

EDITORIAL

Ian Kitley

The fairground stretches out before me, stalls of every color and hue clamouring for my attention, exuding appetizing aromas and encouraging me to approach. The tents set up among the hustle and bustle soar into the heavens, and the sound of laughter echoes across to me.

As I begin to enter this timeless place, I hear the calls of the hucksters whistling along the breeze, little pieces of magical persuasion summoned to my ears. "Come see the Great Cthulhu!" says one, "You'll never view the world in the same way again!" "Witness astounding feats of Magic, requiring whole lands to power!" calls another. I pass a father and son walking out of a tent and hear the boy say to his father, "... little men fighting battles in alien technology. It's amazing, father! I wish I had some."

I shake my head at all of this, and I continue on my way into the delight that CLAWs seems to be since my exile.

Welcome to this Dragonfire edition of Clawmarks. As we begin this weekend of entertainment, a weekend in which many of us hope to lose ourselves in the imagination that is our hobby, I wish to thank everyone for all the help they've given CLAWs and myself during this year. It has been a hard road at times, but we seem to be traveling further along it every day.

The beginning of the year saw CLAWs in a bit of a dire situation, but a good group of new members, and a strong core of older ones has meant that we are still here and hope to be for a while.

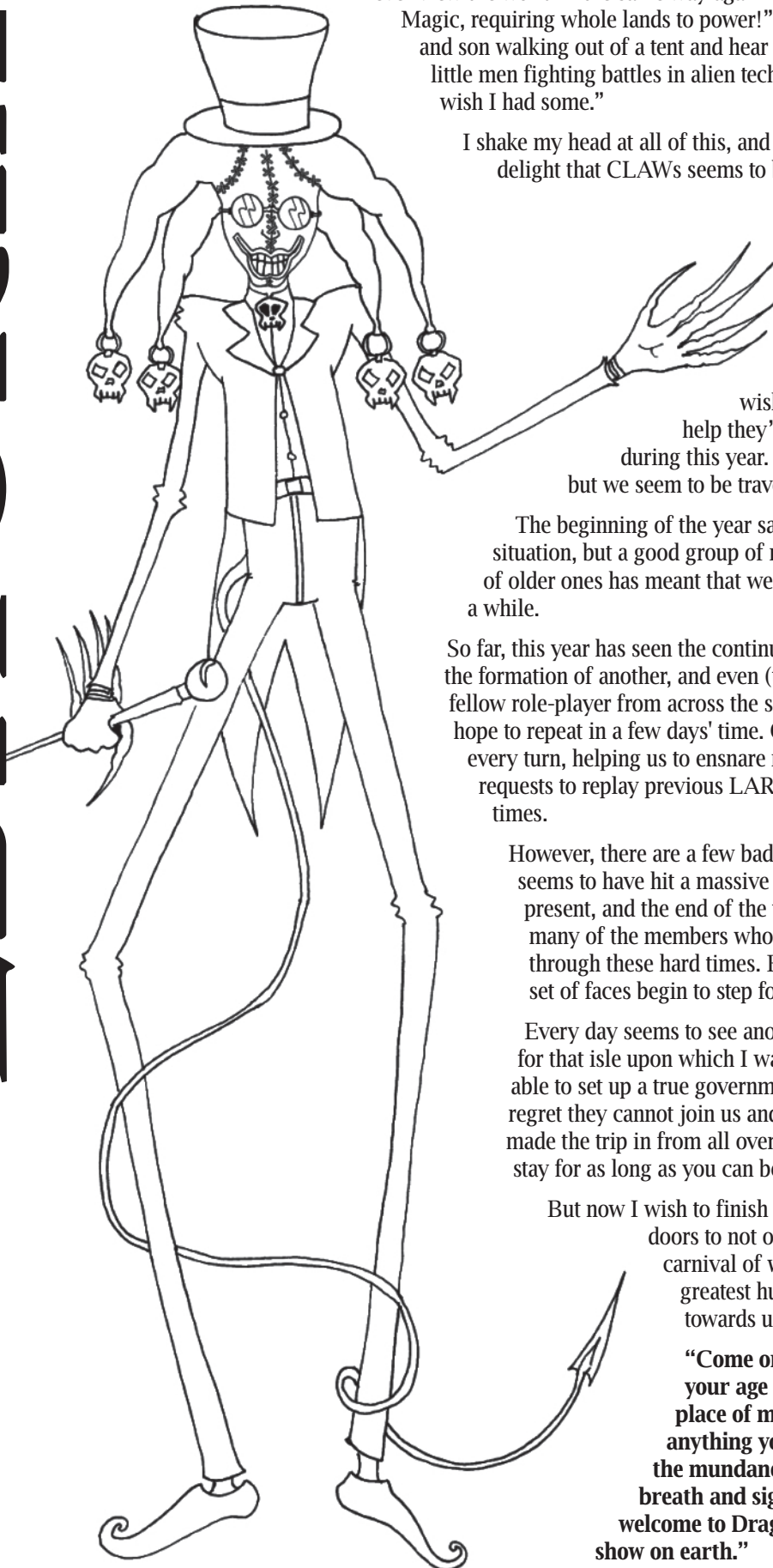
So far, this year has seen the continuation of one ongoing LARP, the formation of another, and even (thanks to the contribution of a fellow role-player from across the sea) an overnight larp which we hope to repeat in a few days' time. Games continue to pop up at every turn, helping us to ensnare new members, and the constant requests to replay previous LARPs and modules astounds me at times.

However, there are a few bad tidings. The fight for the room seems to have hit a massive roadblock and is floundering at present, and the end of the year heralds the departure of many of the members who have kept CLAWs floating through these hard times. But hope still remains as a new set of faces begin to step forward to take their place.

Every day seems to see another friend of CLAWs leaving for that isle upon which I was exiled, and soon we will be able to set up a true government in exile, but for now we regret they cannot join us and delight in those that have made the trip in from all over the country. We invite you to stay for as long as you can bear us.

But now I wish to finish prattling on and throw open the doors to not only this issue, but also to this carnival of wonders and, as the words of the greatest huckster float upon the breeze towards us, I bid you listen to his words.

"Come one, come all, no matter what your age or intention. Come to this place of magic and imagination where anything you can imagine can be. Leave the mundane behind and delight in every breath and sight and sound. I bid you welcome to Dragonfire Carnival, the greatest show on earth."



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ERRATA

Egregious stuff-ups in CLAWmarks 32

Ian Kitley was the editor; d@vid seaward was the copy editor.

The editorial was written by Ian Kitley.

Five Geek Social Fallacies was unexpectedly truncated. You can read the full text online, at <http://www.plausiblydeniable.com/opinion/gsf.html>

CREDITS

Editor <i>Ian Kitley</i>
Art <i>Emily Tolson, Garrick van Onselen, Yancke van Tonder, Rowena Williams, Réseau Internet</i>
Photos <i>Nic, d@vid seaward, Tim Lawrance, Hila Gropper</i>
Art processing <i>Simon Cross</i>
Fonts <i>goodfonts.org, Divide By Zero</i>
Layout <i>Adrianna Pinska</i>
Layout program <i>Scribus 1.2.1</i>



THE UPCON REPORT

Nenad Ristic boldly goes where no man has gone before

For the first time in CLAW's history, we have managed to infiltrate UPCON. Here is the story of my attempts to find out more about this obscure little con.

I had been trying to get in touch with the roleplaying community in JHB, and when I read about UPCON on roleplaying.co.za, I thought it would be the perfect opportunity, so I signed up for the LARP, and headed there. It felt strange going to a con, and knowing almost no-one there. I felt very vulnerable without my usual protective circle of CLAWmembers, but I persevered, and made sure not to let the Gautengers sense my fear, since I knew that I would have been done for if they did.

Actually, despite being virtually unheard-of in CT, UPCON is still bigger than Dragonfire.

At a guess, there were a couple of hundred people present, including lower life-forms, such as Magic players. The entry hall contained several stands representing various Gauteng companies, and numerous tables where wargamers indulged in their twisted rituals.

There was a room showing anime and Japanese movies, and a room devoted to card gaming (as far as I could see, mainly V:TES and L5R). The Magic players were kept away from the civilised individuals, in their own room, on the opposite side of the venue. I know that there was a Tekken tournament, and a Lord of The Rings card game tournament, but I did not witness them.

The roleplaying took place in a central quad outside, with several tables scattered around.

I missed the Saturday morning session, but I did end up GMing the afternoon one, an AD&D module. Despite it being AD&D, I have to admit that it was one of the best modules I have ever encountered. It was called *End Game*. If you ever get the chance, play it! I cannot really say that much more about it.

That evening, it was time for the LARP—which made the first running of *Cedar Falls* look like an example of smooth organisation.

Since they had enough people, they decided to run twoLARPs at the same time. They divided the players into the inexperienced ones and the

“Old Guys”, as they referred to us, much to our disgust—so we took our walkers, and found a corner to wait for our character sheets.

We soon found out that the reason we had to wait was very simple: The main GM had managed to lose them, completely—not just the print outs, but the original files as well. So we waited for them to be re-typed from memory....

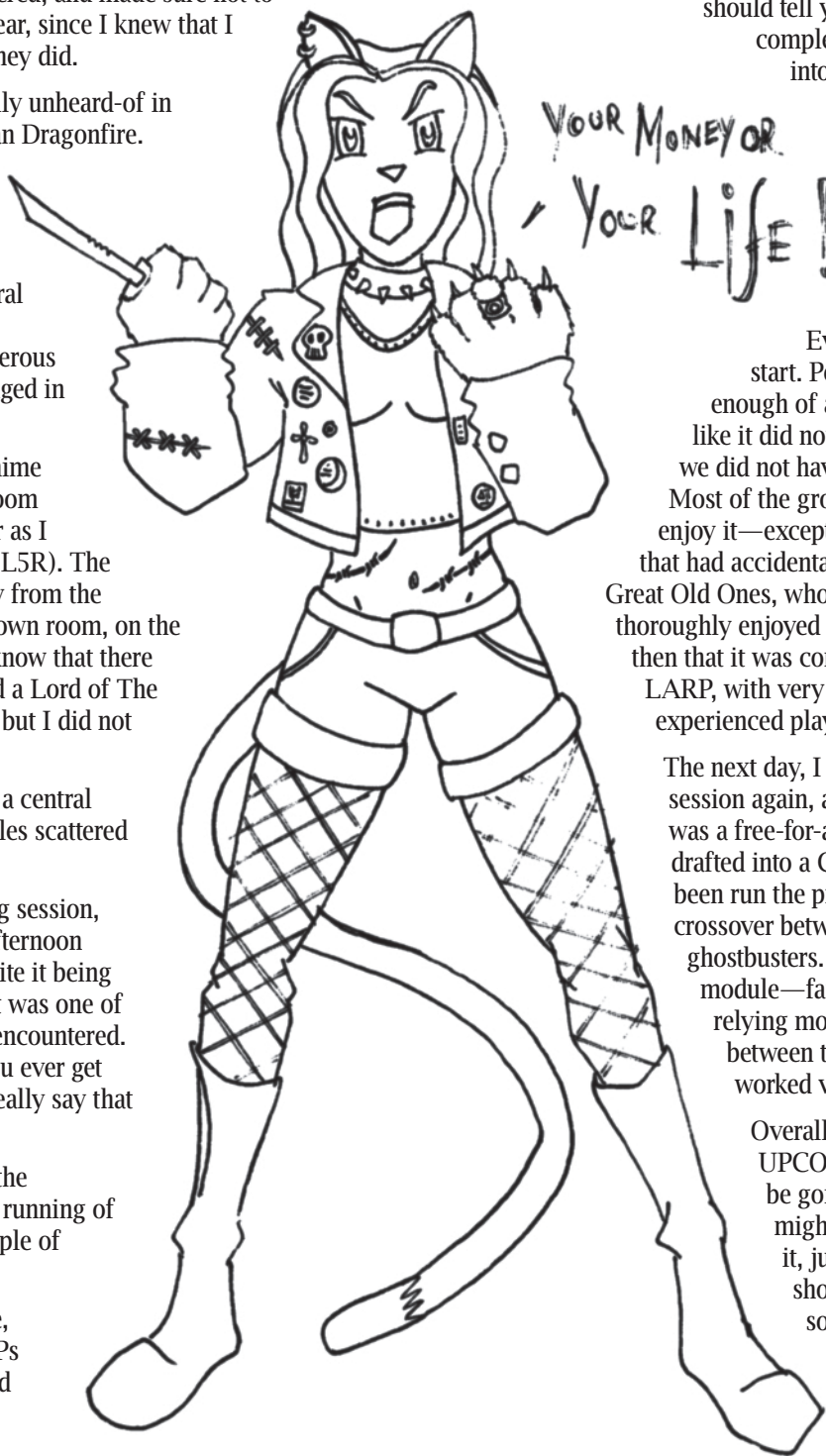
The fact that he managed to reproduce all twelve of the character sheets from memory over the space of two hours should tell you something about the complexity and detail that went into the characters. Most of us got a single double-spaced sheet with a smidgen of information. By now we were already irritated by the wait.

