



The 'zine!

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Welcome! – What's on?

Anime Night

Every Monday 7:00pm for a 7:30pm start, C27 Portland Building

Our regular night for the Anime lovers among you! Whether you love Anime, are curious, or just have nothing better to do, we encourage you to come along so we can ~~steal your minds and souls~~ get to know you better.

Science Fiction & Fantasy Night

Every Wednesday 7:00pm for a 7:30pm start, E126 Portland Building

The regular weekly schedule of film and series viewing: Feel free to bring along a couple of DVD's each week! We'll pretty much watch anything that's Sci-fi, fantasy or cult!

Geeky Crafts Friday (FORTNIGHTLY)

Every Other Friday 7:00pm for a 7:00pm start, C27 Portland Building

Bring along your wool/model kits/papier mache/Lego/paper/writing/long term projects and enjoy this opportunity to try out those crafts you've meant to get round to trying your hand at! Enjoy the informal & laid-back atmosphere! See the Forums for more information on the main aim of each week!

JOIN THE FORUMS-<http://www.su-web2.nottingham.ac.uk/~scifi/phpbb/index.php>

Upcoming Socials:

29/10/2011, Saturday – SCI FI HALLOWEEN PARTY

Down at our favourite pub, the Johnson Arms! 7.30pm – late

30/10/2011, Sunday – GHOSTBUSTERS CINEMA SOCIAL

5.10pm showing at the Showcase cinema, meet at 4.10pm at south entrance

13/11/2011, Sunday – QUAZAR

3 games for £5! Meet at Portland at 2.45pm, games start at 4pm

18/11/2011, Friday – MAY SUM AND EYE OF ARGON

£6.95 for the meal, leave at 4.30pm from south entrance. 6.30pm at P&P

All members of sci fi are invited to all of these socials!

Meet the Committee!

The President:



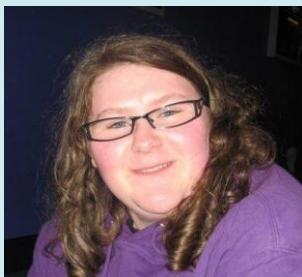
I'm Hal, the Prezident. I'm a second year Medicinal and Biological Chemistry student, which is actually more fun than it sounds. I love pretty much all Science Fiction and Fantasy related works, I also now have a beard, which is apparently traditional for SFFS Presidents to have. I'll be the guy shouting at the front for most of the year, so feel free to say hi- I don't bite. Not until I'm tipsy, at any rate!

The Treasurer:



I'm Nat, your trusty treasurer so you better be nice to me because I have all your money! Well, not all your money but you get the idea! I joined SFFS for the novelty of being around people who understand what I mean if I suddenly shout 'There are four lights!'. I'm a trekkie, a Discworld fanatic and am learning to appreciate the genius that is Joss Whedon. Talk to me if you feel like it - I'm friendly and unlikely to do you any harm (apart, perhaps, mentally).

The Librarian:



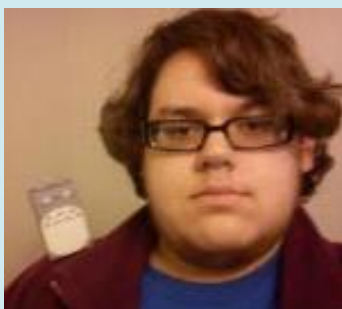
Hi, I'm Verity, although more and more people have started to call me Vexen (it has absolutely nothing to do with my MIND ERASING LASER BEAM!!). I'm studying Natural Sciences but in my case that actually means Maths and Physics. I'm the librarian therefore all your books belong to me, even the ones you haven't bought yet. One thing I know for sure is that I will find out how it get into L-space

The Secretary:



Alexander Carrington, your Secretary for this year. 3rd Year History student with a love of sci-fi and gaming

The Social Sec:



Hi guys! I'm Dan and I'm the Social Sec for the year. So it's my job to organise socials and other outings. If you have any suggestions please feel free to find me and suggest them and I'll try to arrange them at some point if possible. I'm a third year Mathematical Physics student who spends far too much time playing games and watching tv. I'm in to anime and manga, mainly fantasy books, most of the sci fi or fantasy tv series (as well as the other geeky ones), RPG video games and Magic: The Gathering.



The Webmaster:

Hi, I'm Ed. I'm a second year physics student and I have no amusing nickname/title. Feel free to make one up. My non-amusing title is webmaster, so if something is broken on this site find me and (gently) hit me. I have a bad habit of hiding at the back of gatherings and such, so feel free to come and talk to me if you have any questions/interesting thoughts.

The Anime rep:



Hello Minions, I am the Overlord Emperor King (but you can call me Helen), and I'm your Anime rep. That means I'll be running the Monday night socials. I'm studying English Studies and Latin. This year I'm hoping to introduce manga and cosplay projects to interested members of the society.



The M.A.S.C.O.T:

I'm the MASCOT, and have been for as long as anyone else in the committee can remember. Long ago (before I graduated in 2005) I was the president, but I was unwilling to let go of all my power when I left uni and so created this position, which can be held by non-students and has no responsibilities. I need to be re-elected every year, so I'm usually pretty helpful in order to ensure I get your vote at the AGM; feel free to come to me with any questions or concerns you may have and I'll do my best to help you.



The 'Zine editor!

That's me! I'm Nel, your new 'Zine editor for this year! I'm a second year studying for a Masters in Neuroscience - Geeky, confusing and awesome! As your 'Zine editor, I shall be bugging ALL of you constantly for submissions to the 'Zine - Short stories/extracts, Pictures, Poems, Quiz's - anything creative. Cookies or cake will be available to those who submit!

This is your committee for this year! Feel free to talk to any of us if you have any queries or problems in the society or if you have any awesome ideas you want to see happen!

What's on at anime this semester?

Each semester an anime series is chosen (by you lot), and each week another episode in the series is watched! This semester is: GURREN LAGANN

Review/synopsis by Dan Rizzo:

Gurren Lagann is a mecha anime with a strong story and good character development; while the plot is very serious, the anime itself is a semi-parody of other mecha anime. Gurren Lagann tells the story of Simon, a digger who comes from an underground village called Giha village, and his quest to learn the truth behind the oppression pressed on the humans by a man who calls himself the Spiral King, and his eventual crusade to defeat the Spiral King and return the humans to the surface.



Simon does not do this alone. He is aided by his best friend and role model, Kamina, a plasma rifle wielding woman from the neighbouring village named Yoko and other friends who come to form an alliance called the Gurren Brigade (later renamed the Dai-Gurren Brigade) and together they fight against the Spiral King.

In the world of Gurren Lagann, humans are forced to live underground in villages. These villages are prone to earthquakes and are at constant threat of collapsing. To prevent the death of the villagers, they must dig to expand their home, hoping to get deep enough to avoid the collapses caused by the earthquakes. It is while digging new tunnels to expand his village that Simon comes across an artefact that sets up the series: the Core Drill.

Unknown by Simon, the Core Drill will allow him to access a power that will change the world, though perhaps it is better for the world, if not the universe, if things don't change....

Sci-Fi is doing a MOVIE!!

That's right! After many years of pondering and procrastination, the Sci-fi movie is finally on a roll!

The storyline that has been chosen is named 'Jeremy', a short story written for the 3rd edition of the 'Zine last year by Sam Kurd. This story is available to read still on the forums! (Under 'Zine #3)

Now this is where we need YOU! That's right, you there, reading this right now. A film takes a lot of work and people to actually happen, and it would be amazing to get as many members of the society involved as we possibly can.

Sam has just finished writing up the screen play, so now we're all ready to go! A few changes to the original script have been made, and Sam is open to more change suggestions at the next meeting

James Boucher is our main director, him having come up with a pretty awesome idea of how to film it in the first place, having access to most of the necessary equipment, and generally being one of the main driving forces behind the movie in the first place.

But there is still much to do! We need actors, extras, behind the scenes crew, cleanup crew...the list goes on! We also need to do some fundraising in order to actually make this happen and make it happen properly. So even if you've never seen a camera in your life (unlikely), you can still help anyway!

There's lots of information all about the movie and how to get involved in the movie section on the forum, and on our facebook group! Join both if you can.

Auditions for the 2 main characters (one male and one female) will be fairly soon, and dates will be announced in the next few weeks. The next meeting is on Tuesday – see the forum for details!

Hopefully see you all there!

HALLOWEEN! What has come before, and what is to come – By Dawn Hazle

(all pictures from last year's party)

As an erstwhile holder of the Social Secretary position at SFFS, I've organised at least one Halloween Party in my time. In actual fact, I've organised at least 3 but today's is bigger and better than we could ever have hoped for in those heady days of 2003...



My first Halloween party was in my first year back in 2002. We had a theme: Heroes and Villains. I

managed to get my *Sharpe* costume which I'd made a few years prior out of some old green clothes and some judicious creativity. I didn't win, but that's because everyone thought I'd bought or hired it: just the idea that I would have won had it



not been as good was good enough for me to be happy that I'd as good as won (the prize wasn't any good anyway!)

That first Halloween Party was held at The Ropewalk, which at the time was a Yellow Pub (like The Horn in the Hand near Trent Uni). The next year, I organised it (despite being Secretary/stand-in Vice Pres) on advice from the rest of the committee. We held it in Cucumara, a cocktail bar up a tiny

alley off Angel Row: it's still there and still weird. We could hire out the top floor for free and it was an alright night. Following that year, I was away in Russia when the next one happened, but Matt (now MASCOT) was President and reliably informs me that someone managed to get us into the Old Salutation on Maid Marian Way and use the upstairs for free.



