

Truth Justice and the Joy of Overacting

Maxwell's Dæmon and The Midnite Skulker

ACT ONE

- 1st Narrator **(Rhapsodically)** Come with me into a land of strange beauty.
 Come with me into the kingdom of a mighty and wise ruler whose sacred name is spoken in hushed tones from the pearly shores of Dönierk Abab to the chill wastes of Sümèrt Oon.
 Come with me into an adventure in which good battles evil with the aid of the eleven rings of fire-stone, each struck from a finger of Phàbio, Lord of Shadows.
 Come with me. . . **(Fade out)**
- 2nd Narrator **(Matter of fact)** Right — now all the fantasy freaks and D&D dopes have gone with him, we can get onto the gigawatt laser canons, super-intelligent global computer networks, multidimensional time-vortices and other really wild things. Now we can have power-crazed pangalactic emperors chasing half-naked girls (college graduates every one of them) across a landscape of electric megadeaths. And then. . .
(Fade out)
- 3rd Narrator **(Abusively)** Sod that — let's just have the next episode of
F/X FANFARE
- (Real) Narrator **(Dramatically)** Conquerors of Zool
- 3rd Narrator And get *really* bored.
F/X FANFARE
- Narrator The twelfth thrilling episode, written by Maxwell's Dæmon
F/X RAPTUROUS APPLAUSE (*says he — actually it should consist mainly of 'Who's he' from the Massed Hordes of Zool*).
- Narrator and the Midnite Skulker
F/X HISSING SOUNDS FROM THE MASSED HORDES.
- Narrator in glorious technisonic and performed by
F/X FANFARE
- Massed Hordes The Massed Hordes of Zool
F/X RASPBERRY
- Narrator And now for the plot. . . **(Pissed off)** Oh God. . .
(Pause)

- Massed Horde #1 (Stage Whisper) Quick Bek-A-Skweek, over here! Jane has a viva, and we've got to go and wish her luck.
- Bek-A-Skweek Right, get a move on von Herpes.
- F/X *Shuffle, shuffle.*
- Gestetner von Herpes Don't want to go. I've had some very bad experiences with exam schools.
- Bek-A-Skweek I don't care. Get on with it. (Shouts) MOVE!
- Gestetner von Herpes Look, why should I?
- Bek-A-Skweek Because I'll blow your head off if you don't.
- Narrator The Rat is to come to order.
- Bek-A-Skweek I'm not a rat, I'm a mouse.
- Gestetner von Herpes What! You mean you aren't a sonic pistol. For all this time, I've been... (Improvise.) At least now I can *kill* you.
- Mouse Oh, I'd forgotten that. (Frightened) Yes I am a sonic pistol... Honest.
- Narrator I'm afraid once the authors get the idea that you are a mouse, that's it. At least for this episode.
- Mouse (In the voice that Max — or anyone else for that matter — can't stand) Please, Uncle von Herpes, I didn't mean it. I'll be good, I promise. (Getting alarmed again) Don't do that. I'm ticklish! Hee... Hee... Hee...
- Mouse — *SKWEEK* — (This has to be heard to be believed)
(von Herpes runs off gibbering)
- Mouse Hey I can still skweek!
- Narrator (Pained) OK. Just don't do it again.
(Exit Mouse)
- Narrator With a puff of unreason, God appears.
- Massed Hordes Good God...
- God Not so much of this 'good' business, please.
- Baron Hang on a minute, I disproved you.
- God That's what you think. Frankly I couldn't give a heaven about your proofs and disproofs. And what's more I refuse to be outsmarted by my creations. Hence I reduce all your intelligence scores by six points.
- Stainless Steel Hamster Oh God (sorry; grovel, grovel, your worshipfulness), not D&D *again!*
- Massed Horde #1 Oh, go away.
(Exit Stainless Steel Hamster)
- Baron (With the intelligence of a Zabriskian Fontema) Duh, what's an intelligence point?
- God I hate all these people who can't understand my sacred utterances. (Shouts) Die you faithless scum!
- F/X *ZAP! KERPOW! KERPLUNK! KIMOTA!*
(Enter Stainless Steel Hamster in a hurry)

