

This is not...



FREE!
issue 1.3

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Now that Afghanistan's "despotic regime" has been replaced with a Western-backed government, we might naively hope the madness has come to an end... Except this has all happened before. Jason Burke was the Observer's South Asia correspondent before becoming its chief reporter. Read on.

- Johnny

Diary

by Jason Burke, Guest Editor

The first execution I saw was in August 1998. All the executions in Kabul take place in the football stadium, and I sat high in the concrete terraces, buying endless small glasses of green tea from a hawker as I waited for the amputations - which precede most Taliban executions - to start. A crowd of around five thousand had filed quietly through the tunnels and onto the stands. Lessons from the Koran were being read aloud over the public address system and people sat and talked and bought nuts and sweet biscuits and cold kebabs. There were no women present, but many boys.

Just after three o'clock two men were led into the centre circle of the pitch by a group of Taliban soldiers and made to lie on their stomachs. Their arms were tied behind their backs. For a few minutes, a group of white-coated surgeons huddled around them. The stadium was quiet but for a low murmur of conversation and the cries of the hawkers. Once a hand and a foot had been cut from each of the men tied up on the grass, the white coats retired and the amputees were led away. Later, in the street outside, I saw a Taliban soldier holding the severed hands above his head to keep them away from some children who were jumping up to try and touch them.

Soon another man was brought out from the cab of a pick-up truck that had been driven onto the centre circle. He was made to squat in front of one of the goals. He had no blindfold or hood and I could see lank, dark hair and thin features. The soldiers had tied his hands behind his back though he made no attempt to escape. His movements were awkward and sudden. As I watched him fidget, a mullah at the side of the pitch took a microphone and, through the

static, announced that the condemned man was a convicted murderer who was to be punished, according to the principle of an eye for an eye, by the brother of his victim. There was a short pause and some discussion among the soldiers.

Then a man took a kalashnikov from one of the Taliban, and aiming it awkwardly, pulled the trigger. Six or eight rounds rattled out in a sharp, loud burst and the muzzle of the weapon jerked upwards and to the right. The condemned man, still squatting, shuddered and spun round as the bullets hit him, seemed to hold himself upright for a moment and then toppled over onto his side. I saw him turning his head, craning his neck as if looking for something he had left behind. The crowd were on their feet shouting, then there was another short burst of fire and the body shook again. There were long shouts of 'Allahu Akbar'. The small pool of blood was mopped up with rags and, fifteen minutes later, two football teams filed out and started warming up.

It was my first time in Kabul. I have reported many deaths since then - in Ethiopia, Baghdad, Tajikistan, Kashmir, the Gaza Strip - but the executions I have seen in Afghanistan still trouble me. For one thing, I was keen to see them. I wanted to see what an execution was like. I also wanted to be the sort of person who had seen an execution. Besides, they make good copy for the newspaper I work for. In November 1999, an Afghan friend mentioned over lunch that a woman was to be shot that afternoon. I had a professional reason to go: no woman had ever before been executed in such a way by the Taliban. But, as with the first execution, I suspect that I would have gone even if I hadn't had an excuse.

The Taliban had arrived in Kabul on 26 September 1996. Their first target was President Najibullah. Propped up by the Soviets, Najibullah had ruled Afghanistan from 1986 to 1992 and was living in the UN compound in the north of the city. They found him quickly. He was beaten, castrated, dragged behind a jeep and then shot dead. His brother, too, was killed and their battered bodies were hung from a post by a steel noose in the centre of the city. Cigarettes were forced into their mouths and their pockets were stuffed with money.

The Taliban then set about imposing one of the strictest Islamic regimes anywhere in the world. All

women were banned from work, even though they ran the entire primary school system and much of the health system, and young girls were banned from schools. They were ordered to wear the head-to-toe burqa outside the home and not to travel without a male relative. Men were ordered to wear a beard. 'Western-style' clothing and haircuts and most music and television were forbidden. So were kite flying, pigeon racing, chess and anything else that might detract from the study of the Koran. Squads of young men from the newly created Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and the Promotion of Virtue armed with lengths of cable roamed the streets enforcing the new laws.

The desert city of Kandahar lies three hundred miles south of Kabul and, as the capital of the south-east of the country, is the spiritual and administrative heart of the Taliban movement, which captured the city in the autumn of 1994. Nearly four years later, I was there to meet Osama Bin Laden. His associates in Pakistan had given me the name of a man to contact in Kandahar. I reached the city ten days after bombs had destroyed two American embassies in East Africa and Bin Laden was the prime suspect.

Everyone was talking about the West's imminent retribution and I wasn't surprised when, in the course of an interview, a Taliban official, putting down his tea and picking up a piece of pomegranate, asked me if I thought the Americans were going to bomb them. No, I said, it would be totally counter-productive. It's not going to happen.

About twelve hours later, 75 cruise missiles struck the hills that line Afghanistan's eastern frontier. Operation 'Infinite Reach' killed a dozen or so young Pakistanis training to fight in Kashmir, some villagers and a goat. On the night of the strikes I stayed up watching television in a UN compound in Kandahar, waiting for the mob to come over the walls (in Kabul two Westerners were shot, one fatally, within 24 hours of the strikes). On the BBC, I watched Tony Blair enthusiastically endorsing the attacks. Even then they looked petulant; now it is clear they were self-defeating. All they did was turn

Bin Laden into a household name throughout the region, if not the world, and recruit thousands to his cause - itself very different from what the Americans believe it to be. The attack undermined the emerging moderate faction within the Taliban. The US authorities have still revealed no hard evidence to back their claim that Bin Laden was responsible for the East Africa bombings, or any of the other atrocities blamed on him.

Yet if much of what they do is inexcusable, it is by no means inexplicable.

In the summer of 1994 a woman living in a village close to Kandahar was abducted by a local warlord. For years much of south-west Afghanistan had been ruled by half a dozen armed gangs who took what, and whom, they wanted. Fifteen years of war had destroyed the economy and the infrastructure, armed the population with modern weapons, brutalised tens of thousands and displaced millions. For the people of Kandahar the woman's abduction and gang-rape were nothing out of the way. But the reaction was. A group of men

from Singesar village, almost all of whom had fought the Soviets from 1979 to 1989, attacked the warlord's base and freed the raped woman. They were to become the Taliban.

The name means 'students' and represents a conscious attempt to distinguish the Taliban's aims from those of the Mujahideen who had fought the Soviets and, after the fall of Najibullah's Moscow-backed regime, each other. I believe that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, the Taliban do, on the whole, want to eliminate violence and return the country to a state of peace.

The majority, particularly the young footsoldiers, have spent most of their lives in exile. Many have grown up in refugee camps in Pakistan and have been educated, if at all, in Islamic schools there. In the camps and schools an uncompromising and conservative version of Islam has fused with the traditions of local tribal society. Almost all the Taliban are from the Pashto-speaking tribes of Afghanistan's east and south. The Sunni Muslim

Fifteen years of war had destroyed the economy and the infrastructure, armed the population with modern weapons, brutalised tens of thousands and displaced millions.



Pashtoons (Pathans to the British) have traditionally provided the rulers of the country and have dominated its ethnic (largely Tajik and Uzbek) and religious (Shia, Ishmaeli) minorities.

