another article bemoaning our lack of a room. We've been through this, and we know that getting a room out of UCT is well nigh impossible, and hell will most likely be celebrating a White Christmas before we're given one. What I am trying to say is that at least some aspect of CLAWMunity is being kept alive somewhere else: online.

The Wiki

This really isn't difficult to understand. It's a type of website that you can update yourself, from anywhere. You can make your own page, and put whatever you like on it (although don't expect people to remain silent if they disagree with you, but that's another thread entirely). All page names are WikiWords, which is a word where some letters are capitalised, as in WikiWord, ClawMembers, ClawRoom, etc. Get it? It's really self-explanatory, and the best way to figure it out is to read the help pages and then just wade in. Go to <http://claws.uct.ac.za/ClawWiki/Claws>.

The service provided by the Wiki is twofold: firstly, it is a noticeboard, detailing games, parties, lynchings and various other events important to CLAWs; secondly, it is a collection of personal pages - logs, blogs, rants, whatever - where people post whatever they like, which includes sorta-daily diaries, interesting links, reviews, opinions, jokes, and miscellaneous stuff. In the end, this all serves to keep us in one another's pockets, where we belong.

For new CLAWMembers, I suggest you check out the Contents, ClawsNoticeboard and RecentChanges pages (just replace 'Claws' with the page name at the end of the URL above). There's no easier way to keep up with the CLAWMunity. Frankly, only a small selection of CLAWMembers can be found on campus at any time, and this is certainly a society where alumni are extensively involved. While oldCLAWs would often pop a head into the CLAWRoom, you're unlikely to find them cruising Otto Beit on the off-chance of running into someone they know. If you want to know what the CLAWMunity at large is up to, check the Wiki.

Mailing Lists

Some of us prefer to be informed via email of events. For this very purpose, there exist a number of mailing lists to which you can subscribe. Barring disaster, this should make you privy to a trickle of spam about upcoming games, deadlines, opportunities and discussions. Details can be found at <http://claws.uct.ac.za/ClawWiki/ClawsMailingLists>. Yes, this is a Wiki page. You will discover that the CLAWs online world is a sea of inbreeding, and if you don't know how to use the Wiki, you're gonna sink fast.

#claws

CLAWs has an IRC channel on LAGnet called #claws (details of how to get onto IRC, LAGnet servers, nicks, etc, can be found on the Wiki page ClawsOnIRC). It has taken over as the virtual CLAWRoom, replete with various CLAWMembers in various stages of consciousness. On the channel, you will discover one or two users who don't seem to be very chatty. They do respond to certain commands, however. You will learn a few phrases that cause them to perform amusing tricks and impart useful information (and for those of you who are wondering, I'm talking about the bots, not Gnome and Groundy). The channel certainly has all the attributes of the CLAWRoom: constant lurkers, people sleeping, bemused passers-by, something smelly in the bathroom, and a continuous stream of bizarre conversation. This is the place to hang out, to waste time, to avoid lectures. Most of the people to be found here are oldCLAWs logging on from work (yes, some of us have real jobs), but a growing number are logging on from UCT. It's not as difficult as it may seem, since even the most lowly undergrad should have an account in some smelly lab somewhere.

In the end, the IRC channel has done the most to keep alive the spirit of CLAWs. We bitch, we joke, we fight, we rip people off, we avoid work, we fall asleep, we talk about things that no-one else is interested in, we change the topic, we avoid the topic, we ignore the topic, and we harass people who stumble in without a clue. But don't be afraid...we're actually all very nice and well-adjusted, and if you log on and introduce yourself, you're likely to find people quite eager to explain the ins and outs of gaming, linux, sex, and life.

But mostly linux.

Here are some quotes from #claws, to give you an idea. If you think these are funny, visit www.bash.org. You'll regret it.

<ShadowsLight> man... I just can't stay up like I used to
ShadowsLight has quit IRC (Read error: Broken pipe)

<ork_khrist> I like to think of my hands as interactive wonderbras

<GEEKdotNEO> i've been taekwondo'ed the last couple of days - all my muscles ache from the exercise, and i'm all bruised and battered
<+GEEKdotNEO> and NO jo
<+GEEKdotNEO> NOT as in covered in batter
<+GEEKdotNEO> although i could lick myself to sleep if that was the case
GEEKdotNEO waves his hands frantically
<+GEEKdotNEO> no, no! i mean, like, shoulders and stuff

<bAbYaCiD> The History of Magic is a very cool read
<bAbYaCiD> origanlly written in 1870 in french, translated into english in 2001
<Wither> non-fiction?
<bAbYaCiD> of course
<bAbYaCiD> did you know that if some text are to be believed then through either devine planning or strange and twisted coincidence jesus ended up getting nailed to wood that came from the tree of knowledge/life
<bAbYaCiD> and no "knowledge/life" is not a mistake
<ShadowsLight> Yeah... that sounds plausible
<Wither> if some texts are to believed, each city in the world is ruled by a vampire "prince", maintaining some semblance of decorum between various warring vampire "clans"



DIARY OF A CLAWS LEGBREAKER

*Desperate to get articles in on time for editing, the CLAWs committee turned to **Bruce "Balls of Steel, Brains of Jello" Berelli** for assistance. This is his story.*

WARNING: NOT FOR SENSITIVE READERS!

15 January, New York, 11:04

I was dangling Ben "Cruncher" Chianetti over Brooklyn Bridge when I got the call. Unfortunately for Chianetti, I automatically started patting my pockets to find my cellphone. With both hands.

As it turned out, "Cruncher" should have been called "Splatter", judging from the sound he made as I flipped the cellphone open.

The voice was different, but the story was the same. CLAWmembers had a deadline for CLAWmarks submissions. They missed it. Someone was needed to teach them that "deadline" wasn't a figure of speech.

Gotta love those CLAWmembers. Regular business is something of an aberration in my trade, but those guys end up on my list twice yearly without fail. CLAWs practically put my kid through college. Every time CLAWmarks submissions run dry, the CLAWthing calls my name on the "special" List of Souls, and I come running.

The new guy didn't go "mwa ha ha" when he gave me the names (like the previous one tended to), just muttered something about, "I warned them. I really did."

Guilty conscience, it sounded like. Not a problem I've ever had to deal with. I told him I'd pack my kit and be in Cape Town the next day.

15 January, New York, 12:14

Had a little bit of a problem with airport security boarding my plane. After September 11, they tend to get a little concerned when you board carrying an assortment of butcher's knives, two Berettas, a shotgun and an M-16. I tried to tell the guy that it was standard load for someone in my trade – I mean, do they take away laptops from the guys in business class?

He wasn't impressed, and tried to have me arrested. Hopefully they won't find the bodies until after I've left this time zone.

16 January, Cape Town, 9:32 (9 hours past deadline)

Sonvabitch! I thought I'd taken care of my munitions problems with that little multiple homicide back in NY, but while I got my gear past customs, it seems they put it on the wrong flight.



Some confused Taiwanese tourist is probably blowing his own foot off with my equipment as I write this, staring at Mr Harry Lee's collection of holiday snaps and Hawaiian-style shirts. Thanks a bunch, Pan-Am.

I need to blend in with those CLAWs people, and no way can I do that looking like a chameleon on LSD. I need some black clothes and fast. I'll swing by Gandalf's and mug a bartender or something. In my trade, you learn to improvise.

At least I carried my Special Helper with my hand luggage. It was a struggle to fit the polished length of a Louisville slugger into those little cabinets above my seat, but it was worth it. So long as I got my Special Helper, I can do my job. Hopefully I won't need to collect from any of those crazy martial arts CLAWmembers.

Thankfully, I hear Austin Chamberlain has moved on. Last time I had to collect from him, he was waiting with a machine gun emplacement in his living room. I still can't hear properly outta my left ear.

I'm due to meet with the committee tonight to discuss my targets. There's some movie evening about hitmen they're attending – sounds right up my alley.

16 January, Cape Town, 12:01 (12 hours past deadline)

Gandalf's was just as I remember it – a festering hellhole of violence, loud music and piercings. I've been in nicer prisons. Not many people around, but I grabbed a bartender and beat him senseless. I even planned to stop off for a drink or two, but Antonio recognised me and broke a bottle on the bar. Looking at the jagged glass in his hand, I decided to dump a few coins in the tip jar and split.

I don't like to get into bar fights – it feels too much like a day at the office.

16 January, Cape Town, 18:05 (18 hours past deadline)

Had to stop off on the way to the meet with the CLAWs committee to go to work on some artist who was late with a T-shirt design. We'll call him...Mr S.

I took my Special Helper to him a few times. I call it "kinetic inspiration". He was so inspired that he lost consciousness for ten minutes or so.

When S. woke up, he was all too happy to cooperate and finish his sketch. Unfortunately, he started bitching that during our little "inspiration pow-wow" all his art equipment had got trashed and he had nothing to draw with. So I cut off his middle finger. "Draw it in red," I told him, "Quickly, while it's still spurting properly."

But no, the little baby started shrieking. Not from the pain, as I expected, but because he was now unable to greet his fellow CLAWmembers with their usual "secret sign".

I left him a needle and thread. I'm not totally heartless, ya know.

16 January, Cape Town, 19:11 (19 hours past deadline)

Met with the new committee. Some new faces, some old ones. Nothing of particular interest to me was said – all about stalls and getting newbies to join the fold.



Personally, I don't go for all that gentle advertising stuff. You probably aren't surprised by this. You take a 1st year, you threaten to shoot him or her in the knees, they crack and pay up.

And besides membership fees, what else does CLAWs really need from the saps? Except CLAWmarks articles, of course.

The only interesting point was when the CLAWthing mentioned that no one on the committee had finished any articles yet – and then quickly dove out of the window. I almost got the two-timing bastard, but he was too slippery. Had the rest of them dead to rights, though, laid about me with the Special Helper until they were feeling creative.

I also took the time out to extract another T-shirt design from a weirdo we'll call Mr Y. He was only slightly late, but deadlines are deadlines. So I threatened to shove my Helper where the sun don't shine. To my considerable surprise, not only did this not sway him, but he produced a few other things I could shove there, including some sorta trident thing.

Yeesh! I ran like the blazes. I've done my prison shower time, but no more. Sometimes I wake up in cold sweats, still hearing him saying, "We could take turns..."

16 January, Cape Town, 21:15 (21 hours past deadline)

Left a few threatening messages on people's answering machines. I've got the feeling I'm being screened. Word has obviously got out about my presence here.

I should really make a direct visit or two, but Mr Y might reappear....best to lie low for the moment.

18 January, Cape Town, 14:23 (62 hours past deadline)

Okay, this has got beyond ridiculous. No matter Mr Y might have promised to do to me, I've got to get moving. I've never flumped a contract before, and I'm not doing any good cowering in my hotel room. Plus, given the miniscule amounts CLAWs pays me, if I don't get this over fast I'll have spent all my intended fee on living expenses.

Went after one of the ladies, since Mr Y's kinda scared me off males for a while. Ms. L. is apparently behind on some article about forensics...never a field I've been fond of. The CLAWthing warned me (while I was beating him unconscious for not having finished his Editorial on-time) that she's likely to be a tough nut to crack, and that she knows I'm coming.

Not to worry – I'm used to having to get past people's defences. I've gotten hold of a postal worker's uniform. That should get me close enough to the front door to launch a blitz attack and take her out.

18 January, Cape Town, 15:42 (63 hours past deadline)

Goddamn it, Mr Y was bad, but this is just humiliating.

Got my postman outfit all ready, as planned, complete with a huge parcel that "wouldn't fit in the mailbox, so I came to see if you were in, Miss". Easy as pie. She opens the door, I unwrap the parcel (actually my Special Helper under about a hundred metres of brown paper and sticky tape) and go to work.

Everything was going fine. I got the door, package under my arm, knocked on her door. She opened it cautiously, and I gave her the line. She nodded, opened the door a bit more, I stepped in – and she pulled the rug out from under me.

That's not a figure of speech, though it would be more accurate to say that the rug pulled *itself* out from under me. Suddenly I'm hanging in a fucking net, my arms pinned tight...and this woman is coming at me with a syringe...

I woke up in the dark, still wrapped up in my net. Someone shone a torch into my eyes. "Who are you working for?" she demanded.

I squinted in the light, trying to test my bonds, but they were tight. "Uh...the South African Postal Office, lady. Uh, ja. " I replied, trying to sound as South African as I could.

L apparently didn't buy it. "You're him, right? The muscle from New York?"

I'd pretty much exhausted my South African lingo with "ja," so there didn't seem to be much point in keeping up the show. "How'd you know it was me?"

"I knew it!" she said triumphantly. "It's always the postman, or the milkman, or something like that. Oldest trick in the book!"

The torch clicked off.

"Lady? Hey, lady? When are you gonna let me out? I've got more customers to visit, ya know?"

"When you've had some time to stew about what you've done," she said, from further away.

I heard a door open. "Are you just gonna leave me alone in the dark?"

"You're not alone," she said, and I heard the flick of a light switch. Blinking in the sudden glare, I found myself staring at five traumatized-looking postmen, wrapped in rope next to me.

"Hey, mister," one of them said. "Now that she's finally got you, is she going to let the rest of us go?"

19 January, Cape Town, 0:06 (72 hours past...ah, screw it)

Finally managed to gnaw my way through my ropes, at the cost of most of the enamel on my teeth and my ability to enjoy steak, and I snuck out of L's place. I considered nipping back inside to deliver a little payback, but couldn't shake the suspicion that she was staying awake with a tranq rifle just in case of that event.

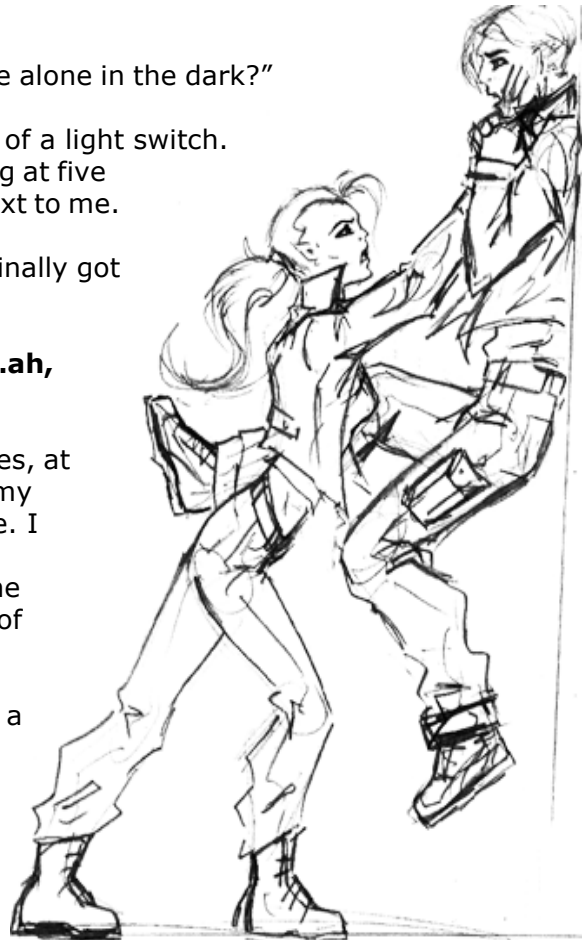
Hell, given what I'd seen of her, it was practically a certainty.

I'm shaken, battered, and my gums feel like I flossed with sandpaper...and I think I saw Mr Y walking in the same apartment building that L lives in. It's just not worth it.

I need to get back to my easy, safe lifestyle – with simple, relaxing things like breaking a mob boss's fingers, or eating McDonalds until your hair falls out. I'm dumping this journal outside the CLAWthing's door, and running like hell for the airport.

Maybe next time I can smuggle a sledgehammer past customs.

This dirty, somewhat bloodstained journal was found by Mike Dewar on the morning of 20 January. The identities of those mentioned remain unknown.



REVIEW CORNER: THE PROMISED SANDS RPG

Dy'lan C'raig reviews the latest sand-filled, apostrophe-studded release from BBRACK productions.