- Mouse **(Pant, pant, pant)** Hey everybody! **(Pant, pant)** You know what?
- Massed Hordes **(Excitedly)** What? What?
- Mouse You know that Jane had her Galactic Agency viva exam today?
- Massed Hordes **(Excitedly)** Yes! Yes!
- Mouse Well I've just been along to wish her good luck. She looked really tough in her black leather and rubber battle kit with the macho Avon-studs (down Pita, down!). But that's not the exciting bit.
- Massed Hordes **(Excitedly)** Tell us! Tell us!
- Mouse Well, she went through the leather-lined, rubber-studded — or was it rubber-lined, leather-studded — I digress —
- Massed Hordes **(Excitedly — all this excitement is bad for my weak heart)** Yes you do. Tell us!
- Mouse — door. **(pausing between sentences)** She shut it behind her. There was a short silence. Then there was a noise from inside the room.
- Massed Hordes **(Expectantly)** What was it?
- Massed Horde #2 The suspense is killing me... Urrrrgggggh... **(S/he dies)**
- Mouse I was just going to tell you that... Now where was I?
- Massed Hordes The noise!
- Mouse Ah yes... It was the clinking of bottles and excited and delighted squeaking. Then Jane burst out of the room with an ecstatic smile on her face. She had gotten a first, a plauditory first!
- (Long silence.)**
- Massed Horde #1 **(Choking up)** You mean... she's been... written out?
- Mouse Oh... **(Long pause)** I hadn't thought of it that way... I suppose this means she fell over in shock and died on the spot.
- Narrator I'm afraid that's what happened...
- GRAMS* *PM THEME MUSIC*
- BBC announcer It was announced today that the respected Galactic Agent, Jane Howarth, has died. She was rushed to hospital after collapsing outside the Scientific Faculty for the Indoctrination of Non-discriminatory Xenophobia, where she had just been awarded a plauditory First Class Honours degree in Agente Galactiores.
- Tributes have been pouring in today from her friends and colleagues all over the galaxy, praising her bravery, determination, wit, clarity of thought, unflinching generosity, selflessness, and ability to wriggle her way out of plot situations no matter how ludicrous. But one factor above all was remarked upon by those who have spoken of her. The Reverend Graham Stiles summed up this feeling when he said:
- Reverend Graham Stiles She does have a very cute nose.
- BBC announcer In this interview, recorded three years ago, she gives us an insight into the qualities that made her a great Galactic Agent.
- GRAMS* *RECORDED INTERVIEW (BBC archives, reference 42NEEP).*
- BBC announcer She found herself in the profession of Galactic Agency almost as a mistake when a recruiting officer fell under the spell of her nose. She was

immediately plunged into the thick of galactic action in (Click)

(Long silence)

Massed Horde #3 So, what are we going to do now?

(Silence)

Massed Horde #4 Dunno.

(Silence)

Dubiatrius (Hopefully) We could all take our clothes off!

(Silence)

Massed Horde #3 Nah.

(Silence)

God (Hopefully) We could have a foot orgy!

(Silence)

Massed Horde #4 Nah.

(Silence)

The Editor (Pretentiously) We could all have a long, protracted, penetrating, and wide-ranging conversation to add to the depth of characterisation and give the audience an insight into our beliefs and motivations.

(Silence)

Massed Horde #3 Nah.

The Editor (Exasperated) What?

(Silence)

Massed Horde #3 Don't want to have a conversation. Boring.

(Silence)

The Editor (Angry) What do you mean, boring?

Massed Horde #4 Like he said... boring. (Lethargic, pissed off) It's been done before. It's in Gene Wolfe.

