

Matter 41

Summary

Live-Action Role-Play

Account by:	Dan Screevey, 23. PhD Student.
Source:	The Waking Dead cache.
Location:	Somerset.
Event:	11 May 2024.
Report:	18 May 2024.

Report



Dan Screevey



18 May 2024 at 10:23 · 🌐

I've really got to tell you about this, because in some ways it's similar to what other people have experienced yet in others it's way, way different.

TL;DR: Our attackers were wearing martial arts outfits, we didn't wake up where we last slept and they rather underestimated us.

Right, so this took place at a live-action role-play event in Somerset. For those of you who don't

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know, a LARP is a role-playing game like *Dungeons & Dragons*, except it takes place in the real world. People dress up in costumes appropriate for the genre and physically portray their characters, like actors in a stage play except there's no script, no audience and the stage is a large, free-roam area reserved for the game, like maybe woods or (if you have the money) a country house. It's a form of improvisational theatre and it's a blast!

The LARP event in question had a fantasy setting, so we were all dressed like out of a *Lord of the Rings* movie. My group – there were eight of us – were mainly playing humans, but we also had an elf mage, a half-elf rogue and a half-orc warrior who'd really made the effort with prosthetic make-up.

Oh, I'll just tell you who everyone is, we're going to meet them shortly. I'll use character names rather than personal names, because this took place in an IC ("in-character") area where everyone is meant to be role-playing.

Delsh human mage (me)
Chay human bard
Rekt half-orc warrior
Haia human cleric
Silla elf mage
Niss half-elf rogue
Graif human paladin

Wilk human ranger

We keep names short so we can shout them quicker in an emergency.

This was an outdoor LARP because there's more freedom to move around and wield weapons in one of those than there is at an expensive conference venue where antiques can and guaranteed-will be broken. However, it did come with some out-buildings available for kitting up, and we were in one of these (which was role-playing being an armoury) when the trouble began.

Haia was helping Rekt into his armour (he's her husband both in real-life and in the game – it's complicated) when the door to the armoury opened and two guys entered wearing the kind of gear normally only seen on a judo or karate mat. They're not germane to the genre – and also not the long, flowing robes that other posts to this group have reported seeing. Each man carried an enormous katana that was definitely against the rules: LARP weapons are typically made of polyurethane so we don't deliver any actual injuries except maybe the odd nasty bruise; steel blades are most certainly unpermitted even for ceremonial purposes.

We weren't expecting these two to appear, but given we were in an IC area it could have been legit. The costumes were all wrong, though – we

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hadn't signed up for some kind of Japanese cross-over event. My first instinct was to call a ref and ask what the hell the crew was thinking, but I figured it was possible that our visitors could have made a mistake and come to the wrong building by accident. I thought I'd maybe better check before kicking up a fuss.

"Well met", I began. "Are you good fellows lost?"

Note that I didn't say I was a *good* role-player.

I was rewarded for my politeness with a swung blade that took my head clean off.

Now here's the second departure from earlier posts. I did wake up with my head back on, but not immediately after I lost it and not where I last slept. It was where I – well, the headless part of me, anyway – fell.

Maybe half a minute had elapsed in the meantime. I could see Chay and Wilk had also gone down, and Niss was on one of the guy's back trying to do some damage with a knife less dangerous than a chopstick. Haia and Graif were at the door, but it wouldn't open. I saw Haia fall to a stab in the back at that point, courtesy of a katana-wielder with some kind of metallic hair.

Rekt was horrified – you have to understand, these deaths were gory, blood spurts and everything – more so when the attacker who didn't have Niss on his back bent down and started to remove Haia's gown. Rekt charged him and started beating him with his fists. This stopped metal-hair guy from stripping down Haia, and one sight of Rekt's half-orc visage gave him pause for thought, too, but he recovered his wits enough to stick Rekt with his sword, and then, to help his companion, took off Niss's head as well.

I tried to smash a window to get out that way, but it wouldn't smash. In ordinary life, the armoury was a farm outbuilding, the glass wasn't toughened, it was single-glazed, but it wouldn't even yield to a wooden staff swung like a baseball bat.

The metal-haired assailant took a chop at me with his katana but I dodged – enough to avoid a fatal blow, but it sliced my arm like a piece of ham. Christ, it hurt! I grabbed the wound, it was awful, I could feel the exposed humerus, then he drove his sword up through my ribcage again and I came to another half-minute or so later.

