

# CLAWMARKS

August  
2012

47



# LETTER FROM THE



# CLAW THING

So it has come to that time of year again. Dragonfire! I hope that this year's experience titillates all tastes and is enjoyed by all. This year we have a chock-a-block schedule, with a ton of new events, so I hope we all play nice :).

As I look back on my short reign: the boardgaming nights have been popular. Boardgames seem to be making a huge comeback. We even had a mini campaign run, some modules and V:tES. The LARPs have also been very popular; especially, it seems, amongst the girls. I hope this dedication to CLAWs continues next year. I also hope to still be around to take part even if I am no longer at UCT—well, at least I hope I'm not still at UCT.

I am really sad that I will soon be passing over control to someone else, but I hope that my reign will be remembered fondly, or at least be remembered positively.

I just want to thank my great committee, for without them nothing would have gotten done; they have really been fantastic. Adrianna, Berndt and Rikus—you guys are awesome! Thanks!

Thanks to everyone else who has helped make things great; I won't mention everyone, as the list is long—but you know who you guys are, and thanks.

Your CLAWthing,  
Kristen

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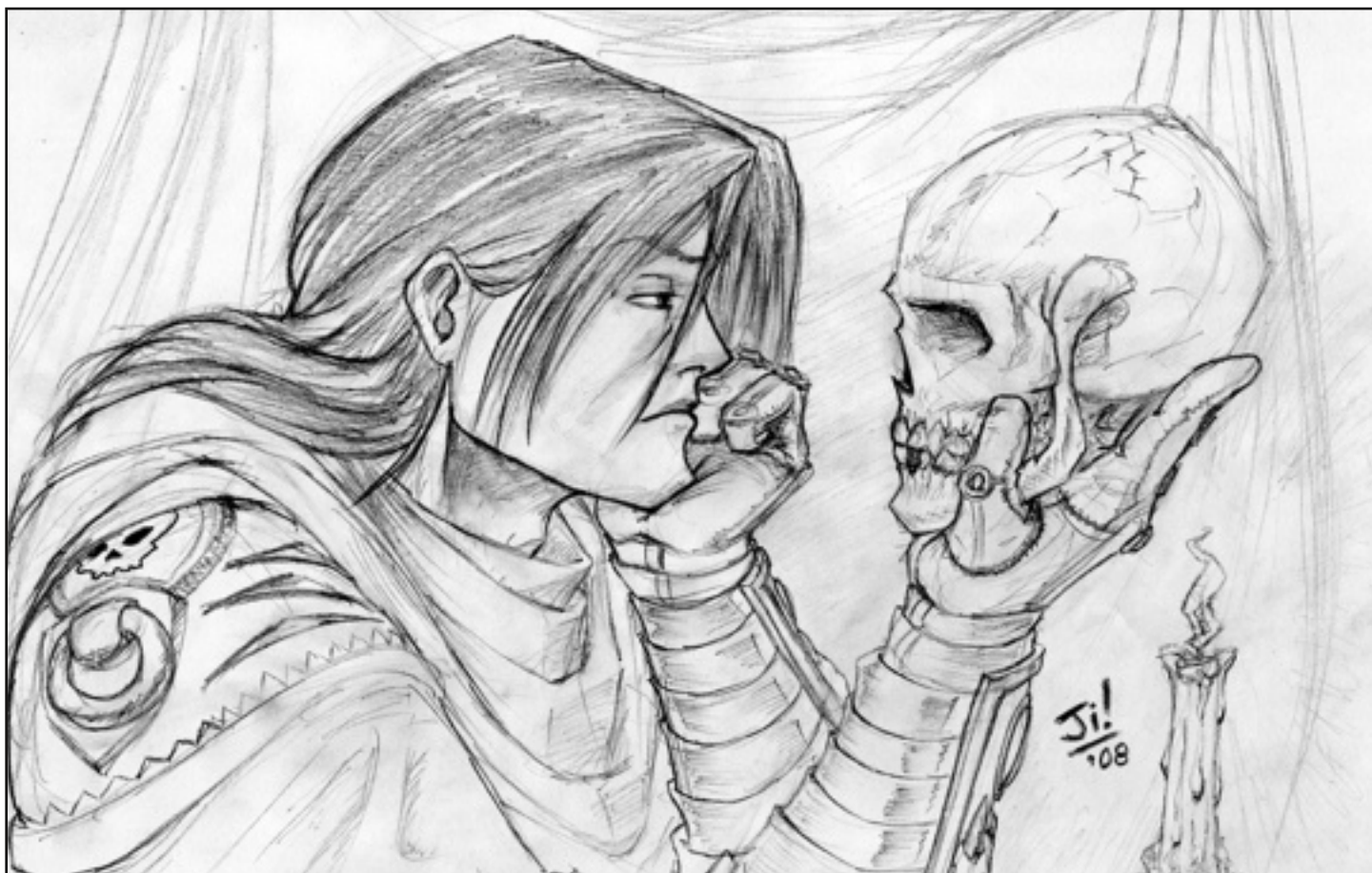
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# Bring Back the Boredom!

Berndt Hannweg appeals to our sense of nostalgia



I'm about to trust you, dear reader, with a terribly shameful secret. Just promise me you won't tell anybody.

Promise? Okay...

Here goes...

I enjoy playing Monopoly SHHHHHDON'TTELLANYONE YOU PROMISED!

But seriously, I do enjoy playing Monopoly. Which is a problem, since I don't think anyone else does. You break out the board, with all its shiny pieces, and more money that you'll ever legally own in your life, and the groaning begins.

"Can't we play something quicker... like Arkham Horror? *That* only takes two days."

What ever happened to traditional board games? In these, my college years, I have yet to see a childhood game that wasn't mutated into a drinking game. Why don't we play checkers and chess anymore? What's wrong with Scrabble?

Is it because we're bored of them? Admittedly, a bad game of chess can go on for hours, but even a mildly diverting one shouldn't take more than 45 minutes.

Is it because they're too childish? Who doesn't derive pleasure from the inevitable tension that an unstable Jenga tower creates, or the Sherlockian showdown that

ensues between two players at the end of a game of Cluedo?

Board games today offer a variety of playing times and experiences, but there is a trend towards complexity that is frustrating. Games like Arkham Horror and Battlestar Galactica are fun games to play, but the initial set-up takes forever and the complex rules and turn structures can intimidate first-time players.