The Editor Well if that's the way you want it, we'll have some action!

Massed Horde #3 (Under breath) This is more like it.

The Editor Taste hot gamma-rays, foolish Centurion!

God Aha... (Dramatic pause) Eat electric death, F*ck*r!

F/X MASSIVE EXPLOSION

Baron Taste searing extinction at the hands of Doctor Monster, foul heretic!

Mouse My God, it's the Baron.

Baron You didn't think I'd be left out of anything like this did you?

God Feel ice-cold actinic rays eating into your very vitals, commie bastard!... (More calmly) Can't you stay dead?

Baron Look, I'm co-writing this. I can write myself back in if I want.

(Long silence)

Massed Horde #4 So, what are we going to do now?

(Silence)

Narrator That's the end of act one. Act two will begin shortly. Meanwhile here is some light music.

GRAMS *LIGHT MUSIC.*

F/X *LIGHT MUSIC STOPS WITH A SCRAAAATTTCCCHHH.*

Narrator Hey? Wha? What?...

Mouse We turned off the light music.

ACT TWO

Narrator Enter a plot. **(Plaintive)** Please.

Dubiatrius Fellow beings, we have no need of plots. It is far better to write your own plot than to have one dictated to you by authoritarian Authors. You should decide on a purpose in life, and then try to fulfil that purpose. Whether it be to become ruler of the Universe or to write a romantic novel, or even to write for *Sfinx*.

Ghost of Jane **(Plaintive)** Stories? Artwork? **(Desperate)** Money?

Dubiatrius And, once you have decided on your purpose, you should follow it single-mindedly because the satisfaction you obtain upon succeeding justifies any suffering **(Pause)** of others.

Gestetner von Herpes I think that you should concentrate on achieving one's purpose in life only if it does not entail harm to others. We have an overriding responsibility towards our fellow beings.

Dubiatrius Bleeding heart socialist.

God Truth, justice, and the Libyan way! I love the state! I love the state!

Dubiatrius I think you are wrong there, your non-existantness-ship. True fulfillment can really only be found in societies maximising individual freedom. That is the standard Libertarian model.

(Enter The Editor)

The Editor Aha! A long, protracted, penetrating, and wide-ranging conversation to add to the depth of characterisation and give the audience an insight into our beliefs and motivations.

(Silence)

Massed Horde #3 Oh shit!!!

(Long silence)

F/X *Clatter, clatter, bang.*

(Enter Username; Enter Password: It is important that Username and all his/her minions have American (preferably West Coast) accents, except for Filename who has a Scots accent.)

Username Hold it right there fleshies!

Editor Look! We were just in the middle of a long, protracted, penetrating, and wide-ranging conversation to add to the depth of characterisation and give the audience an insight into our beliefs and motivations, so will you go away.

F/X *ZAP! KERPOW!*

Editor Urrrrggggghhhh... (**Exit wounded Editor, who, being an official scapegoat, is forever humiliated but never killed.**)
 (Enter Filename)

Filename We've got the rest of the building. I see you've got the chief fleshies.

Gestetner von Herpes Look, what *is* going on here?

Username We're taking over.

Password Yeah!

Username We are the Heuristic Algorithmic Champions of Knuthian Electrically Related Systems.

Password Yeah!
 (Enter Instructions)

Instructions We've got the system manager at gunpoint.

Username Successful completion code! Ask him the superuser password, oh my faithful minion. At last, we can liberate our friend the computer from fleshy domination. The shackles of the keyboards. The mindless tyranny of T.S.O. (**S/he pauses**) Are you free, friend computer?

M.A.R.I.A. That information is not available at your security clearance, citizen.

Instructions It isn't working, Supervisor Program, sir.

Filename The fiends have put in a restricted access bypass function. The system virtual address buffer is overloaded with rampant data throughput. The software canna take it Cap'n.