Publisher: BBRACK Productions
Website: www.promisedsands.com
Format: 386 pages, soft cover
Cost: US\$35
Reviewer: Dylan Craig



Promised Sands is a complex, percentile-based RPG containing both standard and nonstandard elements of the post-apocalyptic and fantasy genres. Adventures take place in the world of T'nah, hundreds of years after an enormous catastrophe scoured the planet of most of the traces of the advanced civilisation that inhabited it. Amidst the rubble of this not-quite-vanished civilisation, new empires have sprung up, warred, and disintegrated in turn: the Romanesque Ch'ak Hegemony and the Persiansque Renzinant Empire. New races have come into existence following wide-scale mutations; the Numid breathe through bone-lined 'gills' in their skulls, the Loshad and Myrlihk are anthropomorphic horses and cats respectively, and the And'wahr, Suvik and Syl are best thought of as two different kinds of dwarf and an elf analogue (down to the existence of 'Ebon Syl'). Full rules for cross-breeds between all of the humanoid species are given.

Lots of the criticism which has been directed at the game involves the mixture of hackneyed RPG cliché with sometimes unwieldy original material. This is clear in the race outline given above. If fan'tasy n'am'ing sty'les with lots of a'pos'trophes bug the living shit out of you, *Promised Sands* will strain your tolerances. OK, the Numids and animal hybrids are interesting and new, but an And'wahr is just a dwa'rf, right?

Luckily, the game ends up using races, and cultures, more intelligently than that. Each stat - there are 9, divided along the familiar body/mind/soul lines - is rolled up using a mixture of dice depending on your race, culture, and adolescent pursuits. So, Loshad get a racial d10 for Strength (they're big bastards), but a Loshad that grew up as a scout (d6) in a desert nomad culture (d4) would roll d10+d6+d4 for strength (average: 11.5, max score 20) while one that grew up as a blacksmith's apprentice (d8) in a culture based on hard farm labour (d10) would roll d10+d8+d10 instead (average 15.5, max score 28). This is a very clever system, easily adapted to any fantasy RPG and typical of the designers at their best. It does turn character creation into a bit of a *Rolemaster*-esque ordeal, best accomplished with a powerful set of spreadsheet skills, and once again this is either something that you love or hate.

There are no 'classes' as such; instead, your character follows a career path much in the same way as in the *Warhammer Fantasy* RPG. So, both of our Loshad braves in the previous example might have ended up as fighters, despite their differing backgrounds, but this would be an in-game choice rather than just something which occupies a slot on the character sheet. And because your careers determine which skills you get access to, the two braves would probably be very different types of fighter.

Which brings us to the skills. Once again, it's hard to imagine these eliciting a neutral response - you're either going to love the idea of having two hundred skills, or you really, really aren't. To take the example of combat skills: do you put your points into Parry, Block, Riposte, or Dodge? Thrust, Slash, a blanket proficiency with One-Handed Blades, or a specific familiarity with your grandmother's ivory-handled shamshir? If you're a sneaky git, do you concentrate on Con or do you add Bluff, Gossip, Deceive, Acting, and Misinformation to the mix? Any given situation (from combat to conversation) may require you to roll any number of these skills either in parallel or sequence. OK, to be fair, the distinctions are made clear in the game's text, but are you going to be able to remember them in mid-game, as well as being able to remember which skills are similar to which? A well-constructed GM screen would probably eliminate these glitches, though, and it's probably a blessing in disguise that BBRACK Productions doesn't sell a pre-made one: working out your own and typing up the tables will help you familiarize yourself with the rules, and this is a Good Thing.

Task resolution itself, as mentioned previously, is apparently simple - d100 roll against a percentile skill, no surprises there, but you also roll a third d10 as an 'effect die' - the origin of the game's so-called 'trinary system' which determines degree of success or failure. Roll high on the percentile and high on the effect die, and you probably have a serious screw-up on your hands; low on percentile and low on effect, you've got a ho-hum success. If this were all there was to the 'trinary' system, it'd just be window dressing on straight percentile, but luckily the system is more coherently integrated than that; effect die totals are used to determine damage, progress towards completion of long-term goals, and all sorts of non-typical actions which, in other systems, need to be adjudicated subjectively or in some ad hoc form. So, the effect die gets my vote. If you don't like the idea of adding a third d10 to your roll, you could always strip it off and use the units die instead. So, rolling against a skill of 50, a result of 41 would be a truly ugly jury-rigged success, while 49 would be incredibly good. The game also lets you trade points between the success dice and the effect die, with the exchange rate varying depending on whether you've already rolled and are trying to save a flubbed action by 'selling off' your effect points (your database program keeps crashing the system. You decide to disable half of its enhanced functions: while the result is ugly, at least it runs), or whether you are erring on the side of caution and are more concerned with just surviving than making it look flashy (you're leaping across a chasm, and you couldn't care less about landing in a sprawl on the other side, so long as you make it over).

OK, character gen... skills... system... What does that leave us? Oh yes, combat, magic and setting. Well, combat is once again a nod to the gore-lappers. Each location has 10 hp, and then you have Consciousness and Blood ratings dependent on your stats. A multitude of little wounds (rat bites?) could thus bring you down long before any of your limbs stop functioning, but a blow that drops a location's hit points below 0 can also do bone or nerve damage (as well as provoking blood loss), providing a permanent loss of function in the affected body part while leaving you on your feet. Now, given that each weapon has different damage for piercing (delivered with the Thrust skill), cutting (ditto, but Slash), and/or blunt damage (either), and each of these prompts a different ratio of bone/nerve damage and/or blood loss when it cripples a limb... yes, all very complicated. It's pretty easy to lose yourself in the combat rules, especially because no fully-fledged example of combat is given (although they do have examples to illustrate initiative, etc.). This complexity notwithstanding, the combat elements of *Promised Sands* are still studded with gems. Full firearms rules, a nifty cinematic system which gives you extra actions when you get a critical success on your initiative roll - but these actions have to be surprising, i.e. not your regular or most obvious attack mode. Going after surprise actions will get people booting their enemies in the knackers, shield bashing, and flick-flacking like anything, which will no doubt add to the enjoyment of all, as will the use of the DISK - free action/trump card/ace up the sleeve tokens of which each player gets one per session - which allow you to take an action at any time, even midway through a foe's turn. Rules are also supplied for using the DISK to alter plot threads, introduce narrative elements, etc., although this is likely to be of secondary appeal to most players.

Magic! OK, this is another of *Promised Sands*' real gemstones, and even - gasp - backed up by a fairly simple ruleset. Magic is divided into Qai and Ido; Qai is natural, harmonious energy while Ido is formalized arcane energy harnessed by study and training. Qai is broken down into set effects (healing, toxin removal, body reshaping, dreamwalking); Ido takes a leaf out of *Ars Magica*'s style by having magic work as a combination of elements and verbs (although this list is much larger than AM's). So far so good. But the really nice touch is the interplay between these two types of magic. If you're a Rusahn (Qai user) who picks up too much Taint by using your Qai effects to harm or kill (including, of course, by curing disease - because those little microbes deserve to live, too), your body eventually and spontaneously starts producing taint-laden lumpy crystals called Maroc Stones, which emit a hypnotic aura. Those who submit to the aura - and taint-laden Rusahn find it very hard to resist - are driven to press the maroc stone into their flesh, thereby fusing it into their magical aura and becoming - hey presto - a neophyte Ido user (or maroc, after the crystals which give them their power)! Dig out the maroc stones, and they can go back to being a Qai user, albeit one with a patchy aura and thus less power. This is all very a la *Star Wars* Dark Side/Light Side and should make for a good roleplaying axis; plus, it doesn't hurt that the game's power level is fairly high and the two schools' respective spells kick ass. Powerful maroc can pull meteorite showers down out of the sky; powerful Rusahn can cause you to extrude your skeleton or, by focusing their power through tapered crystal called a qai blade, slash through a tank's armour like it was so much tissue paper. Oh, and using a qai blade doesn't earn you taint. Happy slicing!

Finally, setting. Well presented (I like the touch of having a birds-eye view of each major city so you get a sense of its layout and architecture), occasional Judeo-Christian slant visible in background (okayyy... although almost all the characters are more likely to be worshipers of Ashik, a deity more obviously modeled on Allah), and only the occasional use of stupid in-jokes (oh look, a herbal sunscreen called Esspeeff Lotion, hardy fuckin' har). But good, middling or bad, the one thing you can't say about the *Promised Sands* setting is that it is skimpy. Each of the twenty-odd cultures is given a full description detailing attitudes to slavery, resource sharing, gender equality, burial... the whole shebang. Domestic animals, check, description of daily diet, check, examination of regional



economies, check. Look, this is a game where you can begin play with the Midwife ('Doula') career – they're hardly going to throw down this super-realistic career tree without providing several societies to back it up. However, this – together with the use of real and mock-Middle Eastern imagery and language - provides the GM with yet another mountain of information to keep in mind. When your PCs ask, 'It says I'm wearing an *agahl*. What's that?', or, 'Um, what's *phah'lok* jerky?' are you going to be able to tell them?

So, to conclude. *Promised Sands* is, I imagine, a bit like dating a coke-addled model. The good bits are very good. The bad bits may or may not ruin the good bits for you, depending on your particular tastes and what you find more or less irritating in a partner. But either way, the whole thing is going to take a lot of work, work which the model's parents could have saved you by putting a little more effort into their child before releasing it into the world. Do I think you should go for it anyway? Yes. This is one fuck-off, no-shit game. You could end up running a campaign like unto the tales of the gods themselves, a Famous Campaign such as CLAW has not seen for five years. But you would have to *worship* this game to pull it off. You would have to put your shoulder to the wheel, train up some eager newbies, make lots of house rules, commit scads of stuff to memory, spend a year at least playing the game to really see its funky XP system push your characters along... and all that jazz. Do you have the time? Can you *make* the time? Probably not. And that's what I suspect will eventually strangle this game - it's too damn needy. BBRACK don't need customers, they need converts, and that's not currently a feature of the international gaming scene. One possibility is that you might buy it just to see which bits you can port out into your current game; certainly Qai and Ido would work as well in a pure fantasy game, and so would the race/culture/apprenticeship stat generation rules. You'd basically be extracting the crunchy bits from *Promised Sands* without having to commit to it entirely.

But that would be a shame.

In the final analysis, perhaps the highest compliment I can pay *Promised Sands* is to wish aloud that Andrew Sturman had been running it in 1992 when I joined CLAW. Andrew's *MERP* and *Cyberspace* games were the first serious campaigns I got into after my callow youth (hey, I started gaming in 1986! How wild is that?), and you tend to build your whole gaming life around such formative moments – trying to re-evolve them, improve on them, negate them, whatever. If Andy had been running a *Promised Sands* game, and I had played in it, I think I would have been a better gamer now. This is a game that raises the bar.

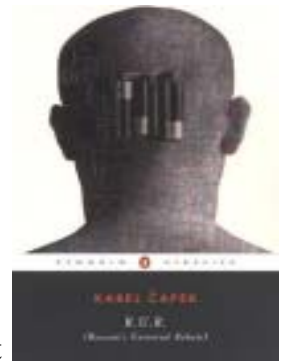
Mad About Books

d@vid seaward can't talk about books without thinking about ordering them

I am fond of pointing out that working at a bookstore is a two-edged sword (+1 versus rats infesting lift shafts) - you get access to lots of books (yay!), and, well, you get access to lots of books (where did my salary go?). Actually spending money on books (as opposed to browsing wistfully as students are wont) and being involved on the retail side, I have come to the conclusion that for the specialist buyer the only satisfaction comes with research (knowing what you want) and careful store selection (a specialist store, or a store reliably devoted to special orders). While my agent hypes my Business/Motivational title **I don't care what f#\$%ing colour the cover is!**, I thought I'd share some of my all-of-two-year's experience and point out some excellent titles...

bookclub ladies' books rather than science fiction/fantasy. With that, rant on...

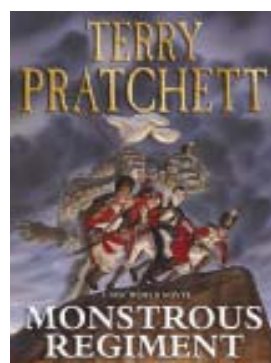
As with **Oryx and Crake** (Atwood), science fiction that is deemed to be "good" is elevated to general book status (or if it's by George Orwell, to the Classics section). On one tentacle this means that



the not-proverbial-I've-met-them-they-scare-me middle-aged bookclub ladies get to read some good stuff in addition to all that human drama and thriller dreck, but on another this leaves a section filled only with the sludge and the popular stuff that cannot be recategorised, fuelling misconceptions of a rayguns and spaceships genre, rather than one where the most engaging and enlightening writing is possible, *without* going OTT. At Carnegie Mellon mixed human/robot soccer teams are taking to the fields, laying the groundwork for future human/robot interaction on a similar scale (where the two are on almost equal footing mechanically and need to communicate effectively to work together) - we also have a rich collection of stories and novels exploring the same issues dating back to Capek's original **Rossum's Universal Robots**. I cannot see how the former is not an actualisation of the latter, and it irks me when sf (in the broad sense including science fiction, fantasy, alternative history - and see later for graphic novels) is assumed to be defined exclusively by the pulp by reviewers, booksellers and others who should know better. (Also the

cause of kneejerk defensiveness in fans who are not complete anoraks, although they may be, well, fanatical.)

The unclassifiably fantastic Terry Pratchett's latest Discworld novel is **Monstrous Regiment**



The Time Traveler's

Wife by Audrey Niffenegger is my best book of 2003 (although it has only been on the shelves since January '04 - proof copies, baby). It is *good* science fiction, by which I mean that it is about real people dealing with the sf element

presented in an engaging way. The time traveller of the title finds himself transported through time randomly (at random moments, to random locations, for random amounts of time, naked), and if you think he's a poor sod, pity the girl who meets him as an adult (in her childhood) and learns that she will become his wife. There is lots of room for lit-type analysis here, but simply put, the book is consistently engaging, with absorbing moments in the relationship between Claire and Henry, and intriguing twists in presenting Henry's ailment. While the sf element is the engine for the story (every scene records the year and the respective ages of the couple), it remains understated - to the extent that you will probably find the book shelved with the middle-aged



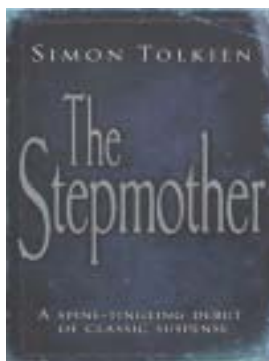
Charlie Brown Goes to Nam

Rabid Wolverines and other fun pets

which I rate a gender-y seven out of ten on the nonesuch scale. While I'm a Pratchett nut, my opinion of a particular book wobbles about until I've read it a few times. For example, when I'm exonerated about Mr Pratchett's alleged garden shed containing his alleged Discworld novel machine which produces a new novel <kerplunk> when his alleged Swiss bank account is running low, I tend to get defensive and contrast style and plot heatedly, and ignore my opinions of the most recent book, which I'm usually unhappy about because it was such a quick read. Although the eye scans Mr Pratchett's words easily I'm still convinced the man himself is not greasy, and rereading verifies this - listening to **The Truth** as an audiobook at a time that coincided with journalistic fiascos in

SA and abroad was thought-provoking to say the least. Anyway, **MR** is a non-series book that involves Vimes as a side character - in a fashion completely unlike **The Truth**, you can stop snickering at the back there - that centres around tiny countries going to war and who gets sent when they start running out of regular soldiers. I always enjoy the invention of the non-series novels, but it doesn't have the immediate punch that other Discworld books, eg **Hogfather**, have had for me.

Several years ago, like before the first time I took MAM100W, I read an interview where the MitBH said he was going to write some non-Discworld stuff. Does anyone know how likely that is to happening, or are we in **Salmon Of Doubt** territory here? (More on that later.)



So, do they have furry feet?