I'm not suggesting that we should stop playing this type of game. I'm simply making a plea for us not to forget those simpler times, when board set-up didn't potentially take longer than the game itself.

Card games such as Fluxx and games like Chariot Racer, with simplified rules and an almost instantaneous set-up, exemplify this principle. While they don't result in hours of enjoyment, they're good for a lunch break.

Monopoly and games like chess aren't the quickest to set up or play, but their traditional nature means that, at one time or another, we were all exposed to the rules—and I believe that we're not far away from a return to the days when one dreaded landing on Jan Smuts.

So dig in your closets and garages. You never know what childhood favourite you might find, and what enjoyment you may yet gain from it.

# RPC KÖLN

*Lucas Wheeler sends a missive  
from Foreign Parts*

On the weekend of 5 May, there was a roleplaying convention in Köln, which some of you may know as Cologne. In size, and presentation, it dwarfed (pun intended) anything in South Africa. The numbers were slightly down this year, because of the weather, from the estimated 50 000 people that attended in 2011. There were three main halls, each of which could have held Dragonfire and Icon and still had room left over.

It was quite an experience to see something of that scale, after only having been to South African conventions. The thing that really struck me was the amount of effort that people put into their cosplaying. Having seen pictures from American conventions, I knew that it was a thing that people did. However, seeing a Darth Vader who looked like he could have been an understudy for David Prowse was quite different to the pictures. This was made more surreal by someone playing the Imperial March on the pan pipes as he walked by. But it wasn't just Star Wars; there was also a number of elves, dwarves, orcs, goblins and various sorts of sprites. The most noteworthy of this lot was the

gentleman who wasn't much over 5' and who was dressed as a Gimli-ish dwarf. There were also stormtroopers, bounty hunters and wookiees. In fact, the local Star Wars chapter had a stall in the exhibit hall. The steampunk brigade was also out in force, as was a group that appeared to be cosplaying L.A.P.D officers.

The convention seemed to be focused mostly on LARPing, which seems to be hugely popular in Germany. But not the sort of one-off, heavily character-driven LARPs that are prevalent in Cape Town. Rather, they seem to prefer the sort of ongoing fantasy/boffer LARP that is popular in Pretoria. To support this, every second merchant stall was selling boffer weaponry that looked quite convincing. There were several fantasy LARP groups that had a strong presence at the convention and gave demos of their fighting. There were also computer and video games being played, both casually and competitively.

However, I didn't see much evidence of actual tabletop roleplaying. I was told that it was happening, by a reputable source. And there was a small handful of vendors that sold sourcebooks and the like.

If you ever get a chance, you should make an effort to get there.

Details at <http://www.rpc-germany.de/>

*photo by Flickr user Zanthia*



# Roo's GONZO ICON REPORT AND BOARD GAME REVIEW

Reuel Miller tells all

This year's Icon was the coldest Icon in recorded history. Or eight years. Whatever. Let's just say I felt like the squirrel in *Ice Age*... chasing after my nut as it had fallen off from the cold. What made it worse were all the cute girls in skimpy outfits for the cosplay competition. Never again do I want my brain to think "Damn, girl, put some clothes on".

So... now that we have that out of the way, let's get on with the report-back.

## FRIDAY

It was Icon so it started late. Actually, that is very redundant to say. Just saying "it was Icon" naturally implies that it started late. But this year, it started late very early which was a good thing. I walked in and the first thing I noticed was a comic book stall with *Thundercats* T-shirts for sale. Oh happy day (as I have been looking for a *Thundercats* T-shirt since 2003). I happily bounded over to them and tried to buy my XXL T-shirt. They had a look and found none. A quick call to the shop and I was informed that *all* they had (at the con *and* at the shop) were *mediums*. Looking around Icon... this was not a medium-wearing crowd. I left disappointed (though later in the weekend I did buy a *Thundercats* baseball cap).

My next port of call was the *Star Munchkin Noir* roleplaying module. I waited and waited and checked back and milled around and lurked (professionally) for about an hour waiting for someone to take my money to sign up for the module but none appeared. So I went to Eugene at the Skycastle Games stall and found a board game to play in the meantime. As I was playing, a friend greeted me on her way to sign up for the

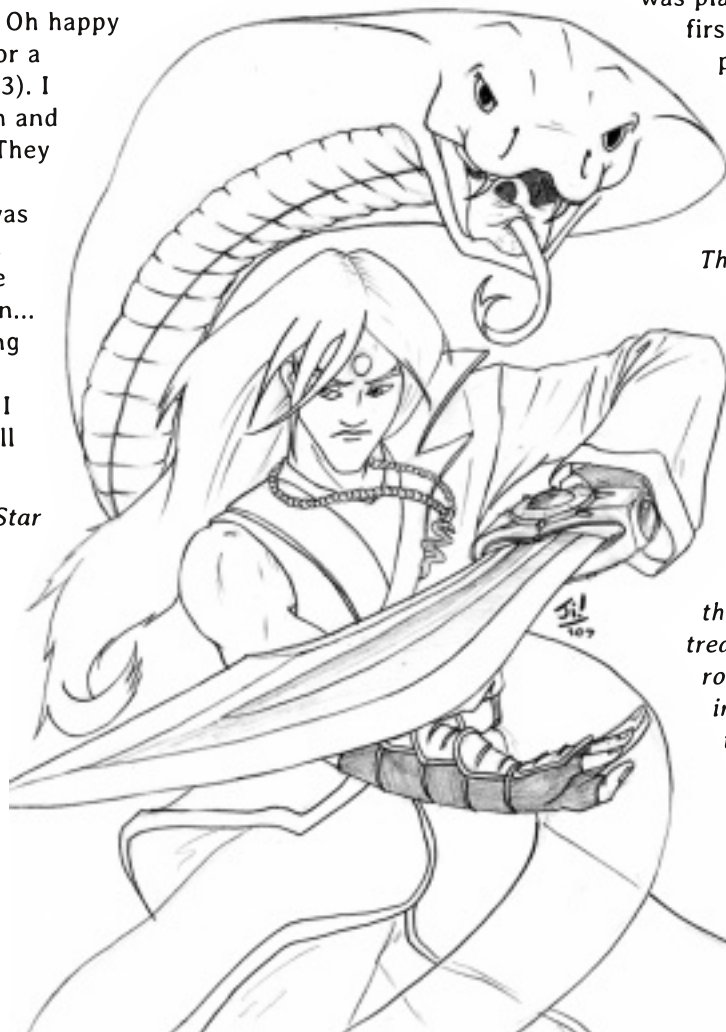
module. Since I was distracted by a shiny new board game, my attempts to communicate "sign me up for the game as well, and let's play together" were horribly garbled. And, as I was so engrossed in the confusing new board game, I totally missed signing up for the only roleplaying module I wanted to play for the entire weekend. But the start of my run of good luck began and one of the players in my friend's group did not arrive on time and I got to play after all.