Eventually the LARP did start. Perhaps we did not give it enough of a chance, but we just felt like it did not go anywhere, and like we did not have enough information. Most of the group I played with did not enjoy it—except for a couple of newbies that had accidentally ended up with the Great Old Ones, who said that they had thoroughly enjoyed the LARP. I realized then that it was completely a beginners LARP, with very little to offer the experienced players.

The next day, I missed the morning session again, and the afternoon session was a free-for-all. I ended up getting drafted into a Cthulhu module that had been run the previous morning—a crossover between the scooby gang and ghostbusters. It was a very fun module—fairly straightforward, relying more on the interaction between the PCs than the plot. It worked very well.

Overall, I am glad I went to UPCON, and I will definitely be going to it next year (I might even write a LARP for it, just to show them how it should be done). I did meet some good roleplayers.

Perhaps next year, we can try for a full CLAW's contingent.



ON THE BEACHES: CAMPAIGN LARPING

Tim Lawrance and d@vid seaward
will never surrender

We began discussing campaignLARPs after the first session of Illusion of Free Will. (We tend to work through these LARPing thought experiments, and sometimes we even write them.) The intention was never to actually run one, because we immediately identified the main problem with campaignLARPs was that they require far too much work.

And then, somehow, we found ourselves planning “Splinters”, a faction-based LARP campaign. (Once we decided it would be a low-magic alternate history and figured out the Aztecs weren't the Incas, it became “Flower War”.) Here we'll highlight issues that are important three of four sessions later. (We're going to make everything public after the final session. Expect an article with more reflection and bitterness in CLAWmarks 34.)



Structured character creation

By having a degree of structure to character creation we again hoped to reduce our workload. While group efforts (creating naevi) were very successful, some individual character submissions suffered from: poorly integrated characters (in the setting and with other characters), powers not suited to a LARP, and empty character sheets. Some of this is due to experience, such as setting an achievable goal for the LARP medium.

Character submissions saw us spending a lot of time detailing powers precisely and creating connections out of thin air. Positively, we were very much inspired by the character concepts and whole new structures and setting elements were created out of them. Players have focused a lot more on player-created detail (e.g. the naevi and secret societies) than “given” setting elements—as it should be.

Idea: A simpler creation system would have a limited selection of powers picked from pre-selected lists (see the Underworld roleplaying & LARPing system). This would remove the issue of unknown powers and rules interpretation, which caused a significant glitch in the last session.

Idea: The importance of connections must be emphasized. At this point in character creation players need to think like writers and realize they can't operate in a vacuum. Alternately, the LARP campaign could start with no connections—this requires more player work during the LARP, and the potential for bored players who don't put in the work. We suspect that players who don't put effort into writing connections aren't likely to put effort into creating those connections in-LARP.

Idea: Write your own LARP and learn all there is to know about making cool characters!

Primary goal: Player driven story

As well as reducing GM workload, a player driven story is more interesting, simply because you're taking the story where you want it to. In Flower War votes have presented the players with directions to take the political scene, with a bloodthirsty emperor removing the need for a wimpy democracy or “none of the above” options. We haven't had a clear plan for the repercussions of every single vote, instead waiting for task



Primary goal: No work for the GMs

We have on all counts failed at this goal, although we did manage to reduce our workload below IoFW proportions (as far as we can tell). Every session has certainly been less work than a normal LARP. Importantly, we decided action would take place on a large scale through political means, primarily votes in a council. This removed the need for unstructured, individual player feedback.

After dividing the voting structure into national groups (provinces) and political factions (naevi), we decided that only naevi would be able to submit feedback (take action) between LARP sessions. Later, when the Green Spider naevus came up with an interesting voting mechanic, we elaborated on this to allow individuals to take action *only if they were funded by other characters*. The intention was to make any action important to the developing story by necessarily involving multiple characters. The economy of tasks (action) and tokens (currency) required more explanation than anticipated.

Idea: Have a fixed (flavoured?) number of actions available at the LARP which the characters use resources to bid for. Working (bidding) together then makes economic sense.

feedback before final resolution. (In the end, the resolution of actions has been moderated by GMs primarily to create a coherent picture. Writing descriptions from various points of view has taken the most time.)

It took a while for players to get used to the responsibility of driving their own story. At the end of the third session we don't feel the need to generate anything new as there is sufficient action generated by the players. (Some doing more moving and shaking than others.)

Our group-based tasks have ensured that the developing story is coordinated (by players) rather than haphazard.

Idea: Allow story development only during a LARP session. Instead of actions, characters have only research tasks between LARPs, which provide pertinent information for that topic. They act on it in the next session.

Idea: GM-less character creation. Currently we have a framework-in-progress for fact-sharing character creation, to generate a single-session LARP without omniscient writers. Play would involve character-portrayal, exploring other characters and generating story during the LARP itself. (From an Author rather than Actor perspective.)

Idea: Removing inter-LARP action. e.g. there is no in-game break in time, or it is impossible for characters to interact between sessions.

(There were more player-administrated roles in the first session, but we removed them primarily to reduce the amount of confusion they caused, and to ensure each session is well-orchestrated, leaving players to do what's important.)



Concluding remarks

If you have any questions about our campaign structure/plan, let us know and we'll include it in the next article. (If you have questions about the Flower War story, public information and photos will hopefully be available on the wiki before the last session, and all the character updates etc will be made public after the final session.)

Please can somebody run a fresh campaign LARP next year? So far we have only two examples of what campaign LARPing could be. (Three if you include the various Cape Towns By Night.) You already have two sign-ups.



Budgeting

Having a fixed number of sessions helped us and players plan realistically when considering real-world and an in-game concerns.

Our pricing model was to charge for sign-up, and then per session. Initial printing costs and the phone bill before the first session were large, since then session costs have been reduced, apart from hot xocoatl (a tasty but expensive Mexicatl beverage, we do not recommend it for LARPs on a budget). After the third LARP we have finally broken even for the campaign so far.

Idea: A large sign-up cost and no session cost, allowing a pre-planned campaign-oriented budget. May reduce sign-ups. Unfortunately would punish those who can't attend a session through no fault of their own.

Suit

We removed combat except in formalized duelling, using the Suit system outlined in CLAWmarks 32. Combats are administrated by a player, who occasionally forgets the system.



BATMAN BEGINS

Rowena Williams reviews the Caped Crusader's movie career

Suffice it to say, DC comicbook fans are very pleased. It seems possible, nay, *plausible*, to say that the last frisson of the camp 60s TV series has left the Batman film franchise. If all goes well, *Batman Begins* could mark the inauguration of a cinematic Bat that touches all those aspects of the comics that fans so enjoy: psychological tension, moral relativism, dark humour and intelligent *noir* detective stories, to name a few.

What the *Batman* book series (and its para-titles) does so well is juxtapose harsh realism and colourful absurdity, linking them with paranormal psychology. When this is done well, we believe anything. We allow, for instance, that a man might dress himself up as a giant bat, but it takes great skill to understand *why* he would do so. And for the first time, this has been achieved on celluloid.

Michael Keaton was previously the most convincing of the screen Batmen, but still had something of a buoyancy about him that Bruce Wayne is incapable of. Val Kilmer's Batman was rather plastic, in the way that a hypothetically Mattel-released BatKen doll would be, with a perplexed expression that seemed to say: "What's this film about again?" George Clooney, although thus far the most similar to the canon character in terms of visage, seemed to have the impression that he was remaking the 60s series (not entirely his fault, given the nature of *Batman and Robin*). Not only is Christian Bale disturbingly intense (one of the trademarks of the, until now, cultish character actor) and therefore believable in the role, but he is also being applauded for being the first actor to fulfil the promise of Bruce Wayne's physical achievements (I don't think any of the previous Batmen took off their shirts at all, actually, which bespeaks volumes of the importance of that chiselled chest-plate).

I for one was rather leery of the fact that the rest of the cast was filled to the brim with big-name, A-list actors. Luckily, this lot is talented enough, on the whole, to work on fully realising each character, as opposed to stealing camera time. The most successful piece of casting, judging by feedback, was Michael Caine as Alfred; serious and sardonic in equal parts, Caine portrays the Waynes' longstanding family friend as someone who is loyal to the last but is nevertheless unafraid to speak his mind. His Cockney humour is faultless: "What good are all those push-ups if you can't even lift a bloody wooden beam?"

In fact, it seems that the heavy-lifting in this film was largely done by the over-fifty crowd. Gary Oldman was a surprising

choice for James Gordon, the future police commissioner, but proved to have an impressively shrewd take on the character, seeming to leap off the pages of *Batman: Year One*. The world-weary yet somehow idealistic cop who's seen too much corruption in his own ranks reacts with a certain wide-eyed acceptance to the caped vigilante, his wryly self-effacing manner playing a congenial counterpoint to Batman's stoicism. Whereas, it is to Morgan Freeman's credit that, whether he be playing a shrewd scientist or the ultimate Creator, he manages to be just as unassuming and convivial. The character of Lucius

Fox had been totally ignored up until now, which is odd considering the visibility of his friendship with Wayne in the comics; at this juncture, he has been given a greater age and a Q-like, master-of-gadgets position that he plays with dry humour but also in a manner that commands respect.

The trick of circulating the information "Ken Watanabe as Ra's al Ghul" in the media might have confused some, until they saw Liam Neeson—whose resemblance to the character, right down to the salt-and-pepper beardlets, made it clear that some sort of plot twist was afoot. Although playing the character with adequate gravitas, Neeson was not entirely successful in portraying just how important Wayne was as a potential heir to his faction of scorched-earth politicians. An omission that may well have been due to constraints of time and clarity was any mention of Talia, Ra's al Ghul's daughter, whom he wished 'the Detective' to marry and take on his cause of purifying the world to begin anew. Because this is neither here nor there for the casual viewer, and because terrorist villains with psychotic visions for the future are currently the cinematic norm, we have a somewhat slimmer plotline than that.

Having said that, a lot has been crammed into the two-and-a-half hour film. A few throwaway moments were clearly there for fans, such as the appearance of the self-mutilating Mr Zsasz in court. But the inclusion of a tentative love-interest in the form of Katie Holmes is generally seen as a mistake. Apart from the fact that her character Rachel is, as far as I know, completely unrelated to continuity (as if there weren't enough potentials in the canon!), her self-righteousness is less the voice-of-reason than just plain annoying.

Speaking of continuity, it's time to point out some problems, and at the same time to reflect on the casting of Cillian Murphy as Jonathan Crane, aka the Scarecrow. Let's start with this:



Arkham Asylum is... not just any asylum. It has a personality; it's almost alive. In some stories, it's even been given a narrative voice. And it is the inheritance of the Arkham family, begun by Amadeus Arkham over disturbing circumstances, and currently maintained by Jeremiah Arkham. One problem with the film is that it chooses to forget all these things, showing what could be pretty much any poorly maintained sanatorium and, it would appear, placing Jonathan Crane at the helm. As a purist, I'm more than a little irritated that Crane's entire backstory, and therefore the Scarecrow's *raison d'être*, has been removed in order to give him free rein at Arkham. It is never even really explained why he finds the fears of others so fascinating.

For those unfamiliar with it, here is a short history of the Scarecrow: Crane grew up being teased for his gangly looks, became drawn to mastering his own fears and, in terms of self-preservation, exploiting those of others, and ultimately ended up as the head of Psychology at Gotham University, specialising in phobias. His unorthodox and frankly dubious methods of research eventually got him fired from the faculty, and in revenge he adopted the persona of the Scarecrow and literally scared many of his erstwhile peers to death with the aid of his fear serum. The reason for the omission seems to be linked to the casting of such a young actor in the role (apparently another middle-aged character just wouldn't do!), as he would be difficult to pass for a university professor. Not only that, but Murphy does not look like someone who would ever have been teased growing up...