SFFS were looking for new committee while I was in Germany (Joint Honours languages takes you places!) and were running short of

social secretaries, so I mentioned that if I didn't get voted in I might have to kill someone, or words to that effect. Anyway, it came and in 2005 we went back to the Salutation, this time without 'exclusive' access to the top floor but it was good nonetheless. There were even some small-scale events like apple-bobbing.



2006-8 were also held in the Salutation, but with it becoming increasingly packed, the decision was made to move it to the Johnson Arms, its current and much more accommodating home. Here we can show films, take decent pictures without people getting in the way, have the run of the garden to play games and do little events, and generally annoy the 'usual' pubgoers. I don't think we've ever been more welcome anywhere else.

Still, the Halloween Party has a long and illustrious history, with prizes given for good and bad costumes alike, long walks up and down the canal into town past drugdealers, plenty of high jinks and tomfoolery, and an ever-present feeling of geekiness, provided in part by RPGSoc, who have always been invited since we share many of the same interests.

So, who will win this year's costume prizes? Will it be a roleplayer in LARP gear, a computer gamer in a costume bought off eBay or some creative geek who spent all of Geeky Crafts polishing off their hand-made contraptions? I might be a LARPer, but I know where my vote goes...



The SFFS Halloween Party is from 7pm on 29th October 2011 at the Johnson Arms. Be there or be somewhere infinitely less geeky.



Quiz Time!

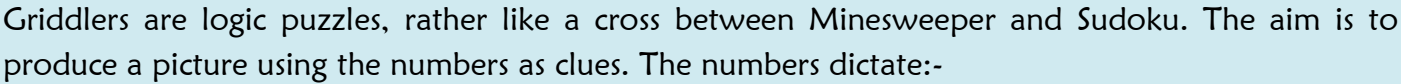
To set things going in this new edition of the 'Zine, let's have a quiz! Answers will be at the end of the issue. Good luck! Quiz and Griddlers by Graham Moore

FINAL FANTASY 1-10 TRIVIA QUIZ

Pop quiz! So.... you've played every game in the series, defeated Ozma with a Level 1 party and have the chocobo theme as your ringtone, but how much do you really know about Final Fantasy? Improve your SeeD rank by answering these questions and with the help of some strangely-dressed travellers, some glitch abuse and a lot of level-grinding, you can put another long-haired megalomaniac in his place and save the world once more!

Disclaimer: The questions only consider FFs 1-10 (the franchise is too large otherwise). I am using the Japanese numbering system and deliberately not using Roman numerals for ease of reading. Oh, and possible spoilers.

1. What accessory typically makes the player immune to all status effects?
2. What are the five main regions of FF8?
3. What weapon in FF2 is notorious for making the final boss very easy?
4. What is Nobuo Uematsu's primary contribution to the games series?
5. In FF7, it is not possible to have more than one copy of which Materia?
6. What is X-Death/Exdeath's true form?
7. How are Yuna and Brother related?
8. What item is most commonly used to feed/summon chocobos?
9. What phrase, uttered by Tellah in FF4, is one of the best known in the series?
10. What are the names of the WEAPONS that appear in FF7?
11. What is Princess Garnet's birth name?
12. What item is needed to upgrade your character classes in FF1?
13. Which recurring enemy uses the Everyone's Grudge attack?
14. Which staple Final Fantasy creature was first seen in Doga and Unne's house in FF3?
15. Who are the only three characters you need to reach Kefka's tower?
16. Which Guardian Forces (FF8) can only be obtained with use of a PocketStation?
17. In Tetra Master, what numbers/letters would be written on the most powerful card?
18. What is the most damaging attack in the first 10 games?
19. Who created the Final Fantasy franchise?
20. Who can rename your characters in FF4?
21. Which character class in FF5 requires the most AP to master?
22. What is the name of Seymour's Overdrive?
23. How do you get Excalibur II in FF9?
24. In FF6, Ragnarok is the only Esper that teaches which spell?
25. In FF8, which character/s can acquire their ultimate weapon/s on Disc 1?
26. Which were first and last FF games (of 1-10) to be released in Europe?
27. Who is Aeris' father?
28. What is the final dungeon of FF2?
29. Which rare enemy in the original FF1 is usually considered the series' first superboss?
30. Fryd tuac drec cyo?



- a) how many solid blocks there are in that row or column
- b) how many squares make up each block
- c) the order in which they appear

For example; [2, 7, 5] means there is a block of 2, followed by a block of 7, followed by a block of 5, with *at least one space* in between each of them. However, the clues do not say *where* the blocks appear – this you must work out with logic. Here are some hints:-

- a) consider the extremes of possibility with regards to where a block can be and you'll find there are certain squares that must be filled in all cases.
- b) once you know where part of a block is, squares that cannot contain part of any block can be crossed out.

There are several other techniques one needs for solving Griddlers, but I'll leave you to work them out. Try the smaller puzzle “Good Knight” before moving on to the larger one “A Girl's Best Companion”.

Good Knight:

[illegible]

A Girl's Best Companion:

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On Creepypasta – By Sam Kurd

Creepypasta is the internet equivalent of sitting under a sheet with a friend, gripping torches and telling each other scary stories long after your bedtime.



No.

The term ‘creepypasta’ comes from ‘copypasta’, the practice of copying phrases, posts or stories and pasting them around the internet. Copy/paste. Copypasta. I’m sure I don’t need to explain it. Creepypasta is the same, only done with material that is ... well ... creepy.

Most creepypastas are takes on urban legends, many of which predate the internet. They’re based on the sort of stories you can find at Snopes.com, stories of mysterious ghostly saviours, horrifically inappropriate fast food ingredients and drug-addled parents cooking their children by accident. The sort of thing that gets passed around in chain letter spam emails that you delete without reading.

To say that these stories vary in quality is putting it mildly. Some are delightfully eerie and chilling, others are tired retreads of the ‘killer was in the house the whole time, ZOMG’ theme. Some will keep you awake for hours, plagued by unsettling thoughts, where others, others will have you scrolling down to the next one. There’s simply so many out there that you’re bound to get plenty of chaff along with the wheat. The creepy, creepy wheat.

It’s not limited to stories, though. Creepypasta also comes in image and video form, the former usually being either old creepy pictures or photomanipulations, both subtle and not so much. Videos and .gif files rely heavily on the ‘screamer’ technique. You’re sat looking at a picture thinking that it’s not all that creepy and

wondering what all the fuss is about OH GOD SUDDEN FLASHING IMAGE OF A SKINLESS FACE WITH A SCREAMING NOISE GAH. Not subtle. Not clever. Not funny. And not creepy. There's nothing creepy about jump scares.

What is it that makes a creepypasta creepy? Usually they play on our primal fears; unknown creatures lurking in the dark feature heavily, as do strangers with evil intentions. The best evoke a feeling of helplessness and confusion, a sense that the previously ordinary is now sinister and cannot be trusted. Eyeless faces, sentient objects, supposedly safe places we take for granted – in the right hands all can leave you with a chill and a shudder.

Creepypastas of note include the Slender Man Mythos, the mysterious Ben from Majora's Mask and pretty much anything from the SCP foundation's creepypasta page. The SCP Foundation itself is worth checking out – they're a fictional institute for the containment of dangerous/weird objects, creatures and people. Some are merely kooky, though the creepier entries make you glad that they don't actually exist. Probably.

If you're feeling brave, check out the sources listed at the Know Your Meme.com creepypasta entry. Go on. It's perfectly safe. You might want to leave the lights on tonight, though.

The 'Zine Serial story – part one – by William Dawson

The Grand Tour of Gerald Worthington, Esquire

Part I: By what Means does our Hero make his Entry in to the Grand Tour

It was in the eighty-fifth year of the epoch of the brood of the Hanoverian George, of the eighteenth century after the birth of the lackey-corpse Christ, and Master Worthington was preparing for the Grand Tour.

His father, the Squire Worthington of Worthington-upon-Tees, was of course present to make his farewells. "I am sure, sir," he said, striding over in the late afternoon sun and giving his hand with great vigour, "that you will acquit yourself nobly."

Master Worthington promised, hand on his heart, that he would.

"I am sure, sir," Squire Worthington said again, "that you will acquit yourself nobly."

Master Worthington, taking note of the wound adorning his father's throat, smiled broadly and promised, hand on heart, that he would.

"I am sure, sir," Squire Worthington said again, and it is likely that this most stout and genial of gentlemen would have affirmed the nobility of his beloved son, were it not for the swift intervention of his wife. The Lady Worthington, smiling in the red-lipped manner of her rank, took the Squire's head gently in her arms, and laid him upon the floor.

"Might it not be, mother," said Master Worthington, "that... I know not how to say it."

"Oh, la! Your education does you great credit!" laughed the Lady Worthington, fanning herself as a jenny spins (and nigh decapitating a servant in the process as they rushed to fetch the august and worthy Squire), "but it is unnecessary to be so discreet about such matters."

Master Worthington, his gaze fixed firmly upon the polished buckles of his boots, decided that it was so. "Might it not be, mother," said he, "that your tenderness and affection are putting a stress upon him? For his disposition is most..."

"You do speak a great nonsense sometimes, Gerald. Only sometimes, mark you, and your tutors in particular."

Master Worthington agreed that this was so; that his tutors and masters, at Eton and Oxford, had a great propensity for purveying nonsense to young sons of genteel and lamian family. "But," he ventured to add, "for little longer."

"Assuredly not! For you, my son, will acquit yourself honourably." The Lady Worthington's smile broadened, the fangs brought to the fore. "I am sure of it."

"Quite so, mother. Quite so."