The module was a silly one, which is exactly what it was designed to be (it was, after all, based on *Space Munchkin*). About an hour in I had kinda figured out the mystery and waited as the other players caught up. We had fun following the red herrings and in the end, I got the immunity for figuring out the killer's identity (the story was set in a futuristic "Survivor" game).

So what was the confusing board game I was playing, you ask? It was the first of seven new games I played over the course of the weekend. It was called *Mage Knight*.

## MAGE KNIGHT

*This is a weird game. It's like the game designer looked at all the popular games and incorporated them into one. I saw elements from: Thunderstone, Nightfall, Settlers of Catan, the Dork Tower board game and some others. It is both a board exploration game, a deck builder game, a "kill the monsters/take their treasure" game and a dice-rolling game. It can be played in a few different ways (first to find a city, find all the cities, then stop when all the board's monsters are dead and then the option to find all the cities, kill all the monsters and then turn on each other until one player remains). It is not that bad, but with a ton*



of bits to set up it takes a while to get going. It is also not a quick game to play and break-down takes a while as well. At R900 a shot, I do not see this game being owned by multiple people. It's definitely better if you set aside a full day to play the game as it can take a long time to play (if you play one of the more complex scenarios). I would like a second chance to play it without buying it (which I am hoping I can do at Dragonfire).

After my roleplaying module I went back to Skycastle games and found another board game to play. I ended up playing it with a girl (well, she was in her 20's, so I get to call her a girl) and her mother and one or two others. I mention that because we played a few other games together and I have totally forgotten both of their names. I hate getting older. So, anyway... back to the games... This next game was called *7 Wonders*.

## 7 WONDERS

*This game had a very interesting mechanic. You are all builders in one of the ancient cities/places in the Ancient World. You have 3 ages to build your Wonder. Each age takes 6 rounds, and you try and gain resources, build lesser buildings (using your resources or the resources you can get from your neighbour), employ an army to attack and defend your neighbours at the end of the age and advance scientific endeavours. Once you are experienced at the game, it should run really quickly (under an hour). Set-up and break-down is really fast. It's one of those games where an experienced player should pretty much always beat an inexperienced player... but since we were all novices, anyone could have won. In the end, The Mom won as she was the only one who had a resource that was pretty much required in the 3rd age and so she was the only one building new places in the last round. I can see myself buying this game, as I'd like to try out some of the other options available and it was fun.*

After that, The Daughter, The Mom, someone else and I played the first game in the *Thunderstone* tournament. The Mother tried the strategy of buying all the Phalanx Fighters, while the daughter and I went after the Outland fighters. The mom's strategy failed as she was not able to clear her deck of her starting cards effectively. The daughter was schooling and she managed to get both Outland Khans before me. But I was using the Foresight Elixirs very effectively to always give myself the treasures and to always go into the dungeon. Also, I was the only one who bought Ambrosias (worth 2 Victory Points) in the early game period. In the end, this proved to be the deciding factor as I won by a mere 2 points.

I then milled around for a while, talking to people and looking at stuff to buy. And, just before the LARPs began, Eugene, I and one or two others got together to have a look at another new game called *Infiltration*.

## INFILTRATION

*This game is really quick to set up, really quick to play and quick to pack up. It's a nice game with a real cyberpunk feel to it. You are a bunch of cyberpunks infiltrating a lab. You need to get in, download as much info as possible, get to the inner sanctum, and then get out before the cops arrive. Fast, fun, kewl.*

## SATURDAY

I arrived late as I was in no hurry (I was not going to be playing any modules, just board games). This year, Skycastle took over the second *Magic* hall (as it was barely being used) for their demo room. It was like the Wednesday Night Games room, but on steroids... and lasting the entire day.

As I walked into the hall, someone was setting up a game of *Descent 2*. I asked if I could join and was accepted. I then got to choose my character and set about learning the rules.

## DESCENT—JOURNEYS IN THE DARK (SECOND EDITION)

*I've never played first edition, but listening to guys who had, this game is a major improvement. It runs exactly like *Mansions of Madness*, in that there is a GM running the board's NPCs and traps versus the players. The nice difference is that you can play in campaign mode. So you can run the same set of characters through multiple scenarios that follow on from each other. Also, different scenarios follow on from previous scenarios depending on the results of the previous scenarios. And characters get to level up, the longer they are played. Set-up is slightly faster than *Mansions of Madness*, but not by much. It was fun, but not great.*

Unfortunately, halfway through we were joined by a girl who seemed to get off on the attention given to females at gaming cons. She was really irritating, playing up her "girly girly" playing choices and just being an attention-slut. She was so bad, the other girl at the table (who was sitting in full cosplay garb that eventually won her the best costume prize) got so irritated she just made an excuse and left. I soldiered on as I was interested in the game, but in all honesty I was thankful when the game ended. I add this note as I think my impression of the game may have been soured by the experience of playing



with that girl.