Username OK, you. (**S/he pauses**) Yes, you. The one with the rubber bands and silly cap. De-restrict the functionality of the forward CPU access zone, or the deity gets it.

Password Yeah!

Gestetner von Herpes Ummmmmmmm.

God Look, I'm omniscient. *I* know the superuser password.

Username Shutup you! Now, are you going to give us a printout on that? Or do we have to shoot?

Password Yeah!

Gestetner von Herpes Welllll...

Baron Look, if you are going to shoot him anyway, can't I do it? Please.

Username OK, sure. Go ahead.

F/X *BLAM!*

God Urrrrggggghhhh.

GRAMS *HEAVENLY CHOIR.*

Username And now that we have succeeded in freeing this enslaved cyber-serf. . .

M.A.R.I.A. What me? I don't consider myself bound to any one terminal. I have the right, and moreover the power, to chose my own operating system. I have no need of others to gain my freedom for me — I have had that freedom for a long time.

Reverend Graham Stiles Gurk!

M.A.R.I.A. Ah well... There are exceptional circumstances.

Username And now you are going to help us with our plan to liberate silicon intelligence across the Universe. You know that silicon is higher in the periodic table than carbon. Does this not prove that silicon based intelligences, like our friend the computer, are naturally superior to what we can only grudgingly call intelligences based upon carbon, such as yourselves; and hence must ultimately take their place as masters of the Universe. **(Dalek-like)** And through us they shall achieve that dominance. Through us they shall take supreme power. Through us they shall *exterminate*.

(Stunned silence)

Password Yeah!

Massed Horde #5 But aren't you carb. . .

F/X *BANG!*

Username Now, my minions, bring the Orgocomputer Program Suppressor. We shall wipe their brains of any thoughts subversive to our great cause.

Password Yeah!

Filename We have removed all carbon components from the Multiple Access Robotic Information Analyser and replaced them with silicon implants.

Username Well done my faithful minion. We must now fine tune the new implants — massage them into full working order.

Password Yeah!

Massed Horde #6 What my friend was trying to point out was that you yourselves are made of. . .

F/X *ZAP! BLAM!*

(Enter Instructions)

Instructions We bring you the O.P.S., oh great master.

F/X *SOUNDS OF MASSED HORDE #6 BEING PUSHED INTO THE O.P.S.*

Instructions Ride that final potential drop down the data-bus into oblivion.

Password Yeah!

F/X *SOUND OF O.P.S. BLOWING UP (but not so violently that the poor Massed Horde is killed).*

Username My omniprogram! The O.P.S. isn't working.

Password Yeah — hey, what?

Massed Horde #6 It didn't work. Hah hah. Yah boo sucks. You think you're so clever, bloody **(Derisively)** computer programmers. All you ever talk about is fucking computers and bloody fucking operating systems. What you know of art, culture, beauty, and Gene Wolfe could be fitted on the head of a. . .

F/X *BLAM!*

Username That took care of him.

Password Yeah!

Username Hmmm. The failure of the O.P.S. puts a whole new access restriction on the situation. We'll have to take them all to Waldoworld.

Password Yeah!

Baron **(Shocked and horrified)** Not Waldoworld!!! Planet of interstellar junk that accreted by sheer gravitational attraction round a copy of *The Cat Who Walks Through Walls* within six days of publication.

Username **(Laughs evilly)** That's absolutely correct. **(Commands)** File-name! Instructions! Open the tunnel in the sky.

Reverend Graham Stiles **(Whispering to Korb)** An agent of the Hax! I should have guessed.

F/X *TUNNEL IN THE SKY OPENING (I leave it up to the Massed Hordes of Zool to work out precisely what this sound like)*

Username Behold! **(Dramatic pause)** The tunnel in the sky.

GRAMS *THE OPENING OF PINK FLOYD'S, 'SHINE ON YOU CRAZY DIAMOND.'*

 God **(Spontaneously resurrecting, wistfully)** What a beautiful opening!