"The Grand Tour of Europe. A chance for you, my son, to see the world, in all its riches, to glimpse the glory of ancient Rome from the comfort of a gondola in Venice, and the splendour and learning of those mortal... *philosophes*, those Frenchmen, from a Parisian opera house."

“The wonders of Rome have been remarked upon, mother; I have studied them under Master-“

“Yes, you indeed have.” Lady Worthington, in one of the displays which were by turns to characteristic and alien to her, laid a hand upon his arm. “You indeed have.”

They were, for a time, silent; the pair of them staring out across the hillside, watching the lights of the village flicker under the rising moon, and the crows flutter from the earth.

“It has been many years, my son,” said the Lady Worthington after a time, “since I travelled the Continent myself. I will be curious, most curious, to learn how it has changed.” Master Worthington briefly considered assuring her that he would write; but he knew her moods, and kept his silence. This returned, for a time. “I have friends, there, who will do their utmost to assist you.”

“More of your friends, mother? Your fine, august friends?”

“Indeed so. There were only ever, I must confess, a handful. They kept us in money, as did my own endeavours.” As did, of course, the Squire Worthington’s rents; but this did not appear to enter the mind of his good lady wife. “They were great gentlemen, when I knew them. Good sorts, who are much inclined to share their prey and wisdom alike. The nights-aye, and the days, too-that I spent alongside them, were magnificent.” She looked as if to say more, but stopped herself quickly. “Quite magnificent.”

“So, then,” said Master Worthington with genuine curiosity, “why did your travels cease?” This was not the action, in his experience (or, at least, that of his colleagues at Oxford), of a young lamian with the continent at his feet and fast friends at his side.

“And why did I settle down with the Squire?” The Lady Worthington smiled fondly up at the manor house, in easy eyeshot for a lamian. “Because, my son, we must all settle down. Even you must, some day.”

It was only then that Master Worthington realised just how small his mother was. He bent himself down, and accepted a kiss. There were, needless to say, no teeth in it.

“Farewell, mother,” he said, rising at last. “The night moves swiftly.”

“Farewell,” she replied simply. “Farewell.”

In the saddlebags of his grey gelding, which he mounted and rode with great skill, Master Worthington had a store of guineas; a flask of brandy; a good loaf, and other provisions; a notebook and ink; a printed copy of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (and, guiltily beneath it, a volume of *Tristram Shandy*); and, in addition, a pair of duelling pistols. These had been born, to his great surprise, by his father, who had by all accounts been a man of great character in his youth. With resolution in his mind, Master Worthington vowed that he would acquit himself nobly; and spurred his horse into action.

It was the custom in that time, before the age of the Empress Victoria, for the lamina to ride abroad, in the manner of mortals. This, it was believed, would be less intimidating (and, by those of a sanguine disposition, to give them less of a chance to rout.) Whilst now this may appear impractical and sedate, it was of no objection to Master Worthington; for, above all things, his passion was riding.

It was a clear night, and man and horse crackled along the cobblestones of the long road to the Channel Ports. Gazing into the forest around him, the rider whooped with joy; here, he glimpsed a gamekeeper, squinting at a lantern, and he found the poacher's tracks with the greatest ease (but gave no warning, for he was not averse to acts of roguery); there, a fox with perfect clarity, and the temptation to chase it was quite overwhelming-but, no, the ship's captain is a Dutchman, of that most precise and orderly of races, and he would need to arrive precisely on time. The moon, the lamian's friend, seemed to smile down. An owl hooted, and he whooped with delight, going on, ever on, cannoning down that narrow track with the wind in his hair (the hat having been whipped off by wind or branches), and the scent of his life in his nostrils. The scent of the journey, and all the wonders it could bring. For he was a young lad at liberty at the first time, and many gentlemen of thirst-

It was, therefore, an unpleasant surprise to him when a rope, quite suddenly, rose up between the trees before him.

The Lamian, with perfect dispatch, made as to leap clear-but a boot tugged at the stirrup, and he had a vague impression of a fall; he fell to the ground with a crash, and had a rather more acute impression of-that most terrible, astonishing of things-pain!

"Good evening to you, young sir."

It was an Irishman's voice, calm and mannered. Master Worthington, groaning to himself, disliked it intensely; but Eton took over. "Good evening," he replied, pawing at the ground and trying to rise. There was-he knew this, had been affirmed it by his mother, and now hoped she was right-nothing broken, for a Lamian was most resilient in that regard. "And who might I have the honour of addressing?" If only, he was thinking, he could reach his-

There was a long, grating click, as a pistol cocked; and a figure stepped out onto the road: a rather stout one, in a dark great coat, with a feather in its hat and a brace of pistols in its hands. "I," the figure said, "am Captain Tempest."

"The Captain Tempest?" asked Master Worthington, moving closer, and ready to spring. "I have read-"

The pistols jerked up. "The very same. These pistols have silver in them, of course."

"Ah." Master Worthington stopped. "I should," he said, "expect nothing more of such a notable highwayman."

"Why, thank you. Thank you very much indeed. I am always surprised how far my fame has spread. And now, I fear, we must get to the more regrettable stage of the proceedings." The highwayman hooted, in the manner of an owl, and a pair of burly, most common looking men emerged from the forest; both had heavy mallets at their belts, and one an oaken stake. "Your saddlebags, please."

"How," asked Master Worthington, fists clenched as his possessions were strung out across the road, "did you conceal yourselves?"

"You are a most bold young fellow! I would have said young man, but fellow will have to do. It was a simple matter; I simply hid behind a tree. Considering matters of practicality, rather than their

own arts and aptitudes, is probably something a lamian should do more often.” Captain Tempest smiled broadly, demonstrating blackened teeth.

“Ah.” Master Worthington turned, to find his money being weighed. “I pray of you, do not touch my wallet further! For it contains a letter of introduction that is very dear to me, and quite irreplaceable!”

“A letter of introduction?” Captain Tempest shrugged under his coat. “What sort of letter of introduction?”

“Why, to a sea voyage. I am, you see, in preparation to travel. And-“

“With respect, young fellow, your preparations for travel could probably have been better handled.”

“Yes, I see that now.”

“If in no other respect, your horse is ridden mostly to death. You did, if I may be so bold to say so, wish to feed on it later, as a form of Breakfast?” This was indeed so; but the Lamian did not think it prudent to say so. “No matter-it is of no import. But a letter of introduction... to a sea captain? Wherever to?”

“Why- in Flanders. I misremember the exact name.” Master Worthington watched, as the golden future started to trickle away. “But... I beg of you...”

“Indeed you do.” After having one of the burly young gentlemen inspect the letter, Captain Tempest nodded. “Indeed you do. And your wishes shall be granted. You will keep the letter, and your boots-which, due to your pleasant manners and conversation, and exquisite taste in reading, I will keep for myself. Good night to you. May I suggest the Royal Oake in the next village for lodging? I am sure that your family can recompense them most admirably, should they so choose.”

“But-“ Captain Tempest, weapons still trained upon Master Worthington, started to withdraw to the forest.

“Master Worthington,” he said reasonably, “I do hope that, in your future, you will acquit yourself nobly. I hope that we meet again in more amicable circumstances, when you can tell me of all your adventures, and I of mine. But-at the present-in the name of Christ and his Saints, get to Port, and get out of this God-damned country!”

And, with that, the three mortals were gone, leaving the Lamian afoot, and with all the world before him.

PART 2 WILL APPEAR IN THE NEXT EDITION OF THE 'ZINE! WATCH THIS SPACE!

E-sport review – By Alexander Carrington

Another month, another large Starcraft Tournament, and once again the Koreans are here to destroy the brave 'Foreigners', except this time they could be walking away with more than a large check. The e-sport scene has exploded over the last few years and this can be attributed in a large respect to the remarkable success and viewer-friendliness of Starcraft 2. Many of the larger Western tournaments can quite confidently expect around 80,000 live viewers for their finals and hundreds of thousands over the



course of the tournaments. This has naturally attracted more sponsorship deals, more professional players and teams, bigger tournaments and HUGE smiles on the faces of nerds around the globe. The recent IPL tournament finals were held in one of the larger Vegas hotels, MLG hops around America with lorries full of the best audio-visual gear on the market setting up in large hotels and halls (which rapidly become filled to capacity), and broadcast it all with a satellite link station that the royal wedding used to ensure perfect quality was maintained.

This has been a delight for all gamers but it does beg the question, will this bubble burst? Can companies continue to legitimise the money they are pumping into sponsorship deals and advertising at these events and on the online streams. Many have been asking the question recently and have been trying to relate it to similar problems that have occurred in the past, such as the WarCraft 3 bubble that burst earlier in the decade. Others have tried to argue that the bubble isn't really a bubble at all but a solid and stable new market which will continue to expand as e-sports becomes more 'main-stream' thus improving viewing numbers and sponsorship further. Although both arguments have merits I cannot help feel that people may be ignoring a crucial reason for the success of Starcraft and the rapid rise of e-sports, namely the initial success of 'foreigners' in the game.