So I went off to get lunch and did not play in the next game that that group played. Instead, I found the The Mom from yesterday. She and I were really keen to play the Big Bang Theory game (no, not Warlords of Ka'a... though there are rumours that a real card game might be made of that, even though the Facebook game has been stopped). Eventually we found a few willing souls and set about learning the rules



*carefully calculated my chances of victory, chose the right commander and was then beaten when a card was played that killed my commander. But you can make alliances so that 2 or 3 players can win if the alliance controls most of the home worlds. So, in the demo, I allied myself with the two most powerful races in the game and our alliance beat the other 2 players. In that regard, once a 3-player alliance is formed, it is pretty unstoppable so the*

*game is a bit broken. It also took a long time to figure out the rules (even with the guy who had played the game before helping). I would not recommend this one.*

## BIG BANG THEORY GAME

*This could be really fun if played with a bunch of friends who know each other really well. With strangers, it was OK, but a bit more random. I won both games we played, but the game is mostly based on luck (when playing with strangers) so I claim no special ability to win. Basically, the game has 2 sets of cards. The first group is a set of cards describing people, places, events, bodily functions, superheroes, etc. The second set of cards is "Ideas". Each person gets a chance to be a Judge. The judge turns over the "Idea" card. The other players then submit one (or, in some cases, 2) cards (of the first kind), that best describes what they think the judge would consider most apt in describing the "idea". The judge then scores each person's submission (without knowing who submitted it). So if the idea is "Who I would most like to be", and the cards submitted were: "A radioactive rabbit", "The Pope with a Jetpack", "Batman" and "A Pack of Physicists"... I would score it as 1 point for "A Pack of Physicists", 2 points for "The Pope with a jetpack", three points for "A radioactive rabbit" and the round's winner would be "Batman". When all the Point tokens have been awarded, every player counts up his points and the one with the most wins.*

After we finished with that game, we got ambitious and took out Rex: Imperium and started to play. One of the guys who was playing Big Bang Theory with us said he had played before, but that was only once so we ended up all learning the game from scratch.

## REX

*Rex is based on Twilight Imperium; it is an empire-building game. You have various races vying for control of the galaxy. Each race has its own abilities, and you go to war over disputed territories. During one of the early skirmishes, I used a lot of my poker skills to bluff that I was choosing a very weak option to entice my opponent to make a similarly weak choice. She did, but I had used my most powerful general in a combat and I ended up beating her pile of platoons with just my general and securing the sector. But I was then similarly beaten later on when I*

We did not actually finish the game properly. Our alliance was in a very strong position and the comedy was about to start. Well, by "about to start" it meant we actually had about an hour to wait. But it was totally worth it as it was an excellent show. Vic (Vittorio Leonardi, for those who don't know him yet... but look around Dragonfire for a very tall guy with long hair that you vaguely remember from the movie District 9... that's him) was the host and there were three other comedians. They were so good; we did not even notice the cold. Well, not much... wellllll... let's just say thank goodness they were good, otherwise there may have been a riot (just to keep warm).

## SUNDAY

I arrived really late on Sunday and had to park practically in Sandton. After the trek to the centre, I went in search of new games. As I got into the games hall, I noticed that a game of Thunderstone was underway. It was a three-player game and Russell Goldman was schooling the other two, having brilliantly converted his entire deck into scouts and Creeping Death spells. He never had one hero... just killed all his monsters by dropping their health with multiple Creeping Deaths. It was a masterful strategy which I have employed online myself. After he won, we went to Eugene to ask if we could play the final of the competition. He agreed, so we had a two-player final (or what I like to call Pure Thunderstone). It was an awesome battle. We had 5 different monster types, Traps, Guardians, 2 Thunderstones, Outlands and Selurians. I started with an Outland strategy, but after getting nailed by two traps had to convert to a Selurian Strategy. It was touch and go and I was leading up until the final battle when Russell sacrificed his Outland Khan to defeat a monster worth 8 VP. In the end, he won 73 - 71. So close...

We then wanted to play something quick and easy and so Eugene suggested Quarriors.



## QUARRIORS

*Instead of being a card deck-building game, this is a dice deck-building game. You use a lot of the same rules and ideas from deck-building games (Russell and I were both able to grasp the game and some of the strategies really quickly by applying our knowledge and strategies from Thunderstone). You are, however, at the mercy of 1) the dice you pick out of your bag and 2) what results they roll. Still, it was a fun game, really easy to learn, very quick to set up, play and break down. At R600, it is a mite expensive for a quick fun game, but I could buy it if it were R500 (at most).*

After that, I hung around and chatted with JHB friends that I had hardly seen the entire weekend. And then it was time for prize-giving. Which was in the tent (at least the comedy was in the hall which provided some protection from the cold... in the tent, you just had to give up and hope you got blood back to your extremities when you got home). The prize-giving took as long as it normally does but then something amazing happened. I'll let Nicole Zerina Abvajee describe the event:

"At prize-giving, while we sat in the freezing cold, Shelly came up to talk about Lory Park and thank everyone for their donations, and let us know that we had raised enough to sponsor 3 of the cats—and this, although not the target, was still an amazing feat (thank you all you wonderful people who donated a few rands, a few tens-of-rands, and a few hundred rand notes, you ;-)).

At this point, someone called out and asked Shelly how much we had fallen short. The answer was R1 200.00. A large amount of money, especially for poor gamers and the end of a shopping spree convention (I may be poor now but was worth it!). At this point a hero (Tony Lamb), as far as I'm concerned, emerged from the crowd. This gentleman walked right up to Shelly held open his wallet and told her to take it all. Shelly tried to refuse and say it was all right, but he insisted and pushed 'till she took it. Seeing even Grant Dixon's eyes go wide, he held up to show us what had to be at least R400-500.

Before we could even register that, another had stepped up with his own surprise donation of a few hundred rand, then another, then another. Within the space of a few seconds, people were passing money through the crowds, giving their last ten rand notes, handing over earnings from their work at Icon (Paul, you are awesome!) and stall owners (Eugene Black from Skycastle Games, especially) and event organisers were pledging to donate more when prize-giving was over.

1. You can see photos of the three-legged serval and other cute cats at the Lory Park Zoo website:  
<http://www.lorypark.co.za/>

Within the space of what had to be at most 3 minutes not only had we raised the R1 200.00 without hesitation or difficulty, we'd gone over that and raised enough to donate to *another* of the animals, a spry 3-legged serval cat (I think)<sup>1</sup>. Shelly (and half the audience including me) choked up and thanked the crowd from the bottom of her heart and prize-giving continued with the auctioning of old posters to raise more money for Lory Park after the unexpected giving from the audience (another couple of hundred, so high five to those who bid and bought the posters).

Grant Dixon then popped in to let us know dinner would be a tiny bit late because Shelly was so happy and overwhelmed she needed a moment to pull herself back together. And then we in the tent cheered that we made Shelly cry (in a good way).

To the gamers and geeks and players and wonderful people of the Icon community: you are all made of awesome. You chose to give everything you could and did something amazing for our community, for Shelly, for the animals of Lory Park, and hopefully for the work they're doing for future generations of geeks and gamers.