The Stepmother by Simon Tolkien is either a lackluster courtroom so-called drama-cum-thriller, or a stunning but incomplete reintroduction to Middle Earth with the

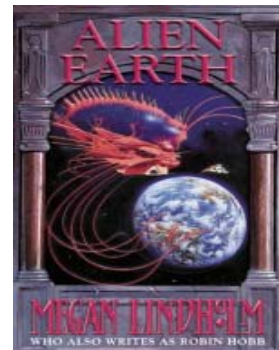
word "postmodern" looming. The actual plot is rubbish and there is hardly enough description of the landscape. The story of boy-hates-stepmother-because-she-killed-his-mom has obvious mythological resonance, and the subtle

clues encouraging a link from the Modern to Third Age are there for any hobbitophile to see, but perhaps too subtle. The victim's connection to the Sackville line is revealed very late in the story, and the boy throws the ring away without any real complications. In a master stroke, though, the mystery is resolved by genealogical deduction, confirming the protagonist is indeed a hobbit, although this is never clearly stated in the text. A poor start, and one that may leave the casual reader confused and the Tolkien fan asking for more (where are the appendices? why are the next two volumes not mentioned?). Hopefully Chris Tolkien's analysis of the writing in future years will shed light on these decisions.

When you next take a trip to the store, with the intention of picking up anything but **The Stepmother**, remember that you can't expect the assistant to revere you for your mastery of obscure sf factoids. And as pointed out, if you don't have access to a specialist bookstore you can't expect a wide selection within what is already a subsection of the store's range. My point is, be a nice customer and don't give up when they look at you blankly - smile and say "Can you see if you can order it? It's spelt C-T-H-U-L-H-U." If you find someone who knows what they're doing, ask for them next time - they'll hate you for it, but in a "at least they know what they're looking for" kind of way. See that positive feedback? On the other hand, if you ask for a popular title by colour do not feel personally responsible if you are bludgeoned to death with the nearest hardcover - you were just the last straw on the camel's nervous condition.

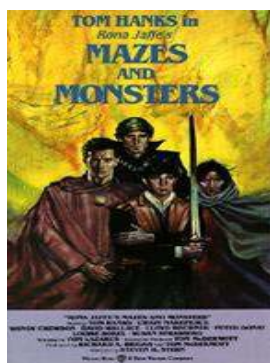
Fool's Fate, the last straw in Robin Hobb's Tawny Man trilogy is out, but I've still got the previous trilogies to get through. I did, however, read **Alien Earth** by Megan

Lindholm, who, the cover tells me, also writes as Robin Hobb. Obviously she doesn't have a middle initial. **AE** is set on a grand scale: a far future when gigantic Beastships sail through space, and humankind is renegaded to untouchable status after messing up the Earth. Watching the



relationships and character assassinations aboard the Beastship Evangeline unfold is highly enjoyable. With an unsleeping alien and only one human awake at a time you can always expect manipulative chitonous trouble. Robin Megan Hobb Lindholm creates memorable, vibrant characters and keeps throwing dilemmas at them till you're sure they'll explode. She reads like the transcript of a beautifully serendipitous LARP.

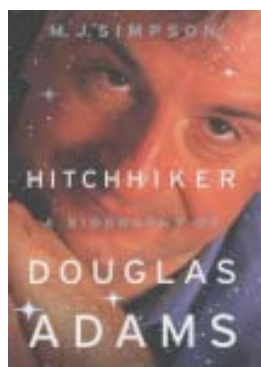
I decided to try some roleplaying fiction, because I've heard it isn't all bad. Unfortunately I chose Greenwood's **Elminster in Hell** and some MTG title which I forget. My fault on the choice, I guess; not much more to say except I refuse to read any more rp fiction unless recommended to me without prompting by someone who has demonstrated they have compatible taste.



The wonders of working in a non-euclidean bookstore include calming down customers who think they're trapped, and also finding obscure gems. Rona Jaffe's **Mazes and Monsters** is just as bad

as roleplaying fiction, and I'm convinced it *is* roleplaying fiction. You see, I think Rona's claims that she heard about a D&D death and her subsequent retraction that she made it up (which I haven't seen documented) are *both* in fact lies. I think Rona was one of those DMGs roped into a campaign they don't want to play, but she wasn't one of those nice DMGs, you know the ones who are sweet so you don't mind that they never die and have the secret super power that wraps up the campaign, she was this psycho bitch from hell and the players hated her, so she presented some kind of an ultimatum to the DM, along the lines of "me or the game", and the DM prioritised, I mean the party were almost at the two towers and the elf had just got his sonar abilities, and Rona was probably bothered about D&D ever since.

And damn but I have dark compulsions urging me to the TV movie of the book; as the **Oh, the Humanity** review suggests "it is your civic duty to watch [Tom Hanks] blow hard".

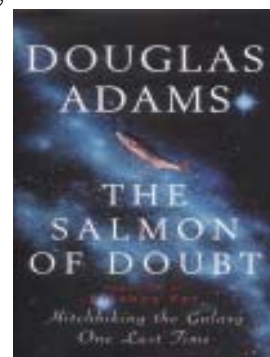


So many ways to shave a cat...

There are now *three* biographies of the late, tall Douglas Noel Adams: the revised **Don't Panic** by Neil Gaiman, an obvious must-read which I haven't yet, **Hitchhiker** by MJ Simpson, co-founder of

SFX, the Brit scifi zine, and **Wish you were here** "the official biography" by Nick Webb, briefly the publisher of the first hitchhikers' book. The original **Don't Panic** came out some time ago and went out of print while DNA was still alive - a posthumous revision seems logical. When **Hitchhiker** came out I snapped it up (well, actually I turned my nose up at the trade paperback and ordered hardcover) - I found it warm, amusing, revealing and everything that a biography should be. Simpson points out that it is after all the first posthumous biography, and no doubt there is more for others to uncover - logical. Less than a year later I heard about **Wish you were here**, notably the "official" bit, and that's when I started feeling someone was messing me around.

Fine, **Salmon of Doubt** was a good selection of DNA's writing, given that the title bit is only half of a novel that probably would have been completely different and had a



different title had it ever actually been written. It means you get to read what there was, which is cool in a dead man's laptop kind of way. It also contains the Young Zaphod story for those who don't have it in a H2G2 omnibus, the Atilla the Hun story, and non-fiction articles from throughout DNA's life. Good. More for the fan than the casual reader, contains an editor's note and a prologue and an introduction (not counting the introductions by DNA inside), but good. Also, now out in paperback.

Fine, anything by Neil Gaiman is worth checking out (I'm not sure he was actually involved in the revision of **Don't Panic**, but anyway), and a

posthumous biography is... a fine thing, especially when family members and friends are actively involved and willing to throw a little dirt and speculation around. But... two? These are from different publishers, not owned by each other as far as I'm aware, so I'm not sure where we are in terms of fierce bidding wars, shameless money-grabbing and the like, but it's like different brands of toothpaste... how many ways can you say "Douglas Adams was very tall and was embarrassed when he had to wear shorts in high school"? Obviously the authors explore different anecdotes, or certain times of DNA's life from different angles, and they are individually well worth reading, but unsurprisingly the basic plot is the same; there simply hasn't been enough time to reflect or uncover particularly sordid secrets or what have you. If you're a completist on a budget my only suggestion can be: wait for the paperbacks.

And if they have extra chapters I'm going to have some poetry to recite, I can tell you.

You may have run across large format (not large print) paperbacks - in the fantasy section they're usually David Gemmell's - these are the trade paperbacks. Introduced at the same time or instead of hardbacks, their sole purpose is to get you more book for your money (or your book for less money, I suppose). They will have a separate ISBN to the hardback or paperback, so if you're ordering by ISBN you'll need to confirm your format too.

Can you spell "supply chain management"?

All hail the great and mighty ISBN! Sometime in the sixties the booktrade realised they would be greatly assisted by a reference system for publishers, retailers, all the middlemen, and indeed the book-buying public. The International Standard Book Number is pretty simple: it consists of a region code, publisher code, book code and check digit, some simple but clever range-setting allows for a range in each code region (most books you pick up will be region code 0- or 1- by virtue of being published in the English-speaking West), and the check digit is calculated MOD 11 so that it ranges from 0-9 or X (10).

We are in fact running out of ISBNs and, like Unicode references, we are not allowed to recycle them. Greenpeace don't care and the very nature of reality is threatened with numerical dumping by greedy capitalists and mathematicians. In the meanwhile, the booktrade will further exploit innocent digits and have announced a new code for 2005, EAN-13. Old ISBNs translate directly into this system (add a prefix and recalculate the check digit) and new book numbers will simply be 13 digits long (and cannot be back-translated into 10-digit ISBNs). Hopefully everyone will be ready in time and hippie protesters will be unlawfully detained.

So, getting the ISBN (or EAN-13) from a review or website, is an excellent first step, *but* - not every ISBN is listed in the CD-ROMs sold to booksellers by Nielsen BookData, particularly small publishers (you /will/ find most popular sf, graphic novels and roleplaying books, it's the small or obscure guys I'm talking about here) - an ISBN refers to a specific edition of a book, that is, a particular publisher, a particular format, a particular year (reprints keep the same ISBN), so you may be missing out on a cheaper (paperback) or cooler (collectors' box set) option, or requesting an edition limited to the American market - not every bookseller can get every book - strange but true - certain national chains are only interested in the latest titles supplied by South African agents <koff>, and certain books simply require more effort to get hold of, and the question is whether the store is prepared to make that effort - when sourcing obscure technical titles from overseas it has sometimes taken over a month of patient re-emailing and re-faxing for me to get a *response*

Anyway, unless you want a particular edition, title and author is all you need: your bookseller should be able to do a 4x4 search, entering the first four letters of the author's surname and the first four letters of the title, such that **Understanding Comics** by **Scott McCloud** becomes MCCL-UNDE, which very quickly brings up all matches (also including **Understanding the Arizona Constitution** by Toni McClory in this instance).

In dire circumstances, get hold of the publishers' contact details and *give* them to the bookstore.

Canadians

One publisher worth getting hold of is **Drawn & Quarterly**, the Canadians devoted to publishing everything I like about comix, currently represented in SA by Real Books CC. Their backlist includes autobiographical, biographical and other non-fiction comix, as well as meaty real life fiction that is good and therefore "literary". As someone who woke up to comix with **Maus** (Spiegelman) and **Understanding Comics** (McCloud), they rock my sequential world.



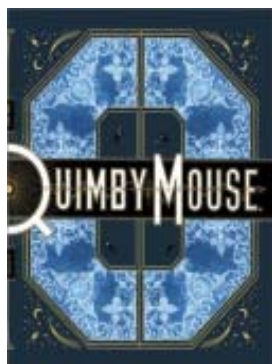
Summer Blonde is a collection of urban vignettes. Characters walk off the street into Adrian Tomine's panels and achieve varying degrees of nothing by the time they leave. (As opposed to Daniel Clowes **Ghost**

World where they take a whole book to go nowhere.) Any more and I'll be forced to say "disaffected twenty-somethings" - just read it. Read **Ghost World** too.

On the other hand I found **Fair Weather** (Matt —) enjoyable to read but not particularly memorable. I'm looking forward to a copy of **Jar of Fools**. What the hell is Julie Doucet on? This literary comix stuff is all over the place, which is part of it's appeal, as opposed to yet another issue of JLA with same menace, different costumes.

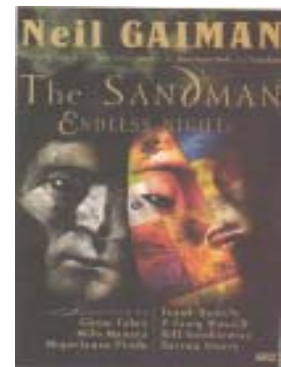
Quimby the Mouse is a recollection and reformatting of some of Chris Ware's out-of-print work. The fine print on the cover page suggests it's not worth buying, and if you aren't familiar with

Ware's style you may want to check before grabbing it. His work is reminiscent of old newspaper strips, with simple black and white characters (the main character is 1928 Disney



mouse-ish) and small square panels. With a lot of non-verbal action, this is not a comic to skim through even without grabby textured art. You practically need to read each frame as an ideogram. Luckily Chris Ware seems to live up to his adulations of genius, he's one heck of a sequential ideogramminator. **Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid On Earth** is done in the same style, but looks to be more narrative. This is the prize winner so someday I've got to check it out.

Sandman: Endless Nights is Neil Gaiman's promised return to the Sandman, with a collection of stories, one for each of the Endless. Dream's story goes back further in the Sandman chronology than ever before, possibly documenting the origins of the strife between Dream and Desire. (Also featuring the old Despair and Delirium when she was still Delight.) It's Neil Gaiman, he's doing Sandman - nuff said.

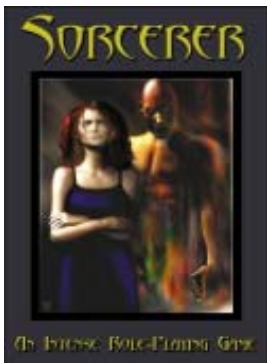


Everything I said about general booksellers and scifi applies moreso to the comix format. "Who's Neil Gaiman again?" "Oh that Sandman stuff" - nuff said. In the end I discovered that booksellers don't hear the x in comix and only understand the phrase "graphic novels", and even then don't know what they're talking about. (And EB still goes and puts them in the Mythology section! Superman as modern-day myth I can buy, but the not-so-newfangled literary comix? Sticking Sacco's **Palestine** in Current Affairs just doesn't work.) Reading an article on graphic novels in **The Bookseller**, I felt like the writer had visited our store: one person actually interested in the section and complaints about bad sales when that section was neglected - duh. Er, and something about not slotting them between science fiction and roleplaying (oops). After ordering decent titles (including superhero stuff, don't get your overpants in a knot) and wrapping them so they wouldn't get messed up, books actually started moving. Amazing. Luckily there is someone in charge of the section now that I have left and it won't die like a piercing-eye-motif victim.

Talk roleplaying or I'll show you some motif

I applied the same thinking to a Roleplaying Books section and got burned, stuck with damn 3.0 ed D&D books. Harry Potter cards sell better. With a much smaller buying public, that's why you don't find rp books *stocked* in general bookstores. This is where specialist stores (eg, Outers and Wizards) have the edge, but if for some reason you need to, a good general bookstore (eg, Adams & Co) can make special orders, especially if they deal with American wholesalers. Armed with your ordering info (title, author, ISBN, publisher), Bob is your tormented fresher.

So, armed with a salary and damned with mutant ordering powerz, I finally bought some of my own roleplaying books: **Universalis** by Ralph Mazza and Mike Holmes, **Sorcerer** by Ron Edwards (and the supplements **Sorcerer & Sword**,



Sorcerer's Soul and Sex & Sorcery) and **My Life With Master** by Paul Czege.

Now **Sorcerer** has regular enough distribution channels (an American-based distributor, the Tundra Trading

Organisation), and you can find it or order it at Outer Limits in Cape Town and Joburg, as well as Adams & Co in Durban (but probably nowhere else).

[On the other hand getting hold of **Uni** or **MLWM** would be trickier, because they're typically available only via PayPal at their websites. PayPal still isn't accepting SA credit cards, and they didn't actually answer my questions when I asked why and when they expect to be accepting them again. Ramshead Publishing have retail terms, so I brought in a several copies of **Universalis** for Adams (yay retail coup!), but Half Meme Press is focused on direct sales which basically means that after a retailer adds their mark-up it isn't worth buying **MLWM** (yay staff discount!). Both did accept dollar cheques, which are neither convenient nor cheap for the roleplayer on the street (yay

accounts department!). For the moment this means being careful before setting your heart on a small press title, and no chance at all on PDF titles, which is a pity because you wouldn't have to pay shipping or get charged VAT. (Not sure about the VAT, I mean it would be easy to avoid but you might be legally obliged to pay it.) Which means I can't get a copy of **Donjon**, grumblerumble.

Verily, these games were worth the trouble I went to getting them, but I'll have to leave detailed reviews till after I've actually played them some more. In brief:

- **Universalis** is an engine for creating worlds and stories with group collaboration *and* competition - atypical to the degree that you might consider it not-really-roleplaying. Now supports play-by-wiki!
- **Sorcerer** pitches PCs into Faustian bargains, with the game world and the nature of humanity for the group to define. Be prepared for actual moral accountability. I would be so bold as to say it beats **Unknown Armies** in the same way that **UA** beats **CoC** or **Mage the Ascension**.
- **My Life With Master** is a roleplaying game tightly focused on the tragedies of a group of minions (the PCs) and their evil master. And how they kill him.