All of us were either dead or on the ground now except for Graif, the paladin. Now what you need to know about Graif is that he's *really* serious about his LARPing. Metal weapons may be disallowed but

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metal armour certainly isn't. Graif is ex-army and is older than the rest of us: he wears *actual plate armour* that he buys from a medieval re-enactment armoursmith outside Worcester. Rather than confronting the two guys with the katanas or trying to escape, he'd crouched behind a table and finished kitting up, helmet and all.

As I got to my knees, I noticed that Haia's gown had been removed but she was still wearing it. It was as if a copy had been made, one not covered in blood. Maybe it was a trophy or something, I don't know. I'm mentioning this now because there were two extra copies of Chay's lute lying around, too, which will shortly turn out to be important.

Anyway, back to Graif. Now fully-armoured, he rose to his feet and advanced purposefully towards the attacker who had the non-metal hair, making enough noise to be noticed as he did so. The regular-hair swordsman did seem to register that Graif was dressed unusually, but seemed more surprised that he was there at all, he'd managed to remain unnoticed for so long. Whatever, the aggressor certainly didn't understand how armour works, and took a swipe at the paladin.

OK, so replica armour isn't necessarily as heavy or as strong as the real thing, but if you see a blow coming you can deflect it – which is what Graif

did. I tried to distract his opponent by chucking a beanbag at him (beanbags were how spells were implemented in this LARP, they're about 10cm square, not the big things you sit on), but my action only annoyed him. Chay, on the other hand, who was also awake, grabbed one of the lutes lying on the floor and smashed it into the back of the guy's knee. His leg buckled forward and he put out an arm to steady himself. Graif promptly went for the other arm, the one holding the katana, and twisted the wrist while wresting the weapon from the hand. The bad guy looked shocked. I hit him with another beanbag and Chay, to rather more effect, whacked him behind the knee again, whereupon Graif sliced his guts open with his own weapon.

Graif deliberately didn't kill his victim. He wanted the guy to *hurt*. He left him on the floor and considered the other attacker.

Having seen what had happened, metal-haired guy stabbed Chay dead, in the back, and turned to face off Graif. Graif removed his helmet, I think to show his opponent that he wasn't afraid of him, but I'm not entirely sure that metal-hair guy really comprehended the concept of knight-in-shining-armor helmets anyway. He certainly understood katanas, though, and went in for a swift kill.

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Unluckily for him, Graif has some top-notch swordplay skills himself, more longsword than katana, admittedly, but nevertheless he was more than a match for the man in the judo flannels. He avoided the incoming two-handed blow, grabbed his opponent's arm and used his momentum to spin him to the ground, then he slit his throat.

Three things thereupon happened in quick succession that defy the laws of physics.

Firstly, the metal-haired man burst into fragments of light, like the particle effects that you get in some video game deaths.

Secondly, the other attacker stood up, perfectly healed. He'd produced a heal potion from somewhere and drunk it.

Thirdly, when the surviving attacker saw that most of us were awake now and that his mate had been killed, he disappeared. He just blinked out of existence, no special effects, no swirls of light like a teleportation animation, he just wasn't there.

Chay and Wilk were still down, and there were some anxious moments as we wondered if they were going to resurrect now that the two attackers had gone. Silla, who'd taken a nasty cut to her leg, managed to get the door open and shout for help.

There was blood galore, our outfits were cut up where we'd been hit, we were dazed, trying to absorb what had happened to us. We were exhausted, too – being killed really knocks the stuffing out of you.

Haia's extra robe and the two lutes disappeared after about five minutes.. There was no fuss, they just snapped out of existence like the second attacker did.

We weren't really up to carrying on with the LARP, but we'd paid and there were other LARPer waiting for us, we didn't want to let them down. After we'd calmed ourselves a bit, we got on with it, had some fun, vented some of our feelings, and in time returned to some semblance of normality.

That evening, we got together to discuss what had happened. I had to explain to the refs why we were late to the action, and it was only the evidence of a floor soaked with blood that stopped them banning us for suspected drug abuse.

None of us knew what had happened. None of us had an explanation. None of us wanted to experience anything like it ever again, with the possible exception of Graif.

There you are. Thoughts?

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Mark Cranshaw

Amazing story! Can you describe your attackers? Did they look as if they were from the Middle East?