That said, his *version* of the Scarecrow has its moments. His sadistic, quietly manic demeanour is actually heightened by his good looks, and his sinister speaking-style is both chilling and charming. However, lapses in logic seem to have plagued the writers when dealing with the Scarecrow. For one thing, why does he remove his mask so much, making it so simple for anyone to identify him with his alter ego? And for another, why, in the basement workshop of Arkham, is Batman able to drug him with his own fear gas? Surely he keeps himself immune, or else how could he spend so much time around it?

There were but a few other technical lapses. The science of the 'microwave' weapon is a little dodgy; if this thing evaporates water, why does it not harm people when switched on, considering that a large amount of our bodies are made up of water? Why doesn't this *microwave* ray simply *cook* people? When young Bruce Wayne is brought to the police station after



the death of his parents, he meets Jim Gordon. Wrong! Gordon does not come to Gotham until the year when Wayne first becomes Batman. Mob-boss Carmine Falcone's story is barely related to continuity at all (for his story, see *The Long Halloween* graphic novel), but it's nice to have a non-super villain from the rogues gallery used on film, so I'll let that one go.

Now onto Groovy Things. Remarkably, in a film this long, there were no 'slow bits' to make me check my watch. Even the fight scenes were so well done that I kept actively watching, which is quite something considering our violence fatigue as a culture. The sets and effects were beautiful; apparently some scenes (such as Batman looking down on Gotham from atop a spire), although seemingly computer-generated, were really done by stunt-people, so kudos to them. And for a personal favourite

moment, I *love* the teaser at the end of the film, where Gordon reveals the Joker's 'calling card', revealing that we are in for an ambitious cinematic rebate for past foibles!

Tally of Batman's on-screen villains

- ✿ The Joker (*Batman*, 1989)
- ✿ Catwoman, The Penguin (*Batman Returns*, 1992)
- ✿ Two-Face, The Riddler (*Batman Forever*, 1995)
- ✿ Poison Ivy, Dr Freeze, Bane (*Batman and Robin*, 1997)
- ✿ Ra's al Ghul, The Scarecrow, Falcone, Mr Zsasz (briefly!) (*Batman Begins*, 2005)

Continuity-wise, starting the new film series with the Scarecrow was solid, as he first meets Batman in the latter's Year One period. Other Year One characters are The Joker, Catwoman, The Riddler, Poison Ivy and Man-Bat. Leaks of the next two films mention Two-Face, which brings us up to Year Two. Talk is that The Joker is to be a lead villain in one of the films, and a supporting villain in the other.

If you're interested in contributing to the further well-being of the Batman film franchise, visit <http://www.angelfire.com/on2/crimson/BatSurvey.htm> and download a feedback form. Forms can be printed out and given to me, or emailed to WLLROWO2@mail.uct.ac.za.

HOW EGG-BOB GOT HIS NAME

AND OTHER STORIES FROM ICON

Chris Cecchini chronicles our adventures abroad

This year I was fortunate enough to attend Icon 2005. There was much fun to be had and lots of noodles to be eaten.

Glossary

RPing	Roleplaying
WoD	World of Darkness
RPB	Roleplaying Book

Pre-Icon Trip

I met up with the CLAWbunch at the train station after spending a relaxed evening at Ian's flat. We found Mike and Garrick lounging at one of the local restaurants. Needless to say, in a couple of minutes the lot of us were all there awaiting our departure time... except Beth. Net result: Ian and I walking down the length of the station and going past many a food shop looking for the lost Beth. After we found her, Hila and Roo arrived. Now that the CLAWteam was fully assembled, it was time to board the train.

The boarding of the train went smoothly. Luckily we had been provided with an extra cabin (obviously 10 people need 15 bunks to stay comfortably...?). The 3-sleeper cabin was designated as luggage room with me having the only key (my Leatherman™). Everyone boarded without too many problems (Michelle took her time—understandably, what with the just-operated-upon knee) and we all plopped down in Cabin A waiting for the train to begin its journey.

And we waited... and waited... and... nope, still waiting.

But, on the upside, we got to explore and found the food carriage (don't know which company was providing us with 'food') to be directly ahead of us. After purchasing our various beverages

(brandy, until the vodka was found) we settled in for a long trip. Various people hit the books: Beth hit Artemis Fowl and Egg-Bob™ hit the chemistry (something about deciding to do masters or something). We all picked our rooms but Garrick was thrown into the luggage room on his own owing to his snoring. He felt this unjust and decided to protest (I think) by holding a stay-awake. Unfortunately he fell asleep that afternoon while participating in the (in)famous Purity Test, thereby nullifying his protest.

There were some interesting results from that... well, not really. We just confirmed everything we already knew... no big surprises. On the upside, it did get us through about four potential hours of boredom, which we were all looking forward to with such longing!

Supper followed the purity test, and a bit of RPing in the WoD. It was lots of fun and I discovered that playing a normal human in the WoD is not a good idea unless you are feeling particularly suicidal. Human vs. anything freaky = much pain! Although I did get to be sneaky! Woot!

Of course, the most interesting thing that happened on the train I, unfortunately, cannot publish. You will have to ask Egg-Bob about his experience with the... just ask him!

The next day was uneventful. We watched the bleak landscape rush past us punctuated with stops at stations and the multitudes of ~~shacks~~ underprivileged housing.

After disembarking at Joburg Station we got a lift to Outer Limits with a couple of

locals. There, many people threw themselves at the comics/RPBs. This left a few people with lighter pockets. We were then fetched by Warren and Co. Upon arriving at Warren's house, we all dropped our stuff upstairs and settled down for a variety of activities—from pool to snooker to popcorn to the Time Crisis 2 tournament. Garrick had discovered a PS2 and proceeded to start shooting all the bad guys. Then everyone joined in and an unofficial 4-round tournament was held. Each round was more difficult than the previous, with developments such as stationary targets and moving targets (difficult, isn't it).

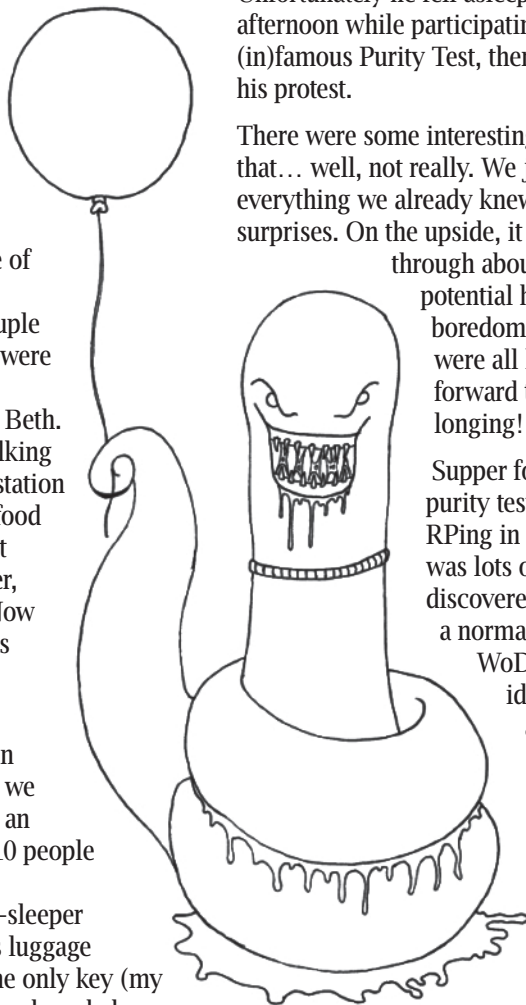
The results are summarized as follows:

Chris	I will own you!
Hila	Just stand still... she shot the hell out of those moving targets!
Mike	Jumping is your best bet here... has no vertical movement capability.
Michelle	Don't worry... you'll be fine.
Ian	Same as Michelle... just can't dodge.

After the Time Crisis 2 tourney was finished, most of us headed upstairs with a few heading out or to the computer to play Kingdom of Loathing (KoL). The idea was to watch a DVD. However, the PS2 didn't agree with us, so we ended up playing Mortal Kombat before crashing. All in all, it was a good start to the weekend.

Icon Day 1

Getting to Icon proved to be a very difficult task. We thought we'd be clever and go with the local driver (Warren). Bad move—we got lost and took almost two hours to get there! What we had done was get onto a particular road that looked like it was the correct way... but we weren't following the directions provided, so we decided to turn around and go the long way around. Unbeknownst to us, 50 metres up that road from where we turned around was Icon! Argh!



Upon reaching Icon, I got my first glimpse of Greg. He was offering to be bribed by alcohol and shouting raucously. I was assured this was normal. After getting in, there was a mad rush—well, more of a walk—to the stores. I picked up an All-You-Can-Drink mug and set to find stuff to buy. Some of the highlights were the multitudes of cool dice (many of us spend too much on dice, but I came away feeling much better for it!), the fuzzy toys and many PRBs. I almost managed to get AIDS/HIV. I know for a fact Michelle gave Ian Mono and got Sleeping Sickness herself!

You recovered from the confusion/shock yet? Let me explain. The one store had, for sale, plush viruses. They are furry fist-sized representations of their deadly, or not so, siblings. Very cute, but not cost-effective enough for me, unfortunately.

There were two module sessions that day. Everyone who played had a good time. The highlight of my Friday was playing in the InSpectres module. It was really fun and I recommend it to all RPer's out there! Make sure you have your imagination and sense of humour tweaked to overdrive, though!

That evening there were runnings of the LARP *Shadowplay*. It was really fun, and I reckon the brass should consider getting a copy to run down here sometime (hint hint). Other activities that evening included a trip to d@vid's sister's place for a braai. Ask the girls how they enjoyed that. On the upside, there was under-floor heating ($\pm 30^\circ$), and scented chessboards for those chess-playing members of the guesthouse. Roo had an interesting driving experience that evening on the way back. He rolled really well on his Drive check, and managed to avoid a six-car pile-up! Go Roo! Warren also managed to get his passengers lost and ended up in Pretoria—a bloody far way from his house in Four Ways Gardens!

Icon Day 2

The next day we awoke bright and early to leave at 8. This time we managed to get where we were going with no problem. We arrived and proceeded to the various areas we were participating in. I went to L5R, Ian and Michelle left for RPer's and Garrick went for a smoke.

I was really keen to play in the first module of the morning, Neighbourhood Watch. I had heard it was really fun and was looking forward to it. My experience

that morning wasn't a good one. On the upside, everyone else had a good time.

The second session that afternoon held, possibly, one of the best modules I've ever played in and definitely the best for some of the other players. *A Father's Grief*, written by Greg Hollyman, left some groups laughing maniacally and the rest in tears. If you haven't heard of it, speak to anyone who played in it. The other competitive module was *The Legati* (CoC Dark Ages). I'm told it was well-written and a good all-round module to play in and DM, except for the 50 pages of unbound text you had to siphon through. Apparently they didn't have staplers back in 1000 AD. Go figure.

That evening was the planned excursion to Zeppelin's. After none of the CLAWteam had left for Zeppelin's—we were all sick or tired or both—the slaughter began. We had discovered Mortal Kombat Deadly Alliance the previous night, and decided to play that. It was Garrick, Warren, Mike and I who entered the tournament. Warren initially schooled us on how to play Frost, but at the end it was I who proved to be the victor, having beaten Mike ten times in a row. Egg-Bob entered the fray as a Fatality-Testing Dummy. Many thanks to him. The most prominent characters were Quan-Chi, Frost and Mopak (the motion-capture guy—he kicks ass!)

Icon Day 3

Rising on the final day was difficult. We were a bit stiff, and the car was frosted-over. After a hasty breakfast we made our way up for the last day of the convention.

Upon reaching Icon I buggered off to L5R. The final session of competitive modules included *The Lucianna* (Cthulhu) and *AfterDark* (D&D). *The Lucianna* was really good and I'm told *AfterDark* was a lot of fun.

The auction at midday was under-attended, and final replays of modules were played before the prizegiving.