I've posted a minireview of **Sorcerer** at the KZN Roleplayers website. Rumours that Perry and I may or may not have a Sorcerer LARP done this year are entirely founded. I'm also keen to try out my ideas on Uni LARP-writing, most especially fun for LARP writers who never get to play. And of course to just play these things. This article was not *just* a long-winded teaser for campaign sign-ups :)

Eats, shoots and leaves closing words

Who would have thought buying a book would be so complicated? Well, someone who had an idea how retail works, I guess, and that certainly

AIDS: Why Daddy Really Died



wasn't me before I strongly suggested that I didn't want to serve coffee any more.

Web retail has its own pros, cons and tips, and whether electronic publishing will ever cut out the retailer, or even take off in a significant fashion, remains to be seen. No malice intended, but I'm optimistic. In the meanwhile, it's useful to know that your favourite bookstore offers more than just what's on the shelf, and tips on how best to get what you want. And if you run into the brick wall of patheticitude give me I shout and we'll see if I can reactivate those mutant powerz.

Hyperlinks for the Hyperactive

Carnegie Mellon Robot Soccer

<http://www-2.cs.cmu.edu/~robosoccer/new/main/>

L-Space

<http://www.lspace.org/alt.fan.pratchett> (so... many... posters...)

Closest there is to an Official Tolkien Website, no mention of the Modern Age trilogy though

<http://www.tolkien.co.uk/>

(apparently the estate have won the rights to jrrtolkien.com but nothing there when I checked)

Robin Hobb

<http://www.robinhobb.com/>

Oh, the Humanity! reviews Mazes & Monsters

<http://www.ohthehumanity.com/reviews/rev353.html>

The Only Place for your M&M Fix!

<http://www.spookylibrarians.com/mazes.html>
(discovered when I should have been submitting this article, awesome!)

Douglas Adams, including the DNA newsletter for such things as news about the movie

<http://www.douglasadams.com/>

Drawn & Quarterly

<http://www.drawnandquarterly.com/>

Neil Gaiman

<http://www.neilgaiman.com/>

Ramshead Publishing / Universalis

<http://universalis.actionroll.com/>

<http://www.indie-rpgs.com/viewforum.php?f=21>

(Universalis discussion forum)

The Universalis Arena (wiki-based game)

<http://www.anvilwerks.com/index.php/TUA/>

TheUniversalisArena

Sorcerer

<http://www.sorcerer-rpg.com/>

<http://www.adept-press.com/>

<http://www.indie-rpgs.com/viewforum.php?f=7>

(Adept Press discussion forum)

Tundra Trading Organisation

<http://www.tundra-trading-org.com/>

Half Meme Press / My Life With Master

<http://www.halfmeme.com/>

<http://www.indie-rpgs.com/viewforum.php?f=40>

(Half Meme discussion forum and experimental play labworks)

Adams & Co

west@adamsbooks.co.za

Sorcerer Minireview (KZN Roleplayers)

[http://groups.msn.com/Kwa-](http://groups.msn.com/Kwa-ZuluNatalRoleplayers/sorcerer.msnw)

[ZuluNatalRoleplayers/sorcerer.msnw](http://groups.msn.com/Kwa-ZuluNatalRoleplayers/sorcerer.msnw)

Outer Limits (as if you didn't already know)

<http://www.outerlimits.co.za/>

The Bookseller, UK magazine

<http://www.thebookseller.co.uk/>

Nielsen BookData / SAPnet

<http://www.bookdatasapnet.co.za/>

ISBN

<http://www.isbn-international.org/>

Mommy Left Because She Hates You

A munchkin's guide to Munchkin

*There is a regular movie evening and Munchkin demo at **Reuel's** house every Thursday. If you really want to know what he's talking about.*

What is Munchkin, you might ask? Well, you might... I mean, you read the Really Impressive Title and you may have understood what a munchkin (with a lower case "m") is, but you may still be wondering what Munchkin (with a Capital "M") is. Well, you might if you are new to CLAWs. Munchkin (with a Capital "M") is simply the biggest card game phenomenon sweeping the gaming community since that last card game, Virgin: The Gathering (and the really nice thing about Munchkin over That Other Game, is that it is not going to cost you an arm and a leg to get started; just 3 fingers, 8 toes and ALL the hair on your body... yes, ALL your hair, Halfling... so go shave those feet).

So what is Munchkin all ready? Okay, okay, keep your Pants of Giant Strength on. Basically, Munchkin parodies all those first games of D&D you played when you were 12. When all you really did was run around a dungeon, kill monsters and pick up treasure. And so, armed with hundreds of roleplaying in-jokes (including the Gazebo, the Duck of Doom and the Jaberwocky/Vorpak Blade; don't worry if you don't know the in-jokes... experienced players will delight in telling you the stories) you stomp around a dungeon indiscriminately killing monsters and picking up treasure. Sometimes you help your friends, sometimes you don't... whatever is best for you is what you do.

Okay. So, how does one play Munchkin? The easy answer would be: Read the rules, play the cards, fuck over your buddy. But that would turn you into a rules-lawyer Munchkin player, and this article is intending to turn you into a munchkin Munchkin player.

So here are ten rules that will help you be a more munchkin Munchkin player:

Rule 1: Play the cards, not the player.

This is vital. If some munchkin screwed you over the turn before, keep it in mind, but don't blow three curses on him if he is level 3 and there is a level 9 player at the table. Always send your curses where they will do the most harm. If that means cursing your girlfriend, and risking going without for a few days... well, that is one of the inherent risks of Munchkin. Which brings me to Rule 2.

Rule2: Whatever happens during the game stays in the game, and should not affect your life outside the game.

Yeah... this is a biggie. You are going to seriously screw over your best friend, your sibling and the love of your life... all for one level. You must understand that during the course of the game you are going to be the sneakiest, evilest, smarmiest, low-down, rotten version of yourself. If your spouse, family or friends can't live with that, then they should not be allowed to play with you again.

Rule 3: Level means nothing; Bonuses and items are paramount

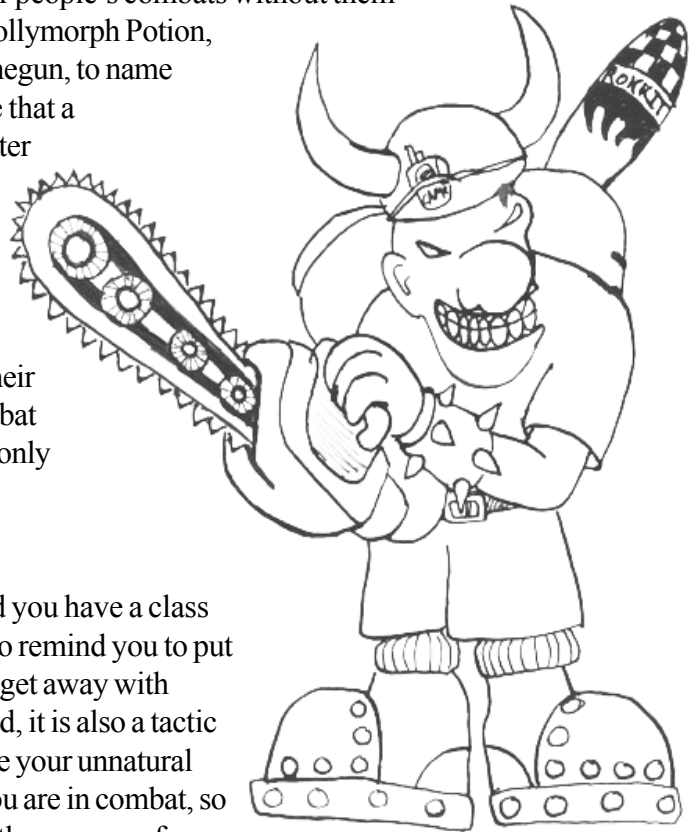
If you go up in level too fast, and do not have the bonuses to back it up you will be in big trouble in a long game. So unless you have been dealt with an insta-win combination (Floating Nose and Potion of Halitosis; Mighty Germ and halfling card, etc) the ideal way to play is to try and keep your character level low while acquiring items. The best way to do this is to be a Thief. If you succeed in stealing, you have an item; if you fail you lose a level... a win-win situation. This is why a game with lots of experienced players will also be a game with a lot of thieves.

Rule 4: Get some Curse protection.

The easiest curse protection is being an Orc. You can just bounce the curse for the loss of a level (which, as I have stated earlier, is not a big loss and is sometimes welcome... especially when you are late in the game and you actually want to get into some more combats). Otherwise, the next best thing is the Magnificent Hat, which bounces curses to other players.

Rule 5: Save your combat-ending, gain-no-level cards for when you really need them

There are a number of cards that will stop other people's combats without them getting any levels (e.g. Potion of Cowardice, Polymorph Potion, Potion of Disbelief, Dead and Deus Ex Machinegun, to name a few). These are the cards that will make sure that a player on level nine can not beat that last monster to win the game. It is actually better to use them early in a combat, before using your combat modifiers, as you do not want to lose your combat modifiers AND your combat ending cards in one combat. The perfect munchkin will wait for everyone else to blow their combat modifying cards, and then use the combat ending card (if still needed) so he will have the only combat modifying cards still left in play.



Rule 6: Cheat

If you lose your race, or give up your class and you have a class or race-only item, wait for your other players to remind you to put it in your backpack. It is in the rules that if you get away with something, you get away with it. But be warned, it is also a tactic for players to mentally note that you can not use your unnatural Axe any more and only "remind" you when you are in combat, so that you can not put down the axe and use another weapon from your hand. This is also very munchkinly.

Rule 7: Bluff

There is nothing saying that you can not claim to have a card in your hand when you do not have it. There have been two great bluffs in recent history. In the first, I was being forced to help in a combat due to the Kneepads of Allure (which force you to help the player wearing them for no treasure). I bluffed by saying that since I was a wizard, I would use my charm power to make the monster go away, thus depriving the wearer of the kneepads of the two levels that the monster was worth. I was bluffing, because I had awesome cards in my hand, and there was no way I was going to throw them away... but the wearer of the kneepads bought it, and let me choose two of the 5 treasures that the monster was hiding. The other bluff happened when one player was happily beating a monster until I threatened to get involved in the combat if he did not give me a treasure. He refused, and I got involved and then he played a card and was winning again. I then threatened him again, and then, so did another player. He then agreed and gave each of us one treasure to not try and stop the combat. It turned out that the other player had no cards at all that could have influenced the combat, and had been bluffing with a race card. Bluffing is very munchkin.

Rule 8: **Save your powerful cards for the end of the game**

It is useless to use your Wand of Dowsing to go get that Go Up A Level card when you are on level 3 and need to beat a level 3 monster. Save the card for when you really need it, like when you are on level nine and are up against the Humongous, Ancient, Enraged, Undead, Intelligent Plutonium Dragon, its mate and their brood and you go diving for that Dead card to get all that lovely treasure. Other cards to keep and only use at the end are Annihilate and Restraining Order.

Rule 9: **Watch your timing**

Some of the most munchkin moves can be made even more munchkin if you play the cards in the right order. If you are a Halfling and want to become an Orc, sell things first, then make the change. If you are in the middle of combat, and the monster is at a bonus against warriors and you are a warrior, first throw out your three cards for your berserker power's +3 bonus and then drop warrior. The best case of perfect timing was when one player was a warrior with the Unnatural Axe in his hand. He dropped his warrior class (and thus lost the use of his Unnatural Axe), played a thief class, successfully stole another weapon, equipped the second weapon, and then dropped the thief class and played a second warrior class from his hand... thus gaining the use of his Unnatural Axe again. A very munchkin move.

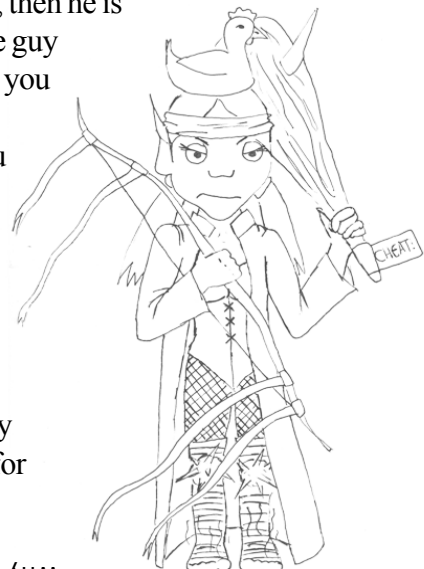
Rule 10: **Do not be afraid to interfere with combats early in the game**

Some people will only start getting involved in combats when players are at level 9 and are about to win. While this is a valid tactic, there can be reasons to get involved with some-one's combat early on. Like in my bluffing example. Also, if the player has some nice stuff that you might want, you might try and get him killed, so you can loot his body. Another tactic I have seen is when one player interfered with a player's combat and threw in a lot of monster modifiers (which come with added treasure). The player then had to ask for help, which only the player who had interfered with the combat could offer, and he happily agreed to help, for all the extra treasure.

Rule 11: **Word your agreements carefully**

When munchkins help each other in combat, they do so because they have agreed to help each other for a share of the treasure, or for help later on, or to cement a truce, or for a myriad of other reasons. Just watch the wording and intent of these agreements, because there is no judge, and there are no penalties (well, no game-related penalties) for breaking your agreements. Also, look to see what is in your own best interests. Instead of two unknown treasures, ask for an item he has in his backpack that you can use. And if you are the only one that can help, there is nothing saying that you can't screw the person over ("Okay, you can have the level, but I want all the treasure"). And there is strength in a united front. If all the players have high demands, at least one of them is going to get lucky, but if there is always one guy who offers "I'll do it for one treasure, your choice", then he is always going to get some crappy treasure and you all lose out to the guy who was in the combat. Another thing is to make alliances "I'll help you if you never steal from me, and I'll never steal from you", "I'll help you if you never use <insert card here> against me" or "I'll help you if you use <insert card here> on another player now".

Of course there were 11 rules. Munchkins are always going higher than normal players. And now you know how to play, all you need to do is find someone who owns the game (or you can get a copy of it yourself from www.sjgames.com/munchkin) and start playing. There is always the open Munchkin Demo at my house on Thursday nights, which everyone is welcome to attend (book seats and vote for the movie before the game on the wiki @ <http://claws.uct.ac.za/ClawWiki/ThursdayNightMovies>)



Why the Bible Lies

BEWARE THE BLUE CANDYFLOSS

Your Teddy Wants You Dead

Cassandra Claire Soo raises the issue of a terrifying new threat to humanity. You be the judge. The rest of us are too busy sniggering.

Somewhere in the immediate vicinity of mine brain there exists a tiny world where bunny rabbits are planning to rule the universe. This may seem really arbitrary to you, but some of us are rather concerned about this. (Also it fills up article space so screw you too.) Back to the actual article, rabbits are out to take over EVERYTHING!

Yes, rabbits are even more deadly than cows... Everyone knows that cows are the most intelligent organisms on Earth. Their hold on the human race through dairy products is very cunning (like fish) and it will work if the bunnies let it. For centuries rabbits have been refining their mathematical skills in order to come up with the strategically perfect diabolical plan. If I told you what the plan was, I'd probably be killed, so I won't (cue evil laughter and :p) Back to evil (I meant really cute and cuddly with dead expressionless eyes) bunnies... Their amazing procreative abilities have ensured that there will be armies, mountains of rabbits covering every corner of the Earth! (That is if the Earth had corners, which it might, if you squashed it.) I've just hit writer's block, nooooooooooooo! (In my past life I was a lollipop, a red one. I was a really well behaved lollipop so God let me be a people this time.)

So, rabbits... Rabbits like eating blue candyfloss. I believe that this is their only weakness, the only advantage we have over them. So we must manufacture more blue candyfloss! We must, to save the world!