The division between Korea and the rest of the world harks back to the original game which became a national sport in Korea and their players capable of performing at a level that would make the Mona Lisa beam with delight. It has become the Mecca for Starcraft pro-gamers with the top players making hundreds of thousands of pounds per year, dating pop stars (or at least Korean pop stars) and generally living the good life. In Starcraft 2 the Koreans are still regarded as the best, but for the first 6 to 8 months there were cases when foreigners went toe-to-toe with Koreans and won. Importantly, Western tournaments with reasonable prize money, like MLG and the TSL, arose and were won by Foreigners. In fact the West seemed to finally be producing good players that could compete at international levels whilst retaining interesting and relatable personalities that the



Figure 1 – Typical Dull Korean Celebration

West could rally behind, like the Badboy of gaming Greg 'Idra' Fields. This was a marked difference to the Korean players who have traditionally frowned upon overt displays of emotion after winning or losing games resulting in many seemingly uninteresting players (outside of the games), with a few notable exceptions. The problem with having so many fans focused on the foreign players is that now, when Korean players have begun to both compete in the wealthy foreign tournaments but also dominate them, the fans and viewers that

became used to Western personalities and success might wane whilst the Korean moon waxes. As a result, the money that followed the foreigner fans might dry up too taking with it much of the impetus that Western e-sports has been revelling in recently. The Koreans might be taking home the majority of the prize money of each tournament but if they aren't careful they could bleed the West of the money and viewers it needs to maintain growth in e-sports.

This could, however, be depressed doom-mongering with minimal research written for the sake of getting something other than another short story into the 'Zine. In fact, the Rise of E-Sports in the West we are currently witnessing could be the first signs of a mainstream acceptance of pro-gamers and e-sports resulting in a select few 'Baller-Nerds' dating the likes of Keira Knightley and Scarlett Johansson. I certainly hope that the bubble will not burst as it has in the past, be it from limitations in technology or the games, ignorance and idiocy surrounding pro-gamers salaries or simply lack of support of the e-sport scene. This time it could be different, this time the money, viewers and developer support might turn out to be lasting and dedicated to the cause. However, despite the money and viewers that are flooding the stage, I cannot help but fear that this is just another step towards the trap door of failure that seems to define e-sports. As much as I love being right, when I come to reflect on this article having just watched the MLG grand finals 2036 on my television ... or perhaps having had it broadcast into my brain directly, I will be far happier than if it turns out I am living in a world without mainstream e-sports and cranial implants.

Starcraft 2 review – By Alexander Carrington

Reviewing Starcraft 2 is rather odd in that it is both topical and up-to-date, and over a year late. The game was released in July 2010 and has achieved remarkable success for Blizzard, a developer that was in dire need of a big game after embarrassing series of failures like Diablo 2 Warcraft 3 and World of Warcraft ... Oh wait. That Starcraft 2 is a huge success, with over 3million units having been sold so far and a guaranteed trilogy of games is not overly surprising given that the first game, released in 1998, became a national sport in Korea and still maintains a huge following. However, the prequels success is not the simple answer for the Starcraft 2's which relies upon some of the most impressive game design in Single-player, Multi-player and modding options.



The game's initial premise is almost embarrassingly simple ... and indeed stolen from Gamesworkshop. There are three warring races, the Terrans (grumpy, unshaven and wearing bulky suits of power armour), the Zerg (alien race reliant upon massing large numbers of creatures with large teeth) and the Eldar ... I mean the Protoss (slowly dying race of technologically and psychic advanced aliens). The single player starts four years after the first game, and follows the exploits of Jim Raynor who is introduced as being gruff, American and enjoys shooting TVs when they say things he disagrees with. The plot is not exactly gripping with a fairly simple revenge motif between Jim Raynor and Emperor Mengst (who is disappointing lacks a Ming the Merciless style beard and is therefore a second class of Emperor) tying the first half of the skirmish missions together. The second half can, in the most basic terms, be viewed as adding the drama between two exes, albeit these two are now different species and apparently destined to either shooting or eating the other. A little bit of mystery is introduced with the mystical ancient race called the Xel'Naga and a prophesy of them returning to the galaxy they once owned and are, quite understandably, annoyed at finding some squatters there and are going to kill everything.

The writers seem to enjoy throwing as many ideas and clichés into a blender and using the resulting mess to form the Starcraft 2 plot but in the end the plot runs fairly smoothly and any seeming jumps in motive by the main character are hidden under a mountain of amazing music which is perfectly suited to the races and situations you find yourself in, and a plethora of fun and interesting units and missions. In fact, if one ignores the plot completely and simply views it as a "I am a hired gun killing *****" RTS game, there is a remarkable degree of fun to be had and desire to



complete the campaign simply to find out which new unit and setting you will be facing. Each mission provides new and interesting twists on an otherwise fairly well explored genre, for example a mission floods most of the map with the magical power of turning living matter into chunks of black and smoking charcoal every 2 minutes whilst another primarily limits the player to producing only air units, or

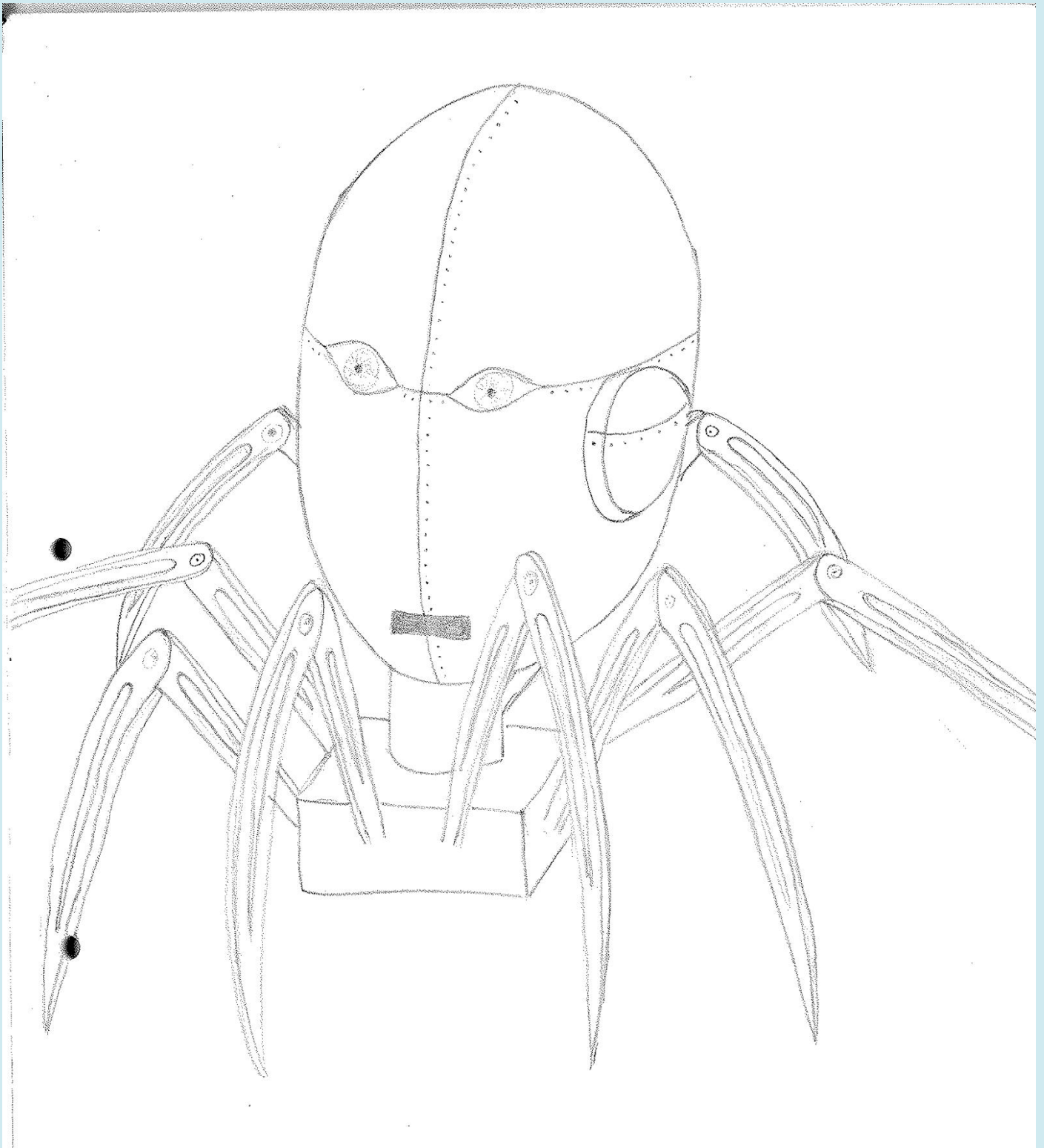
having to survive a vampire horror movie with night attacks and rebuilding during the day. The inclusion of mission objectives and rewards for completing them (primarily unlocking new profile pictures for your account) and a reasonable range of difficulty levels ensures that the game has multiple hours of game play and replay value, if you like getting rewards, full completion notifications and a challenge, but even with a fast play through it has more Single Player game play than many new games so complaints are hard to find.

The jewel in the crown for Starcraft is the Multiplayer that has a professional gaming scene blossoming around it, which is now dragging the entire e-sport scene along with it. All three races are involved with players generally choosing one and then attempting to perfect that play style and defeat random people on the internet. There is a selection of both team games and solo battles; 1v1s, 2v2s, 3v3s, 4v4s and Free For Alls each with varying tactics and amusement levels which is as much dependant on personal choice as the game's design. The game's multiplayer is designed, unsurprisingly, around the 1v1 game play with all game balance focused on it and Blizzard has met with remarkable success in this respect, even if many of the players believe that it is still dangerously imbalanced and broken. The game play in many ways is like a modern mix of chess, Chinese Go, and rock-paper-scissors with economy control, unit production and unit control the key to winning. The layers of strategy are truly extraordinary with the result that there is always something new to learn and improve upon.