The prizegiving kicked off with Vic giving us a bit of stand-up comedy. I'm told it wasn't as good as last year, but it was still funny. My favourite joke (and many others' as well) was the Talking Goth joke. Text really doesn't do it justice, so I would ask you to find one of Iconers and ask us. The prizegiving continued, with Shadowcasters winning the best team award. Mike Dewar won 3rd place for best Cthulhu DM. Go Mike!

Woot!

This was followed by Mike's huckstering (look it up in a dictionary) about Dragonfire™ Carnival, followed by similar announcements about ImbolCon and Conserve. Mike almost killed Grant with his cane. It was really good!

Dinner was really good, and there was even enough food for seconds! The food consisted of Chinese [*how many Chinese? Were they de-boned? —Ed.*]. I'm still not sure about those bow-ties, though. There was a mini-con meeting between the con organisers, including a very drunk Grant. I got Tequila! Woot! After successfully avoiding a herd of girls trying to pluck my eyebrows (including Sarah in *bright pink*—she is very brave, in my opinion), I got a drink and sat down to contemplate the universe. There was much bantering between friends and dancing. I don't know if I spaced out, but a couple of hours later I awoke (not that I was sleeping) to find a lift home.

Post-Icon trip

I'm sure that (if you've thought about it) you've noticed that mention of Egg-Bob has not told you anything about the way in which Graham was christened with this new name. After getting a bit of sleep and packing all our stuff together, we all left Warren's house to get onto our train. A couple of us had gone for food and gifts that morning, and we barely got back in time. The train trip back was generally uneventful, and was punctuated with me hitting myself on the head with a shield, Garrick doing something interesting to himself (again I can't publish that), and Hila barely managing to knock herself out. Garrick did ask for C-Level a lot though.

Oh, yes... on the way to the train station, Graham had chosen to wear a very... um... *interesting* selection of clothing. I was sitting there, calmly having my vodka, and suddenly there was a blinding light to my left. I looked, and to my horror Graham had removed his jacket, revealing his clothing. He was wearing a bright yellow shirt with glaring white pants. The screams from around the taxi were terrible. There were shouts of *OH MY **!* HOLY SHIT! Is it an egg?! IT'S EGG-BOB!* And from that day shall Graham Poultry Poulter forever be known as Egg-Bob.

Who I don't need no damn good platform

Rowena Williams has shot the food.



What I enjoy about old computer games is the sense of absolute menace. Who's bad? The guys who fly at you. Who's good? Well. Usually no one but you. What's good? The little gift-boxes that you find lying around the galaxy or when you blow up enemy ships. Shoot anything that moves. After all, if they were good guys or rebels or defectors or whatever... surely they would have radioed ahead, wouldn't they? Screw 'em. It's all shareware anyway. Somehow I know there's going to be no big pay-off. I'd buy the full

version, I honestly would.

But I don't think the companies even exist anymore, and I for one am leery about wiring my credit details into the electronic ether.

The other fun thing is that the software isn't entirely compatible with modern operating systems, so I get no sound to go with my pixels, which is fine, because they sounded like mobile phone rings anyway. I get to choose my own music and play it from my desktop. I find Tears for Fears's original *Mad World* is perfectly ominous and also period appropriate for any kill-em-all space shooter. My favourite right now is *Slordax: The Unknown Enemy* by John Carmack, SoftDisk LTD 1991.

There are no impressive ship upgrades, like in *Overkill* (Tech-noir, Epic MegaGames 1992), but you don't need them. You're glad when you get a speed booster so you can dodge the obstacles cleanly whilst picking objects around them. You're *thrilled* when you get up to your maximum of three lines of firepower. *Euphoric* even when you get the autofire item so that you can stop the rather disturbing spasm in your left hand and just let a finger rest on the Ctrl key.

Why I'm currently so hooked on this deceptively simple piece of Shareware is because I can't win it. Duh. *Overkill* is bloody gorgeous to look at, shiny so shiny, but once you conquer *all two levels* it's kind of pointless. Even with the MIDI soundtrack (one of the few that work!) that sounds like a theme from a pretty-girl sci-fi anime.

One problem with *Slordax* (apart from the fact that the name occasionally makes me think of *Deep Space Nine*) is

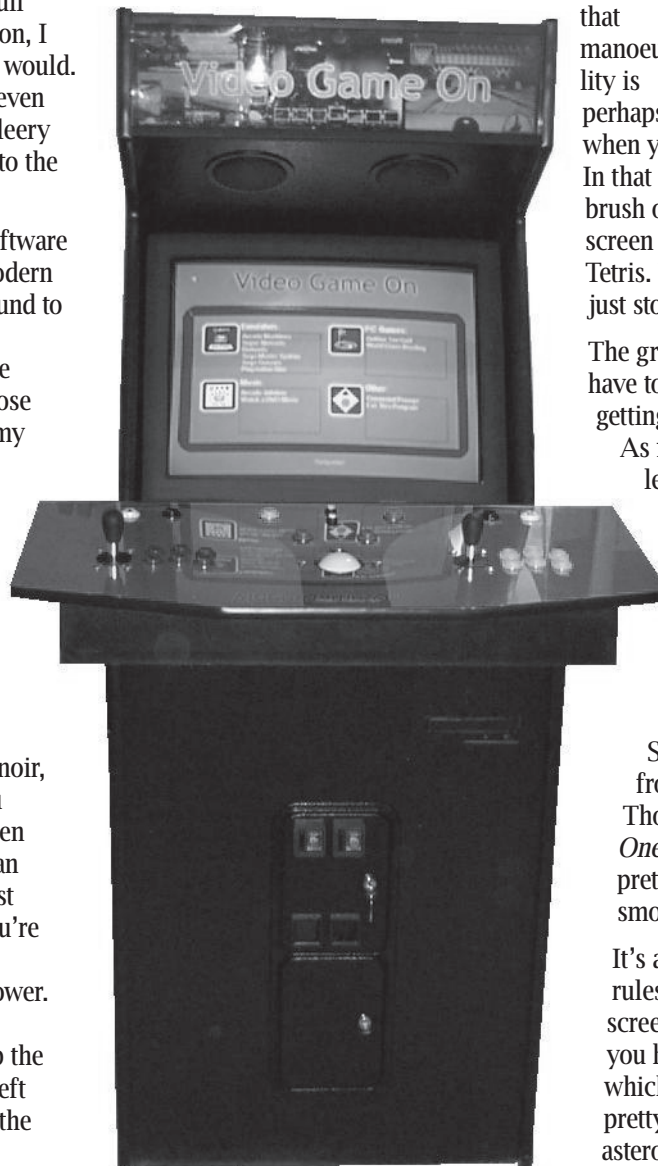
that manoeuvrability is perhaps *too good* when you've collected a few speed boosters. In that adorable retro way wherein the barest brush of the cursor sends you across the screen quicker than a block on level ten Tetris. Which is an easy problem to solve: just stop collecting boosters at about three.

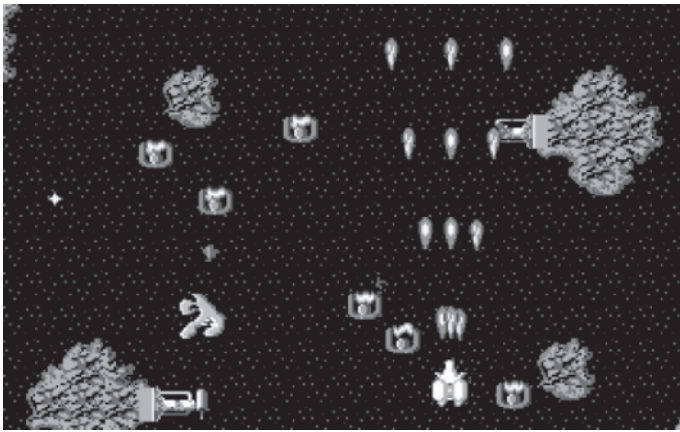
The graphics are extremely basic, and they have to be, because you really can't be getting distracted by The Shiny in this game.

As far as I can tell, there are at least four levels, rumours of more, which is pretty good for shareware. Level one is an asteroid field, level two is a weird orange planet, and level three seems like some kind of ice cave. With curiously pixie-like robots and big laser-firing cyclops aliens and such. Acid is groovy.

So that's *Slordax*. When I need respite from that, I go to *AstroFire* by Owen Thomas (1994, ORT; shareware, *Episode One: Into the Storm*), which at first looks pretty old-school, but handles much too smoothly for the 80s.

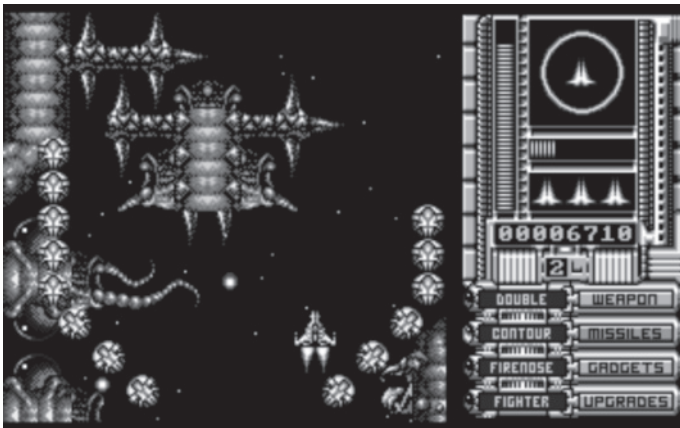
It's also got a different set of movement rules: you stay on one non-scrolling screen, like the very very early ones, but you have absolute freedom of revolution, which you need, because that screen will pretty soon get desperately full of rolling asteroids (big ones are made up of medium ones, medium ones are made up of little





ones, and some of them hide bonus crystals!), laser-shooting spinner UFOs, violent purple satellite thingies and giant... I don't know... space anemones, I guess. They become a cloud of yellow shuriken when you blast them, though! Pretty good game.

For a while I was discouraged because, after a few weeks of obsessive playing, I won at every game, my only challenge being to beat my own scores by getting every bonus possible. Until I realised that I'd been playing on the Easy Setting and there were two higher settings! So now I barely get anywhere. It's great! So I highly recommend that one. (These and more *should* be pretty easy to find online, but if in doubt ask me for copies.)



"Well that's all very well and good", you might say, "but what does it mean to me? I love my PlayStation like a spouse! More! Why should I give up the 360 camera angles and theatre-quality sound and vision to dally in the recesses of retro recreation?" Good question. "And isn't it possible", you might also say, "that your alleged lack of interest in the PlayStation is related to your never having one? Or an X-box or anything like it?" Good (compound) question as well.

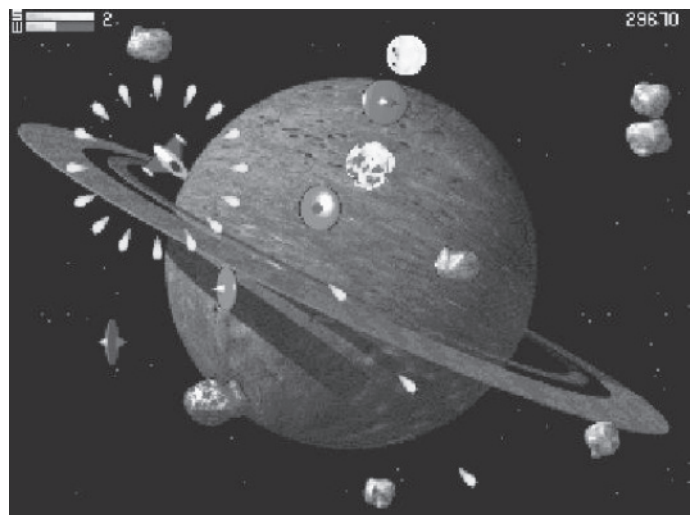
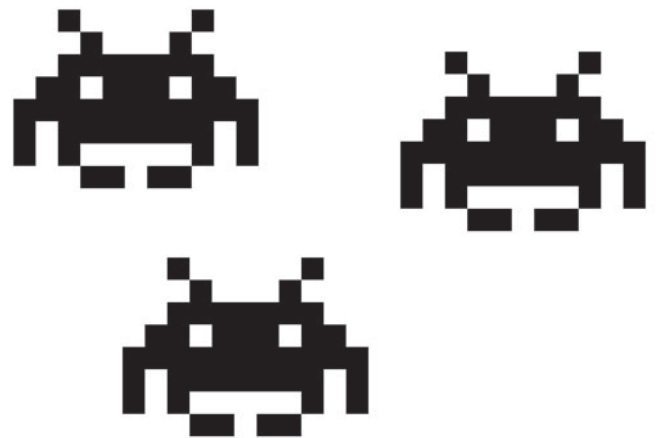
This is what I think: computer games should be about honing simple skills. Hand-eye skills. Killing skills. But without emotional involvement above and beyond that little startled flinch when we get blown up. Faceless enemies. Pointless victory. The last thing I want from my video game is a complex story arc so that I can get all attached to the main characters and start writing game fanfic about them. (Come *on*, have we sunk so low, people?) That's what books and RPGs are for.