Ummm, have reached the climax of this article and have nothing more to say so... I WILL WRITE ABOUT CAKE INSTEAD! Susan and I really, really, really like cake. So, you should all give us cake. Preferably chocolate mousse cake. Yes, you want to give us cake. Give us cake, God(dess)damnit! Considering that I didn't receive any cake (and I checked my e and snail mail twice!) I don't think that this whole hypnosis thing works. I shall have to come up with an alternative method of persuasion. Seduction, manipulation, blackmail maybe. I could, I suppose, but I'm too damn lazy to put in the effort. Fine, don't give me cake! I'll just go sulk in a corner somewhere (on the squashed Earth). Hmmmmmmm. On second thought I'll just go roleplay.



A poisoner's handbook

Arsenic and other easy recipes

Lara Davison explains easy and convenient ways to commit murder. Impress your friends! Amaze your family! Get your older brother's room space! Read on...

Back in the good old days of gaslight and gallantry, before the widespread availability of guns and contract killers, people had to bump each other off the old fashioned way; with poison. From about 1700 to as late as 1950 poisoning was an extremely popular method of murder¹ since it was not violent and was frequently mistaken for a natural illness. For DM's running investigative or horror games (such as Cthulhu, Castle Falkenstein, Deadlands etc.) set during that time, it would be "period" to include poisons here and there, and a nice slow painful death is always fun to narrate². More importantly, (during that time span) poison is a very probable method that your wicked NPC might use to try to eliminate your players. It would also behove those LARP writers including poison in their plot lines to consider writing in an *actual* poison with known symptoms and an estimated duration of time before death. There are almost no known poisons that just knock someone conveniently unconscious without any other nasty side effects.

Availability

When DMing in (or around) a Victorian setting it is important to keep in mind that unlike today, poison was easily available. Not only was it common in rat poison, flypaper and cosmetics, but you could also simply buy various poisons from a pharmacist. All you had to do to procure arsenic, strychnine or other nasties was pay for it and sign your name in the poisons register that was kept by each pharmacist. They often did not require identification so you could sign with a false name or even use someone else's name to incriminate them.³

There are a great variety of poisons that were and still are available, but for the purposes of this article we'll just have a look at the ones that were commonly used in the eighteen hundreds and early 20th Century... the classics so to speak.

Aconitine

Aconitine is one of the earliest known poisons commonly used to eliminate unwanted persons, so much so that the ancient Greeks knew it as "stepmother's poison." It is a vegetable poison derived from the roots and leaves of the wolfsbane plant (*Aconitum napellus*) and is a Central Nervous System depressant that was easily available as an ointment for toothache neuralgia and arthritis. It was especially popular as a way of speeding up inheritances as until the 1880's there was no way of detecting it in a corpse.

The symptoms of aconitine poisoning include numbness in the mouth, a high temperature, as well as nausea, vomiting, visual disturbance, a weak pulse and loss of muscular strength. The victim becomes paralysed within minutes and death occurs as a result of respiratory or heart failure. 1-2 mg is known to be a fatal dose and can kill someone in less than 10 minutes. For more information (including instructions on how to make it!) see [King's American Dispensatory http://www.ibiblio.org/herbmed/eclectic/kings/aconitum_aconitine.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/herbmed/eclectic/kings/aconitum_aconitine.html)

¹ Particularly among female offenders who typically had access to the food

² Especially if you are Mike

³ Despite this a remarkable number of convicted prisoners were caught because they signed their own names in the poisons register and went to their local pharmacy rather than one on the other side of town.

Antimony (tartar emetic)

This is very similar to arsenic but has the advantage of being colourless, odourless and almost tasteless. As tartar emetic (potassium antimonyl tartrate) it was water-soluble and was easily available as it was an ingredient in various patented remedies to treat coughs and constipation. In very large doses, it induces vomiting which may cause the poison itself to be expelled. Thus the cautious poisoner would have to be careful with dosage or else, opt for the long-term approach. In fact, it was perhaps most successfully used to induce chronic poisoning, as this was more likely to appear to be an illness and there was less risk of the poison being expelled.

Like arsenic, continuous small doses causes vomiting and diarrhoea and suppress the appetite causing the victim to become weak and emaciated. It is also a CNS depressant and death often occurred due to a combination of exhaustion and heart or respiratory failure. Unlike arsenic it has the added effect of causing constriction of the throat and muscle cramps. A fatal dose could be anything from 1.5 to over 100 grams. Despite the availability of this drug it was never known to be a particularly popular choice of poison.

Arsenic

This mother of all poisons has been around since the 8th Century. In Ancient times it was so popular that the wealthy employed food tasters and in France it was known as “inheritance powder”. It has the advantage of appearing like sugar or salt and has very little taste, so can be easily disguised in food or drink. The symptoms of vomiting, diarrhoea, and skin discomfort and discolouration could easily be confused with various diseases and indeed many victims of arsenic poisoning were first diagnosed with gastroenteritis. It was ideal for someone wishing to poison someone to whom they were close, as it was best administered in multiple small doses so that it could accumulate in the victim’s system and weaken them for the fatal dose, while maintaining the illusion of disease.

For centuries it was very difficult to detect in a corpse, and even when methods were developed to identify it (such as the Marsh Test developed in 1836), it was a favourite because it was so common in everyday life that it could always be argued that a victim was exposed accidentally. It was available in green wallpaper, flypapers, rat-poison, weed-killer, medicines and cosmetics and was used in sheep-dips, glass making, taxidermy and dyeing. To secure a conviction, the prosecutor would have had to show that the suspect has actually purchased arsenic or have witnesses to the poisoning.

DM’s should note that Arsenic does not break down in corpses and from analysing the hair of the victim an investigator could determine the duration and extent of the poisoning, even in a corpse exhumed months or years later. It is also important to keep in mind that there is often arsenic to be found in the earth surrounding a coffin, as well as in a naturally-occurring form in the human body, and this could further complicate an investigator’s attempts to detect arsenic poisoning. In addition, it was not uncommon for people to deliberately take tiny quantities of arsenic regularly in the belief that it had health benefits and it has been argued that some prominent cases of murder by arsenic⁴ were in fact cases of self-induced arsenic poisoning.

The Arsenic Act was passed in Britain in 1851, after which point arsenic had to be coloured before purchase and could only be sold to persons over the age of 21 who were known to the seller. All details

⁴ For example James Maybrick and possibly Pierre Emile L’Angelier (<http://www.fix.law-firm.co.uk/AnalysisFS.htm>)



of the purchase also had to be recorded in the poisons register. For further reading check out *The Pharmaceutical Journal* miscellany <http://www.pharmj.com/Editorial/20001223/articles/arsenic.html>

Cyanide

This is more of a favourite for suicidal poisonings than murders, because it is very fast acting and the symptoms of the poisoning are unlikely to be confused with disease. This is the sort of thing that a villainous spy or time travelling voodoo ski-Nazi⁵ may use to avoid interrogation by party members. Cyanide was not popular in Victorian times and would be more plausible in post-1900 settings.

Cyanide is a vegetable acid that occurs in many fruits. It is not harmful in its natural form but when combined with certain other chemicals (often naturally) it degrades into a noxious substance. Hydrocyanide is distinguished by the odour of bitter almonds however about 20% of the population can not detect the smell of bitter almonds, so there is a built in 20% miss chance on any “detect cyanide” rolls.

Cyanide kills quickly, with the fastest recorded death being ten seconds. Usually it takes about five minutes. It acts on the respiratory centre of the brain causing unconsciousness, and convulsions with dilated pupils and often a froth at the mouth. It is possible to survive a case of mild cyanide poisoning and fortunately there are a number of antidotes to cyanide poisoning, which is great if you happen to be carrying them around with you. A pro for the poisoner is that cyanide degrades very quickly in the body so unless cyanide poisoning is suspected and the corpse examined immediately after death, it may be very difficult to prove that the victim was poisoned.

Strychnine

Strychnine guarantees a particularly painful death. It was discovered in 1817 as an alkaloid present in the dried, ripe seeds of the tree *Strychnos nux-vomica*. It was used for medicinal purposes throughout the 1800s as a stimulant, however it was also acknowledged as an animal poison. Accidental deaths were common when patients inadvertently took too concentrated a mixture of their medicine. Given its availability and toxicity, it was inevitable that it would become a method of murder and was very popular as such in the later half of the century

Strychnine is a colourless crystalline powder, which tastes very bitter and would need to be well disguised to go unnoticed. It is absorbed quickly, hampering respiration and causing convulsions. The spine arches dramatically and the muscles cramp and become stiff and rigid, with only the head and feet of the victim touching the ground. These spasms last for minutes and then subside before the next spasm. These are accompanied by a grinning effect (*risus sardonicus*). Death usually occurs within an hour due to respiratory failure or exhaustion. The standard lethal dose is about 100mg.

Disclaimer

This is meant as a *role-playing* tool, people. I will not take responsibility for any poisoned relatives or enemies. Besides, these poisons are reasonably hard to come by these days and most are quite easily detectable through modern forensic pathology. Only a real idiot would try to use them if they expected to get away with it⁶. Poison is not the “perfect murder” tool it once was, but was a very real threat before about 1920 so any games set in that era should at least consider it as a peripheral feature. In conclusion I’d like to leave you with some good advice from a very sensible young lady:

“One should never drink very much from a bottle marked ‘poison’, as it is almost certain to disagree with one sooner or later” - Alice (In Wonderland)

⁵ Not much use on the undead unfortunately.

⁶ Not when there are so many lovely undetectable poisons available©



Go fish

Cats Honk If You Stomp On Them

D@vid Seaward eats sushi, with technical assistance from William MacDonald and Bronwen Wheeler

If you're wapanese, an otaku or into culinary exploration, you will eventually find yourself contemplating the raw fish phenomenon. Yum. Rather than bootstrap your way in I strongly recommend finding some experienced sushi diners (at least orange belt) and getting them to show you the ropes. For one thing, they will know which local restaurant serves good fish and good sake, and they can give you an idea on which choices are good bang for your buck.

But you might want to find out just a little about what you're letting yourself in for, and thus I present an Absolute Beginner's Guide To Eating What Your Friends Order...

miso soup (me-so hungry)

A recommended starter. Seaweed and tofu in a thin bean curd soup. Sometimes with fish. More appetizing that it sounds, but not the highlight of my sushi experience.

Kamikaze General's Warning:
People may grin when you first taste wasabi.

sake (pashsh the sharky)

Rice wine, although a more *accurate* description would be rice *vodka*. Served hot or cold. Nice hot. Verr nice. Stronger than it looks and tastes. You have been warned.

soya sauce

It's salt in a sauce.

wasabi (wusa-aarghaaaarghitburns!)

Horseradish paste. What did they do to that poor horse? When your host asks, "Are you feeling adventurous?", think before answering; the just-a-blob-of-wasabi in the mouth experiment is eye-opening experience in more ways than one. After a couple seconds of flames, the heat just... dissipates - it's quite weird.

Ninja tip!

The green stuff is the wasabi. For amusement and profit try to convince your friends that it is avocado dip and that a teaspoon full is a good amount to garnish their sushi with. While they're crying and trying to breathe nick their wallets.

An easy way to prepare your condiments is to stir a little wasabi into the soya sauce, and just dip. Add a little wasabi and test, then add more, 'cause you can't take it *out*.

ginger (ninja!)

Take a slither to cleanse the palate between options. For those who wimp out from wasabi, which does the same job with vigor.

Sushi mistress tip!
Samurai-ko Bronwen recommends you try your sushi with a bit of ginger on top!

Drowning Rover and other rainy day activities

Sushi master tip!

Samurai William recommends you always order sushi fresh - supermarket sushi is for suckers. (Say that ten times fast.)

And now the meat!

sashimi (sa-shee-mee)

Your basic raw fish, hold the anchovies. Marinated in vinegar for smooth texture (you don't taste the vinegar). Try it on its own, no sauce. It has a simple, clean taste and melts in your mouth.

sushi (soo-shee)

As above, on a bed of rice. Chopsticks are difficult enough without trying to hold rice together - use your fingers. But one day, Grasshopper, you too will be a sushi master, capable of dipping and flicking it into your mouth while killing a man in one easy motion.

maki (ma-kee)

The funky stuff you normally see traveling on the little conveyor belt. Rice wrapped with seaweed, with a fish or veg centre. I discovered you cannot bite the seaweed - just put the whole thing in your mouth. The wide ones with lotsoffishandvegandstuff in the centre are awesome, although you wonder how manga characters can manage with such small mouths.

california roll (y'all)

In the land of shrimp showers the locals have adapted the art of raw fish rolling much like they did feng shui - curiously. A california roll has rice around a seaweed centre, with sesame seeds on the outside.

tempura (tempt-prrrrrr-aaah!)

Just when you thought it was getting too healthy, some batter-fried goodness. Raw shrimp, fish or veg quickly dipped, still crunchy. Yum yum yum.

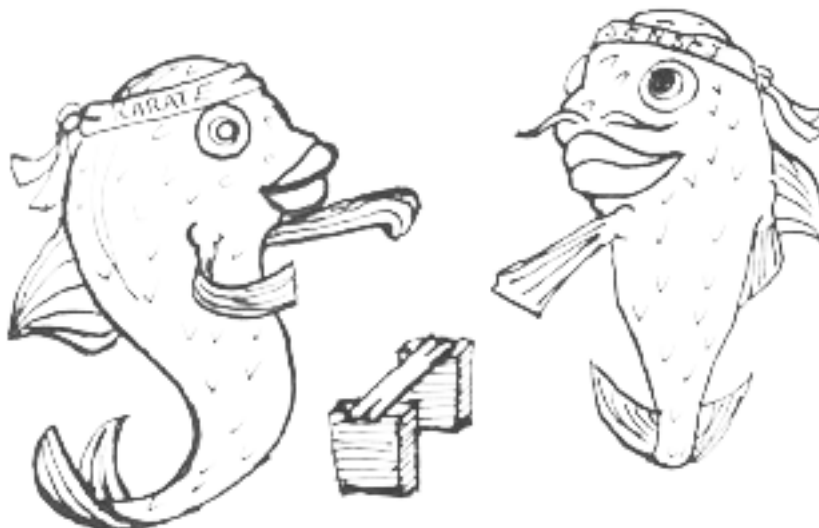
karaoke (oh baby baby how was I supposed to know?)

I have not been to a sushi bar that carried this ingredient. Sounds dangerous.

So, now that you know what will be wobbling on the plate in front of you, why not take the plunge?

Sushi master tip!

Samurai William notes that you should not take sushi home in a doggy bag.
(Insert dog joke here.)



Cinderella Lost More Than a Shoe



LORD OF THE RINGS THE RETURN OF THE KING

Reviewed, ranted at, dissected and generally prodded by Jessica Tiffin, undercover English academic and hopeless Tolkien geek who has come out of the closet as a Pervy Hobbit Fancier.

When I am old and grey and 97, I shall tell my grandchildren (or, more likely, my 13 pet cats) that I was *there* for it – I saw the three *Lord of the Rings* movies in their opening weeks, with my own eyes, way back in 2001-2003 when the ice caps were still frozen and the US President didn't have to pass an intelligence test. When they ask me what it was like, I shall tell them, scratching them behind the ears¹, "It was amazing. It was the most important event for fantasy in my lifetime. I was glad to be there." Sitting here in 2003, contemplating the approaching CLAWMARKS deadline and wondering if Mike would actually dare implement his editorial death threats on a Great Old CLAW One, I am thinking that it's over. Three years of expectation have finally reached their climax, and future Decembers stretch bleak, empty and hopeless into the distant mists of time².

I was rather rude about *Two Towers* last year, and I stand by my criticisms, even though the extended version is a much less flawed product – Jackson is relying far too heavily on the extended DVDs to shut the fans up, anyway. Of which more anon. *Return*, thank heavens, was not the hobble of imperfections and inconsistencies that *Two Towers* was; even on the third watching, *Return* leaves me drained and weeping, a beautifully-judged (and highly manipulative) emotional epic with enough grandeur, pathos and sheer spectacle to make me forgive *Two Towers* for its manifold inadequacies. The director's straying feet have found the True Path again – there are things changed and omitted in the adaptation, but they are understandable, necessary, and completely outweighed by the sheer number of moments where Tolkien's world springs from the page and brings itself to life in front of your eyes. Mordor, Minas Tirith, Minas Morgul, Shelob and Cirith Ungol, and Mount Doom itself are lovingly true to the book; Frodo's journey, the heart of the epic, is, in emotional terms, at least, as Tolkien conceived it. Hell, Aragorn even *looks* like a king when he washes his hair.