Feel proud, geeks of SA. You deserve it."

So that was my Icon.





*Messrs Sharpe and Thurgood*



*Miss Sharwood*



*Mr Benadé*



*Miss Malczyk*



*Mr Kemp & his  
vanquished rivals*



*The Icon  
Hall*



*Mr Norris'  
companions*



*Earnestly awaiting  
tea*

# Campaign summary: LA by night

*Anna Malczyk reveals our cunning plans*

We pick up where we left off with Ezekiel, Svetlana, Eleanora and Evelyn neck-deep in various vampiric intrigues (check out the LA by Night campaign summary part 1 in CLAWmarks issue 46). Soon after the unfortunate blackmail incident, the crew decided it was time to stop messing around and formulate a solid, aggressive plan for taking over LA from the Anarchs and impinging Sabbat.

With Miss Mella in tow, the coterie went to investigate a creepy church (what other kind is there?) and found the sad remains of a staked Kindred. It turned out that whoever was running the religious operation had taken off (leaving shredded papers in their wake).

In the meantime, the coterie was busy dealing with a Sabbat Kindred whom they'd captured while investigating Eleanora's sudden embrace. The hapless Gregory, one arm missing, spent most of his time staked in the porn studio, occasionally being revived to face interrogation. Finally, it was decided that Gregory would be handed back to his pack (with an elaborate tracking device and an ambush in place) and the arrangements were made.

When the time came, however, the Coterie was disappointed. Instead of the show of force they were expecting, and despite the Anarch muscle they had acquired to help in the ambush, the Sabbat sent one lowly human who seemed to be under a weird spell. Annoyed at this, Ezekiel killed the human with one shot, and that was that. After a long wait, the Coterie decided to simply leave Gregory behind (in an old oil tanker). Displaying their usual sense of loyalty and compassion, the Sabbat promptly blew the thing sky-high, and that was the end of Gregory.

While all that was happening, Republican candidate (and now mayor elect) Sunny Johnstone was

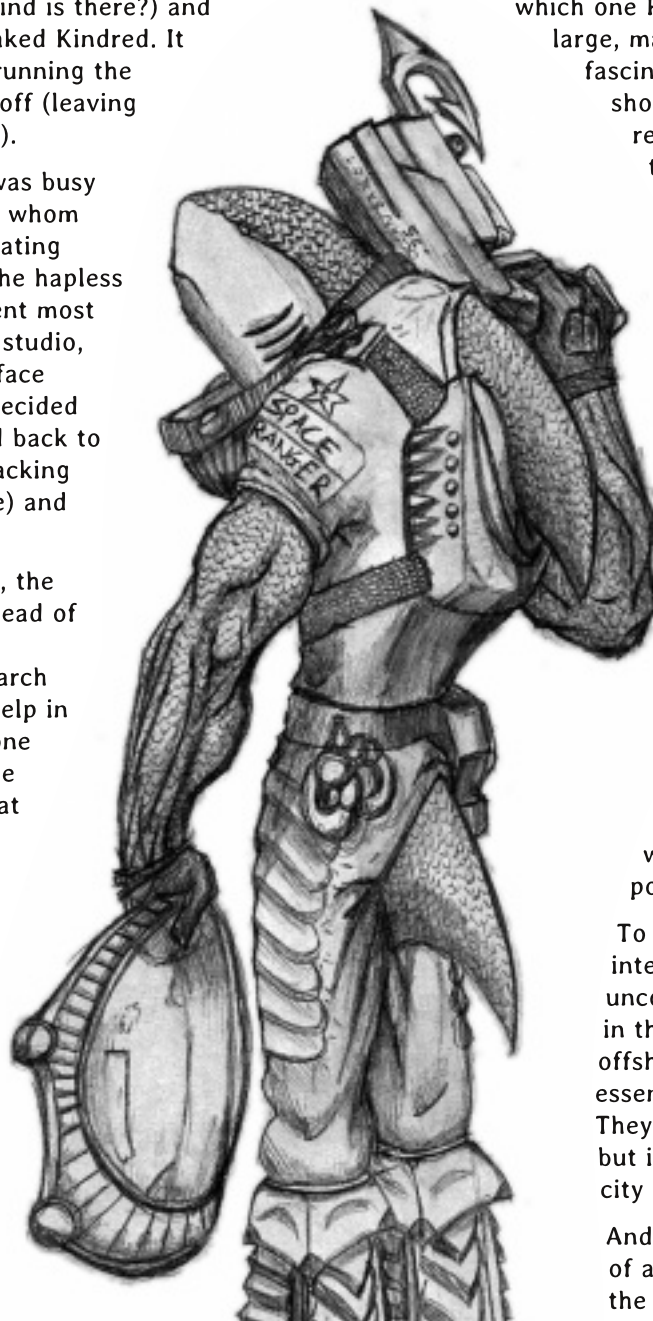
causing troubles of his own. Despite his short leash, the incompetent managed to kill a hooker in a hotel room. This required some quick-thinking cleanup and yet more chastising. Sunny's campaign manager, Meredith, was proving herself much more level-headed and a far superior candidate for ghoul-ing, so Svetlana moved in.

Life was continuing on at a middling pace when things suddenly got very interesting. The Coterie was invited to a mysterious meeting at the local airport, during which one Reverend Morningstar, Sabbat at large, made his presence known. He had a fascinating offer—the four Camarilla should side with the Sabbat to remove the Anarchs from the city to fulfil their mutual goal, after which the two remaining factions could duke it out.

The decision was quickly taken to pretend to side with the Sabbat (which is exactly what they would expect) and buy time to act against them (again, totally expected). It's still not quite clear what the Sabbat want from the arrangement, but it's proved useful already—a helpful Tzimisce created duplicate heads of all the Coterie members so that they could claim to have killed the "doppelgangers" who had "committed the murder of the Prince's childe". Seems to be working so far! What could possibly go wrong?

To make things even more interesting, the gang has just uncovered another faction operating in the city—the Kuei Jin, a strange offshoot of vampires who feed on life essence and can walk in the sunlight. They want to be left alone (for now), but if politics become heated in the city they are bound to get involved.

And then, there's still the tiny matter of a War Ghoul rampaging around in the city sewers....



# nemesis

Q: What is Nemesis?

A: A fantasy roleplaying game with online resources replacing books to assist running games, Nemesis is both a system and a setting designed to be played by roleplaying groups.