And if it's going to get so bloody shiny... why not just watch a film? Seems a lot of effort... I mean... just getting to all the pre-recorded sequences almost becomes one of the main aims of the game. Dig: when you win AstroFire, it freezes the screen,

whatever you're doing, and slowly brightens to white, like a solar flare, and prints a well-done message. Yes, I've spoiled it. Don't be surprised. My favourite old end sequences are actually for the Commander Keen series, which have a sort of picture book you scroll through with amusing little animations that play to the game's quirky sense of humour.

But the *main* reason I prefer these mothballed old games is that they quite simply take me back. To before high school even. To a time when computers were the New Big Thing in schools, when most of the screens were 4-colour and the most advanced game on them was Nibbles (Sammy and Jake!), except for the three big computers at the back, which were full colour and had Commander Keen, Christmas Lemmings, Duke Nukem, Crystal Caves et al, and which we tackled each other to get to once our typing was completed. To a time when there was a special soundproof booth that housed The Multimedia Computer, with the very impressive 'CD-ROM' and such sources of entertainment as Microsoft Encarta, Cinemania (sound and video clips!) and interactive educational discs about dinosaurs (very cool video clips, like the now-infamous 'Triceratops in a forest gets attacked by T-Rex over grassy snack') and mythology.

I don't know about you, but I'm getting *very* old. I can feel my nostalgia gland getting more and more active. So for gods' sake, keep *something* simple! Dust off that Rubik's Cube (is it just me, or is it related to Tetris? I mean, like, which one is the pretentious cousin, the poseur of the family?). Unearth that tangled slinky. Have a game of Pong (there's one embedded in Keen 4 if you can't find a stand-alone!). Play a MIDI file. You'll thank me. Oh, you will.



A Series of Daguerrotypes of a Most Exciting & Educational Nature



*Lord Lucas in an Impenetrable
Disguise*



*Archduke Michael Displays His Most Excellent Moves to Viscount
Garrick & Margrave Reuel.*



*Earl Gregory Surveys His
Demesne*



*Viscount Garrick & Marchioness Bronwen Enjoy a Romantic
Interlude at a Fine Culinary Establishment.*



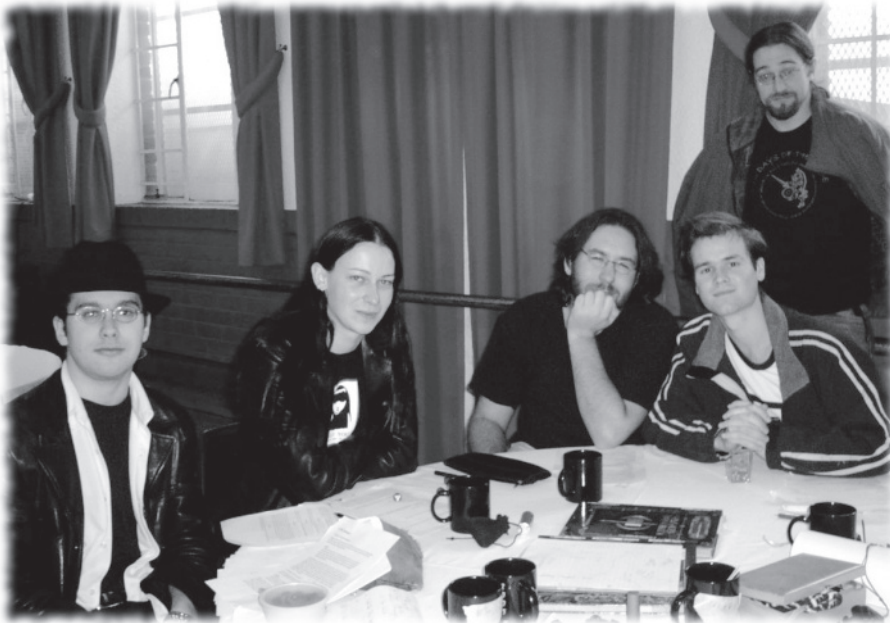
Margrave Reuel Samples an Exotic Herbal Delicacy



Dege Ryan's Manservant Escorts Monsignor Antonio from the Table



A Young Lady Attired in a Most Ingenious Contraption



Messrs Michael, Kieran & Peregrine Attempt To Remain Suitably Stoic Whilst Messrs Ian & Graham Flaunt Their Most Improper Union.



Duchess Hila, An Infamous Byzantine Anarchist



Count Neil Strikes a Dapper Pose

THE ZAMMOW REPORT

*d@vid seaward couldn't zammow his way
out of a paper bag*

Not many contributions from around the country this time round. Fear the sliding deadline protocol, gnash at the lack of a website update. But there are two items for you to consider, gentle reader:

zammow braai

This year I had a plan to host a braai at Icon, as a get-together for interested zammow contributors, to put faces to names and organizations. Timing it to coincide with a terribly good LARP from Durban was therefore a bad idea, and next year I'll hold it the evening *before* Icon begins. Hopefully a variety of gamers and affiliate types can be encouraged to attend. (As it was a terribly good time was had by some CLAWmembers and friends.)

There were mumblings at the Icon afterparty about scheduling the various gaming conventions so that the end of the year isn't heavily weighted, which leads me to...

travel arrangements

The fact of the matter is that travelling around the country to meet and play with other gamers costs money. If you aren't going to limit your experience of games, or players for that matter, to one city or bulletin boards, how can you do it?

At the moment I have no answer. Having conventions spread out over the year means cost can be spread, but doesn't alleviate the total. Alternating travel plans means you'll always miss out on something. And, you might decide an experience wasn't worth the trip.

Hopefully a little news from all around will sooth the savage gamer...

Altered States

No contributor. The first part of the Illusion of Free Will LARP series came to a close, having moved through to the modern day in three sessions. Angels almost invaded, but we don't know any

more because further LARPs are planned. (Although Fuzzy won't be as involved and Shaun has gone off to green and pleasant lands.)

SAWU

Contributor: Colin Webster
(wargames@iafrica.com)

In April, the South African National Wargames Team returned from the historical figure-games component of the 8th Individual Wargames Championships held at Melbourne University in Melbourne, Australia—having taken both gold and silver in the junior event. “The future of South African gaming seems to be in safe hands”.

eTV screened an insert on wargames in March, with appearances from SAWU members. *[Find the recorded downloads on the CLAWs wiki at the keyword SAWUonE - thanks to Norman for recording it.]*

Local qualifications and competitions have continued apace.

Shire of Adamastor

Contributor: David Eikonoklasmos

Shire Birthday was a resounding success featuring, amongst other attractions, a war over pies. The feud between Lady Ameline and Lord Thomas is far from settled, and more wars are likely in the future.

WORG (Wynberg Organization of Roleplaying Games—Wynberg Boys High)

Contributor: Davi Araujo
(daviAugustosa@gmail.com)

I have to admit WORG as a society has not done much. I tried my best to allocate buses to take the WORG members to Dragonfire, but the school only cares

about rugby. But I've have talked to a lot of people about their adventures; it seems everyone is playing something.

There will be a WORG day, probably in September; the date depends on the school calendar. I will DM an RPGA adventure, but the idea of the day will be the same as last year: people come, whoever wants to GM, GMs, and whoever wants to play, plays. Just like that.

I'll make an announcement if WORG does something together with the card and wargame societies.

Conventions

UpCON 2005 (April)

See Nenad's report for details.

Icon 2005 (July)

Sandringham once again withstood the gaming invasion. Being the biggest certainly means that Icon is the convention where you're most likely to meet the widest spectrum of people, in terms of where they come from and what they're interested in. You may even meet people who wear pink.

14th Old Edwardian Winter Championships (6 & 7 August)

Open to all players, including those not registered with SAWU.

Dragonfire Carnival (August)

It should be happening around you ;)

Upcoming events

Open Ancients (13–14 August)

Please note that the Botswana Wargames Federation will be hosting an open Ancients figure Gaming Championship

for the Ancients period on 13 and 14 August 2005. The rules are the same as those as used by the South African Wargames Union.

For further details, please contact Sean Barry at:

email: cammybarry@hotmail.com

phone: (h) 09267 4923565 After 20h00

Imbolcon (24–25 September)

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

Got imagination? Wanna play? Held in Durban, KZN. (A Cape Town team is being organised, and crash space is available.)

Here Be Dragons (23–25 September)

Adamastor is proud to present Here Be Dragons, a weekend of feasting and fighting at the site of South Africa's oldest Moravian Mission. Activities will include both heavy and rapier combat, and some classes.

Site: Hester Dorothea Centre, Genadendal, Western Cape (no street address). Genadendal, the "Valley of Grace", is about 2 hour's drive from Cape Town. Site opens at 17:00 on Friday and closes at 17:00 on Sunday. Accommodation is in dormitory beds, bring your own sleeping bags or request bedding at an additional fee. A few

double rooms are available at an additional fee, but please book early with the Event Steward to secure these. Crash space in Cape Town and transport to the event site is also available.

Cost: R200 per person, which covers beds on Friday and Saturday night, a light supper on Friday, breakfast and lunch on Saturday and Sunday, and feast on Saturday night. Day fee and feast is R60.

Children 6 years and under free, children 7–14 half price. Double rooms rather than a dormitory are an extra R50 per person, per night. Please contact the Head Cook well in advance if you have particular food requirements or allergies. Reservations should be received by 16 September at the latest; please make sure that you give the Event Steward full mundane and SCA names plus e-mail addresses for all attendees, and specify number of nights staying, and type of accomodation required. South African guests should pay into the Shire bank account: Shire of Adamastor, Standard Bank, Branch No 025009, Account Number 274913151. Please give your name as a reference when paying. Foreign guests are welcome to pay on arrival, but need to book before the deadline. There is a R50 additional charge for South African guests paying after 16 September.

Event Steward: Baroness Jehanne de Huguenin (Jessica Tiffin), P O Box 443,

Rondebosch, Cape Town 7701, phone +27 (0)21 685 6224, cell 073 305 0808, e-mail melisant@iafrica.com.

Head Cook: al-Sayyid Garsiyya ibn Ibrahim ibn Sulaiman al-Qurtubi (Patrick Vine), e-mail garsiyya_al_qurtubi@yahoo.co.uk.

Marshal-in-charge: Lord Berthold Wolfer (Wolf Laudien), e-mail berthold_wolfer@yahoo.com.

CONserve II (28–30 October)

Location: Willowmore High School, Benoni

Events: Cthulhu Masters SA, Ravenloft marathon, White Room Universal RPG, Star Trek CCG nationals, Magic, Duel Masters, Wizkids games

Website:

<http://www.gibbousmoon.info>

Adamastor Christmas Stall (December)

Hosted in late December at the Rondebosch Craft Market. The stall is stocked with handmade items inspired by arts, crafts and items of the Middle Ages, including biscuits and sweets, various cordials, calligraphed greeting cards, jewellery, candles and leatherwork. It is the perfect place to find a gift for that "hard to buy for" person...



A THOROUGHLY UN-BITTER REVIEW OF ONLINE ART COMMUNITIES

Rowena Williams is totally not bitter at all

Let's face it: if you're exhibiting art on the web and you don't have your own domain... you're probably at DeviantArt.com. Or you should be. Sure, there are other sites, some only marginally smaller, but usually these are highly specialised and rather snotty.

Take Yerf.com. Not to be bitter or anything, but they're a bunch of in-bred, self-congratulating, nepotistic wannabefurries.

And not just because they never let me join.

Then there's Elfwood, a fairly old fantasy-art site, which, last I checked was no longer being maintained, or at least no longer taking new sign-ups. Or Side 7, which, according to an ex-member, "has become overrun by no-talent children and too much fan art" (a problem that's hardly domain-specific). As well as many, many other little sites that claim to be the New Big Thing, but generally suffer from a population of art thieves, making mini galleries from other artists' work and calling it their own; a little site like that, who's gonna notice?