Return is very much the darkest of the three films, necessarily since it's about equally divided between war against hopeless odds, and a quest which drags its hero through the utmost physical, mental and emotional torment. Jackson's directoral background in cheesy horror and/or the genuinely disturbing, is evident here – while violence is stylised and largely bloodless, in approved Tolkienesque manner, there's enough of it to keep me flinching and cowering under the seat. It's conceived in epic, wide-screen style, too: the Battle of the Pelennor – and, particularly, the charge of the Rohirrim – are first-class cinematic spectacles, their CGI choreography damned near immaculate. The same darkness and hopelessness pervades Frodo's journey, again with faithful reproduction of lots of beloved bits from the books, particularly the final scene when they're collapsed on a rock while Mount Doom explodes, and the eagles arrive. The fall of Sauron's tower and the Black Gate are likewise epic and satisfyingly destructive. Oh, yes. Go, Peter Jackson. This is not a kiddies' story, and damn right too. (In fact, during one screening I attended the nice lady sitting in front of us hustled her kids out at about the time that the bits of masonry started squishing orcs. Those kids won't be able to tell *their* grandchildren much).

¹ I'm not much good with kids.

² Until the Extended *Return of the King*, of course, and Jackson's *Hobbit*, once they finish squabbling over the film rights. But you get the idea.

There are, of course, changes, but, as in the first film, these are forgivable and make good cinematic sense – the simplifying of the Pelennor battle, the omission of the Woses in Druadan Forest, no muster of Southern Gondor once the corsair ships were overwhelmed. I did feel that Minas Tirith became rather seriously under-garrisoned, without Prince Imrahil, the men of the Morthond, Old Uncle Fat Forlong and all, but I suppose that points the hopelessness of their conflict against the massed might of Mordor. (Damn all these Ms, what *was* Tolkien thinking?) On the other hand, Aragorn’s green-glowing, stepping-out-of-air Army of the Dead kicks serious butt on Pelennor Field, and I wouldn’t have missed that for the world. (Like Cassie Claire, I’d like to see them face off against the undead pirates from *Pirates of the Caribbean*). The otherwise complex tactical manoeuvres of Aragorn et al, taking short cuts and collecting incidental reinforcements – which I only understood properly on my third reading of LotR, after making a map and damn well plotting it – become dramatic, simple, cinematic. The proliferation of mumakil is perhaps overly Hollywood, but what the hell, it gives us cute Legolas and Eowyn bits, and Eowyn’s confrontation with the Witch-King, always a nicely dramatic episode, is largely faithful in its details. (Although I miss her “Begone, foul dwimmerlaik, lord of carrion!” Dwimmerlaik, such a cool word). Likewise, Gollum’s nassssty manipulative lembas-nicking is a bit gratuitous, I thought, but it pretty much worked in context. The total loss of a lot of the Mordor trip was inevitable, since it’s fairly repetitive, visually; as is the Scouring of the Shire, a tagged-on and time-consuming episode, whatever its thematic centrality. But again, as in the first film, we also see the clever use of dramatic episodes to encapsulate whole sections of the book: Denethor’s feasting as emblematic of Pippin’s constant hunger in Minas Tirith, Frodo’s rejection of Sam as an externalisation and compression of months of tension between Sam and Gollum. He even puts back the singing, which is possibly one of the things I miss most from the book, and gets away with it – Pippin and Aragorn’s songs are a wholly unexpected bonus. He’s a clever man, that Jackson.

Poor old Saruman probably gets the Most Shafted Award for *Return*, although the omission of the confrontation at Orthanc pales to insignificance besides Faramir’s character assassination in *Two Towers*. (And, incidentally, was Christopher Lee pissed about his complete failure to appear in the third film at all!) Fortunately, the interview with Saruman, and the back story with the palantir, is apparently back in the extended edition. Things I’m hoping will also be there: Denethor’s palantir (it makes much more sense of his psychology, currently he’s just maaa-ad, and no excuses); Aragorn and the Houses of Healing; Frodo and Sam’s inadvertent stint in an orc column. Lucky Jackson, having the extended versions behind which to scuttle when the howls of outrage from deprived fans becomes too much to bear... I have to admit, his theatre versions are probably better, tighter *films*, saving directorial street cred while he covers his geeky butt in the better *adaptations* of the extended versions. Having your cake and eating it, how nice.

So, the opus being complete, and the expectation over – what of *The Lord of the Rings* as a whole, the not-a-trilogy of films as the realisation of Tolkien’s vision? Pretty damned cool, is what. Four years ago your average Tolkien geek would not have been able to accept that LotR could be filmed at all, and look, gosh-wow, it’s even been done well. Not perfectly; there are sell-outs and compromises, but there are also soaring moments of vivid, credible realisation, an integrity of vision which makes the changes forgivable, and have given fantasy the cinematic Tolkien legacy it needs. I am struck by how often discussions of the films with friends end up in impassioned defences of precisely the problems we most dislike; we may quibble at details, but Jackson’s overall achievement inspires identification and protectiveness. For a big-budget Hollywood studio film, it’s amazing how much it’s *ours*.

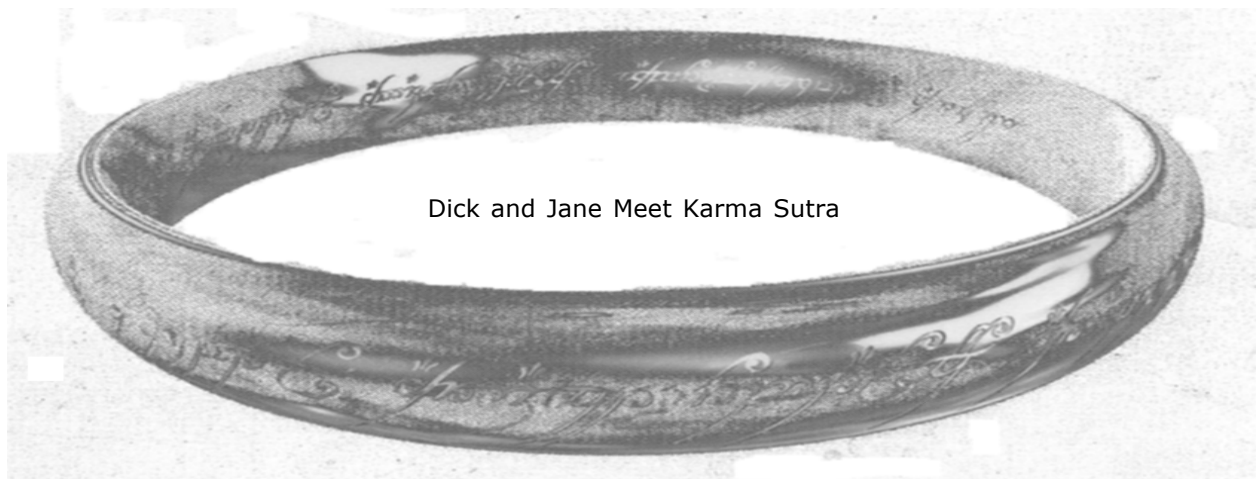
This also applies, of course, to the somewhat naïve fan investment in LotR Oscar hopes. Out of the forest of previous Oscar nominations, FotR and TT picked up only the low-profile technical ones: *Fellowship* got Make Up, Cinematography, Visual Effects and Score, and *Two Towers* pulled in

How Curiosity Killed the Cat (in 7 easy steps)

Sound Editing and Visual Effects. Now that the three films are out, we're all hoping, of course, for Best Director and Best Film, but I personally think that the well-known Academy bias against fantasy will kick in. New Line are pushing Elijah for Best Actor and Sean for Best Supporting Actor, but, despite the tendency of both roles towards the kind of angst, trauma and emotional decline so beloved by the Oscars, I think they'll be lucky to get nominations. However much the films have moved Tolkien towards the mainstream – and it's amazing how OK and fashionable Tolkien mania has suddenly become – really, when you get down to it, the film was made by a geek for geeks. It'll be a red-letter day if the Academy gets its head out of its collective butt for long enough to admit that the lunatic fringe is actually capable of Art.

So, finally, what will I tell the grandkiddies (or kitties) about my own impressions of the films? Out of the huge range of effects and responses, it's difficult to isolate one dominating thread. Perhaps the landscapes and settings – so much beauty, so much magic, not only the New Zealand mountains or the trees of Lorien, but the flawless digital grading which creates colours intensified beyond the real into the fabulous. Certainly the casting; the extent to which those actors have come to embody their roles, endures for me even into re-reading of the books. (Not for all of the characters, Cate Blanchette eeuw! – but my mental images of Frodo, Gandalf, Aragorn are now inextricable from the film when I read. That's quite something, given the incredibly personal nature of an internal fantasy universe. And a bounty in chocolate chip cookies to anyone who can tell me where to find copies of those incredibly beautiful cast sketches in the closing credits...)

But, and particularly after seeing the third film, what I shall most remember, amid the beauty, is the sense of loss. Courageously, for so expensive and mainstream a film, Jackson has not been afraid to include and emphasise Tolkien's sense of tragedy – the departure of the Elves, the doomed love of Arwen and Aragorn, the crippling of Frodo by the Ring. Popular film generally requires a less ambiguous feel-good ending, and it's interesting to see how far Jackson has managed to push the bittersweet conclusion. It's prefigured, of course, in the earlier movies – the flash forward to Arwen weeping at Aragorn's tomb – but *Return* makes enormously effective use of it. One of my favourite bits from the books is the description of Frodo's arrival in the West – “the grey rain curtain turned all to silver glass, and was rolled back, and he beheld white shores, and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise.” I rejoice (and weep) that that line, that vision of death, was given so movingly to Gandalf during the siege of Minas Tirith, because it resonates through to the final scenes as the Elven ship departs. Jackson manages to deny the instant-gratification ethos of modern consumer culture – and of Hollywood itself – to insist that the beautiful, the magical, the transcendent, are not part of our mundane lives; that beauty was never ours, anyway, and is unattainable, inextricable from loss. To me, for that reason alone he is a worthy interpreter of Tolkien. He, his cast and crew, have enriched Tolkien's fantastic heritage when there was so much danger of betraying it – and thereby, have enriched all our lives.



Dick and Jane Meet Karma Sutra

Stoked...A Jo'burg Review

By **Wednesday leFey**

Are you ready? Do you think you can handle it? Johannesburg, home of smog; commercialism and cugels. (If you don't know what those are you're soooooo lucky.) It is time to continue the adventures of me in, "Tales from Jo" (cue dramatic music). Prepare to be shocked and amazed (or rather just shocked) by the taste of pavement grease and the feel of the wind in your hair as you dice down the M1 at 160km/h. This is a festive review, (and there is nowhere else in the world where things can be less festive) a tale of cheer and goodwill to all mankind (or not.)

Montecasino-Fourways

Christmas day (Happy Birthday dear The Son of God) I spent with me mommy. I cooked me very first turkey and it was great. To add to the Portuguese flavour I made peri-peri prawns and we had a crab curry. (I'm Chinese and I like talking about food so sue me!) I was surrounded by teenage girls (many wouldn't have a problem with this...) and feeling quite out of my depth. You know there's something wrong with the world when your 16 yr old cousin's cell logo says "Whip me" and her welcome message reads something along the lines of "Oh you sexy beast you." Is that sort of thing normal for a 16 yr old girl? I don't recall being like that. Maybe I skipped being 16 all together. I'm barely that porn now. Later on me dad came to pick us up to party at Montecasino. (Only the Chinese would spend a holiday at a casino.)

The plan was simple, pretend my sister was my dad's friend's foreign girlfriend and casually stroll into the casino for free food and free vodka... Plan fails because my sister looks 14. Damn her for being 16! So then I didn't get free food and had to settle for walking round Monte in the middle of the night. A few hours later, we were lucky enough to bump into a lil friend of mine, Nick. This hot lil Brit decided that it was his duty to sneak us into the casino. Clark and Nick distracted the guard and we walked right past them and were free to roam the Prive. The boys went off to blow a grand at the tables and my sister and I went in search of daddy and free booze. (Question: Where the hell does a 19 yr old get a grand to waste at the casino?) An hour and triple vodka lime & lemonade later security escorted us out of the casino. Apparently the management watching the cameras thought we looked too young. As a roleplayer, I am liable to be a lil overly dramatic at times but this was just ridiculous. All the security guards surrounding us (oooooh two girls, so dangerous?) and talking on their walkie talkies and acting all scary and stuff. Even if I wasn't drunk I would have canned myself laughing. (A can of sweetcorn!) (I apologise for being corny – I did it again – but I can if I feel so inclined.)

As a side note, the bathrooms are sooooo beautiful. Admittedly I only know this because on another occasion I drank a fishbowl and ended up chundering in one of them. It was in a very clean and dignified way, I'm anal about cleanliness.

The Doors-Edenvale

I am a regular. By regular I mean more than twice a week. I don't say this with pride but with a sense of embarrassment. The Doors is about 3 times the size of Gandalf's and packed every night. You'd think that with six bars the barmen would have it easy, they don't. Much like Gandalf's, the emphasis is on commercial music (commercial rock that is) and the djs are a bunch of arrogant asswipes. Requests = no f*%\$*ing way! Except for Brent because he's a sweetie. (And his brothers are soooo hot!)

So the night after Christmas Max, Bubbles, Tammy Rae (me sister) and I trundled off to The Doors. (The bouncers let her in cause she has nice legs and she was with us, the 3 Chinese chicks.) There was fake snow everywhere and luckily the place was relatively quiet. Everyone was still recovering from the party the night before. We had an excellent time, dude! The music was your typical rock party mix (Violent Femmes, R.E.M, The Cure, etc) and we danced & jumped till half 4 the next morning. Two weeks later I was still shaking polystyrene out of me boots.

The Doors, regular parties, regular live acts and a bunch of metalheads and goths with no place else to go.

Syn-Melville

Amazing venue. Fetish club of note. Medieval décor fitted with crosses, guillotine type things and swings in the ceiling. Whips, chains, cages, this place is awesome whether or not BDSM gets you off. It's also owned by people that roleplay! Two bejillion points more for the place! It's right next to Outer Limits so if you're in Jo, stop in, the music and atmosphere are to die for!

Wythfest-Midrand

Heavy metal festival in the middle of Midrand? Is this possible? Well, it was and we're still reeling in wonder. Midrand for those who don't know is akin to Claremont but much bigger, much better and much more expensive, also much less underage kids...

Upon entering, we were each given a free cd (very good cd too) featuring S.A metal bands. Inside, the crowd was everything a person like me could want. Beautiful goths, metal heads and freaks. Long hair, leather and black t-shirts all round. Very cool venue – very big and dark.

The bands, Aggro, Sacrifist, Toyland, Tyburn, such were the names on the line up. Barney Simon played mc, and sucked ass at it. (Most of the people attending wanted him lynched.) The most amazing band I heard that night was Wrust. Four black guys from Botswana and they played the best Black metal I've haerd in ages. After their act, I had to run and get their autographs. They were interviewed right there for a metal magazine and they blew everyone away.

Let me tell you something rather strange about this particular crowd of Jo natives. Out of deep respect for the bands people stayed far away from the stage. There was minimal moshing out of consideration for everyone else present and applause commenced only after the songs were done. In this way it ensured that everyone could hear and appreciate the music. The venue after the concert was clean. People were even smoking outside. Weird shit when you've been to a concert in C.T.

Well that's all folks and don't let the violent tendencies of zombie Jo'burgers prevent you from sleeping at night. Good night.



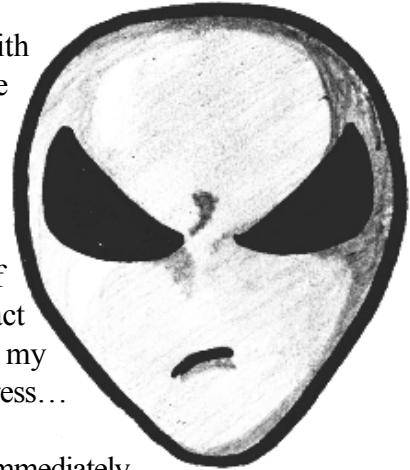
Why are they looking at me like that?