A crucial facet of Starcraft's popularity is the effort that has been placed into ensuring that the game is observer-friendly. The developers worked from the beginning to produce a game that would be able to immediately take centre place in the e-sport scene and they succeeded magnificently. The units and animations although detailed and descriptive are never overwhelming, which is both a boon to players and observers. Major Starcraft 2 tournaments can draw upwards of 70,000-80,000 live viewers for the grand finals and hundreds of thousands over the entire tournament, and amazingly many viewers do not even play the game and if they do they only play at a low level. Hundreds of people watch Starcraft streamers, like ex-pro and commentator Day9, despite not playing the game.

Every part of the game, and subsequent updates, reflects how blizzard has maintained a constant idea of how and why they were producing the game. The single player campaign has been well honed and retains interest whilst the multiplayer is remarkably well balanced despite the constantly evolving metagame and staggering numbers of players all trying to find the most imbalanced way of playing the game to their advantage. Given that the game is over a year old you have probably already decided on whether to buy it or not so I shall spare you the barrage of stars and thumbs. However, if you have not heard of the game or decided not to buy it, I would strongly advise buy what time will remember as a staggeringly impressive creation which acted as the catalyst to a blossoming Age of E-Sports.

Picture/drawing time!



This awesome spider was drawn by our Librarian Verity!

If you have any drawings/photographs/pictures etc that you think are pretty geeky/awesome and you want to show them off, please feel free to email them to the 'Zine editor and they'll be in the next edition!

Dust – By Nat Wassell

It had been a long winter.

So long, in fact, that in living memory there was no season but. The knowledge of sunlight's warmth on bare skin belonged only in legend, the sound of bird song only in myth. And because it had been so long since any of those things existed, there had begun the whispers. That the past, so exalted, was a lie. That history was just that; a story made up to pass the time during the endless darkness. A way of explaining the very nature of an existence so bleak that had no such explanation existed, all hope would be lost. And it was because of those whispers that the authorities accelerated the Emergency Plan, implicated so many years before, and deemed it time to go Outside.

For a set of guidelines put in place in the midst of unmitigated chaos, the Emergency Plan had served its purpose surprisingly well. Written in Spanish, and the dying languages of Mandarin and English, the Plan had originally been conceived as a last hope; something to cling onto in the middle of the horror that had befallen a once green and prosperous world. No one had expected the Plan to actually work, not even those responsible for its manifestation, so it was tribute to the survival instincts of all those left behind that the Plan provided for them all that it had so recklessly promised. It would be the first time that the Emergency Plan had been disregarded, if the authorities decided that the time had come to send people Outside, but it was a necessary move. The people were forgetting, the last straw was breaking, and all the determination that had been poured into survival by generations unwilling to accept their fate was being laid to waste. It was time for a change.

Seve was a pilot, one trained to drive the vehicles designed to carry people around the vast compound. A man of fifty, he was on the cusp of the age limit for those to be chosen to go Outside, but he knew that each of the two hundred teams being formed needed a pilot and that he was still one of the best. As a child, he had grown up hearing the story of how, someday, people would go exploring and that only the best and brightest from their fields would be allowed to go. Children before him had grown up, lived and died in the hope that the day might come for them, but Seve had always known that he would be one of the lucky thousand chosen. A rarity, in that he did not go into the same field of expertise as his parents and their parents before him, he had been trained as a pilot by the best that the compound had ever seen; Abran Cooper-Vega. The old man had recognised talent when he saw it and nurtured Seve right up until his death, teaching him all he knew of piloting and vehicle maintenance, as well as to speak the increasingly rare language of English. Now, if people in his district needed English words read to them, they came to Seve, and if

they needed to train a particularly promising pilot, they came to him too. People knew Seve. They knew he'd be assigned to a team, so it came as no surprise that when the team contingents were made public, Seve's was the first name on the list.

He met his team only once before they were due to head out. There was their engineer, Sophia Torres; the doctor, Alessandro Ramirez; the scientist, Hannah Li and the soldier, Leon Castillo-Kuo. Seve was the oldest on his team by a long shot, the others barely thirty, although already experts in their fields and all as excited as he was to be chosen for such an honour. Of the four, he had only met Leon before; the soldier had cross-trained as a pilot in a scheme introduced a few years before designed to encourage more diverse skills among the population. Leon had been the only one of the group assigned to him that Seve hadn't grown frustrated with, and he was almost willing to fight for the then nineteen year old to remain with the piloting contingent. But Leon was a good soldier as well, and they had not been willing to give him up. Seve was glad to have the youngster assigned to his team now; it would be reassuring to know that he had not only backup but also someone interesting to talk to. On the morning that they were due to head out, with the vehicle packed and the team assembled at one of the heavily guarded access points, Leon was practically jumping up and down with excitement, his new boots squeaking in time with his bounces.

"Joven, if you don't calm down I'm going to lock you in the hold until we get out there," Seve deadpanned, clapping the youngest team member on the shoulder, "Save some of that energy for exploring."

Behind Seve's back, Hannah rolled her eyes and grinned. Seve could tell from Leon's laugh that someone was mocking him but he let it go; it was important that the team bond. They could be together for a long time and it wouldn't do to have any of them feeling uncomfortable with one another.

Sophia chose that moment to come jogging back from the access point control room where she had been having a last minute consult with the engineers on duty. Her dark eyes shining, she called out her news, evidently too excited to wait until she got to them.

"Jefe! We're ready! Let's go!"

Nobody needed telling twice. As the rest of the team scrambled aboard the vehicle, Seve took a brief second to breathe and lose himself in the enormity of the moment. The guards around the point watched him enviously, this old man who was getting to fulfil the wishes of so many people. The teams in the vehicles already lined up behind theirs bristled with their own energy, knowing that they were a few moments closer to getting Outside, once this team had made the first step. Seve waved to them, unsurprised to find his hand shaking as he did, and climbed into the vehicle.

Alessandro was waiting for him; he held out a large, steady hand and helped Seve abroad, pulling the door closed behind him as he did. Leon was already settled in the co-pilot seat, his face focused as he performed the prep.

“That’s my job, *joven*,” Seve said lightly, settling himself into the large pilot’s seat and turning to check that the other three were strapped into their own, “Everybody set back there?”

“*Si!*”

“Leon, let them know we’re ready.”

The scream of the alarm should have come as a shock, as the machinery warned that the access point to Outside was being opened. The noise barely registered though, as five pairs of eyes stared expectantly ahead of them, Seve easing the vehicle along the tunnel that would eventually lead to Outside. The vehicle lights kicked in as they slid into the darkness, casting long shadows along the edges of the tunnel. As soon as the whole of the vehicle out of the access point, the radio crackled into life.

“Congratulations,” cried the voice recognisable as the chief engineer of the section, his tone suggesting that he was fighting back tears even as he spoke, “Good luck, *mis amigos!* Come home safely.”

And then the point closed and they were alone in the blackness. Seve stopped the vehicle to catch his breath, realising that he had been holding it since almost the moment he set them moving. Next to him, Leon seemed to be doing the same thing, although the radiant smile never left his face. Glancing behind him, he saw similar looks of shock and sheer joy on the faces of the team. History was happening. History that might one day be told to children who once again walked on the grass of a healthy and whole planet, who could smell the flowers and take a dive into a pool of crisp, shining water. History that meant something all of a sudden. Names that would never be forgotten.

Sophia found her voice first, unbuckling her seat belt and walking to stand behind Seve. She laid a hand on his shoulder, kneading it slightly until he responded with a look that was almost lost.

“*Jefe*, we better get moving. It only takes half an hour to prep for the next team to come out.”

Moving slowly, Seve nodded and moved his hands over the control panels. The vehicle lurched forwards, and the movement in itself seemed to be enough to jerk his teammates from their melancholy. They talked quietly, periodically releasing themselves from their seat belts to wander around the cabin. Alessandro entertained them all with paraphrased versions of the old stories that his grandfather told him, his deep baritone voice resonating pleasantly in the cabin and contributing

heavily to the warm feeling of camaraderie that had seized them all. Hannah prepared them all some simple food when she judged them to have been travelling long enough to need it; the fact that none of them ate very much of it was perhaps the only indicator that the excitement and trepidation was actually affecting them physically.

It was only three hours later, although it felt like so much longer, that the light in the tunnel began to change. Leon noticed it first, his keen eyes having been fixed on the tunnel for most of the trip. He pointed wordlessly and Seve cut the lights. The space in front of them darkened but not entirely; a faint yellowish light was continuing to cast shadows on the walls.

“Strap up, *ninos*,” Seve grinned, waving vaguely at seats in the back, “We’re on the approach.”

He didn’t move again until he heard the definitive clicks of three seat belts, and then began to push the vehicle forwards. He sincerely hoped that there wouldn’t be a reason for them to be strapped in once they reached the surface, but it was better to be safe. He felt the vehicle shift beneath him and compensated for the sudden uphill slope of the tunnel. The patch of light grew stronger as they crept closer, and when it had filled the space in front of them, he held his breath. They broke into the light, the vehicle straining at the last climb, and then he brought it to a stop. The light was almost blinding in intensity after the hours in the dark and he closed his eyes. The only sound came from somewhere on his left, as Leon unclipped his seat belt.

“*Mierda!*”

At the sound of the young man’s expletive, Seve’s eyes snapped open.

“What is it, *joven*?”

“Birds! There are birds!”

Gazing out of the window, unable to move anything but his eyes, Seve watched as a flock of black birds skimmed across the grey sky. The three in the back scrambled to see too, standing close behind the pilot’s chair and watching in mute fascination as the birds completed their invisible circuit and then disappeared across the horizon. Until just three hours before, birds had been creatures of fairy tales, confined to stories like those told by Alessandro’s grandfather. Seve knew right then that even if they achieved nothing more on this exploration, he would die happy.