The Taliban's vision of a perfect society is based on a romanticised idea of rural life before the Soviet invasion, when, they believe, the behavioural code of the Pashtoon tribes - the honour-based Pakhtunwali - was strictly adhered to, women knew their place, harvests were plentiful, everyone was happy. The way to achieve their vision is clear: follow, to the letter, the Shari'a. If everybody can be made to do so - even though coercion is contrary to the spirit of Islam - then, Taliban logic goes, the ideal will be realised. If people persist in straying from the true path then it won't. Instead of a perfect society in the eyes of God, you get flawed, sinful, violent chaos. Given these high stakes, you can begin to see why the Taliban feel justified in resorting to extreme measures to make people do what they believe is 'the right thing'. Their programme, contrary to what Putin and the State Department say, is restricted to Afghanistan. There is no real idea of 'global jihad'. Most of the Taliban would find it difficult to identify their own country on a map let alone the neighbouring states they are supposedly planning to subvert.

The key point is that, for many in Afghanistan, the Taliban are a great improvement on what went before. An Amnesty Report covering the (pre-Taliban) period from 1992 to 1994 was entitled 'Women in Afghanistan: A Human Rights Catastrophe'. For those who find it difficult to understand why there should be any sympathy for the Taliban the report makes challenging reading:

"armed groups massacred defenceless women in their homes, or have brutally beaten and raped them. Scores of young women have been abducted and raped, taken as wives by commanders or sold into prostitution . . . Scores of women have . . . 'disappeared' and several have been stoned to death . . . The perpetrators are the main Mujahideen groups . . . As territory changes hands after long battles, an entire local population can be subjected to violent retaliatory punishments. The conquerors

often celebrate by killing and raping women and looting property."

These days, rape - at least by strangers and soldiers - is relatively rare in Taliban-controlled areas. So is the widespread theft and abduction referred to in the report. The Taliban soldiers are on the whole well-behaved. Wrong-doers in the ranks are punished, often savagely, which wasn't the case among the Mujahideen groups who preceded them. In much of the country the dismal security situation has been turned round. There is a system of justice and rudimentary policing which, whatever its manifest flaws, does function. I once asked the owner of a roadside tea stall near the eastern town of Ghazni what he felt about the Taliban. 'Now you could leave a bar of gold in the street overnight and it would be safe,' he said.

The idea that the Taliban are a universally hated military regime ruling through fear and violence simply doesn't hold up. The occasional revolts are mostly to do with conscription, which is very unpopular. The repressive edicts that so outrage the West have long been the practice in most of rural Afghanistan, where 80 per cent of the population live. In the rural regions around the western city of Herat a year before the Taliban took control, there were, according to Save the Children UK, nearly 75,000 boys at school and fewer than 2000 girls. In the Afghan countryside women have never gone to school, left the village unaccompanied or chosen their husbands. There is no need to ban television - there aren't any sets. The 1994 Amnesty Report also says that 'women have been prevented from exercising several of their fundamental rights . . . to association, of expression and employment - by Mujahideen groups who consider such activities to be un-Islamic.' So you couldn't really say that the Taliban are innovators.

In many urban areas the situation is different. Taliban rule in Herat itself is vicious. The city has a predominantly Persian culture and language and is largely populated by Shia Muslims of different ethnic stock from the people of Kandahar. Unlike the south-east and Kabul, Herat was calm, prosperous and relatively liberal when the Taliban seized control in 1995. More than 20,000 girls were then thrown out of school. In the north - in cities like Mazar-e-Sharif



and Taloqan - the situation is similar or worse. There the Taliban are indeed an army of occupation. One reason for the lack of balance in reporting of the Taliban is that coverage is weighted towards the cities. Travel in Afghanistan is arduous, and in towns such as Kabul and Herat the story is simpler: there are obvious villains and heroes. I was surprised, for example, to learn that Kabul had a good war under the Russians. Its tiny middle-class was cultivated by Moscow. They were given good jobs in the new universities or government departments, were sent overseas for training and spent their money in the city's new cinemas, cafés and restaurants. If they fought at all they fought alongside the Soviets in the Kabul Government forces against the Mujahideen.

The war took place out in the mountains and the deserts and the old orchards and wheat fields. It was the villages there - where the Taliban or their fathers grew up - that were bombed and burned (as well as Herat and the northern Panjshir valley). As a result, when the Taliban took Kabul, there was a feeling that it was payback time. The city had been the entry point for the disease that had infected their country. It had to be purged. As the Taliban have little in common with the Kabulis ethnically, linguistically, religiously or culturally, their self-appointed task was that much easier. They set about their purifying mission with zeal.

Yet even in the capital, where people remember the violence that accompanied the fighting in the city before the Taliban took control, I often found a grudging respect for what they had achieved, alongside a deep-seated contempt for their style of government, their relative illiteracy and their fanaticism.

'These assholes are assholes,' a female doctor - one of the few still permitted to work in the city - told me on a ward in the shattered hulk of Kabul's children's hospital. (Our conversation was illegal under Taliban laws about women associating with men outside their family.) 'But they are better than all the other assholes we've had in the last few years. I might have to wear a burqa but at least I'm not

going to get rocketed or raped.'

I often think about the doctor and our illegal conversation. How can I know whether being free from a continual fear of rape is worth being denied the right to education? Improved security is worth what, exactly? And what if you never had any concept of a right to education - or indeed a desire for education - in the first place?

The West, of course, bears a certain responsibility for the current plight of Afghanistan, having contributed billions of dollars to the Mujahideen war effort during the 1980's. Once the job was done, Afghanistan was allowed to fall apart. The Taliban are a function of that chaos. The country is poorer than anywhere else in Asia. Only in Sierra

Leone are maternal mortality rates higher. Male life expectancy is 42 years. But there is little help from overseas because no one wants to be seen propping up the Taliban. Potential donor governments run away from anything that might be taken as assisting a pariah regime. The only half-decently funded projects are those aiming to reduce the flow of drugs from the country - a

trade until recently taxed by the Taliban - to the West's junkies, and even here there is an unwillingness to fund crop substitution programmes that might be seen as aiding the administration. It is the Kandahari opium farmer or the Kabuli female doctor and her patients who suffer.

I am not sure whether writing about executions helped anybody understand what was, and is, happening inside Afghanistan. Readers scanning my piece somewhere between the gardening page and the small ads would no doubt have added their voice to the overwhelming consensus that encourages our leaders to appear on my flickering TV screen with a mouthful of banalities explaining why the West backs ludicrous missile strikes or continues to deny sufficient aid to the country. And so the journalistic justification for my presence disappears and I am left as a tourist and a voyeur.

The second execution I saw took place in November and the hills that rim the horizon were

white with snow, the threat of winter hanging in the air. Once again I was sitting on the concrete of the football stadium watching a Taliban mullah in a white turban harangue the crowd that had filled the stands. Small groups of young Taliban fighters, with their black turbans bunched low over their tanned foreheads, swaggered past. A new Japanese pick-up truck bounced into the middle of the pitch with three women in light-blue burqas in the back. A group of armed men fanned out around the truck as the woman in the middle, the oldest and frailest, was helped down. She walked unsteadily. She was led to the edge of the penalty box where she knelt down, and turned her head as if unsure of what to do, like a shy child on a school stage looking to her teacher for instruction.

'This woman is Zarmina, daughter of Ghulam Haznat of Parwan province,' the mullah told the crowd. 'She is the mother of seven children. Five months ago she killed her husband Alauddin with a heavy hammer and has confessed her crime. The sentence of death has been upheld by three courts.'

The metallic rasp of the breech being worked on the kalashnikov could be heard from where I was sitting twenty metres away. There was a moment of silence, and I remember the breeze gently lifting the pleated hem of the woman's burqa. I was glad I couldn't see her face. Then three shots cracked out and though they were less than a second apart there was time to see the dust spurt twice from the ground in front of her and see, on the third shot, a shard of skull fly out through the air and hit the grass.