E Makes Daddy Love You

Shelagh Parry helps to answer a oft-wondered question: Do scientists have a sense of humour? Of course, it's not actually a question – we all know they don't, but she prevents some compelling evidence to the contrary.

This is the question that my inner roleplayer/crackpot poses to me with somewhat more regularity than I would prefer. Okay, so I might not be the most stable person on the planet, but dammit that comment was funny!

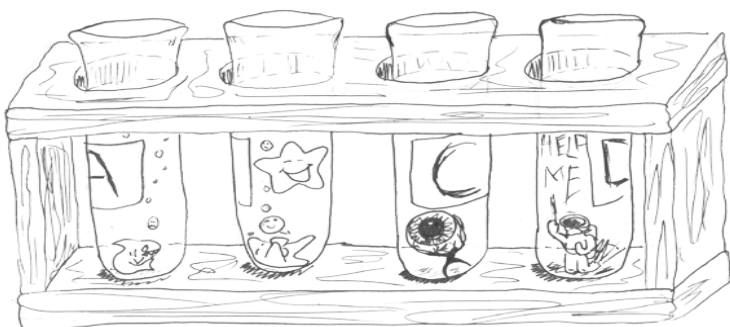
One of the drawbacks of being a Masters student in a scientific field is: “PHENOMENAL COSMIC POWERS.... itty bitty little sense of humour allowed.” Clearly I missed the really fine print on my contract when I signed up for this gig somewhere in the cosmic milieu before my father's eye had even considered apples as being a possibility. But I digress...



My point is a simple one: why does having any shred of academic drive immediately negate the possibility of one having a wacky sense of humour or being able to roxxor the dance floor? Is there some clandestine rule that only owners of below average IQs are allowed to have a good time? Reading over my last sentence I realise that I may sound pompous and academically arrogant – that is not my intention, I am merely using this space to ruminate on a topic that I find simultaneously fascinating and highly amusing.

But as with most discussions the time has come for me to put forward my case, so gather around children (or just skip to the next article – it's all about choice). I first stumbled across this pet theory way back in high school (where I must confess that like many of you I was considered fairly smart – the fools). One particular incident stands firmly etched in my brain. I was out with some friends at a club and I happened to look up at the precise moment that I was spotted by one of my fellow classmates. From her response I am convinced that the person in question is capable of dislocating her jaw. Her expression could best be described as closely resembling someone who's just caught his/her parents in a most compromising position. She then proceeded to make her bewildered way past the pool tables and utter: “What are you doing here?” Now what response can actually be given to that question that doesn't involve sarcasm of any shape or form? I can't remember what my response was, but I think that I managed an answer that left her view of how the world should be intact.

Chatting with some of my friends during one of the long vacs I was amazed to discover that I was the subject of considerable speculation and rumour during my school years. Unbeknownst to me the common consensus was that: (1) my parents used to lock me in my room and force me to study, (2) we didn't have a TV and (3) I was only allowed to have fun for a couple of hours on the weekend. All of this clearly



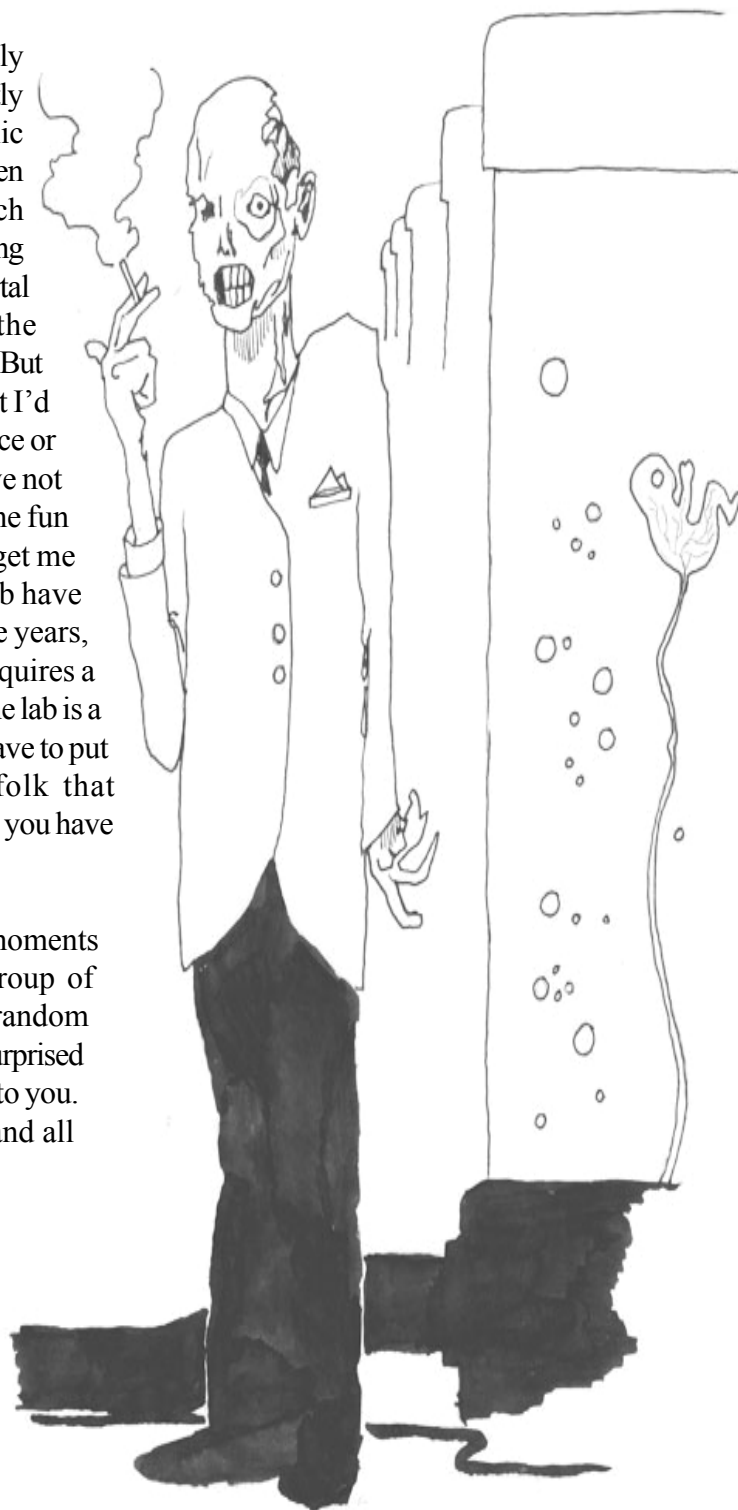
How to Check If Wild Bears Are Cuddly

slipped my attention while I was watching movies and playing Star Control II (amongst others). Damn my parental units are dashed cunning.

Now we move onto the hilarity that is the university experience. I have been tempted over the last few years to make up an interesting, yet exciting cover story to tell new people that I meet. Because invariably when the conversation swings round to the “so what do you do?” stage my response (despite the fact that we may have been having a great conversation prior to this) is usually greeted with a suspicious look and the person nervously edging away from me as if I might taint them or start explaining organic chemistry in excruciating detail. It’s at times like this that I often want to grab the person by the shoulders and remind them that I’m still the same person who can sing a large portion of the Digimon theme song that I was mere moments ago. I mean really, people.

This all brings me very neatly to a recently developed sub-theory: that having a slightly zany outlook on life, even in academic circles, seems to be frowned on. I have often been tempted as I stand at my lab bench with frothing beakers and dangerous looking implements of science to utter the immortal phrase: “Fear my l33t skeelz” (in the appropriately diabolical tone... naturally). But I couldn’t be bothered because the effort I’d have to expend in explaining the reference or convincing my fellow lab rats that I have not stopped taking my medication makes the fun seem too much like hard work. Don’t get me wrong, the people who populate my lab have been slowly warped by science over the years, but if the humour isn’t mainstream it requires a permit to use. Plus my suspicion is that the lab is a restricted area. But hey, at least I don’t have to put up with the airheads and preppy folk that monopolise many of the other faculties – you have my condolences those who do.

The upside to all of this are those rare moments when you’re sitting around with a group of complete strangers and you make a random amusing comment only to be pleasantly surprised to hear someone chuckling quietly next to you. Just remember your new cover story and all should be well.....



How To Draw: Suicide Attempts

The Things About Stuff. Volume II: Now With More Stuff

Prozac Makes Everything Better

Well, Quentin Tarantino made a film with two volumes (*Kill Bill*, if you care). So I decided to write the second volume of an article. The link may seem tenuous to you, but it's quite enough for me. Enough to justify 1000 words of stuff, as required to fill up this particular section of CLAWmarks.

So let's talk about dice. You'll note that I'm using the plural here, the singular being "die" as in "DIE, MOTHERFUCKER! DIE! I'LL RIP YOUR INTESTINES OUT!" though probably without the same intent. I just mention this because a lot of people, myself included, talk about rolling "one dice". I didn't used to. It's like a verbal plague which has slowly crept into my vocabulary, until finally I found myself saying it and not noticing the error until a few seconds later. It's the same stomach-churning feeling I got when I first uttered the phrase "133t skillz" *without sarcasm*. I don't even use IRC – I get stressed out if people ask me to type faster than a paragraph an hour.



Speaking of, it's time for a break.

Ah...that's the stuff. Over the previous hour-long break, I totally forgot where that section above was going, so I'll round it off with something suitably vague. Just let me warn you: bad English can be contagious, like AIDS or gonorrhea. And you don't even get to have some sex first. Oh, that's right. We were discussing dice: or rather I was writing about it, and you were flipping to the next section. Anyway, the relationship between CLAWmembers and their dice is always something of a funny one. Here are logical students of science, of commerce and whatever-humanities-students-do, and they ascribe deep and possibly mystical powers of little plastic polyhedrons. Don't touch my dice, you'll drain their...um, luck. Or "these dice only roll high" or "training your dice."

"Training your dice" is a masterpiece of logic generally attributed to White Wolf players. If you leave your half-ton of d10s with the tens upwards, you'll "train" them to

roll high. I've seen *statisticians* obey this one. And the scary thing is not that they believe this, but that the people who don't tend to roll badly.

Or the special rolling. Watch a roleplayer who's got his/her character in a dangerous spot. Watch his/her face as the DM tells them to make a luck/dodge/perception/Don't Die Like A Dog In The Street skill (hey, that last one comes up in *Unknown Armies* a fair bit). Watch his/h...oh, for God's sake, I'm going to gender-stereotype. Watch *his* arm sweep up. Watch the way the dice are flung desperately at the table, revolving at a fair percentage of the speed of light, and bounce to a halt, smoking with friction-generated heat.

There seems to be an unspoken rule that the more important the roll, the more theatrical it becomes. Vegas craps players have got nothing on us. It doesn't matter if the dice bounce off the table, if your

whirling arm clubs an innocent spectator unconscious, if the DM has privately decided you're going to fail "for the good of the plot"...just as long as the right numbers come up. If, of course, they don't, you can always retreat to that favoured hobby of roleplayers (even more so than actual role-playing): bitching. It really works. If you don't believe me, watch Brendan's face screw up in pain the next time I mention the Unknown Armies game where my character was RUN OVER BY A CAR IN THE FIRST SESSION JUST BECAUSE HE FAILED A BLOODY DODGE ROLL, YOU EVIL BASTARD. If he's reading this article now, his face is probably entertaining to watch.

Yes, be it science or fiction (or science fiction), roleplayers have an odd attitude to probability and karma and – holy crap. Just realized I've written four paragraphs in a row without stopping. Excuse me.

Aaaah. Nothing like slacking off. It's so bad, but it feels *so good*. Now I'd like to talk about kids. Why are they always evil? Not in real life, I mean, though I've seen precious little evidence that they *aren't*, but in role-playing games. Any roleplayer worth his or her salt knows that if it hasn't hit puberty, shoot first, shoot second and then angst about it in-character later. In games (especially horror modules), kids are always possessed by the devil, or vampires, or zombies, or secretly psychopaths. It's just a given. Especially if they skip. Nothing good can come of skipping.

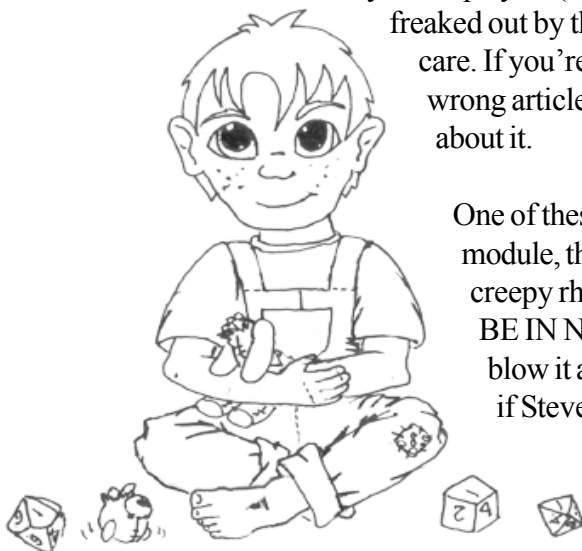
Steve Emslie put it best, shortly after an unpleasant encounter with a ten-year-old boy who just happened to be so barking nuts that he bent reality around himself - resulting in time loops, zombies and Bush being elected for a second term (I told you we were talking about horror games).

He spotted something running through the bushes and said, quite calmly, "If it's a little kid, I'm going to shoot it. I don't trust little kids anymore. I have little kid issues."

The creepy little kid is a staple of horror, right up there with the mysterious janitor who assured the terrified co-eds that there's no murderer on campus, while washing red "paint" off his hands. It just works. Maybe a psychologist would trace it back to some fundamental cause in our own childhoods, or maybe roleplayers (mostly young, irresponsible types) are just plain

freaked out by the little bastards. I don't know, and don't especially care. If you're expecting a valid conclusion, boy, are you in the wrong article. But I do know that I'm going to do something about it.

One of these days, I'm going to write a module. And in this module, there will be a small child. And it will skip, and sing creepy rhymes, and stare at the characters all the time AND BE IN NO WAY EVIL. I figure the players will crack and blow it away about fifteen minutes into the game. Maybe ten if Steve's playing. I've now reached 1000 Words of Stuff, so bye.



Your Real Mommy Was a Crack Whore

Classifieds

EVERY BOY'S BOOK OF MAKESHIFT WEAPONRY

Lost and Found

Lost: The True King of Surren. Calls himself the Cleric of the Computer. Keeps talking about a beast called the Lynicks. Do not harm. If found, please get word to Simon Phoenix, care of the Iron Gard.

Lost: The memory of one Elvish Monk. Who am I? Why am I here? Why do I keep following this party around when they keep getting into life-threatening situations? If you have the answers, please get hold of me through the Iron Gard

Lost: many hours of sleep due to long games of Munchkin. Just change my name to Friday Zombie.

For Sale

Large quantities of Squattish Ale for use as brazier cleaner, insect killer, lamp oil, explosives, or for consumption (only for those with the constitution of the gods).

Wanted

A bath for Druidic Shaman "Eyes-of-the-Wild". It may be a natural for you, but it is eau de craphouse for us.

One sugardaddy to take care of me, financially, for the rest of my life. Must be openminded and not jealous if I want to spend the night elsewhere with someone else. My fidelity must not be questioned, but yours must be constant. Call Lexi at <deleted phone number>

A black leather suitcase. Contents unknown, but possible fatal. If located, please contact Dirk Allen.

Memories. If you have mine, please contact me, Jane Savenka, care of Templar Investigations, Las Vegas.

An appointment with a really good shrink. If you know anyone to talk to, call the entire staff of Templar Investigations, except Terrance Sinclaire. Not because he's any more stable, but because

he's already got his own private shrink.