“We should get moving,” he said eventually, his hands reaching reluctantly for the controls.

“*Jefe*, we’ve got half an hour on the next team. Let’s stop here and stretch our legs. Please.”

Sophia's plea was echoed by the rest of the team, Leon already at the back of the vehicle and pulling their atmospheric suits out of the storage compartment. With a shrug, Seve stood too; he wasn't going to argue with an opportunity to have a look around. They had an assigned quadrant to travel to and explore, but this was literally an experience that would never be repeated. They would never be the first people on the surface again. The team, needing no encouragement, was already scrambling into their suits and assembling by the air lock, waiting for Seve to be ready. They were going to let him out first, he realised, let him be the first name that people would remember when they thought about this magnificent day. With a tear in his eye that he couldn't explain, he nodded to Hannah, who opened the airlock. He was planning on making his exit as dignified as he could but the moment that the door was open, his legs moved first and he ran down the ramp, only coming to a halt at the bottom. The team charged after him, leaping off the sides of the ramp so that he didn't have to move. Leon threw himself onto his stomach, pressing his visor to the ground as though he were kissing the dust. Alessandro and Hannah knelt with slightly more decorum, gathering handfuls of the dusty earth and letting it fall between their fingers, whilst Sophia reached out and took Seve's hand. She led him away from the vehicle and turned him around, pointing to a remarkably healthy looking tree that had been out of sight behind the vehicle. He walked forwards and pressed his hands to the trunk, his forehead resting on the silvery bark.

"We should carve our initials," Sophia said eventually, her voice echoing in his helmet, "So that people remember."

She disappeared and came back with the sharpest maintenance tool she could find, calling the others over to join them. With shaking hands, Seve reached out and carved a tiny 'S.B'. Leon went next, his hand slightly lighter than Seve's, and then he disappeared whilst the others took their turns. Alessandro was just adding his moniker to the end of the list when there was a startled cry over the communication system in their helmets. The four scattered, their voices jumbled as they called for Leon. Sophia spotted him first, standing about two hundred metres away, his gaze fixed on the ground.

She began to run when she heard the first sob.

By the time Seve reached the group, all four were staring at the same point on the ground. Leon was still crying, his hand held by a similarly trembling Hannah.

"Joven, what's wrong?"

The young man pointed wordlessly at the ground. Seve followed his finger. He didn't even know he had fallen to his knees until Alessandro knelt beside him, an arm around his shoulders.

A footprint.

A human footprint.

In the dust.

And suddenly, the last grasp being made at championing history and the victory of the Emergency Plan didn't seem much like an adventure anymore.

Forbidden Sights – By Sam Kurd

I had been crouching in the bushes outside her house for at least two hours when the show started. Some people might call it obsession. Me, I like to call it dedication. When I fall for a woman, I fall fast and I fall hard. Too hard for some, sure, but you know chicks, am I right? Sure I am, you sly dog. A woman just needs to be shown some dedication, she'll come around eventually. That or call the cops on you, but that's usually a sign of a crazy bitch, you need to learn to stay the fuck away from those ones.

So anyway, like I was saying. I had been crouching in the bushes outside her house for at least two hours when the show started. And boy what a show! Brother, I tell you, you ain't seen nothing till you've seen a woman in her prime all- but wait, I'm getting ahead of myself. Gimme another cigarette, will you? Aw, come on, you know I'm good for it. 'Sides, I need as many as I can get after what I've seen. Thanks, man.

After I'd just started getting cramp in my legs and was thinking about trying for a different bush, she finally appeared in her bedroom window. Man, what a woman. She was a real classy lady, you know, the type you can't just bang and run out on. You got to at least stay for seconds, you know what I mean? Hair like ... and skin, dude, her skin was ... man, words can't ... tell you what, let's just stick with beautiful shall we? Not just smoking hot, but something else. Yeah. Beautiful.

I didn't have to wait long. It was like she knew I was there, wanted to give me a show. In fact, for a second there I could have sworn she was looking right at me. I held my breath, kept myself perfectly still, but it was only for a second and I wasn't sure I'd even seen it. That's when she started undressing. Slowly. Painfully slowly, almost. It was ... what's that word, it's like 'sexy' but, you know, all classy and stuff? Sensuous, yeah. It was sensuous. I couldn't believe my luck. Normally I'm lucky if I get to see a tit or two, but this lady she stood right in front of her window, curtains open and all. Just staring out into the night as she slipped out of her dress. I remember it floated to the floor, like it was made out of feathers or something. Funny, at the time I don't think I even noticed it at all. I was hypnotized.

And then her fucking boyfriend walked in.

Man, what a mood-killer.

I mean, it ain't like he was one of those pretty boys who almost look like women from certain angles, you know? That would probably have been ok, I guess. He was a fucking Neanderthal. He had more muscle in his neck than I've got anywhere on me. He had eyebrows on his eyebrows. I'm telling you, if I was her I'd have made that guy wear a plastic bag over his head. Fuck paper. I know it's a cheap shot, but Jesus, talk about Beauty and the Beast.

For such a big guy he was quiet, though. He crept up from behind, slipped his arms around her. She smiled and sort of half-turned – and there it was again, just a second where I thought she was looking straight at me, sorta with one eye. Like we were sharing a private moment, like this was all part of a show for me. Then they kissed and she turned away to face him. I was all kinds of disappointed. I'd waited hours, and yeah I'd just had an awesome show, but I was hoping for more of her. Man, I could have eaten her up ... uh, dude, can I get another cigarette? Come on. Last one, I swear. Thanks. God, I need a drink.

So yeah. They started talking. Now at this point I should have just called it quits and gone back home. Cashed in my chips, so to speak. I know I should have done that. It would have been the smart thing to do. But God knows I've never been one for smarts. I tend to do my thinking with my fists. Or, you know, something else. Heheh. No, I know I should have gone home and left it there and then. But those maybe-imagined looks from her ... her skin, all soft-looking and olive-coloured ... Something stopped me from going. It was like I was trapped there. All I could do was sit and watch.

They talked a little. Then they stopped talking and started making with the sexy stuff. Well, this made me feel pretty uncomfortable. I mean, I'm not a perv, you know? I don't want to see two people getting it on, that's just weird. Unless they're two chicks, of course. But again, I didn't go. I was glued there, just watching as they kissed and, er, and then some. Things were getting pretty heated, but it didn't take long for things to go all kinds of wrong.

He started slipping his hands down where she obviously didn't want them to go. I could just about hear her tutting as she pushed his hands playfully away. This happened a couple of times before he got this real ugly look on his face. He got more forceful, started pulling her around. She scratched him, pushed him away from her and moved away from the window. That was nearly it for me. I felt a sudden rush like a flood, a pure need to get the hell out of there. Nearly did it, too. I think I shifted my weight a little, but then she was back at the window and somehow I just wasn't going anywhere. I froze. It was like some kind of ... well it sounds dumb but I guess it was

like some kind of magic. Yeah. Yeah, you go ahead and laugh, man. Go ahead and laugh. You ain't seen what I seen.

They started arguing. I couldn't hear what they were saying from where I was, but whenever I caught glimpses of her face as they stalked round each other, I could tell it was serious. She wasn't just pouting and tossing her hair the way women do when they're mad you ain't bought them a necklace or a ring or taken them out to eat in a while. There was fire in those eyes. Their voices were real low, I couldn't make out more than a murmur or two, but I figured it was probably pretty serious. I don't know what made me do it, but I found myself edging closer to the window, straining to listen.

I wasn't disappointed. They started pacing round the room, raising their voices. I could hear it, alright, only trouble is I couldn't understand it. It was like they were talking in some foreign language. Only it can't have been, cos I could make out plenty of words, and not the kind of words those foreign guys slip into English for, like 'cash' or 'benefits' or 'crack'. There were words like 'foolish'. 'Addiction.' 'Humans.'

The shit really hit the fan when she started laughing at him. From the look on his face, she'd just said something really cutting, really insulting. Probably saying his dick's on inside out or something. Then he hits her. And I don't mean like a love tap, I mean he backhands her across the face, man. Sends her across the room almost. Now here's the thing; he's a big guy, right? Big brutey guy. After he's sent her flying, she *gets straight back up*. No crying. No whimpering. She didn't even make a sound as she went down, and she's up in a flash. She had a hand pressed to her cheek, and man I'm not exaggerating when I say she was *pissed*. You know I said there was fire in her eyes just before? Well now it was fucking *Pompeii*. Rome was *burning* in there, man.

And then as quickly as she'd gotten up, she was smiling again. It was so weird. She just ran a finger down her cheek, which was already going red where he hit her, and then she just started beaming. She had the most beautiful smile I've ever seen, and I kinda get the feeling I'll never see one like it again. I found myself almost pressed up against the window, watching; I don't know what I was thinking, if I was thinking, I didn't even care if they saw me. Moth to a flame, man. Moth to a flame.

Her man, he eased up a little as she strutted across the room to him, all slinky and sexy. I could hear her purring, murmuring sweet nothings to him, could see her stroking his chest. Holding him in her arms. It took him a second to put his around her, I guess he was being cautious. Should have been more cautious.

She started to sway, moving him in time, starting a little dance. I guess he was relieved she didn't seem to be so pissed at him anymore, cos he got pretty into it. She danced him towards the window ... she danced him towards me ... and then ...

Now this is where it starts to get crazy, but I swear to God, this is what happened. I know you're not going to believe me, but I can't just sit here and not tell you my side of what came next. And you're my lawyer, so you've got to let me say it, right? I mean, that's how it works, right? Yeah? Yeah.