Late last month Mullah Muhammad Omar, the Taliban's spiritual leader, ordered a purge of un-Islamic images in Afghanistan. His troops have since destroyed thousands of statues and figures, some nearly two thousand years old and many of great cultural value, including the two huge figures of the Buddha that were hacked from the rock above the mountainous central valley of Bamiyan in the third and seventh centuries. Anti-aircraft guns have apparently been turned on them. To us, such vandalism suggests that the Taliban know how to hit the West where it hurts, while playing up to our deeper prejudices. Their behaviour is, after all, exactly what we expect of the turbaned, kalashnikov-wielding, hardline Muslim - a figure who predominates in all our thinking, not only about Afghanistan, but about

Islam and the Middle East in general. Some air these prejudices quite freely: the Hindu nationalist Government in New Delhi - who have their own predilection for sectarian demolition - spoke of 'medieval barbarism'. In Bamiyan, where there have been a number of rebellions by Shia Muslims recently, the destruction of the Buddhas is a powerful demonstration of Taliban authority. It will resonate throughout the country. More than anything, however, it is a giant V-sign shown, with typical Afghan defiance and calculation, at the rest of the world. It's a gesture born of the Taliban's frustration that they are still not recognised as their country's legitimate government, that sanctions remain, that Bin Laden's presence is still such an issue, that their recent eradication of much of the opium crop - a major source of funds - has been ignored and that the humanitarian crisis affecting much of the country has barely been noticed abroad.

It is also a clear signal of the dominance of the Taliban's hardliners. When a zealous commander shot up the Bamiyan Buddhas three years ago, he was disciplined and Mullah Omar, pushed by the moderates, decreed that such sites should be shown respect. That order has now been rescinded. Inside Afghanistan, and in the world's dealings with this isolated country, no one shows much respect or understanding any more.



More Info:

Burke Criticism:

<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v23/n11/lett2311.htm>

Why This War Will Not Work - J. Burke:

<http://www.observer.co.uk/waronterrorism/story/0,1373,578020,00.html>

The Observer:

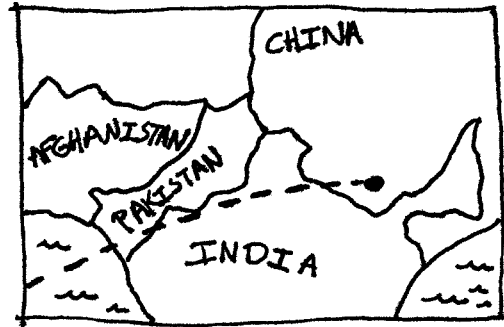
<http://www.observer.co.uk/>

Diplomacy Shockwave Movie:

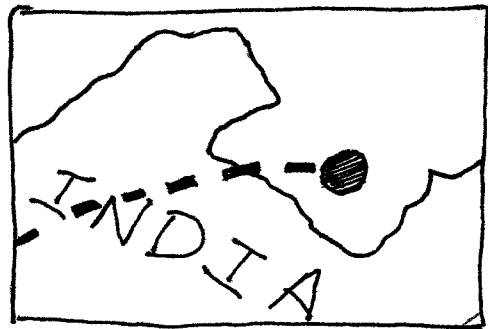
<http://greetingdelight.com/Flash/Flash16.html>

THE ADVENTURES OF MAX OF Pleistocene Fish

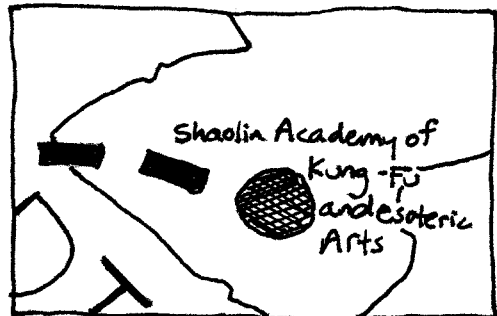
If I was going to find
Claire, I was going
to need help.



My quest led me to
the snow covered peaks
of South Asia—



to Tibet, and to
the hidden monastery
known as....





To the Boy Who Lost His Belly Button

That could be dangerous.
That's what holds your butt cheeks on.
Without it, your butt falls off.
That's why it's very important not to
mess with a person's belly button.
So now you know.
Gosh, I learned that a long time ago.
And you're now just learning it...

the semi-VEGAN reVIEWER



by
*John Wayne's
Ghost*

After witnessing his own autopsy, lifelong meat eater, John Wayne has returned from the grave to review vegetarian-friendly restaurants in Northern Colorado (though he spends most of his time in Fort Collins). Please send restaurant suggestions to johnwayne@ssdpres.org

Well pilgrim, this issue's format's going to be a little different than yer used to. Not only did those pansy-ass'ed, so called, editors force me to wear this here idiotic hat, but they also told me I had to add a "Question and Answer" bit to my gig or they were going to can me. Not that they pay me anyway, besides what am I going to with money? I'M DEAD! Screw them hippies.

Anyway, enough about that, here's how it goes. You ask me questions 'n I answer them.

This weeks question comes little Al Lathrem of Fort Collins, Colorado.

Q. Mr. Wayne's Ghost,

Will I die if I become a vegan?

-A

A. Andy, I can say with complete honesty and confidence that based on the strictest of scientific evidence you WILL die if you become a vegan. Hell, you'll die if yer a carnivore too, unless you go vampire, in which case yer screwed if you are a vegan. Basically don't worry about it too much, what's important is the good livin' to be had while yer here. First of all, it's pretty likely that if you pack your intestines full o' decomposing meat you could probably be a little healthier. Secondly, if yer going to vegan you want to avoid becoming what's often referred to as a "Junk Food Vegan". These are people that were maybe vegetarian first and they lived off PB&J, cheese burritos, day-old pizza and twinkies. After they go vegan they stop eating 3/4 of their food sources and maybe even the bread on the PB&J sandwiches. (freaks.) These people are going to notice real fast like that they are going to feel like they've been dragged through two states from the back of their horse, have no energy and probably lose a LOT of weight. The idea is to actually eat real food. Sure, eat out occasionally, but make sure you try to actually eat a few meals a week that don't come out of a box (or a jar for that matter). My buddy Spackle's recipe section can be good for those days. (I can vouch that he's a better cook than boss.) While yer at it, maybe even eat some fruits and vegetables. A lot of people say they feel noticeable better after eating a vegan diet for a short time. My doctor was always harpin' on me to eat that healthy stuff when I was alive and look were my macho food attitudes got me. Sort of makes me think it wasn't such a good idea to pay that second quack to keep his trap shut. I guess maybe some of them doctors do know what they're talkin' about.

Thai Food

Sri Thai (Fort Collins) - This is one of my favorite restaurants in Fort Collins. Their Veggie Sampler appetizer is totally greasy but tasty, a meal in itself. However, if your looking for something other than fried tasty treats, their menu is full of items that can be made vegetarian and every one of them I have ordered has been excellent. My personal advice, if you like spicy food, go with Hot, if you don't, still try to go with Medium. The spiciness increases some but not as much as the flavor. I understand everyone has different spice thresholds but I don't think you will be disappointed. If you go for the dairy, I've heard their Thai Tea is great. Located on the corner of Shields and Elizabeth.

Thai Pepper (Fort Collins) - In my experience I like them better for lunch than dinner. They have a good lunch special that comes with Pad Thai (that they've made for me without egg) and a veggie eggroll (if you eat them). Best of all the lunch special price is reasonable. On Laurel, East of College.

Toy's Thai Cafe (Fort Collins) - This place is a little shadier than the last two. I still eat here occasionally because I think their veggie curries are tasty, but something feels a little off. They serve lunch and dinner, both (I believe) with the same menu. Located on Laurel a block West of College.