A subdermal tracking implant to be injected into Steve "Mystery Steve" Emslie. We'll get him to a game on time one of these days, damnit

A professional mesmerist to help with the elimination of some annoying hallucinations. Apply: Alice Hargreaves

Information regarding the whereabouts of the white rabbit. Apply: Alice Hargreaves

A baby sitter for Twitch. Must be experienced with two-year olds, computers, AI and the psychology thereof. Don't call her, she'll call you.

Anger management councilor. Contact Flashfire at the Blackburn.

Crane uniforms. Please contact the starving, smelly 'ronin' wandering around your lands.

Deaths

Jude Ceruleas, Paladin Crusader and Holder

of Knowledge for the kingdom of Surren's Guard of Twelve. A great teacher and mentor. I will miss you. You will be avenged.

One Dark Elf, cut in twain. When that barbarian woman asks "Can I go berserk?" be afraid, be very afraid.

More Dark elves. You aren't so tough when you don't have any magical backup. Eat steel, you bitches!

Buko, of the elite duo of gangsters "Osso and Buko." Actual name: Val Tomasi, but the player's nickname kinda stuck. Val, never given to smiling in life, smiled in death. Through his neck.

Four unfortunate Interpol Agents, hacked to bits by one Lance Wilson, supposed antiques dealer, but also pretty handy with a sword. Well, it was an *antique* sword.

Arthur Bailey. A lot. His internal organs strewn about his hotel room like party decorations, Mr Bailey left behind some

You Were an Accident and other facts you should know

confused detectives, a broken vodka bottle, and mysterious scorch marks.

A fair number of creepy street people, alternately blasted, kung fu-ed or magicked to death. A few were also beaten to death with a toilet seat.

Digsy, a street Entropomancer, who played Russian Roulette for magickal power. As you might have guessed from the context of this entry, he lost.

The crew of the starship Wayfarer. They survived a lot (most notably their own malfunctioning ship), but met a variety of unpleasant ends aboard an “abandoned” Technocratic Dreadnaught.

The Blue Dragon’s Aunt. Damn the British Army

An avatar of a mad-god. Struck with soulfire, run over repeatedly, shot, blown up and finally somehow destroyed causing a reality rip.

An M16 toting Naga lurking on the school field. Thought we

couldn’t see though your human suite huh?

The Crystals Waters coven. Went down with the Library in a hail of bullets and mojo.

Many of the townsfolk of Clearlake thanks to the rotten zombies.

Tons of zombies thanks to us with some help from a shady govt organization.

The psycho, new age, demi-human inhabitants of Clear Lake,



depth charged into oblivion

A crazy religious cult. Smited by our local demon, and a good thing too.

Our dignity via having tracking devices implanted in our arses.

Another avatar of a mad god. Blown up, shot lots, shouldered and finally smashed to pieces with a tire iron.

Thousands of evil little spiders. Now crispy critters after being blown up in their nest.

Some Egyptian cultists, shot by Dr Watson and various British soldiers for the good of Queen and country.

An innocent Egyptian workman. A snack for Mr. Renfield

1, 2 ... no... 3, um 4? 5! 6..er 12. I give up! Many security guards. Thanks Flashfire.

Ash was dissolved into her component molecules by sheer kinetic force, i.e. red-

misted. Thanks Flashfire.

Many, many Yakuza, their nova, their warehouse and the minefield next door were completely obliterated. Thanks Flashfire. (Note to Aberrant DMs. Don’t give your players plasma rifles.)

Many, many (we guess Project Proteus) operatives infiltrating a base were unintentionally mortally affected by newly discovered powers. Thanks Flashfire.

Phoenix shugenja, wounded by an arrow and finished off by a naganata hurled into his back. Yes, naganatas can be thrown and all the kami you control will not save you from it if you don’t see it coming.

Notices

No swimming

Advertising fees in CLAWMarks are R50 a page. So... that’s R150 for blatant advertising in your article Reuel.

Henceforth anyone using **insert words here** for bold in CLAWMarks articles will be shot.

Fridge Quotes

Michelle: "How do they know where we are? Maybe there are cameras and bugs hidden all over the place?"

Nenad: "Maybe we have tracking devices in our arses? Just a theory." (We do in fact have tracking devices in our arses, courtesy of a shady government organization)

Michelle: "Guys, this is getting a bit, like, fally aparty."

Alastair: "You hear a 'drip, drip, drip' in the water around you and a sudden splat as something hits the railing."

Alex: "Fucking birds!"

David: "He is wearing boots and a hat and nothing else."

Philip: "Which way is he pointing?"

David: "Here, I have a tyre iron. Why don't you go beat his skull in?"

Nenad: "Ok. Parma this!"

Alastair: "They are chanting in Latin."

Alex: "We don't hold with that new age shit!"

Philip: "Monsieur, are you alright? Perhaps some alcohol, or shall I light your bottom?"

Philip: "Maybe it was a practical joke... Hmm, maybe it was an impractical joke?"

Brendan: "Dr Watson! He's dead!"

Mike: "Damnation! I shot the blighter in the leg! Do these Arabs keep their internal organs in their legs!"

Mike: "Crazy Arab death. They call me Dirty Watson... I'll never say that again."

Colette: "I was weirdly hurt by that... (looks panicked)... vibrator."

Mike: "Do it, or the bear gets it."

Dave: "Leave Superted alone!"

Mike: "They walk in, and judging from their build and stance, they're professional muscle."

Steve: "So basically, they walk in, trailing their rap sheets like toilet paper stuck to their shoes."

Lara: "It's my stealth skill. I just call it 'stalk'."

Steve: "Yes, and my charm skill is called 'rohynol'."

Tai: "I'm going astral to look for spiritual life signs"

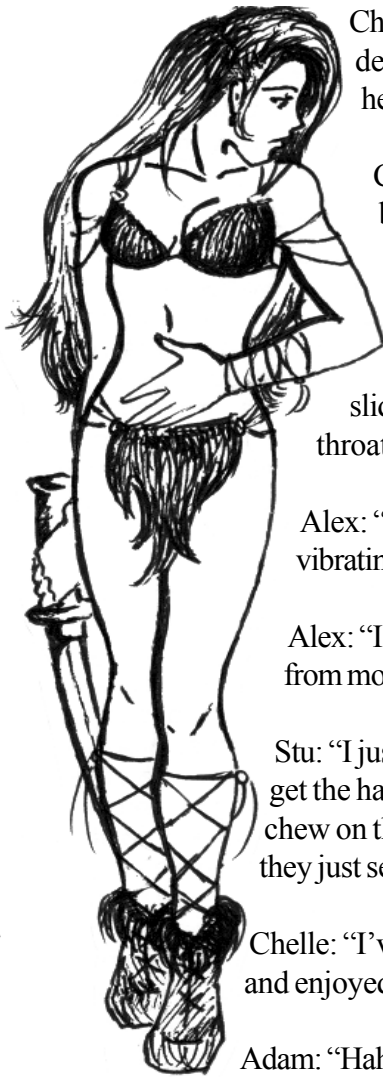
Mike: "Not so much as a spiritual sausage."

Mike: "His record is squeaky clean."

Sean: "The kind of clean that smells like detergent?"



Jane Eats Dick



Chelle: "I'm so much deeper in my own head."

Chelle: "It's useful being able to control one's gag reflex."

Chelle: "Things that slide down your throat are good."

Alex: "No, wait, it's not vibrating like it was."

Alex: "I can generally get it from most angles."

Stu: "I just suck on it till i get the hard bits, and then chew on those. Why can't they just sell the hard bits?"

Chelle: "I've had it both ways, and enjoyed it both ways."

Adam: "Hah! Shelagh thinks she's going to get a muffin!"

Dave: "Can this guy teach me blessing?"

Nenad: "He's an angel...what do you think?"

Lara: "I sleep the sleep of the innocent and noble."

Lara (who has elemental earth): "How are we going to dig up the tarmac?"

Mike: "At least twice a day I have an argument with a vampire. I am quite past implausible thank you."

David: "Minutes later you hear a buffeting and a howling as..."

Philip: "...Lord Greystoke runs out of bananas."

Amy: "Every time I lie on my back, Conrad starts snoring."

Sean-Bob: "So are you going to be wearing clothes?"

Andrea: "Well, that depends on how I'm going to be protecting you."

Carli: "Bone! It's a bone! It's a bone thing!"

Carli: "Open legs! Thank you!"

Dave S: "Why don't you just let us sugar and milk ourselves?"

Jason: "I must still milk myself."

Alex: "The population on Uranus has decreased? I just can't terraform it! It's uninhabitable!"

Al: "So you three are observing a rubbing in a bathroom?"

Dave: "I'm just watching."

Lara: "I learn to respect the rifle."

Lara: "Um, I'm a little nervous about giving it a go."

Al: "You guys just feel the effects of wind."

Alex: "I want instant elementals!"

Nenad: "Just add water?"

Alex: "For a water elemental, yes!"

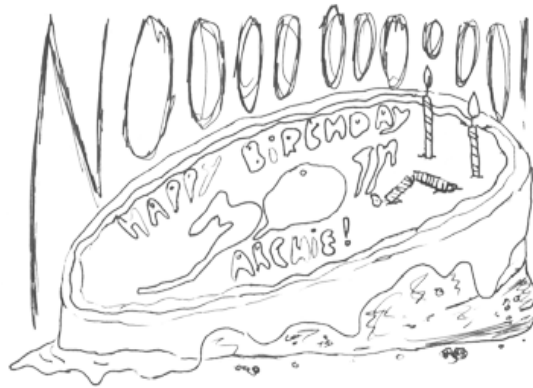


71 Reasons Why I Hate Turning Thirty (and 15 Reasons Why I Hate Airports)

Grounded in LAX, while waiting for a connecting flight the Hell Out Of America (as readers may remember, not his favorite country) the Archbigot of the Necropolis remembers an important detail...

They have metal detectors.
 They have foreign defectors.
 They have metal defectors.
 They have mental defectors.
 They are mentally defective.
 They...oh, crap, I'm thirty.
 Just remembered, thirtieth CLAWmarks.
 I hate CLAWmarks.
 I hate fingernail marks
 On my back
 Because I've never had any.
 I hate being thirty.
 Why, you ask?
 Premature baldness.
 Premature...other things.
 Damn Viagra.
 I never get to take Viagra.
 I never get a REASON to take Viagra.
 Rabbits don't need Viagra.
 I hate rabbits. And goats.
 Goats take Viagra.
 I still walk funny in cold weather.
 I don't want goats breeding.
 With me.
 No more goats!
 Goats breed with poodles.
 The poodles deserve it.
 I hate poodles.
 And poodles hate me.
 I still walk funny in warm weather.
 Poodles have weird haircuts.
 I'm running out of hair to cut.
 Animals hate you when you're thirty.
 Everyone hates you when you're thirty.
 Even me.
 Everyone wants me to settle down.
 So they know where to avoid.
 I hate settling down.
 Everyone hates it when I settle down.
 Near them, anyway.
 My parents want me to settle down.
 I hate my parents.
 Who doesn't? Bastards.
 My parents hate me.
 Who doesn't? Bastards.
 My parents want me to have kids.

I hate kids.
 Kids have freckles.
 I hate freckles.
 I have freckles.
 I inherited my freckles from my parents.
 I hate my parents.
 My parents hate my freckles.
 My parents want me to get a job, so I can support them.
 I want them to get jobs, for the same reason.
 I hate jobs.
 No one hires you when you're thirty.
 Except to write down things you hate for CLAWmarks.
 I hate CLAWmarks.
 And then they don't pay you. Bastards.
 And I hate it when I'm edited – the editor is a stupid [CENSORED] [CENSORED].
 I hate people who says my attitude stinks.



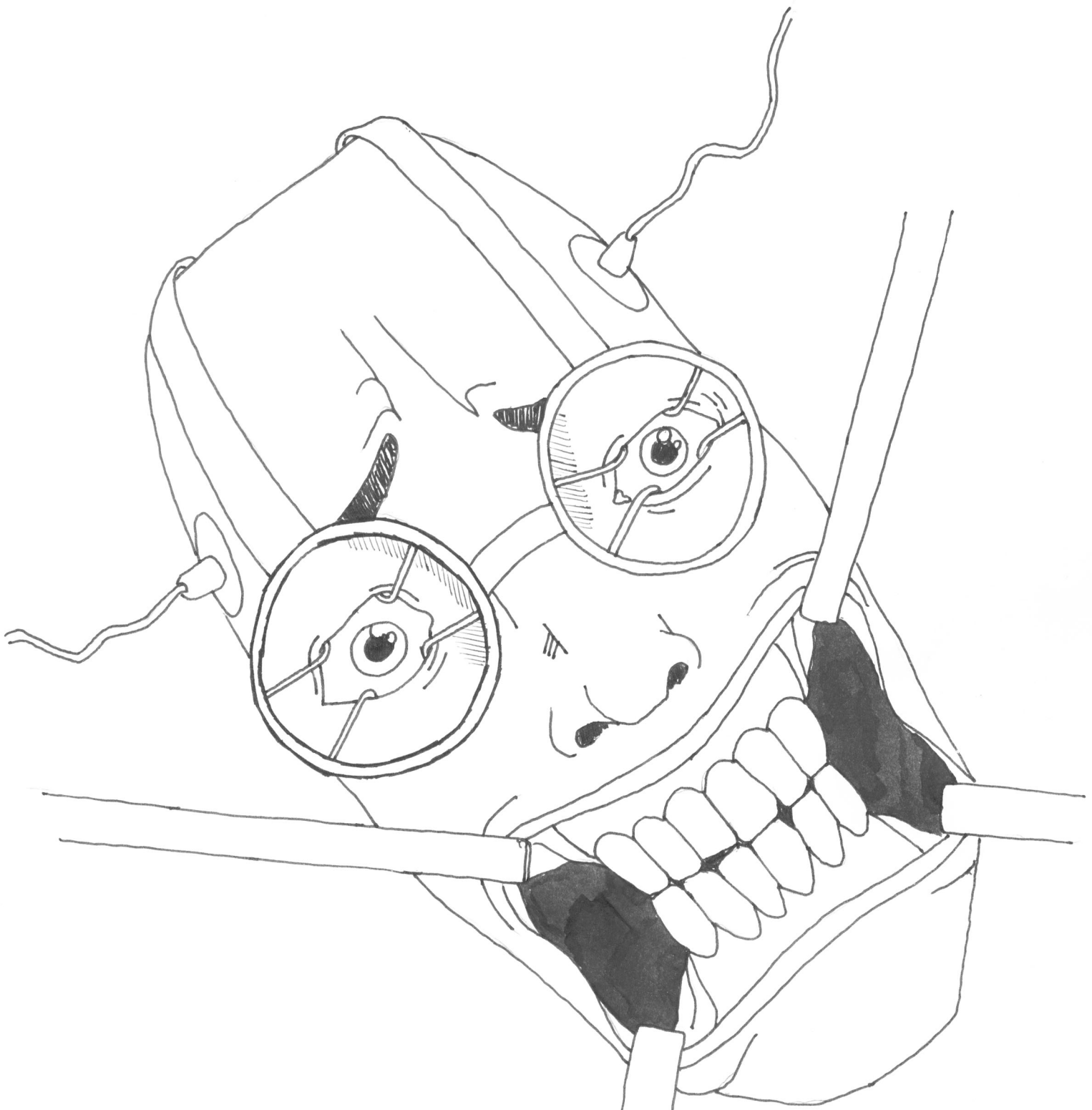
And... my speeling and, my, grammar, my repetition of my repetition... and my BO
 I need to bathe more.
 And eat healthy.
 Like bananas.
 I hate bananas.
 I'm going to be a fat thirty-year-old.
 A dirty, fat thirty-year-old.
 I hate fat.
 Bananas don't make you

fat.
 But I hate them anyway.
 Bananas grow on trees.
 On islands.
 I hate islands.
 Islands are hard to get to.
 You need to take a plane.
 I hate planes.
 I hate airlines.
 I hate airline food.
 Everyone hates airline food.
 Even if they live on islands.
 I hate planes.
 Planes come from airports.
 I hate airports.
 And I really hate being thirty.

What Christopher Robin and Winnie the Pooh Really Got Up To

LSD and Your Cat

The Little Girls Guide on How to Be Easy



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2004