Ok. Ok. So. They were dancing by the window, slowly, going round in circles. He had his back to the window, I was about to make like a tree and get the hell outta there when her face peered round him and *my God she was definitely looking straight at me that time*. And she saw me. She looked right into my eyes, and the fire was back in hers but it had changed somehow, it was different, it was really weird. Her eyes looked almost purple now, and she was still smiling but it was wrong, that smile was wrong, it was wrong, too many teeth and her mouth, it was too big and it just got bigger and bigger as she smiled more and more teeth kept appearing *and then her fucking face cracked open, her head cracked right the fuck open and it was full of teeth!*

She bit into his side, and he screamed... my God, man, that scream. That was no human scream, it was the scream of an animal caught in a trap. He tried to push her off him, but she was latched on tight, and her arms, man, her arms! She didn't have any fucking hands any more, they were gone, what she had was claws, claws and these things like fucking tentacles. And she was digging into him, slashing him up, eating him a-fucking-live, man! The screaming! And the blood! Yellow blood! *It wasn't human blood!*

I was at the window, I got covered in this stuff, and chunks, chunks in my hair ... I ran, ran for miles, I don't know where I went ... the cops picked me up in that park and ... and ... well, and the rest you know.

I know how it sounds, Jesus I know I sound like a real crazy bastard, but I swear it's true. It's all true. It's what happened. It happened, and she's seen me. She knows what I saw. And she'll be coming after me. It doesn't matter if I go to jail or not. My number's up.

Help me? No. No you can't help me.

No one can help me.

Seeing a Man About a Dog - By John Steele

It was dark in Salzeir's. It was always dark in Salzeir's. Not a warm comforting darkness. Nor a cold and frightening darkness. It was more of a sickly and insidious darkness. The sort that lurks and waits. Never doing anything offensive or malicious, but always carrying the threat. The threat that, maybe, just maybe, if you make one misstep it will devour you. It was in all of the sphere of the world, of all the dark corners, a darkness quite without peer. It was a special darkness, a darkness built by man to hide his deeds and swaddle his secrets. Most of the other peerless darknesses are wild or bestial, occasionally one of their number is a slaving malevolence. But since they are all ultimately, of nature, they carry with them a feeling that they could perhaps be tamed. Despite the enormity of effort that this task might entail, the slim chance that they could be tamed, imparts a transience upon them that makes them seem just a little less dark. Sometimes all you need is a torch.

The darkness in Salzeir's is something quite different. Being as it is, a product of man, it has taken the qualities of man; it is cunning, deceitful, violent and patient. It is a construct of murder most foul, wrought in the forges of architecture and set loose upon an unsuspecting world. It has no master, it cannot have a master, for to master it would be to subvert its purpose and such an oversight was not included in its design. Perhaps this is all conjecture and in fact the lamps in Salzeir's are just a bit too dim to adequately illuminate the vaulted ceilings and colonnades. But it certainly feels unwelcoming. That is of course entirely the point.

* * *

The sound of urgent, dispassionate love making came from the adjacent booth muffled into a disturbing obscurity by wood scarred with the passage of time and careless patrons. Salzeir's was not one of Callis' favourite places. It wasn't because it was dirty and sordid, because he quite happily fell into those categories. It was because it was so terribly unnecessary. The entire point of Salzeir's was to provide a discrete and private meeting place for people from all walks of life. Somewhere where they could remain unobserved, unjudged and anonymous while being served a selection of fine wines, fine foods and fine narcotics. Providing you could afford the exorbitant rates. Salzeir's was the cloak that hid the fouler deeds and conspiracies of the lords temporal and criminal. After all, they claimed, even the most diabolically evil man still needs somewhere to meet his cohorts. Anonymity was the watchword of the family Salzeir and its eponymous establishment. They had ever been keepers of secrets. This service that they extended to those who could pay was inviolate. They would allow no word of what happened within its walls to slip out. Callis always thought that exactly the same could be achieved with a dark alley and a picnic basket for a fraction

of the cost. Alas money and privilege do often rob men of anything approaching sense and rationality.

It was always wise to take certain precautions when visiting; the doors to Salzler's were ever watched by prying eyes in the shadows outside. Callis never used his real name here, that would be sloppy, careless, inelegant. To the denizens of Centillis' seedy underworld there was no man called Callis, he was just a myth, a story told by naive lowlanders in taverns late at night. Something to scare wayward second-story men and ambitious enforcers. A myth that through a network of middle-men and intermediaries, through bartering and reasonable discussion could be hired out for a not so reasonable fee. As far as Centillis was concerned Callis was a very distant entity, and most certainly not a peddler by the name of Mordin Biet. The man they called Callis would never be found sitting in Salzler's opposite a small weasel faced man called Henry.

"You shouldn't have rented an adjoining booth" said Mordin, glaring through the gloom at a nervous Henry. Despite his obvious nervousness, Henry sucked disparagingly through his teeth.

"Those other booths are pricy things Mordin. I'm not made of money you know" replied Henry.

"Your friend is..." Mordin left the statement hang in the air.

"Yes but he's not here is he?" Henry sneered. "Do you know how the rich stay rich Mordin? It's because they don't spend any fucking money if they don't have to!" Henry's cheeks were starting to take on a slightly flushed colour. He sighed "Look, you've gone and gotten me all riled up now." Henry took a few quick deep breaths as Mordin smiled at him.

"It's true. But our friends in the next booth are somewhat dampening the professional air of our proceedings" said Mordin jerking his thumb at the adjoining wall.

"Oh quit your moaning, you're just pissed off that he's late"

Mordin sighed and slapped his palms onto the table in front of him. "Is it so much to fucking ask for? These titled nonces strut around as if they own the place!"

"Mordin...They *do* own the place."

"Oh stop being a fucking pedant Hen, I was speaking figuratively." Mordin slumped back in his seat and sighed. "I swear I'm half tempted to sod the commission and just stab the bastard when he gets here."

Leaning forward Henry rested his chin in his hand “It’d be messy...” Henry left the conspiratorial whisper to fester. He smiled, showing an unnerving amount of teeth. Mordin leaned forward to meet Henry and locked eyes with him.

“I fucking love messy!”

Both of them started to laugh. It was the hearty sort of belly laugh that idle men around the world enjoy over beer.

“One of these days your impatience is going to get you killed Mordin”

“And one of these days your face is going to get you killed Hen”

They both sighed and sat quietly for a while, the sound of grunts and squeals still emanating from the next booth.

“I fucking hate waiting.” Mordin’s comment wasn’t directed at anyone in particular. It was just one of those exasperated declarations aimed at nothing and everything, intended truly for the universe’s ears only.

“You think he’ll show?” asked Mordin?

“Oh he’ll show alright. You don’t start asking for Mr. Callis unless you *really* want someone properly dead.”

“As opposed to slightly dead, just dead or dead-ish?” Mordin retorted.

“People can be picky when it comes to death you know.”

Mordin sighed “I just don’t trust nobles. They’re just too...” Mordin waved his hand clutching for a word.

“Nobley?” Interjected Henry

“It’ll do.”

The two men sat in their little booth wittering-on as bored men are wont to do. They argued and bantered long into the night, waiting. It was well passed midnight when he finally arrived, in one of those dark and mysterious hours in the sleepy dead-zone between midnight and dawn. The curtain to the booth was whipped aside with a flourish and a preposterously dressed man strutted in, drawing with him the smell of vomit and wet iron that pervaded the corridors of Salzeir’s. The hands of both Henry and Mordin flew to their hips tearing knives free from their belts. There was an uneasy pause as they decided whether they should stab the man who hand so arrogantly entered

their booth. It took a few seconds for the realisation to filter through to their conscious minds that the only sort of man who would make such an entrance in such a clandestine place would be a noble, and a stupid one at that.

“Close the curtain and sit down, you idiot” hissed Henry.

The noble in question sported a shock of flaxen hair and a sickly sheen to his skin. There was a slight, dazed and puzzled look to his otherwise unremarkable face, which was as unremarkable as a face produced by generations of inbreeding can be. The noble just stood there, slack jawed at the impertinence of the weasel faced man who had just addressed him. Mordin slammed the knife blade into the tabletop and simply whispered:

“Sit” it was in that calm silent tone that brooks no argument, nor question. “You’re late” continued Mordin. “We’re not serfs who need to be taught their place. We’re businessmen. *Serious* businessmen. It’s unprofessional to keep us waiting.”

“How dare you talk to me like that!” squeaked the noblemen “Don’t you know who I am? I’m...”

“I don’t want to fucking know who you are! That’s not how it fucking works, do you fucking understand!” Mordin barked. The noble seemed suitably cowed by the outburst and began a thorough examination of his fingernails. “For the purpose of our negotiations you are Lord Green. I’m Lord Purple and my friend over there is Lord Red”

“Well Lord ‘Purple’, I want a man killed” replied Lord Green.

“We’d gathered that...” muttered Henry.

Mordin pinched the bridge of his nose, he had a feeling that ‘Lord Green’ was going to be a terribly awkward client.

“Who do you want killing?” replied Mordin in careful, measured tones. The sort of voice you use when dealing with small children and elderly relatives.

“The Duke of Hacustra” replied Lord Green in a voice now free from its previous privileged vacancy, now it was filled with malice and hate like fresh forged steel.

There was silence. Both Mordin and Henry were stunned. The Duke of Hacustra was a big mark. Colossally big. Lord Green may as well have asked them to kill God. Mordin gathered his thoughts and took a deep breath.

“We’ll need thirty thousand marks”

“That’s quite reasonable” replied Lord Green almost giddy with excitement.