San Francisco (and surround areas) - Yes, San Francisco the city. When I was there this summer there were more Thai restaurants than there are SUV's in Fort Collins. We ate at a number of them and they were all good. Thai Basil stands out, as does the mythical and mystical Thai Jungle, which we never found. We also ate at a good one that was located just south of Golden Gate Park on some main drag or something that I can't remember. If you go to SF eat some Thai food, you will not have to look far.

Indian

Taj Mahal (Fort Collins) - I've been going to this place for almost as long as I've been in Fort Collins. The owner is a little odd, but very friendly and nice guy. Lots of vegetarian selections, maybe some vegan ones... I don't ask. The Mushroom Curry and Bengun Bhartha are my favorites. Again, I ask for them hot. Watch out though, the owner will most likely try to talk you out of it, and not believe you when you say, "No really. I think I can handle it." They also have a great lunch buffet, though the price has slowly gone up over the years. Located on Oak, just West of College Ave.

Star of India (Fort Collins) - I've eaten here a dozen times at least and order the Bengun Bhartha every time. Not sure if I just discovered the thing I like most there or if I'm just being chicken, but I'm never disappointed. Their service is odd, a combination of shitty and overly attentive. I ate there once on New Year's Eve and had my water refilled after every drink and eaten there other times when I had to remind them multiple times to bring my beverage. They occasionally have live music and they advertise Belly Dancing, though I've yet to see it. Located on the corner of Harmony and College Ave.

Well, hope you enjoyed it. Come back next time for more Q&A and reviews.

Disclaimer: If you are eating out, you are most definitely not eating vegan.
A rule of thumb: If you don't want to know, don't ask. If you do want to know, don't eat out.



Gringo's Guide to Day of the Dead Skulls

by bagboy



(A traditional folk art from Southern Mexico, sugar skulls are used to celebrate the Day of the Dead. Whether you want to welcome back spirits of the deceased, are obsessed with your own mortality, or just have a thing for dried bones, sugar skulls are cheap, long lasting and easy to make. - Johnny)



You'll need: clay, plaster, 5+ lbs. granulated sugar, meringue powder/powdered egg whites, decorative icing, flexible plastic tub, water. Optional: food coloring and your favorite Mexican folk music/Sisters of Mercy album.

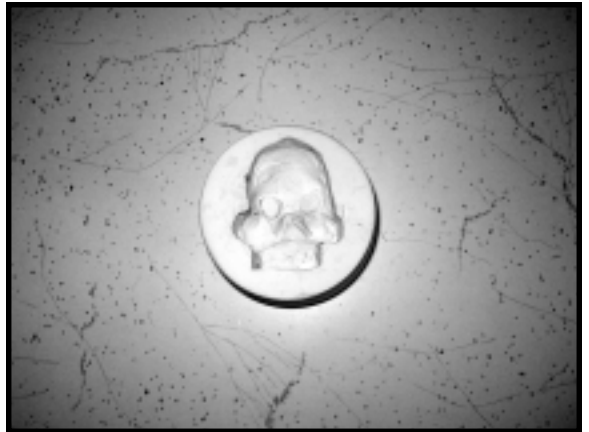
1. Mold a skull out of clay. Accentuate the prominent features: eyes, cheek bones and jaw line.





2. Mush skull into the base of your tub, making certain not to leave any space behind the back of the skull. Mix up plaster and pour inside. Let dry over night.

3. Crack free mold from tub and pull clay skull from mold. Carve away any plaster flash. Mix well: 1 teaspoon eggs white powder, 1 cup of sugar. Sprinkle 1-4 teaspoons water (and any food coloring).



4. Knead sugar mix by hand until mix resembles moist sand. Pack mix firmly into mold, and dump onto cardboard sheet. Let dry over night. Use spatula to gently peel skull free. Flip and dry for another day.



5. Decorate skull with icing and whatever else is handy: tin foil, glue, old ank nose rings.

Trouble Shooting:

- Sugar Mix should hold your finger prints firmly. Add the water gradually, kneading in-between teaspoons.
- The skulls will sag if the mix is too moist. Add more sugar.
- If the sugar sticks to the mold, spritz the mold with oil.
- Bigger skulls need more drying time; the outside crust can be hard while the guts are still mushy.

DIY “Authentic Skulls” for Fort Collins readers:

1. Go to the far North side of town, where our community leaders have done their best to hide the Hispanic/Chicano population of Fort Collins.
2. Make friends with some of the people that live there.
3. Hang out on the days leading up to November 2, and help out any families that celebrate the Day of the Dead.
4. Celebrate the return of deceased loved ones and your place among the living.

Pros: Chances are you won’t need the “Trouble Shooting” section of this article.

Cons: You might have to leave the Sisters album at home.



fade in, close-up, cue nurse and patient:

You're not in any danger of drowning, are you?

Yes, I am.

I'm in danger of drowning in my love for you.

dramatic hug, kiss, music, fade out.

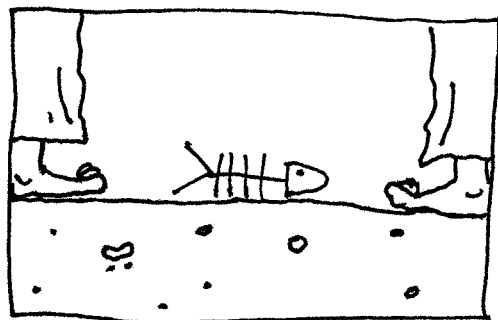
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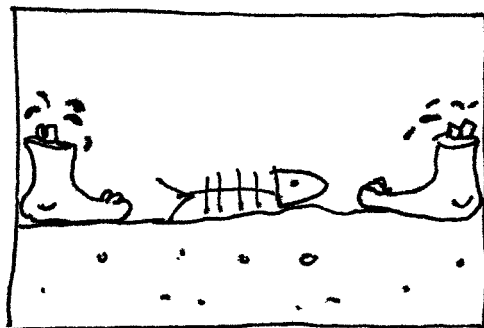
THE ADVENTURES OF MAX

Pleistocene Fish

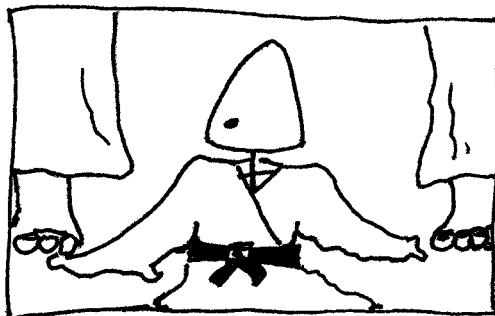
At first the Shaolin Monks
were hesitant to accept
me as one of their own -



Only after trial
by combat was I
permitted to enter the
sacred inner sanctum.



Under the watchful
eye of Grand Master
Miso, we began our training.





The following story is our first totally anonymous submission, short of a Yahoo! email address and an assumed (we assumed) name. Nothing is known of the author other than they may or may not be a nun and we are very thankful they were willing to work with us to get this story printed. Thanks.

- Spackle

Love Costs Only the Price of a Razor

By Nun by Day

The light rigidly blasted through the large, clean window, making a path along the white carpet. Tory awoke and thought of the day ahead. The brightness made him squint tightly, causing aching in his head. He got up and called Laura. They had not spoken for a couple months, but he knew he could lay in her bed tonight if he chose to. The phone rang on the other end until a message machine picked up. He hung up. He would just call Stephanie. There was no guarantee of her bed tonight but it was too good the couple times it had happened not to put forth the effort in a time of need. Tory really was upset about Klaire leaving him; he just didn't know how to cope with painful emotions except to go find physical pleasure elsewhere. Whatever bed he will end up in by nightfall, he will regret. He will lie on top performing with Laura or Stephanie, but he will be thinking of Klaire and feel intense, internal pain at the thought of her being the one on the bottom of another man.