So yes. DeviantArt. The CBGB's of the online art community. Very hip, very eclectic, and organised enough to have its own yearly summit. It's super-easy to join, which is naturally a double-edged sword: those artists with talent don't have to wade through sulky administrators who made their mind up from the get-go not to let in any Outsiders (again, not that I'm bitter or anything); likewise, it's no trouble for every 14 year old with a bishounen¹ fetish or a downloaded episode of Tenchi Muyo to set up a gallery of Critically Relegated Art Pretension (because calling it *crap* would hurt their feewings...).

And so you have your DeviantArt gallery. Makes you feel special, dunnit? Your address is so tastily simple: it's just your username followed by the domain. Piss-pie! However, don't think you're going to get the 30 000 hitcounts little Haiku-Chan² who joined last Tuesday has. Even though her gallery is nothing but poorly drawn renderings of some bishounen called Akito with his shirt off. Why, you might ask? Oh. Ho ho ho. She chortled indulgently. There is *many* a reason!

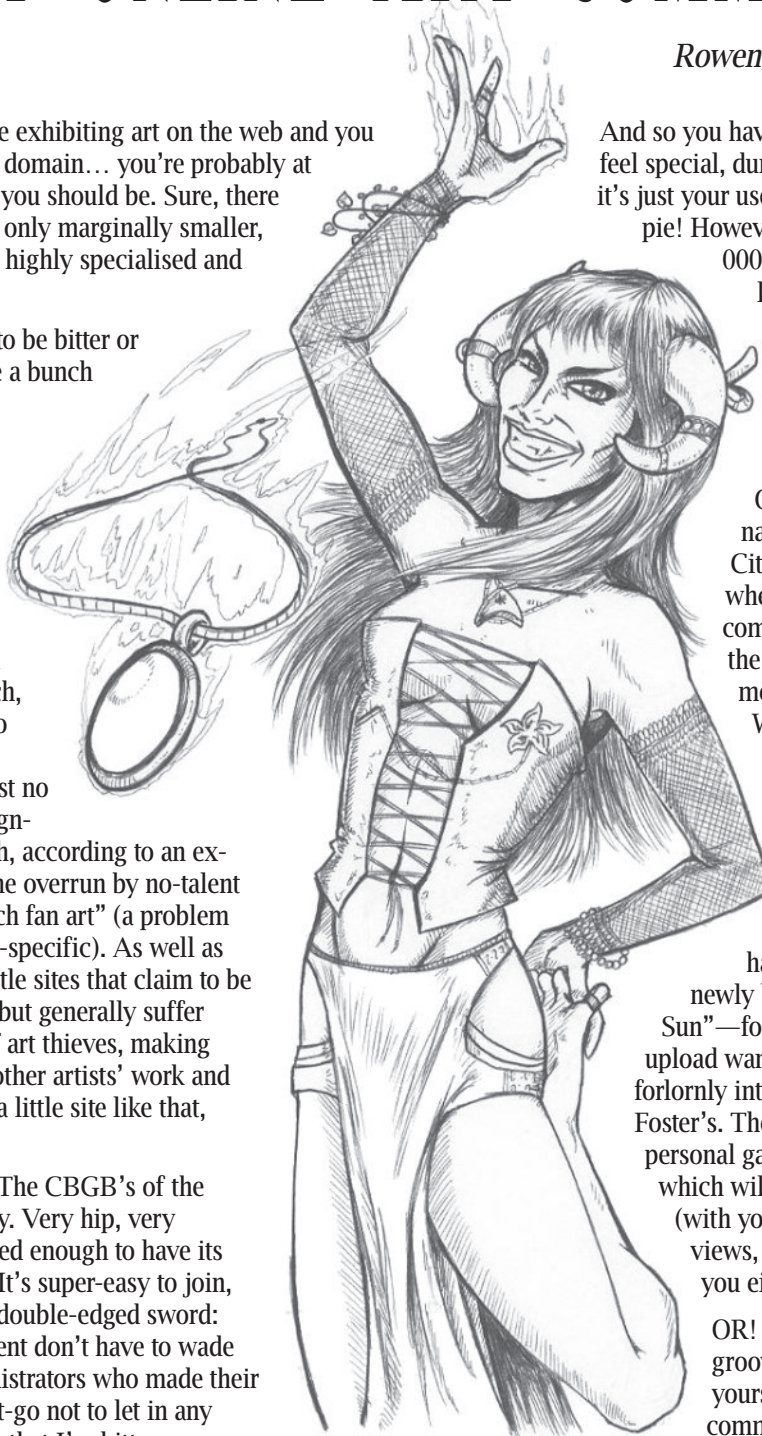
One is that little Haiku-Chan (whose real name is Jennifer Sue Marshall) is a US Citizen, and is thereby part of The Majority when it comes to online art. Hell, when it comes to online *anything*. Which means that the largest amount of browsers and members are online when *she* is online.

Which means that anything she uploads will go up on the front-page (for about half a second, by the usual rate of uploads), increasing her chances of a page-view by... I don't know, fifty trillion. Dude, I'm a BA...

Anyway, if, for instance, you're a happy-go-lucky Australian uploading your newly bronzed sculptures of "Emus in the Sun"—forget it. Everyone's asleep. Your little upload wandered across the front-page and stared forlornly into space like the ugly imaginary friend at Foster's. Then it went to dig itself a hole in your personal gallery, which no one knows about, and which will therefore *rot* and depress you so much (with your three year residency and 12 page-views, *half* of which were accidental-surfs) that you either leave the site or kill yourself.³

OR! You get by on word-of-mouth, which is a groovy way to do things if you can get yourself firmly cemented in a sub-community. Which brings me back to: why *else* is that Haiku-Chan so damned popular?

No one who spends more than five minutes away from the official ends of the Internet can avoid brushing shoulders with that ubiquitous beast FanArt (or its twin sister, FanFiction⁴).



1 One inevitably picks up anime slang on the art-web, because apparently only the Japanese can draw, judging by peer appreciation. A bishounen is a pretty, androgynous young man. Almost every anime love-interest looks this way. Stay tuned for more Japanislang.

2 Do not search DeviantArt for Haiku-Chan. Although she is a fictional stereotype, there are so many something-Chans at DA that you might actually run into her and somehow get my gallery banned. So yes...

3 And just so there are no misconceptions, my pageviews are approaching 4000, so.

4 I don't mind admitting that I've even caught a few fleas during the aforementioned shoulder-brush, which I now keep in a shiny jar and release only on special occasions, like fanart competitions.

The trouble with fanart is, predictably, that most of it is not very good. Some of it is positively excruciating, on a technical level as well as a content one (be warned: most fanart is conceived because there are certain things bishounen *do not* do in their canon shows - and for very very very very good reasons). And the sad truth of it is that the community members don't care. You drew Akito-chan with his shirt off? I press the favourite button!!!! And very soon, Haiku-Chan has 140 favourites on her piece, out of 150 page views, and 145 full views. All in the few hours after its upload.

I want to say it's shocking, but it's really depressingly unsurprising. It's not about the artwork, it's about the indulgence. Fair enough, I admit I indulge my fanart whims from time to time. I know there must be some people who have me on their watch-lists and groan: "*Gods of Elwher, not another Joker portrait!*" However, even I wouldn't upload a five-minute doodle on smudged paper with no background and expect people to comment on it.

Wow. When did this turn into a rant? Okay, so Haiku-Chan gets lots of favourites from her friends and watchers. This has a domino effect: her piece appears on all *their* front pages for a short while, under their Favourites window, which means that friends and watchers of theirs who might never have heard of Haiku-Chan might just hightail it over to her gallery and make a few favourites of their own. And so on.

So what can one do, when so much attention is given to fanart,

and of *that* attention, the ratio is something like 55:40:5 for anime and anthro and Everything Else? Well, there's always identity murder. But aside from that, one can become a self-promoting gift-machine. Make yourself useful. Spend tons of time on the forums, even if you find the inane nattering makes your ears bleed. Design cool avatars and offer them up for use by anyone, as long as they credit you in their journals. Give gift art to well known members so that they mention you in *their* journals. Join art clubs (appreciation groups, like fans who enjoy drawing... like, Biker Mice from Mars art, but don't fill their galleries with that exclusively) and get your name on the members list. There's also being a fully paid-up member. That helps; it gives you access to the search engine and such, and apparently improved

visibility. There are ways. Ways and means.

And for those of you bored out of your minds at all this silly art-chatter... you might be interested to know that Leet Geekdom is alive and well at |)3V14] \ | + 4r+. It must be said, some of the digital art that's uploaded has all the beauty and sensuality of a maths equation. (See how impartially I said that? Take it in whichever way rings true to you!) Vector art blows my mind, because I don't know how they're doing it. I know it's not what I do, taking a pen (/stylus/mouse) and moving it across paper (/tablet/appscreen). It's to do with... figures an' stuff. And then you get something that looks amazing. Or you can.

For me, digital art is like religion: it looks very attractive from the outside, and I know that it gives people immense joy and I appreciate that and the beautiful things it can create (vector is just one of the cathedrals erected by the digi-faith), but I'm too much of a sceptic to try and get involved. "You kids today with your newfangled Photoshop 15s and your isometrics!" I shall grumble, clutching my inch-long Colleen khaki and my half-inch cream and trying to create Caucasian skin tone on a warped piece of cardboard. Ah. The traditional methods.

I don't know if it's quite a Berlin Wall, between the communities of traditional and digital artists, because most of us dabble in the other in some form from time to time, even if that means that some of us occasionally spend hours colouring stuff in MSPaint. But there's certainly a rift of sorts. The downside of digital art technology is that it's deceptively pretty. Brings to

mind Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, it does, thinking about the thick coat of makeup that can be applied to all manner of sins! (I warned you: BA!)

Quite simply, there is a lot... of rot... that's getting hits and faves... because it's been given a nice lick 'o paint in Photoshop. Look at it for more than it takes to *click* that blasted fave-button, and you'll see that often perspective is non-existent, anatomy is a joke, and content is entirely banal. But it's shiny! And what illustrator *isn't* attracted to Shiny? But thinking before faving, that would be my proverb for the day. "A Fave delayed is a Fave well-made!"

However, it seems to be time to wrap things up. And as I did promise a mini-dictionary of art-slang (it's right up there in the footnotes!), here it is. It seems that English is only good enough for describing and not for naming on the artweb. For that, on the whole, we use Japanese.



The Ickle Dictionary of Useful ArtWeb Terms

Anthro: Also “furries”, but DA slang is generally anthro. Short form of “anthropomorphic art”, meaning anything non-human treated as human, strictly speaking, but culturally referring to animals, most commonly mammals and mammal hybrids, drawn in half-human, ‘were’ forms (think of any non-human cartoon shows in the 80s basically... Care Bears... Gummy Bears... TMNT...)

Bishounen: Attractive, sensitive, yet *manly* androgynous young men in anime and manga. Usually the male lead. And easy fangirl fodder.

Glomp/Glumping: The action of leaping on someone and hugging him or her, in its purest form. May have overtones.

Hentai: I don’t suppose anyone is actually unfamiliar with this particular branch of anime or manga, but on the off-chance, I’ll explain in two words: vine porn.

Kiriban: This is an amazing thing to have a word for. The concept it entails is thus: if a landmark hitcount shows on your page, say 10 000 pageviews, and if someone captures that in a screen capture (or note, but that’s less convincing), they might be rewarded with gift art from the page-owner, the nature of which depends on who the page owner is, how much time they have, and how generous they are, as well as how much of the kiriban to be drawn is up to the capturer and to the capturee.