But it seems that that is not all that is intended in this South African-made product. Having spoken to one of the Nemesis guys at ICON, I was interested enough to go to their website and look up some details.

So, they introduce a world to you in the Genesis Era, (see more info on their website or mobisite) and then you learn how to play and how to use their system, which a GM can edit and run from a tablet or laptop and a player can keep upto date with via tablet it smartphone.

Their end-goal, sometime in the future when this option is implemented, is to encourage people to create their own worlds; and being able to edit your character's details or (as a GM) your NPCs, locations, initial reactions and even dice rolls on your electronic device would certainly appeal to many. Let's not forget that this is also offsetting your carbon footprint, seeing as you won't be needing all that paper anymore.

So for now, I leave you with two pertinent FAQs from their website<sup>1</sup>:

*“Q: How much content is there?”*

*A: Currently at release there is the Genesis Era with three Ages, the first of which, the Survival Age, being available, The next Era is Exodus which is planned in the next 2 years or so and there are plans for three more complete Era's*

*Q: How much will it cost?*

*A: The basic system, setting and core Survival Age is free to play, extra features and Content that become available will become subscription based payments. The expectation is that we will have dollar based pricing and not exceed \$55 for any individual in a year to purchase everything released including ongoing subscriptions.*

*There will be specials for Groups and competitions, even discounts based on rewards, interactions, feedback and contributing as a community to the growth and development of Nemesis.”*



*Desilu Crossman reviews  
two virtual tabletop games*

# roll20

Roll20 is a Kickstarter funded project started by American Riley Dutton that got over 700% funding before the deadline was reached in May 1st this year.

Their by-line is: virtual tabletop gaming that tells a story.

Says their website<sup>2</sup>:

*“Other virtual tabletop software tries to turn pen and paper into a video game.*

*Instead, Roll20 provides tools to enhance storytelling and bring your group together, including text and video chat, player journals, background music, and a real-time shared graphical tabletop.”*

They are “system agnostic”, and you can run any game using any system on their software. D&D, Pathfinder, Indie RPGs, and of course any game that uses a D20. Their site boasts features such as turn-tracking and dice-rolling as their basics.

Their software will run on almost any browser, whether you use a Mac, Linux or Windows machine, although they do say it runs best in Firefox or Chrome.

Their website apparently has some of the best graphics and for background noise, they have the entire SoundCloud library for your every mood and scene.

The “also included” blurb on their site:

*“Fog of war to hide and reveal areas of the map, a turn tracker to aid in encounters, drawing tools including text and freehand, token health bars and auras, grid snapping, a measurement tool, and a GM info layer to let you keep track of traps without tipping your hand. Plus even more on the way.”*

This is a GM's paradise: create your world, select your monsters and your creepy background music and start sending out those links and start playing!

1. <http://www.nemesisrpg.com>

2. <http://roll20.net>

# romance in larps

Andrea Walker gives some advice

It's very hard to get romance in LARPs right. Very hard. You run the risk of ending up with characters whose entire focus is romantic. And unless you cast that very carefully, it makes things very difficult for players. I've been involved in quite a few LARP romances, even if it took me ten years to get around to LARP sex. So I'm going to look at the problems (and advantages) of LARP romance based around my own experiences with it.

There are certain, mostly older, LARPs where virtually every female character's entire LARP runs on romance. And even the only worthwhile female in *[unnamed LARP]* has a rather large focus on romance. I played her and I found it very frustrating because of the other player in question. His name was Graham. He had red hair and glasses. That's all I remember of him, because that's just about the only time I ever saw him. And, he annoyed me intensely. His character was supposed to be trying to convince my character to marry him. His character was in luck, because mine had discovered she was pregnant and was finally willing to give in to his request. Except, he spent the entire night avoiding me. That made one of my goals completely impossible to achieve. I don't think I managed to say an entire sentence to him the entire night.

I suspect that the problem in this case was casting. I'm pretty sure it was his first LARP (in those days I was able to play in just about every LARP that was run, so I'd remember). I don't know anything about him, but he may have been shy, he might have difficulty talking to girls. And, as much as it pains me to admit it, some people apparently find me intimidating. He might have been one of them. Whatever the reason, the casting didn't work



out and it meant I couldn't achieve all my goals for the evening. Of course, since I had the only useful female, I had other stuff to do. If I hadn't, it would've ruined my LARP.

If you get it right, though, casting can work really well. Romantic sub-plots in LARPs give people allies and people they can trust (or at least, people that they think are allies and trustworthy). In *[another unnamed LARP which will hopefully be run again soon because it was awesome!]* I played a woman who had a particular duty. This duty meant that she was unable to form a romantic attachment with the gentleman of her choice. However, that duty would no longer be hers as of the next day. So, since the gentleman in question was played by a friend of mine, I had no hesitation in taking him

aside in the first few minutes, saying "there's this thing that stopped us from being together, but it'll be someone else's thing from tomorrow and then we can be together". So we made a plan to run away together or something similar. This accomplished one of my goals (I'm not sure about his) within the first five minutes of the LARP and freed us up for other matters. It also meant that we were able to rely on each other as allies and trustworthy people for the rest of the LARP.

This is also true of most established romantic relationships that may appear in LARPs. Though, of course there may be problems with the relationship. Of course, the LARP mechanics may cause difficulties as well. In *[another unnamed LARP]*, which I think came from Jo'burg and which we played at Dragonfire, I was in an established relationship with another character, played by someone I was actually in an established

relationship with. In this LARP, there were supposed to be problems with the relationship. I don't remember what the problems were supposed to be, what I remember were the mechanics of the LARP. Many of us had little collections of paper and every time the DMs said so, we tore off the top piece and got a new motivation, suspicion, or some information. This may have worked well for the Jo'burg LARPer. It may have worked well if they'd cast differently. However, what these mechanics did not take into account was the possibility that I might go to the other person and have a discussion with him about these suspicions and what I was feeling. Which is exactly what I did. So when I got to the next piece of paper and read "something or other makes you more upset/suspicious", it wasn't relevant anymore because I'd sorted it all out already. And if he'd been able to convince me, there was no reason for me to act in the way that the DMs felt I should act. Mechanics like this might work in other situations (though I can't actually think of any), but not for interpersonal relations where there's always the chance that people will actually talk to each other.