Sex is only outside, physical pleasure. The pain Tory felt inside was far beyond physical, and that is why sex will not distract his emotions of torment. But, he must combat the wrenched, tight feeling within him. He must have a moment of pleasure to hold on to. Feeling his body tense as his orgasm comes along the surface of his unit is the only pleasure he can achieve each night with minimal effort. Tory tried to balance these seemingly contrasting sensations: internal pain and external pleasure. But, as he had discovered over much experimentation, it would take more physical pleasure than he could imagine to fog over and dull the pain of a lost love. So much pleasure, in fact, that he had never truly achieved calming any pain he had ever felt. And, it was definitely not because Tory did not have enough

or good lovers. He had the best, all excellent examples of prime females, fine lovers, all around extraordinary individuals. Tory would go to art showings and the star artist would end up going home with him and he had seemingly some power that she could not look past to even concentrate on her own showing. But, if these women stuck with him too long and started to know him in-depth, the attraction they had for Tory soon diminished into no more worth than a sigh. This was the story of Klaire. Her paintings had deeply touched him. His favorite was a large oil on canvas. The woman in the painting was on her knees looking up at her lover. They were dressed as if to be married, with flowers surrounding them. Her toes gripped an edge that gave way to an abyss directly behind her. The lover's hands gripped her shoulders readying to push. They peered into each other's eyes in true love. She would die, and her love would be the one to push her. They would end it in a way that the inside pleasure would go on forever, because it was never given the chance to diminish. And, just separating would make no sense, because lovers stay together if at all possible; being away from one another for even a day, knowing the other one is out there is torment. But, if one of the lovers is dead, the other has only the choice to continue on, loving him or her for the remainder of their days. Tory now understood that Klaire knew their predicament before he did. If they truly found love, one would have to die for it to continue. It would be an act of the most pure, and beautiful. But, unfortunately they stayed undecided long enough for her to go and lay under another man, maybe with the hopes that he would kill her before the inside pleasure broke apart and seeped lightly and quickly through her pores. Tory now realized once the inside pleasure of love subsided, which was inevitable, only physical pleasure remains, followed by internal pain from love dulling that was not guaranteed to ever go away.

As the phone's pulsing ring sounded at Stephanie's apartment it suddenly occurred to Tory that he did not know what was worse: being with someone beyond the time of the inside pleasure leaving, or it ending and having the inside pain. He didn't want to only take lovers his whole life, bouncing from inside pleasure for a short time to inside pain and meek physical pleasure for a long time afterwards. What if he killed the next love that he fell into? He could go into the relationship with no apprehension of the loss of feeling to come. He could be completely

genuine for the entire stretch of the relationship. And, the final scene would be glorious. He then could walk away into the world always living on that love that was not given the chance to fade away. The internal pleasure would last until the day he died.

Stephanie picked up. Troy sat breathing, listening to Stephanie repeat hello several times before he responded.

“Oh, yes, hello. Stephanie?”

“This is me. Who are you?”

Her playfulness immediately helped Tory to feel a little lighter.

“This is Tory.”

“Oh, Tory, how are you? Long time since I’ve heard from you.”

“Yeah, I’ve been busy. Are you busy tonight? Maybe you are interested in dinner?” Tory realized in his excitement he had become too forward with Stephanie too quickly.

“Perhaps.” She replied slowly, answering coyly with no intention of turning Tory down in the end.

“O.K., do you want to give me a call before six if you think you’re interested.” Tory spoke in a tone that only came when he asked a woman to allow him to take her out. She was a little disappointed that he had not tried a little harder, but she did not want to take the chance of another four months passing and not hearing from him.

“You know what? Forget other obligations. I can go, it’s only dinner anyway, right?”

“Yeah, of course. You will be home as early as necessary.”

“We’ll see. Pick me up at what, maybe seven?”

“That’ll work just *fine*. I’ll see you then.”

“O.K. And Tory, it is really good to hear from you.”

“Yeah, you too, see you soon”

Tory hung up the phone, and looked at the ceiling. It held no answers. Tory felt anxious at the thought that if he found love with Stephanie, he now thought he knew how to hold onto the pleasure of love forever. His mind could not help mapping out how many weeks, no longer than just a few for sure, probably a month for love to set in. “Maybe two months max. I can last that long for sure,” Tory thought. The sure feeling of constant internal pleasure to come caused Tory’s immediate pain to subside.

Tory could not wait any longer just sitting in his home, so he started to get ready for his date that would be the beginning of a life that was not

constantly burdened by either pain or the surety of pain to come. He showered, and carefully shaved. Each stroke of the razor, Tory questioned if a razor would be the way to do it. It would be fast enough, but not so fast that he couldn’t enjoy the moment of everlasting pleasure being instilled in his bone marrow outward through his skin- encompassing his body. He finished with his neck, twisting the sharp edge around the curve of his Adams apple. He finished primping himself, put away all the items he had used except for the razor, which he left sitting nicely on its side upon the counter and headed to the bedroom. Dressing himself slowly and meticulously, he became increasingly excited about the night to come and his thoughts that originally started at two months soon became two weeks, and then only two nights. Tory finished tying his last shoe and stood up to take the final long hard look into the bedroom mirror. His eyes seemed to glow to himself. He looked lighter and freer than he ever thought he had seen in himself. Tory nodded to himself in the wall-mirror and turned quickly away, out of his room and down the hallway to pick up his newly found passion for dinner, the love that would last his whole life. His long steps carried him hurriedly past the bathroom door, but he suddenly stopped just beyond the edge of the doorframe, noticing the light he had left on in the bathroom. Looking back over his shoulder, he looked straight into the shinning metal blade held firmly by the handle sitting upon the counter. Turning slowly, he walked to the counter and grasping the handle with his fingers he picked it up. Fondling it lightly, spinning it around and around with the light catching the very edge of the blade with every resolution. “This could be the blade that makes true love; the edge that gives Stephanie and me the gift of two hearts in unison that stays strong, never to fade or become fickle,” he thought with excited eyes that flashed in the reflection of the blade. He stopped spinning the handle, detached the flat blade from its grasp, and slid the shinning edge slowly into his left shirt pocket. He flicked off the light and stood for a moment in the dim room, barely being able to see the outline of his own figure in the mirror. Before turning to leave, Tory opened the small cabinet under the sink, pulled out the box with the remainder of the replacement blades and joined them with the sole blade that was already at the bottom of his pocket.



T.I.N. Top 5

(Thanks to Giant Robot for the idea)

Melchior - *Anime episodes to pirate.*

5. Excel Saga--Viewer Rating Escalation Week
4. Kodomo no Omocha--Idiotic Parent-Child Bowl Tastes Awful
3. His and Her Circumstances--Her Difficult Problem
2. Now and Then, Here and There--The Girl Watching the Sunset
1. FLCL--Maruraba

BWS - *Giant critter flicks that you haven't seen (and probably shouldn't)*

5. Attack of the Crab Monsters
4. Attack of the Giant Leeches
3. Them!
2. The Monster That Challenged the World
1. Night of the Lepus

wasawasnotnot - *Reasons to watch "Supermarket Sweep"*

5. The ageless host.
4. The universal excitement of guests across all social boundaries.
3. Opportunity to watch contestants unscramble "GEG".
2. Inflatable Gas-X prize worth \$250!
1. Hope that they'll wax the floor.

Phlegm - *Favorite(?) comments from doctors*

5. Oooh -- That looks *real* bad!
4. Does this hurt? What about this? This hurts? What about now?
3. Wow... that glue sealed your eye up beautifully!
2. That DermaGlue is really strong stuff, isn't it?
1. We're really, really sorry about this. I can't apologize to you enough...