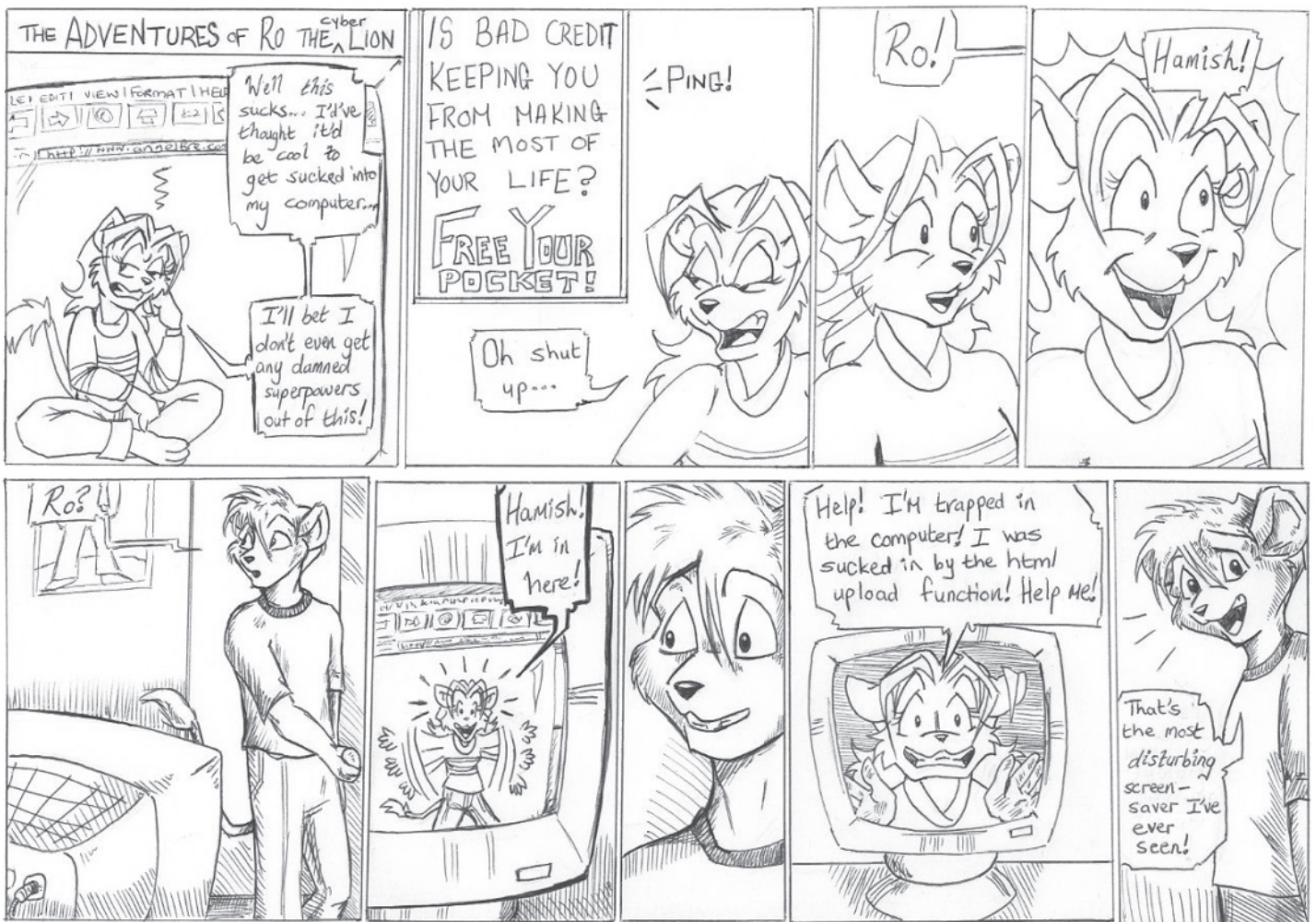
Kitsune: Mythical Japanese fox-spirit, with the ability to change between a purely human form, one with between one and nine

tails, a were-fox, anthro-type stage, and a pure fox form, with the same tail number options. Tails (aka Miles Prower) from Sonic the Hedgehog is a kitsune. This species is *incredibly* popular on the artweb, rating right up there with cats and dogs when it comes to anthro.

Omake: A short comic or set of comics written and drawn as a creative sidebar from the main comic, using tones and situations not present therein. For instance, someone writing a very serious Gothic horror comic might draw a series of omake where the characters are humorously put in an ice-cream parlour or go camping, enemies together, or even socialise with their creator in her toon-form.

Quads: Similar to anthro, but with the emphasis on four-legged depiction. Think The Road Rovers versus Balto... Biker Mice from Mars versus those Disney mice in Cinderella... All of the characters in The Animals of Farthing Wood are quads. Except the birds, of course. And the humans.

Yaoi/ Yuri: Male or female Japanese names for slash (not necessarily anime slash, but usually), i.e. same-sex romantic pairings found in the fan-domain that do not exist in the canon text.



DO YOUR HOMEWORK!

Mike Dewar sternly incites plagiarism among DMs. Yes, he knows that inciting means he's encouraging it, but he can do that sternly if he wants to.

I've decided to give up on originality for a while. Creativity, imagination and innovation are all laudable qualities in roleplayers, but there's a certain something to be said for blatant theft, too.

What do I mean by invoking the Gods of Plagarism so? Well, I'm talking about research. When I first started roleplaying, I couldn't help feeling that using existing ideas and concepts instead of your own ideas was a little like cheating. It wasn't fair... it was too *easy*.

The good news is that I have since uncovered a number of useful benefits to background research. The bad news is that it certainly *isn't* easy.

Just the facts, ma'am. Or at least the interesting ones. (aka Present-day Factual Research)

This is the most obvious and least-interesting kind of research you're likely to be doing. Here we're looking at DMs who download street maps of the cities in which they roleplay, keep up to date on Guns of All Nations for their more trigger-happy players and continuity-check their plotlines versus timelines.

Now, just because I call it the "least-interesting" type doesn't mean it isn't worthwhile. A DM who totally throws this sort of stuff aside is likely to get on the nerves of his players from time to time, and end up with inconsistencies that detract from play and shatter the suspension of disbelief into little cynical fragments. No party wants to find plot-important areas relocating themselves on a regular basis or be told that their rival is threatening them with "like, one of those little rifles SWAT teams use".

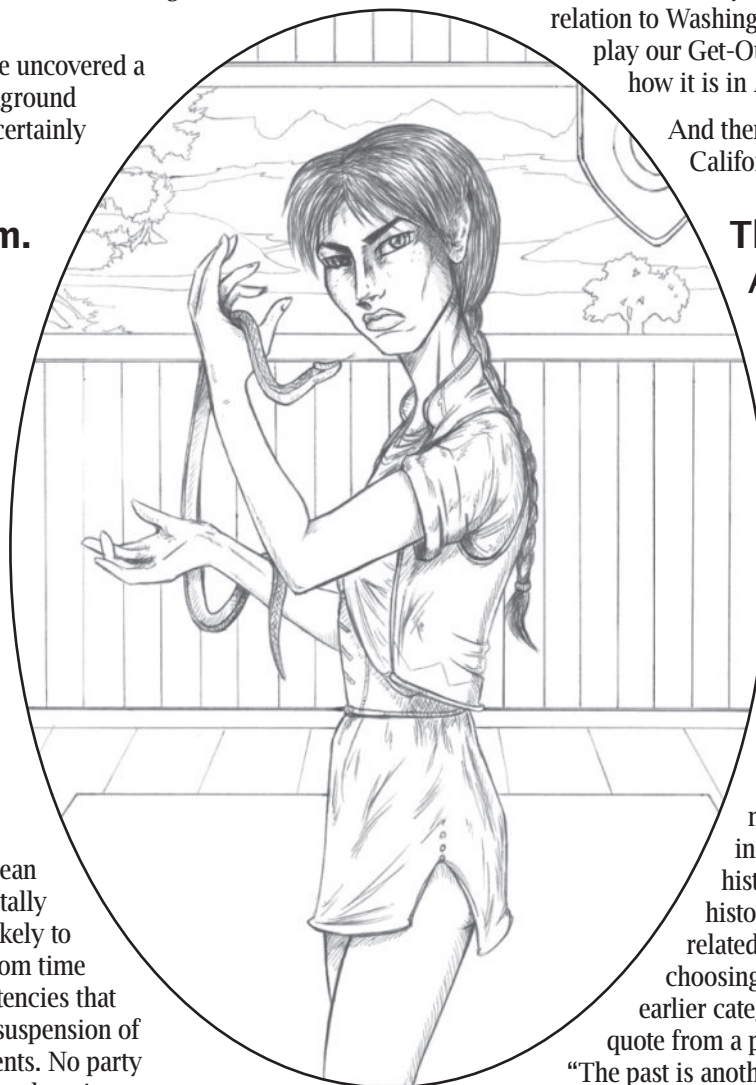
But, it's also important to realise that the ratio of work-to-reward often isn't very complimentary. You can sit and memorize the layout of every street in your preferred city or the calibre sizes of your favourite guns, but there's a certain point past which your players just *don't care*. It's important that you're consistent, but not that every location every visited can be marked on the

street map or that every by-law is correctly applied.

You're also facing an inherent handicap, since there are more of the players than there are of you. Assuming everyone has their own private stash of trivia and (un)common knowledge, it's almost certain that you won't be able to keep ahead of everyone *all* the time. At times like that, when players correct you with trivial little details like, "But that much Semtex would level the

block!" or "Where did you say California was in relation to Washington DC?" you can always play our Get-Out-Jail-Free card: "That's how it is in *my* world."

And then go and learn where California is.



The Past is Another Country—hard to navigate, with different traditions, and you just can't understand the people, 'cause they're DEAD! (aka Historical Research)

Yes, I know history is still made up of facts (or the inconsistent interpretations of historians, if you're cynical/a history major—the two are often related). But the reason why I'm choosing to differentiate it from the earlier category is because, to borrow a quote from a person I can't remember, "The past is another country."¹

The further back in history we go, the more likely it is that your players' combined general knowledge will be reduced to what they know from movies and Wilbur Smith novels. At this point, the little work-to-reward ratio I mentioned earlier gets a bit more favourable. You're still not likely to impress people with Authentic Street Names, but being able to describe what life in Whitechapel was like in Jack's hey-day or reveal the real meaning of children's songs like a "Ring-a-ring-a-rosy"² can earn you Major Style Points.

¹ As you can see, I'm working up to plagiarism gently.

² The bubonic plague. When in doubt, follow the rule of thumb that creepy children's songs are usually about the plague. Morbid little buggers.

There are two reasons why it works. Firstly, even the most rabid History Channel fan has a certain innate tendency to forget the past *really happened*. I'm not talking about Alzheimer's here—the fact is that in our shiny, modern world it requires some focused thought and imagination to understand that it wasn't always like this. Not to understand it on a rational level, but to really *feel* it in your gut that Hitler didn't have a microwave.

That's one of the attractions of historically-authentic movies: to look at something strange, gross or beautiful³ and remember that this sort of thing *really happened*. So discussing the exciting use of leeches in your medieval game has more impact than detailed research into modern-day ER procedures, because it has that combination of the alien and the familiar to titillate the modern imagination. Plus, who doesn't love leeches?

The second reason is more pragmatic. As I mentioned earlier, people's general knowledge on the past is likely to be far more spotty and inaccurate than their present-day trivia. So when the inevitable arguments start, the DM who spent an hour or two on the internet before the game has a *big* advantage. Unless, of course your game contains a history major. In that case, you have two options:

- 1 Ritual suicide. (But historically authentic, of course.)
- 2 Co-opt them. It's one thing to get into general continuity wrangles with the whole party over common knowledge, but if you've got a genuine expert (or expert-in-training) on the topic then by all means use and abuse them. Obviously, you won't be able to get their input on the Big Secrets of the campaign ("Tell me, what do you know about a group called the Hellfire Club? No, no reason..."), but you can get general historical flavour and thus save time which can be used to look into the

forementioned Big Secrets. Non-player history majors (or any I'm-trying-to-research-it major) are equally useful. Call them up to ask obscure questions! For the price of a little ego-stroking and your self-respect, you can get a fair amount of data.

Obviously, most of this discussion is only really useful if you're running a game set in the past. But it's also often helpful to look (briefly) into the history of your present-day games. Given the average DM's love for ancient horrors, ghosts, fanatic cults and Them Damn Commies, you can get a lot of mileage out of taking an older concept and using it as a root for your present-day ideas.

interesting and creepy in a way that is hard to duplicate. Part of this stems from the fact that while many people may have a passing familiarity with a wide range of myths, they are likely to know of them on a pretty superficial level. That means you can set up concepts which are hauntingly familiar, but then take the players deeper into the story than they would normally go.