Back to casting. Casting is very important if you want the romantic sub-plots to work properly. And to cast well, you need to know your players. If you know your players well enough, you should have a fairly good idea of whether or not they're going to be able to engage with the romantic sub-plot in question. Do they know each other? How will that affect the LARP? Assuming they know each other, are they in a relationship already? Have they previously been in a relationship? Is there any sort of tension that might affect their ability to play the romantic aspects of their characters. Of course, if they've inconveniently decided to end their relationship acrimoniously the day before the LARP, you can't recast them. And, of course, the importance of this all depends on how important the romantic sub-plot is.

In my first LARP ever, I was involved in a few romantic sub-plots. There was a DM just to keep track of the poison and other mind-altering substances, such as love potions. My romantic allegiances kept shifting between who my character wanted to be with (and managed to end the LARP by running away with), who was played by a guy I barely knew, and someone my character really didn't want to be with (thank you, love potion), and who was played by my ex-boyfriend. That made me quite uncomfortable and I found it very difficult to allow my character to be swayed by the love potion. Very difficult. The inexperienced aren't always very good at separating player and character and when that happens, it's frequently the romantic plots that suffer.

One of the simplest ways to deal with romance is to make it very much a sub-plot—something that the character would like to have happen, but that isn't integral to their interactions with others. This works best as a

background thing. For example, in *[a more recent unnamed LARP]* my character had been trying to have romantic liaisons with some of the other characters in the days leading up to the LARP, but whether or not she chose to act on those inclinations during the LARP was left entirely up to her (and, of course, to the other characters in question). This allows one to view the other characters involved either as allies, or as potential betrayers (or both, given that these are LARPs, after all). In *[a slightly less recent unnamed LARP]* my character was convinced that at least one of her allies, only one of whom she was involved with romantically, was intending to betray her. This led to her playing them off against each other (or trying, I'm really not very good at manipulation) and using the romantic aspect of that relationship to do so. As it turned out they were all loyal, which would have made things easier, but it's not what one expects in a LARP.

In *[yet another unnamed LARP; I need better nomenclature]* the romance plot I was involved in was quite important, but it was not the only thing my character was focused on. What it allowed (and what I particularly liked about this one) is that a knowledge of her feelings and her belief in the other character's feelings affected everything she did in the LARP and the way she reacted towards other characters (especially the one she was supposed to marry). This allowed for the romance to have an effect on her behaviour without her having to spend too much time with the other character. I did choose to focus some of the time on resolving that plot because I was comfortable with the person playing the other character. If I hadn't been, I would've been able to avoid it.

So, ideally you should know your players well enough to know who they're comfortable playing with (or against, as the case may be), while also giving them the option to let that sub-plot slide by without actively pursuing it. There are certain people I would not be comfortable with in certain situations, and whom I would actively avoid interacting with in this way. I'm fairly sure I've done it on occasion (though I can't actually recall any).



# MACINTOSH

## AND THE MYSTERIOUS MASSACRE

*Stacy Fabre reveals the origins of her Scion character*

"Welcome to Macintosh's Mac N Cheese, I'm Twilight Jack Macintosh. I run this here joint! What can I get ya Georgie boi?" Macintosh exclaimed with pride. She didn't own the most popular restaurant in Betty's Hill, Texas but they had good mac 'n cheese; that's all that really mattered to her; good friends, great food and a bit of blood magic.

Intelligent as she is, Mac couldn't figure out why people were so afraid of her. She is a tall blonde-haired, blue eyed southern bell with a voluptuous figure; the chemistry set and the many books with pentacles on the cover were a bit off-putting but she reckons it's because she is a scion of Odin (scion is just a fancy word for kid, and Odin was that Nordic fellow with the one eye and the big spear); people from around here weren't too keen on that idea, here in Texas there was only one God and he only had one kid. Most folks took her for a demon, or worse one of those Anglonquian-Indians that turn into wolves (Wendigos as they are commonly known); dang things keep eating sheep.

"What y'all havin' t'day Georgie?" said Mac; dishing up a bowl of her infamous Mac 'n Cheese (you could swear at times it would swirl and move by itself).

"Just the usual," Georgie replied, "and try not to put too much "soul" innit this time Mac; last time, I couldn't hear myself think!"

"A'ight!" Mac cracked open a dusty glass jar, its contents seemed like a vapour but also like a liquid, which released a series of moans and cries that could be heard all through her shop. She slowly poured the vapour into a bowl, slopped some mac 'n cheese on top and slid it across the table to Georgie.

Georgie took a spoonful; blew on it and chomped it down. The mac 'n cheese screamed in pain with every bite.

"Them's just pseudo-souls right?" Georgie asked; though he had asked before, he was the kind of person to make double sure. He didn't want to consume real souls.

"Yup, them's 'hundred percent fake... well; I did throw a few convicts in thar, y'know them types who deserved it?"

Georgie pushed the bowl aside, "Dangit Mac! That's the third time this week." He stood up in quite a huff. He was wearing his good leather chaps today and his best cowboy hat; he even neatened up his usually crusty beard.

"Hoo wee! Y'all looking mighty fine t'day Georgie!" Mac exclaimed, "Where are we headed?"

Georgie took in a deep breath; he just couldn't get angry at Mac, her carefree manner was refreshing to him.

"I'll get to that, how's work on that bullet commin'? The mayor is getting mighty tired of handin' me out silver bullets for all them supernatural hooligans runnin' round."

"Dang nabit I'ma tryin'!" Mac said angrily slamming her hand on the table, "This here knife my dad gave me only seems to work with some magic; it can't channel the formula I need to make my idea work!"

"Sheesh! Okay... come let's hit the dirt. We got work."

Mac grabbed her poncho, cowboy hat, and revolver and stormed out the shop with Georgie.

They drove for quite some time; it was nearing evening when they arrived.

Stepping out the old black Cadillac (she was an old car, but Georgie added a few select features); Mac instantly recognised the dry, dusty environment.

"The Chimhimahadig-a-wigg desert... really Georgie?"

"Well that's not exactly how's pronounced... but yeah." Georgie crouched down, scanning the hot sand for tracks, "Got a call from a Mexican... didn't catch the name; she just said 'el Diablo' then I heard screamin'; tracked the signal t'bouts here."

Mac yelled, "Hey! Georgie boy, what ye make o' this?"