Vaginagirl - *Favorite things about Nancy Drew*

5. Blue Convertible
4. Dad who only shows up when death seems imminent.
3. Alliterative boyfriend.
2. Bess & George
1. Always gets her man...

Spackle - *current favorite comic titles*

5. Green Arrow (Kevin Smith)
4. The Red Star
3. Barry Ween: Boy Genius
2. Herobear and Kid
1. Transmetropolitan

Holiday Feast - Tofu Loaf

Around Thanksgiving I realized that there are a LOT of holiday recipes out there for vegans, but many of them are either lame or way too complicated or time consuming. I was looking for a recipe for something that would be substantial and could easily stand as a main course. After I rummaged through dozens of recipes I decided to combine the aspects of many of them into something that sounded better to me. The instructions for the loaf may seem long and involved, and although it might take an hour and half to two hours to complete it, I would suspect you will agree that it is all worth it in the end. After all how often do you get to cook for a large group of friends or family. Enjoy!

1. **Stuffing** - edited Linda McCarty's stuffing

- 1 medium onion (diced)
- 6 small celery stalks (chopped)
- 1 tablespoon each: parsley, sage, and thyme (fresh if you have it or add a little extra)
- 6 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 small loaf whole grain bread (cubed)
- soy sauce or tamari (to taste)
- a little vegetable stock

Cut the bread to the size you prefer (I like them a little less than an inch cubed). Spread the cubes out on a cookie sheet and put it in the oven for a bit to toast them a little but mostly to dry them out. Combine all the ingredients in a big bowl and add enough Vegetable stock to moisten it up again and help it stick together a bit. I would suggest buying a box of good veggie broth to use in the rest of the recipe as well. Spread the stuffing back out on a cookie sheet or two and bake at 350 F for about 20 minutes. Set this aside for now. Cook the extra for another 10 - 20 minutes

2. **Faux "Meat"** - altered from http://www.healthwell.com/delicious-online/D_backs/Nov_97/thanksg.cfm

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 2 packages plain tempeh | 1 teaspoons black pepper |
| 1/8 cup toasted sesame oil | 1 1/2 cups water |
| 2 cups diced yellow onion | 1/8 cup mellow white miso (soybean paste) |
| 1/8 cup canola oil | 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard |
| 1/2 tablespoon dried sage | 2 packages water-packed tofu |
| 1 1/2 teaspoons dried thyme | 1 teaspoons sea salt |
| 1 1/2 teaspoons dried marjoram | |

In a skillet over medium heat, brown both sides of the tempeh patties in sesame oil. (You can do this while the bread for the stuffing is toasting or while the stuffing is cooking). Cut tempeh into small cubes and let cool. While the tempeh is cooling, saute onions in canola oil for 5 minutes or until soft and translucent. Crumble the cooled tempeh into breadcrumb size pieces and add to onions along with dried herbs, pepper and water. Cook covered for 5 minutes or until water has evaporated. Add miso and mustard and mix

well. In a large mixing bowl, crumble tofu like the tempeh and add cooked tempeh mixture and sea salt. Mix thoroughly. You may want to add some flour and egg replacer to this mixture if it is too moist. Set this aside for now.

3. Pastry Dough - taken from *Bark And Grass #2* (Cookbook)

2 cups Flour	1 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup softened margarine	1/2 cup water

"Cut" the margarine into the flour and salt with a fork or pastry cutter while adding as much water as necessary to hold the dough together. The dough should be oily, not sticky. Set aside for a moment.

4. Glaze - taken from <http://www.vegweb.com/food/subs/turkey2.shtml>

1/2 cup toasted sesame oil	2 tablespoons orange juice
1/4 to 1/3 cup soy sauce or tamari	1 teaspoon mustard of choice
2 tablespoons miso	

Mix this all together and set aside for just a few minutes. Have a pastry brush handy if you have one.

5. Building the Loaf - come on, it wasn't that hard so far, was it?

Take one medium size deep bowl, or two smaller deep bowls. The idea is, we are going to put a layer of dough into the bowl, then put the tofu/tempeh mixture and the stuffing into the bowl, close it up, flip it over and remove the bowl before baking the final product. So, first, roll out the pastry dough big enough that it hangs over the edges of the bowl a few inches after it has been draped into the bowl (keep a little bit of dough for the end). You probably want to flour the inside of the bowl; I oiled it once and had a tough time getting the loaf back out when it was completed. After the dough is covering the inside of the bowl take the tofu/tempeh mixture and pack a thin coat (maybe an inch) of it around the inside of the bowl leaving pocket that you then fill with stuffing. Leave about an inch of space in the bowl to put a final layer of tofu/tempeh so the stuffing is completely surrounded by the "meat". Roll out the last bit of dough, place it on the exposed filling and then fold the hanging edges of dough over the "bottom" to seal up the filling. Take a cookie sheet and invert the bowl onto it. The bowl should then lift off the loaf you have created leaving you with a bun of sorts. If the bowl doesn't lift off don't worry, you can start cooking the loaf and try to remove the bowl after it has been cooking a bit. Obviously if you are using two bowls you would just do this twice to make two smaller loaves. Once the loaf is complete and on the cookie sheet (minus the bowl), brush a layer of the glaze onto the outside of the loaf, loosely place a piece of aluminum foil over the top of it (to avoid burning or excessive drying) and place it in the over. Bake for about 30 minutes at 350 F. Feel free to brush more glaze on a few times during that time. After 30 minutes remove the foil and cook for another 10 minutes or until the loaf browns a bit. When it's done, serve with gravy!

6. Gravy! - Taken from somewhere but hell if I remember where. There are a good number of vegan gravy recipes out there... feel free to use whichever one you prefer. There was also a good one in issue #4 of *Anthros ex Machina*.

2 1/2 tablespoons soy margarine	2 tablespoons soy sauce
1/4 cup all-purpose flour	1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 1/2 cups vegetable broth	

Melt margarine in small saucepan over medium-low heat. Add flour and whisk together about 30 seconds; then add broth slowly while whisking. Cook over medium heat for 2 minutes. Add soy sauce and pepper. Cook until gravy achieves desired thickness. Pour into a gravy boat or bowl. Serve warm.

The rest of these are either ideas for things that I feel would go good with the Tofu Loaf or recipes I haven't tried yet, but that sound good. Side dishes can be a pain in the ass, but all in all they are usually easier once you know what the main course will be. Try anything else you can think of.

Mashed Potatoes

Always a favorite at my house. I don't really have a recipe for these but they always come out good. Get a bunch of "new" potatoes or Idahos, cut them into little pieces, then boil 'em good. When they can easily be stuck with a fork, drain them and throw them all in a big bowl. Scoop in some margarine, grind or shake in a whole lot of pepper, put in some crushed garlic (or powder, shake in some salt. Use a bit more than you think you should. Start mashing with a fork, masher or pastry cutter and add soy or rice milk to make creamy. Cover with vegan gravy or margarine.

Steamed Broccoli or Asparagus

Pretty straight forward. Chop up some broccoli like Dana Carvey and toss it into a strainer and place into a big enough pot to hold it with enough water in the bottom to not touch the broccoli. Steam for 10 minutes. If you are going the asparagus route, I suck at making asparagus but love it. I think you are supposed to place them in the bottom of a pot with a little bit of water and boil until tender. You could do an assortment of veggies, but for some reason that doesn't sound as good as going with just one kind.