“No. You misunderstand me. We’ll need thirty thousand marks, each. The actual deed will cost you somewhere in the region of four to six hundred thousand marks.” Mordin spoke in the same careful, measured tones. Henry’s eyes were bulging; Mordin could tell his companion was only keeping calm through a substantial application of willpower.

“WHAT?!” Screeched Lord Green. “That’s daylight robbery!”

Henry licked his lips “No your Lordship, it’s murder” he replied. Mordin took his cue.

“And you’ve just engaged us both in a conspiracy to murder one of the single most power *and* paranoid men in the world. What we’re asking for is just a small commission, a consideration.”

Lord Green’s face had returned to its previous slack-jawed vacancy. Henry idly toyed with the blade of his knife.

“What my associate is trying to say is that the money is an incentive. An incentive to not slit your throat and dump you in the river.” Henry gave one of his obscene toothy grins and slammed his knife into the table alongside Mordin’s. “Just so we’re clear how things work round here.”

Day 249 – By Nat Wassell

The ruined city was surprisingly easy to find, bearing in mind that along with every city in the world it had been lost for a hundred years. But one day a curious young man began to dig, convinced that there was something important just waiting to be found.

And he was right.

On that day, Luke had been digging for exactly two hundred and forty nine days. He knew the number precisely because at the start of every day he added to the tally hacked into the rock face. He'd started the tally as a way to try and prove to the world that his actions were not futile; they were, he wanted people to understand, important enough to have records kept about them.

Up until that day, he'd not had much luck. Everyone knew that there was a ruined city just around the spot that he was excavating, but either the people who had fled the city had not owned much or it had all been destroyed and couldn't be found. That is what Luke said anyway, convincing only one person; his cousin Tyler, who decided he had to dig too if only to see for himself. Tyler had started his own tally, on a rock quite separate to Luke's, but Luke didn't mind. History needed to be corroborated after all.

Up until that day, no one believed that they would find anything. That was until Luke put his old, rusting spade deep into the ground and fell, quite unexpectedly, through the sudden hole that he had created. He fell twenty feet and landed heavily on his side. His arm cracked and he must have passed out, because the next thing he remembered was seeing Tyler's concerned face. The boy had lowered himself on the rope they brought for such occasions, and he was looking with disconcertion at Luke's very obviously broken arm.

"Have you got the med-kit, Ty?" Luke rasped, gesturing feebly. Tyler nodded, snapping the tin open.

"What do I do?"

"You need to brace it," Luke winced, forcing himself to sit up and look around, "Grab the broken piece of the spade handle. You have to lay it against my arm and wrap bandages around really tight."

"But won't that hurt?" Tyler said anxiously, poking through the med-kit for bandages as cautiously as if a viper had set up home there.

"It will but it's for the best."

Luke gritted his teeth and tried to stay quiet, even when Tyler grasped his arm a little too firmly. Thankfully, even though he was clumsy, the boy didn't linger and soon enough Luke was able to swallow enough painkillers that he could see more than the flashing colours before his eyes.

He'd fallen into a cavernous room, Tyler's footsteps echoing as he wandered cautiously afield. There was a large object covered in dust only steps away and Luke hauled himself to his feet. He wiped away the thick layer of dust and realised with a start that the object was a table, made of wood, that was showing only the barest hints of old age.

"Ty, come and look!" Luke called. His voice bounced back to him, ringing in his ears and actually making his arm ache a little. Tyler came jogging over, his eyes bright, and Luke recognised his own enthusiasm in his young disciple.

"Look at this, Ty," Luke smoothed his hand over the table, "It's wood. This place must have been airtight before we broke through."

"Have we done it, Luke?" Tyler asked, taking the opportunity to brush more of the dust from the table top, "This is what we were looking for, isn't it?"

"It sure is."

"Wow- and look at this!" Tyler said proudly, digging his boot into the layers on the ground and revealing a tiled floor a little worse for wear but identifiable none the less, "I found it there too. It's everywhere!"

"I don't know where we are, Ty," Luke said, bending down to examine the tiles, the pain in his arm dulled by the meds and his own giddy excitement, "But it doesn't matter. This is the most important discovery for a hundred years!"

A long corridor led away from the room, and they walked carefully along it, the light fading as they moved away from the hole in the roof. Tyler pulled a matchbox from the bag and lit one, the tiny flame offering almost nothing in the way of support until they found a shelf stacked with blocks of paper. Tyler put the match to one and it flared up brilliantly. He put it on the floor, far from the rest, Luke took another of the blocks from the shelf and examined it carefully. The paper rested between two pieces of stiff card, words printed on the card, and the paper had closely printed text on both sides. He looked down the shelf; it was full of the blocks, and stretched as far as he could see. With rising excitement, he turned the block over in his hands and suddenly he knew what was looking at.

"Ty, it's a book! These are all books!"

The boy's jaw dropped as he gingerly took one from the shelf and turned the sheaves of paper.

"I thought they had all been lost," he whispered, "No one has seen one since-"

"I know! And now we've found these! Think of the knowledge buried here."

"And this is what people used to read, before the screens?"

Both Luke and Tyler had grown up in a world where the knowledge of the past had been compressed into pages on a screen. So little of what the world knew had been saved after the Destruction that they had to rewrite the records based on the little that people could remember, and it was a bane of society that whilst they knew there was more to learn about the past they could not know it.

"Yes. This is history, Ty. Generations and generations of history and stories waiting for us to find."

"What's the one called that you've got?" the boy asked, lifting the edge of the cover with his fingertip as though he were handling a relic. Which, in a way, he supposed he was.

"It's poetry, I think," Luke murmured, turning the pages, "Alfred, Lord Tennyson." He flicked the pages and began to read the first random poem he came across. Tyler roamed further along the shelves and pulled a volume from the stack.

"The Divine Comedy," he read slowly, saying the words out loud as he followed them with his finger, "Dante."

For a few moments the only sounds were the slight crackling of the still burning fire and the eager turning of paper pages. Luke read a few more and put the book back, taking another and thinking privately that he could quite easily picture himself doing the same thing forever. Reading and reading the things that the ancestors had to say, trying to pinpoint the moment it all went wrong and the human race took the wrong fork in the road.

He was torn from his study when Tyler came skipping back towards him, the volume of Dante clutched to his chest and an enormous smile on his face.

"Listen to this, Luke!"

He began to read.

*To get back to the shining world from there,
My guide and I went into that shining tunnel,
And following its path we took no care,*

*To rest, but climbed: he first, then I so far,
Through a round aperture I saw appear
Some of the beautiful things that Heaven bears,
Where we came forth and once more saw stars.*

As Tyler read and the words painted a picture in Luke's mind, he felt the hairs on his neck and arms stand up. If they thought they had been wrong to disturb the peace in this hallowed place, he did not believe so now. Something had made Tyler choose that book, turn to that page, read that verse. There was something powerful here, something that had been waiting in the darkness and biding its time until someone willing to listen came along.

Hope. Hope was here.

And for the first time in his life, Luke no longer feared what the next day might bring.

ANSWERS TO THE FINAL FANTASY QUIZ:

Did the questions raise your Intelligence stats or did they leave you Berserk and Confused?

1. Ribbon. *Gain 2 Exp.*
2. Balamb, Galbadia, Centra, Esthar and Trabia. *Gain 1 Exp for each correct one.*
3. Blood Sword. *Gain 4 Exp.*
4. He composed most of its music. *Gain 4 Exp.*
5. Underwater Materia. *Gain 5 Exp.*
6. A tree. *Gain 3 Exp.*
7. They're cousins. *Gain 4 Exp.*
8. Gysahl Greens. *Gain 4 Exp.*
9. You spoony bard! *Gain 3 Exp.*
10. *Gain 1 Exp* for each of Diamond, Ultima, Emerald and Ruby and *gain 2 Exp* for Sapphire (official name, though not mentioned in game).
11. Sarah (as written on Eidolon Wall in Madain Sari). *Gain 5 Exp.*
12. Rat Tail. *Gain 4 Exp.*
13. Tonberry. *Gain 3 Exp.*
14. Moogles. *Gain 4 Exp.*
15. Celes, Edgar and Setzer. *Gain 7 Exp* for these names only.
16. Moomba and MiniMog. *Gain 3 Exp* for each.
17. FAFF – Assault battle class with F attack power, physical defence and magic defence. *Gain 8 Exp.*
18. Oblivion (Anima's Overdrive). It can do just short of 1.6 million damage. *Gain 6 Exp.*
19. Hironobu Sakaguchi. *Gain 6 Exp.*
20. Namingway. *Gain 4 Exp.*
21. Red Mage. *Gain 7 Exp.*
22. Requiem. *Gain 4 Exp.*
23. You must get from the game's start to the end of Memoria within 12 hours. *Gain 5 Exp.*
24. Ultima. *Gain 5 Exp.*
25. All except Irvine – his Exeter requires the Moon Stone, which cannot be obtained until Disc 3. *Gain 8 Exp.*
26. FF7 and FF3 respectively (George Lucas must have been in charge of the release order or something). *Gain 3 Exp* for each correct one.
27. Professor Gast. *Gain 7 Exp.*
28. Pandaemonium. *Gain 2 Exp.*
29. Warmech. *Gain 6 Exp.*
30. It's written in Al Bhed – both the question and the answer are “What does this say?” *Gain 10 Exp* if you were able to read it without a translator.

Are you ready to take on the final boss or are you in dire need of Phoenix Downs?

0-30 Exp = Better stick to Mystic Quest.....

31-60 Exp = Temporary player character

61-90 Exp = Warrior of Light

91-120 Exp = Limit Break!

121-150 Exp = One-Winged Angel

151+ Exp = Either you're using a Gameshark or your game is bugged