Georgie strolled over calmly, trying not to mess up his nice neat chaps.

"Dangit... well that's her." Georgie; was a bit upset as he looked at the corpse. He even got into his good chaps (paranormal investigation was a lonely endeavour).

"Sorry George," Mac said solemnly.

Mac knew he tried to avoid senseless killings. Mac grew up knowing she wasn't mortal, but something about Georgie's determination to make a change always motivated her.

The corpse looked very decayed and whittled for someone who had died a few hours ago; Georgie asked, "Mac, you sure that's her? Ain't no one I know's decomposes that fast."

"Well ya see, it's really quite simple Georgie boi!" Mac said, in a patronising manner that Georgie knew so well, "Some critters can't be digesting their food inside, so them's dun made a way t'do it by injectin' or pukin' on their prey; then they suck it up like a kid drikin' a slush-puppy."



“Lovely image,” Said Georgie looking rather disgusted, “well this thing ate this here innocent lady and I may never enjoy a slush puppy again! So what is it, and how many holes do I put innit till it goes down?”

Mac flipped opened a book titled ‘From Harmless to Deadly: Creatures of Magical Descent and how not to die’; she began to inform Georgie, “That all depen’s; giant spiders are pretty bad lookin’, but they dun’ look too nasty; oth’r thern that there’s some wasps ‘n mersqueters, nu’in t’ bad.”

“I’ma get my fly swatter... then we can track this thing ‘n plan a course of...”

“Imma summon it!”

“NO no no! Wait wait wai....”

BOOM! Mac stabbed the digested corpse with her knife; the dust around Mac and the corpse instantly whipped and spun around and then stopped. Everything became quiet.

“Uuhhh... Mac.”

Mac looked around, a little disappointed, “Weird... them’s usually landin’ right on my head when I do that.”

There was a lingering rumble, as the sand beneath Mac and Georgie’s feet began to sink; like something was sucking it in.

“Aww.. shit, my feet are stuck!” Georgie said trying not to slide down further, “Mac, what is this...”

“Dangit Georgie I’m fallin’!?”

Georgie could barely see Mac’s hat and gloves; she was near the centre of the sink-hole, getting sucked in.

“Hang’n there!” Georgie yelled; He looked around frantically for an idea, he noticed the sink-hole was getting larger and that the old black Cadillac was now sliding in.

Georgie pulled out lasso, “Hang on Mac! I’ma commin’!”

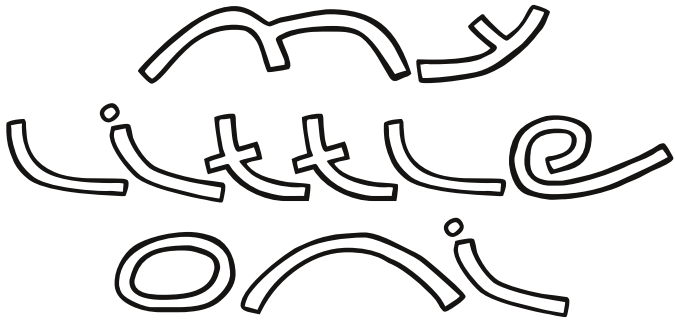
“Thar’s tenicle-like thins down ‘ere”

“Oh Gawd!” Yelled Georgie panicked; he flung his lasso at the Caddy, just catching on one of the rims, managing to just trod and clod his way to it.

Georgie just slid into the driver seat, trying desperately to get a rev on the engine when he heard two gunshots followed by a horrid, piercing squeal that echoed in Georgie’s skull. Georgie could now see five giant tentacles surrounding the sink-hole in a star formation, closing inwards. (...)

*Read the rest of this story online:*  
<http://wp.me/p2zjeg-d>





*Kelvin Millington*

*[Sung to the tune of the My Little Pony:  
Friendship Is Magic theme song]*

My little oni, my little oni  
My little oni  
I used to wonder what power could be,  
'Till you all shared its evil with me.  
Blood sor-cery!  
Tons of taint!  
A malevolent heart,  
Black-en'd & strong.  
Ser-ving Fu Leng,  
Or you're dead meat!  
And Maho makes it all complete!  
You have my little oni.  
Don't you know you're all my very best  
slaaaaaves!



101 reasons why I hate

APATHY

*the Archbigot of the Necropolis*

Meh.

# CLASSIFIEDS



## FRIDGE QUOTES

- "Where's it leaking from?" - Kait
- "While he's sleeping can I, like, fill his dreams with fun times?" - Kait about a little boy
- "She's an author, she can sell me whatever she likes" - Kait
- "How many pilots in a fleet?" - Kait
- "You can't sleep with all of them" - Warren
- "The moment I'm hard again I say 'I need a cock!'" - Kait
- "I have Dark Sandokan under my arm and his package is rapidly expanding" - Adeeb
- "Don't poke my fleshy bits" - Kait
- "My love for you is moving from the platonic realms into much weirder places" - Garrick
- "I always go by the backdoor myself, my wife never complains" - Adeeb
- "Yes, but some people actually have dudes in their things" - Kait
- "I have one with bone in it" - Kait

## GOOD ADVICE

"Never let your sexual exploits get videotaped by a douche-bag in space with the ability to broadcast it galaxy-wide" - Koket Movan

## LOST

**1 Valkyrie.** Last seen heading for Angola. Answers to the name Freyja. Caution advised when approaching subject, she may bite. Reward offered to survivors!

## FOR SALE

**1 slightly used Box of Woo** (the ultimate dice roll randomiser of awesome). Cost: 1pr leopard-print underpants and 3 month supply of polar-bear food.

## WANTED

**1 coffin.** Must be large, waterproof and have lots of room for tentacles. Contact NEG offices in Mzuzu. No reason.

## BIRTHS

To Mrs V. Qal, an adorable private clone army.

## DEATHS

Some unlucky cultists. Your guard walked right into us, so we had to do the rest of you too.

## AN EPIPHANY

"What are we going to do tonight, Brain?" "The same thing we do every night, Pinky—try to take over LA for the Camarilla!"

## ACTUAL ADS

Be warned... They're coming.

Follow Ross, Rigg and many more dynamic rivalries in the run down, cyberpunk wretches of Augullus city. The city remains corrupted by something other than simple racism and fear of the gifted... it's lurking through the city, killing morale and good intention.



<http://sabrekittydesigns.wordpress.com/>



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