Cranberry Sauce

24 ounces fresh cranberries, washed
Pinch of sea salt
1 cup maple syrup
Zest of one orange

I haven't tried this one yet, but here is what they tell me. Place cranberries and sea salt in a wide-mouth saucepan and cook over a low flame for about 30 minutes. The cranberries will release their own juice. Stir every few minutes, until the cranberries lose their shape and become soft. In the last 5 minutes of cooking, add maple syrup and orange zest. Continue to stir until liquid from the cranberries thickens to consistency of syrup. Taste and add more syrup if desired. Let cool, then chill for 2 hours. Garnish with orange zest. Taken from http://www.healthwell.com/delicious-online/D_backs/Nov_97/thanksg.cfm.

Bread

Either make your own or go splurge on some good bread from the store. Great Harvest makes some amazing bread. If you own a bread maker this is the time to drag it out of the closet and dust it off. Everyone loves fresh bread. If you want to make it garlic bread, take some margarine and stir/mash in some crushed garlic. If you are feeling feisty you can also add some Italian type seasonings and paprika to the mixture. Slice up the bread spread on a healthy coat of the margarine mixture. Put them on a cookie sheet and bake or broil for a little while. KEEP an eye on them... they burn way faster than I ever expect.

So even if you hate the holiday season it's always a good excuse to put in the extra effort to make an amazing dinner for your friends and relatives. Besides you can always celebrate the solstice. Invite everyone over early to help cook. Make it a party, maybe drink some wine. Have fun and eat well!

Tickle-Me Elmo

I'd use a stick, dude.

Wacka doo

Wacka doo

Wacka doo

Wacka doo

dice rock.



Princess Jenny and the Antidote

Part 2 of 3

Last time we left the Princess she had just collapsed after eating pudding that had been poisoned by the valiant ant Clipper at the vengeful request of the Queen Ant. See TIN #2 for the complete part 1. 'nuff said.

- spackle

The doctor was called for, as were all the magicians and wise men of the kingdom. The apothecary found the remaining part of the poisoned crumb. The magicians determined it to be enchanted. And the doctor was able to revive the little princess, whose eyes were wild and gray, and who didn't believe she could speak. Monkey had seen this transpire and had some knowledge of animal spells, so he put his shaking and tiny paw on the princess' forehead, mumbled a few words and watched her peacefully close her eyes into slumber.

Overnight the happy kingdom became very solemn. Many, aghast at the poisoning, demanded that the king do something to revenge his daughter. But the king, in abiding melancholy, cared only for her health and could think of nothing else.

The first couple of days were black. The princess, always a fragile bubble, had seemed to burst, and her smile was weak indeed. She couldn't walk and could only eat a little and she spoke whispers. She slept most of the time, and when she grew tired her eyes began to swirl. Doctors kept a constant vigilance, while the magicians furiously researched a counter-spell, but it was all to no avail. Time, they could

tell, was rapidly running out.

And, to top it off, Monkey, always the princess' faithful companion, had disappeared! Somebody had seen him crawl out of the castle walls the night the princess fell ill, and many believed he had abandoned her. A few even thought he had helped the ants poison the child. The princess, who couldn't believe Monkey had left her to die, merely cried softly, feeling very alone and very frightened. Sometimes, she would pretend he was there, telling a story or a riddle. And it would make her smile. But the blackness and the cold would soon return, reminding her of how sick she actually was. Though she could not understand it, a very deep enchantment was at work within, and it was, she knew, much bigger than her frail, little body.

After a few days, the princess seemed to get better. Her smile returned, as did her eyes, but she still wasn't really able to talk, and her voice was her life. The kingdom rejoiced, but the wise men knew something still was wrong. The princess might seem fine, cheerful even, and would open her mouth, as if to tell some amazing story. But, sudden as an icy wind, her face would fold like paper, her eyes turn to cat slits, and her breath catch short. She tried screaming, but could find no voice, and it would take hours of sleep and soothing words to help her regain herself. This lasted for several weeks, each day seeming more terrifying to the princess than the last. And still, the wise men pondered.

One night after a particularly devastating

episode, the princess awoke to see a shadowy figure creeping beside her bed. She silently screamed as he reached out to her with a mangy hand, which turned out not to be a hand at all, but rather a monkey's paw, with a very gentle touch! She suddenly found she could speak again as she clung to her dear old friend, who seemed cold and tired, and she began to cry.

"Monkey," she sobbed hoarsely, "where have you been? What have you been doing? I've missed you so and people have said so many bad things about you. Will you stay with me now? Will you?"

"My sweet, please rest yourself. I have a story for you, to explain what I've been doing these past couple of days.

"When you became ill, I realized that you had been subject to a very special potion, made with black animal magic; I needed answers, and quickly, so I went to the woods to visit Old Toad, who knows almost everything. You see, animal magic works very differently than the human kind; so differently, in fact, that some people don't even believe that animals have magic or can even talk!"

"But that's ridiculous," the princess almost shouted. "I've been talking to you since I was a tiny girl!"

"That's right, my dear. You have done most of the talking. But the point is, to understand what exactly was happening meant I had to visit the Toad, which I didn't look forward to at all. He looks like a moldy rock and smells even worse than me! But he was very nice and told me how the queen ant had concocted a special poison meant to kill you for destroying her summer home."

"Her summer home? Oh no!" The princess suddenly realized, "That must have been what the ants were building when I dropped that rock and their wee little heads. I can't believe this! Now I feel terrible!"

"Well," continued Monkey, "immediately I asked Toad how to cure you, and he leaned way down, grabbed my ear and licked it!" (At this,

Monkey made a horrible face and the Princess burst out laughing.)

"It wasn't funny!" Monkey looked shocked and then winked at her. "I mean it! His tongue was like slimy gelatin and was green with disgusting pink spots. 'Eeech!' I screeched at him. 'What are you doing!?'"

"'It looked like you had a delicious bug crawling on your ear and I thought I'd take care of it for you,' said he. 'I think it was a piece of lint or something, because it didn't taste very good. You really should take more baths.'"

"I agree," laughed the princess.

"Anyway," Monkey raised an eyebrow, "Toad said, 'The answer to your problem, like most others, has a quite logical solution; now think, what's the best way to get rid of an ant poison?'"

"With an antidote, of course!" interrupted the princess.

"Correct, my dear!" exclaimed a surprised Monkey. "Correct, indeed. What a bright little lass you've become! It took me about three hours and a headache to come up with that one!"

"I've always been rather quick you know, Monkey."

"You should have been there, my sweet. Toad was laughing at me while I was straining with every last nerve of my pathetic brain to find out the answer. When I finally did get it, I even did a little dance. I made it up myself and it looked something like this!" Monkey demonstrated a strange half-jiggling, half-twisting motion that left the Princess bewildered and impatient and Monkey quite pleased with himself. He had always loved dancing, though it made him look like an epileptic rodent. Not a pretty sight at all.

"Well, did he say where to get this antidote?" she asked quickly.

"Patience, patience my dear. Can't I even enjoy myself a little?"

"Not while I'm dying!" she snapped.

"Yes, sir." Monkey looked abashed. "Toad told me that whenever the queen makes a poison, she keeps the antidote locked in a box in her



throne room. The problem is, the queen is the only one who knows where the key to the lock is.”

“So what are we going to do?” the princess blurted. “I mean, after destroying her summer house, I’m sure the queen still definitely hates me. And, in case you hadn’t noticed, I’m not exactly in the best of shape to go rooting around ant holes; I’ve got no clue how were going to get into that throne room, much less get a hold of the antidote. Aaaaccchhhh! I mean, what are we gonna do?!” By this time, the princess was furiously clutching Monkey’s arm; she had certainly regained some of her strength.

“Slow down honey. You’re going to tire yourself out. It just so happens that we are going to have a plan. Look, I’ve got part of it right here.” Monkey reached into his mangy fur and extracted what looked like a dusty magnifying glass.