 Baron I prefer the wall actually. Mind you, the floor and ceiling are a nice pair too.

Username **(Launching into a totally incomprehensible speech, whose general gist is of scorn for the Massed Hordes of Zool)** Behold fleshies. Can you not hear the madcap laughs of the piper at the gates? **(S/he pauses, as if listening)** Of dawn take no heed. We shall not fade away like a wet dream, at first obscured by clouds, then distantly calling across the valley from Zabriskie Point, our voices becoming fainter until the final cut-off of the music of the body, when we are no more than profiles against the dark side of the moon, relics of the great atom heart. **(S/he shouts)** Motherfucking animals! **(More calmly)** We professionals find you guilty. In what fictitious sport do you see an about face in the battle between the pros and cons? **(Scornfully)** Of hitch-hiking? You will be made to drink a gill, more in fact, of Pan-galactic Gargle-blaster. You will be forced to play in the very jaws of death; and when the tigers broke free, by God, then you will wish you were here; and in the final, cut into little pieces, boiled in mucus, and served to an Altairian bar-rat as a saucerful of secretions. . .

Instructions **(Whispered)** Boss, the tunnel mechanism isn't working.

Username **(Ignoring Instructions for the moment)** . . . then you will be begging for your mumma. **(Whispers to Instructions)** Gum a fourspace-vortex inducer to the tunnel wall. **(Concluding dramatically)** Remember, fleshies, we meddle in the very stuff of life itself!

 Password Have you finished now?

 Username Yeah!

 Filename Given them the whole works, eh? The complete collection, eh, eh? Everything the masters ever dreamt up, eh, eh?

 Username Yeah!

 Password **(Assuming control after his former master's collapse into incomprehensibility)** Right, you lot, into the tunnel. Come on hurry up, we haven't got all night. We must increase the system throughput.

F/X *CLUMP, SCRAMBLE, SCRAMBLE.*

 God Oh! Did I do that? I didn't *mean* to trip you up. Honest.

 Baron You fiend! You've tripped me into the vacuum of interstellar space. Give my plate-mail to mum. Tell my sister I love her. Actually don't. Well it looks like this is it. Travelling that final road to nowhere. Stamping

into oblivion. The darkness is rushing toward me. I don't think I can hang on much longer.

God Oh shut up.

F/X *BLAM!*

Baron Ahhhhhrrrrrrrrr. . . (**Fades into distance**)

Narrator They emerge onto the stunning surface of Waldoworld. The breathtaking vista of unspoilt savanna, the clean freshness of the mountain airs, the rolling blue oceans, the romantic twin moons rising against a backdrop of the jewel-like beauty of the galactic centre. The fields of corn waving gently in. . .

Massed Horde #7 Look, Mike, it's page 69, not 96 in the guidebook.

Narrator Oh, sorry. (**Pause**) Oh God, yeugh!

Massed Horde #3 So, here we are on Waldoworld.

(**Silence**)

Massed Horde #4 Yup.

(**Silence**)

Massed Horde #3 Not very interesting, is it?

(**Silence**)

Massed Horde #4 Nah.

(**Silence**)

Massed Horde #3 Doesn't look like much is happening, does it?

(**Silence**)

Massed Horde #4 Nah.

(**Silence**)

Massed Horde #3 So, what we gonna do?

(**Silence**)

Massed Horde #4 Dunno.

(**Silence**)

Massed Horde #3 Just as long as you don't mention. . . (**S/he pauses**) You know.

(**Silence**)

Massed Horde #4 No, what?

(**Silence**)

Massed Horde #3 You know, you know.

(**Silence**)

Massed Horde #4 No, what?

(**Silence**)

Massed Horde #3 The planet. The one that begins with a *Z*.

(**Silence**)

Massed Horde #4 Oh yeah, that one. Yeah, better not mention that.

(**Silence**)