Fairy tales are a classic example. Anyone who can't find a few genuinely horrifying fairy tales (the original versions as opposed to the sanitized Disney nonsense, which is horrifying in an entirely *different* fashion) just isn't trying. And what makes it really work is that we all know the aforementioned



Myths and Legends and Fairy Tales and Books and Lions and Tigers and Bears—oh my! (aka “all of the things in the sentence above and more” research)

My current favourite of the hour, myths and legends span a wide range of styles and moods. While they lack the “it really happened” punch of history, they often have the benefit of being genuinely

sanitized nonsense so well. For example—anyone remember nice, sweet, none-too-bright Snow White? At the end of the original fable, she (being a little peeved at the Evil Queen) locks the older woman's feet in iron boots and heats them in a fire, forcing her to literally dance herself to death. I can't imagine why Disney left it out—after all, it's the only genuine dance number in the whole story.

The important thing to remember when translating/borrowing-from/retelling myths and legends is that you need to put some serious thought into execution. Just snatching up ideas and removing them

³ Usually just strange or gross, moviegoers being what they are.

from their original context makes for dull, pulpy stories along the lines of “Leprechauns are fighting the Titans. In Egypt.”

Alan Moore’s League of Extraordinary Gentlemen is a great example of how to do this sort of thing *properly* (albeit using fictional characters rather than mythological ones). If you’re going to use mythological concepts and ideas, you need to spend time thinking about how they can change and evolve to fit into your *own* overall game world. Moore’s League isn’t made up of the characters exactly as they were originally written, but it manages to draw them all together in an interesting and convincing way while keeping the core of the characters the same.

It also helps to use myths and legends as a *foundation* for your story, but not to make this immediately obvious. That allows you to play up the feeling of familiarity, and let those better-read party members experience the reward of figuring out, say, that the Fed-Ex employee who keeps delivering helpful, if annoying, messages to them is actually Hermes.

You may of course run into trouble if your players aren’t familiar with the appropriate background: “So the evil corporation we’re facing is the latest incarnation of the Aztec high priests, stealing the hearts of its victims not for medical experiments, like we assumed, but for a religious sacrifice to bless their planned IPO? Huh? Who are the Aztecs?⁴”

In this case, rest secure in the knowledge that you’re using these ideas as a foundation and that the story should be exciting and effective without the players needing to pick up every nuance. Adding the use of mythology just allows for an extra dimension to your game, as well as being a damn good source of information and inspiration.

A (Very Short) Conclusion and Threat

So, while at times it can feel suspiciously like hard work, there’s definitely an upside to plagiarism. Just always remember, if you start planning your campaigns with a bibliography, cite my article or I’ll hunt you down.

⁴ Though recent LARPs ensure this question isn’t likely to be asked often.

GOATHAM: THE UPDATE

Hila Gropper Returns

Well, it’s been a good couple of months and Gotham has gone from this stuffy little place next to One Ring to this stuffy little place next to One Ring that is the hub of the Cape Town Goth community. From Trad Goths to Cyber Goths, they have all found a home in this tiny little club on Obs Lower Main.

Some changes since the last CLAW marks—there is a second doorway leading into the bar-room, which minimizes the traffic on most nights. There are aircons in the bar-room, which help with the stuffiness and the heat... on most nights. When I say most nights, I mean nights when there are no theme parties, like the last zombie themed party, Autopsy Turvy. Those of you who have been into the club may be hard-pressed to imagine 150 people even fitting into Gotham, but they did. Normal nights drag in about 50 people, on a good night.

Themed nights are great. You dress up, there is free alcohol at the door and lots of people crawl out of the woodwork and comfy PJs to make at least one party a month. The regular nights are more optimal for dancing—as there is no “sardine syndrome”, like there is on a themed night.

There are two regular barmen. Friday nights there is Nick—or, as he is known on DarkLight¹, Santa’s Little Helper—and on Saturday nights there is John, the Evil Barman. They’re both wonderful boys who are definitely part of Gotham furniture and would be missed if they were to leave. I think they miss being away as well, because nine times out of ten they are at Gotham partying on the nights they have off.

Parties on the way

8th of August—**Bela Lugosi’s Listening Lounge**: coffee, hot chocolate, marshmallows, snacks; chilled music; no Entrance fee.

12th of August—**Grave Nation**: EBM (*doef doef*) party; R10 before 11, R20 after.

27th of August—**Creatures of the Night**: Theme party, vampires and other nightly creatures (duh!); R10 before 11, R20 after.

As for what to wear to Gotham... as long as you don’t seem like you’re there to cause *kak*, it doesn’t matter too much what you wear. Right of admission reserved, etc., etc.; it’s up to the doorman’s discretion—but, if you would like to go all out and need a place to buy something to wear that is keeping with the “Goth” style, there is always Wolf Clothing™, which now has a shop on the bottom floor of One Ring from 12pm to 6pm.

Regular nights go as such. On Friday night, anything goes... well, almost anything. If you ask Dj Minstrel, Strahdza or Corvus for Britney Spears, there are likely to be daggers stared in your direction. So stick at least a little to the genre when placing a request—anything from synthpop to Trad Goth and the occasional 80’s Goth.

Saturday nights are meant to be strictly Trad Goth, but strict is relative, and ultimately whatever pulls people onto the dance floor gets played. Theme nights follow the same flow except when otherwise specified (e.g. (G)rave Nation).

Even if you’re not a “Goth”, but do like the alternative side of things, Gotham is worth checking out—and if you are hesitant, try a Friday night, when it’s more relaxed. It’s R10 to get in, and the bar isn’t that expensive (R18 for a double amarula or single kahlua; R17.50 for a double vodka, lime and lemonade. Don’t ask me what beer costs—I don’t drink that stuff).

See some of you—hopefully most of you—there!

Signing off,

Hila

¹ <http://www.darklight.co.za>, an online forum frequented by the South African gothic and dark alternative music community

Classified!

Fridge Quotes

Schpat: "Why isn't there a seduction skill in D&D?"

Shelagh: "There is. It's called Use Rope."



Wayne: "Common, motherf*cker, do you SPEAK it?!"



Rolf: Has she gone mad?

Caroline: She's always been mad.



Warren: Its not man meat, it's an overcooked kebab.



Hila: Garrick was asleep on one of the poofs.



Bronwen: You want to buy me my own floor tile. I don't even have my own house yet.

Deaths

One half-doppelganger, known as Mercy, who was shown none by the two winterwolves who took her out, helped in part by an arrow in the back from her own party member.

Several nameless NPCs, shot in the back by a now-infamous frenchman. They should have known better than to turn their backs to him.

One gnome, killed by dastardly imposters, who will be missed by her party. She was buried...eventually.

One god, we think. We were never actually sure but after we killed him, this big fiery lava beast attacked us, so whatever we did, it pissed him off at the very least.

Four protectors of the forest. Hurtling into the ground like a comet and destroying the crystal pillars that kept them alive was probably not a good idea.

That may have also pissed off the lava beast.

Ian Kitley from Mono (better known as Kissing Disease). His girlfriend never suspected that a cute, fluffy germ would bring her such pain.

AJ, Scarlett's bodyguard (and janitor). Things had been going downhill for him ever since Troy. He wasn't the brightest soul, but now he's a real rock-head.

Lucky Lucy, the most-loved blackjack dealer at the MGM Grand. Well, the players loved her, but management disliked her tendency to draw natural 21s on almost every hand.

Scheduled Deaths

Texlati. The Red Cardinal was unmasked, but the tlataoni still demands a sacrifice.

Lost and Found

One half-ork, answers to the name of Tunk. Anyone who has seen him please direct him back to his party, who are beginning to suspect he is dead.

Mugs, posters, dice, mind and everything else between at Icon. If anyone knows where Ian Kitley's head got to, please let him know or return it.

Found

Someone who can actually direct Batman. We have been praying for so long and you have finally heard us. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Wanted

A straitjacket for the man with no name. We don't know what happened, but the last we saw he was gibbering something like "...the glasses, the glasses, they can see me, they're watching me...". Please contact Mathew Slade to organize delivery.

Information on those glowing crystals or an answer to the following riddle:

what is quantum, but not? We hate cryptic GMs.

A helmet of protection against stunning fairy wands. It's bloody embarrassing when they're wielded in the modern day by your own party member and hurt only you. Please contact Tyson.

Reward Offered

Anyone who is willing to break into a secure facility and not set off any alarms or get trapped in the warehouse because of damn, quantum sapping red orbs. Please apply to T2M, who will send you out to replace their present team in New York.

Personals

The Family ain't amused. We're coming for you, and we're not just gonna stomp that little winged runt this time.

Services Offered

Vengeance for Hire. Has the world wronged you? Need a fair, but firm, hand to mete out judgment? Specialities include beatings, whippings and asset seizure. Leave a message at 552 4623. Please.



131 REASONS WHY I STILL HATE ROLEPLAYING CONVENTIONS

The Archbigot of the Necropolis

They are too close together
I can't go to all of them
I want to go to all of them
I can't afford to go to all of them
But the 13 year old Wargamers can!
I hate the transport
The train is late
Cars break down
You miss the flight
Your baggage gets lost
Your baggage gets lost even if you're in a CAR!
You ALWAYS get propositioned
I ALWAYS get propositioned
Why do I get propositioned by men?
Why don't I get propositioned by women?
I hate women
Women hate me
My dice hate me
My dice are women
They have PMS
And I blame Thirteen.
I hate roleplaying conventions because of the food
The food is bad
I have to buy the food
There is no other food
All I can buy are hotdogs and noodles
There aren't even bananas
I hate bananas
There's free coffee and tea
You have to buy a R50 mug to get the free coffee and tea
It's not free
I keep losing my mug
I have to buy a new mug
10 minutes later they sell the mugs for half price
And NOBODY TELLS ME!
I hate roleplaying conventions because of dumbass newbs
There are good modules
There are bad modules
I'm in all the bad modules
I'm in all the bad modules because I'm with the newbs
I'm in all the bad modules because I'm with the rules-lawyers
I'm in all the bad modules because I'm with the 13 year olds
I'm in all the bad modules because I'm with Thirteen
I'm in all the bad modules because I have to roleplay with
smokers
I have to roleplay in the smoking areas
There are smokers
They smoke
I smoke
The DM's don't have enough time
The DM's take all the time
There aren't enough DM's
I have to DM
I have to DM Thirteen
It sucks!
They feed me saki
I hate roleplaying conventions because I have to sleep on the floor
I have to sleep with the floor
I have to sleep at a stranger's house
I have to sleep with a stranger
AND their poodle
Garrick snores
I don't sleep.
I don't understand why Martian life is red
I hate that people judge me when I wear pink
People judge me when I wear any colour BUT black
Everyone judges me when I wear lumo yellow
And I don't understand why they're calling me Egg Bob!
I hate roleplaying conventions because people dress up
I hate roleplaying conventions because people don't dress up
You can't tell who HAS dressed up
I can't afford to dress up
They wear chain mail
I hate chain mail
I can't afford chain mail
They wear Star Trek costumes
I want a Star Trek costume!
Why are you giving me this red shirt?
I always die first!
I hate roleplaying conventions because I get too cold
I hate roleplaying conventions because I get too hot
I hate roleplaying conventions because I can't get "just right"
I get sunburnt in winter
I get sunburnt in winter because I'm wearing my bloody LARP costume
Who thought an anime LARP would be fun?
And why am I the schoolgirl?!

I hate roleplaying conventions because there are things besides roleplaying

There are magic players
Roleplayers hate Magic players
Magic players hate roleplayers
I hate roleplayers
I hate Magic players
BURN THE CARDS! BURN THE CARDS!
They have Warhammer
Wargamers play Warhammer
They are 13
They have freckles
I hate freckles
I hate Wargamers
They spend too much money
They have too much money
They have no money

Their parents have money

They spend it

I wish I could spend it

I spend too much money

I spend too much money on dice

My dice never roll properly

They make me screw up the module

And I always die first

I threaten my dice

They still roll badly

I have to buy more dice

Now I can't buy that sourcebook

My DM bought that sourcebook

And Thirteen won it!

I hate Thirteen

They win all the prizes

I want to win the prizes

But I'm in all the bad modules

And my dice hate me

And I always die first!

I hate roleplaying conventions because they have
LARPs

And I always die first!

I get the character sheet half an hour before the
LARP

I can't afford to hire a costume

And I didn't bring a costume

Because I got the character sheet late!

LARPs never start on time

Nothing starts on time

Why can't things ever start on time?

...I hate Mike's bell.