“I got this years ago from a traveling band of gypsy badgers I happened to know.”

“It looks like a dusty magnifying glass.”

“It’s not. In fact, this is an ancient magical relic, the likes of which I’m sure you’ve never seen before.”

The princess was suddenly very interested. “Really? What does it do?”

“I’m glad you asked. This, my dear, is the Wondrous Demagnifactor, perhaps the only one in existence. It, simply put, shrinks human beings to ant size.”

“Ant size? Cool!”

“With this little device, you can shrink yourself, go down the ant hole and recover the antidote. Unfortunately, it only has one use and lasts for just two hours.”

“What are we waiting for, then. Let’s get going!” The princess hadn’t been this excited for days, and she jumped toward the monkey’s arms. A wave of illness passed over her, however, and she collapsed into her friend.

“Easy, princess! You are still very ill and must rest at least through the night.” Monkey gently helped the little bundle into her soft armchair. “There is one thing; the Demagnifactor only

works on humans; royal humans to be precise. I can't go with you."

"What do you mean? I have to go alone?"

"What can I say?" said Monkey. "I won it in a card game. I'm sorry, my lovely. This is something you have to do by yourself, unless you can convince one of your sisters, or your father to go instead."

Now the king was a very sickly old man, who had never been known for his keen intellect, and the princess couldn't bear the thought of him rummaging about in ant holes looking for secret potions. And as for her sisters; well, they had never even left the castle grounds. They spent most of their time combing their hair and gossiping, which drove the little princess nuts. Besides, she was the bravest and the cleverest of them all and couldn't bear the idea of missing out on such a great adventure. So, gathering herself up, she said, "I don't care how sick I am; I'm not afraid of a few measly bugs!"

Monkey smiled. "I have a secret for you; something which might make this easier."

"What is it?" The princess' eyes were wide as the moon and filled with dew.

"Well, my sweet, as you might know, ants value nothing so much as their sense of sight; after all, they have thousands of eyes! But Toad told me something very special about the queen ant, which you might find helpful. You see, she's blind."

"How is that going to help me?"

"I'm not sure, but it might prove useful. It's the kind of thing someone like the queen ant would have a hard time admitting, even to herself. Maybe you could find a way to trick her or something." Monkey smiled and then sighed, "You see, my sweet; you are a very clever girl and a very brave one and I know that you aren't going to fail. I can't help but have confidence in you. I'm even kind of jealous; I always wanted to see what life is like in those tiny holes. I have a theory that the smaller you are, the more the world has to offer. And you get to see it first hand!"

The princess, smiling in spite of herself,

shuffled her feet, looked down, and then deep into Monkey's eyes.

"I don't know how I'm going to do this without you," she said meekly.

Monkey hugged the princess and, without a word, kissed her forehead.

"You need your rest. I'll see you in the morning and we'll get started."

The princess slept fitfully that night; she dreamt she was stuck in a cave and couldn't breathe and she woke up screaming. She imagined what it must be like to be so small and helpless that everything and everybody could pass her by or crush her and no one would notice. The morning dawn was brittle and the princess exhausted.

After breakfast, Monkey and the princess slipped out of the castle. They made their way slowly, because the princess was still so weak, past the wall, into the valley and very near to the spot where she had dropped the rock on the queen's summer home. She nearly was unable to make the journey and was forced to stop several times, doubling over in increasing agony.

Monkey looked at the princess with concern. He then produced a huge pill, which looked something like a small, square watermelon.

"This will give you strength for a couple of hours, at least. But you must hurry, for you will become weak indeed should once it's powers wear off."

The princess swallowed the pill, as Monkey prepared the Demagnifactor. First he dusted it off, then twisted the head, and whispered something into the handle.

"Close your eyes, princess! Here we go!" And with that a piercing beam of stark white light shot out of the contraption and coated the little girl. She felt a rush of wind, an exhilarating alpine blast that forced her to catch her breath. All went gray for several seconds and when the princess opened her eyes she saw a towering beast reaching out toward her.

To be concluded!

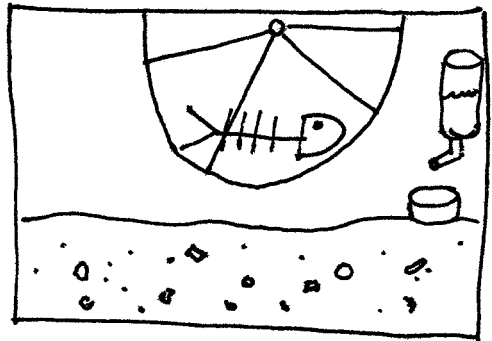


THE ADVENTURES OF MAX OF Pleistocene Fish

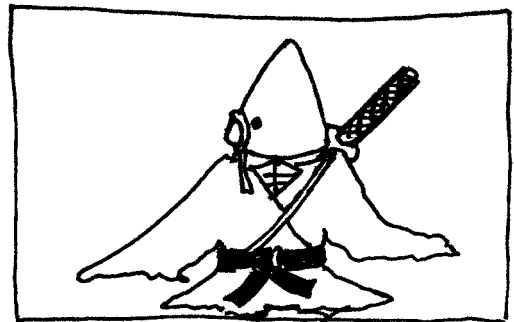
Master Miso taught us
many styles of martial
arts... Drunken Monkey -



Flying Tiger, Iron Fist,
Silky Whip, and the notorious
Hamster Man.



Finally, our hearts, minds,
and bodies girded, we were
ready to return to the
world.



Bravo-51 Sniper Rifle (.300 cal) ¹



Plane Ticket to Chardzhou, Turkmenistan ²



“Persian For Dummies” Audio Tapes ³



Getting Smuggled into Afghanistan ⁴



Bus Ride to Mazar-e-Sharif ⁵



Bribe into BL’s cave ⁵



Total Cost: \$7581.00

(Legend: Each \$ icon = \$1000 or less, US Dollars. Each Soup Icon = 1 Can Soup. -WP)

The T.I.N. Ballistic Report

Tests by Warrior Poetess. Shell casings picked up by Bagboy.

Politics notwithstanding, it is hard to argue that any on-going conflict involving the USA and a 3rd World party won't result in an extraordinarily high death toll - mostly peasants caught under the gun when the Red Cross scoots out of the country. Five million Afghanis are in danger of starving to death this winter - and bin "Franklin" Laden isn't one of them.

In the interest of minimizing the number innocents that get paved under in our quest for national security, Bagboy and I have done an analysis on how much it would cost an average citizen to take down the Big L. Use our findings to budget your own assassination attempt and to decide where you can afford to cut corners.

Sure, you could donate money, buy stickers for your car, or even give blood. But why not put your pistol where your mouth is and get this thing wrapped up in time for Christmas? (For the sake of simplicity, I've assumed urban combat/sniper training. Or at least 100 hrs playtime on your favorite 1st person shooter.)

¹BB leaned towards the softer .308 caliber, but I insisted on the .300 Winchester Magnum. One big criticism of the .300 is the amount of recoil that the round produces. To be honest, it really does punish the shooter, making long sessions at the range a very grueling situation. If you are not careful, you could easily develop a flinch in your shooting cycle.

²Includes layover in Calcutta, India.

³8 million Afghanis speak Persian but there are 30 ethnic groups living in the territory of Afghanistan, each with its own language, customs, and traditions.

⁴Afghanistan is experiencing mass starvation. One or two cans of lentil soup should get you anything you need. Budget cost analysis will vary slightly if you can get soup on sale.

⁵ See previous foot note.

Tune in next issue, Martial Enthusiast, for WP and Bagboy's Special Valentine's Day Ballistic Report! SEX AND VIOLENCE! SEX AND VIOLENCE! SEX AND VIOLENCE!