Like Reply Share 2 d



Dan Screevey

Sorry, should have mentioned that! They looked as if they were from maybe India or Pakistan, not North Africa or the Middle East. Hope that helps.

Like Reply Share 2 d



Douglas Nobbs

Why does everyone else have interesting and dramatic deaths? I was simply pushed off the cliff at Tintagel. I didn't even see who did it.

Like Reply Share 2 d



Gemma Ashton

Incredible tale, Dan! How are you all now? Did Silla's leg need stitches?

Like Reply Share 2 d



Dan Screevey

Thanks for asking, Gemma. On the whole, we're coping well. Most of us are over it, but Niss isn't his usual chaotic self and Haia had to take a couple of days off work to process what happened. Silla did need stitches and a tetanus jab, but she's taken it all in her stride. The docs think there'll be an unsightly scar, so she's planning on getting a tattoo to cover it up.

Like Reply Share 2 d

Notes

Mr Screevey would not reveal the proper names of the members of his group when requested by Facebook Messenger, citing privacy concerns as his reason.

Matter 42

Summary

Walt Disney World

Account by:	Chris Doolan, 33. Business analyst.
Source:	Facebook post.
Location:	Orlando, United States.
Event:	11 May 2024.
Report:	11 May 2024.

Report

I was expecting to spend this evening with a drink in my hand, telling you of the wonderful time we had standing in line for a half-dozen rides here at Walt Disney World, in beautiful if reactionary Florida. I was expecting to pepper my post with a bunch of photos of Ashley and the kids, all out of order because Facebook can't even get a simple thing like that right. I was expecting to tell you what a good time we all had, and how we're all looking forward to more of the same tomorrow.

OK, so I don't have a drink in my hand because that makes typing difficult, but there's a can of Miller Lite nearby should I need it – and boy, am I going to need it when, instead of what I was expecting to tell you, I tell you about this totally amazing show we came across.

No, it's not one of those musical extravaganzas like "The Lion Beast" or "Beauty and the King" or whatever they're called – I'm going to have to sit through one of those tomorrow, Ashley has tickets (hey, it's Mother's Day, I can't get out of it). This was a kind of show I didn't even know they had at the Disney parks, it must be new.

So, we were walking back from having failed to meet Merida at Fairytale Garden because our map was out of date, when we noticed a small crowd gathering. The kids were getting crotchety from hours of standing in line in baking heat while worrying about possible alligator attacks, so we went over to see what the fuss was all about.

There were two people there, a man and a woman, engaged in a very loud argument. I could tell immediately that they were performers, because no-one has dressed like that since the days of John the Baptist.

The woman was accusing the man of encouraging children to come here, which to me seemed a bit meta for Disney but the kids were immediately engaged. The man said he was doing no such thing, he was here on his own.

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The conversation went something like this (I'll tell you why it's not "exactly like this" shortly).

OK, time for a quick taste of beer.

"The people here aren't real, you know", said the woman.

"They look real to me", replied the man.

"Well they're not. You just want to believe they're real."

"I can believe what I like. Stop bothering me."

"You can't bring children here."

"I haven't brought children here."

"Well you can't." She seemed to think this cemented her argument.

"I just want to look around."

"You'll want to come back."

"You're only saying that because you yourself want to come back."

"I don't want to come back."

"Well why are you still here?" He was smug about this line, as if he'd made a major conceptual leap to deliver it.

"I'm here to protect the children."

"From what?"

"From wanting to come back!"

At this point, Noah, our youngest, asked me if the woman was a wicked witch, so I confirmed that she was. Ashley accused me of flat-out sexism, but jeez, it was as if this woman had gone to wicked witch school and graduated summa cum laude.

The man was fed up with being harangued and started to walk away, but the woman grabbed him by the arm and told him to listen when she was talking to him.

He replied that he didn't have to listen, and pointed out that there was a crowd of people right there listening to her, if being listened-to was what she wanted.

At this juncture, the woman seemed to become aware of us and looked around. "Those things?" she said, sneeringly. "Those aren't people."

"Yes they are", retorted the man. "They live, they die, they suffer, they love."

"Dying is their job!" asserted the woman. "Suffering is their job! They wouldn't have been created otherwise."

"What about living and loving?" asked the man.

"That's what they get to do so the dying and suffering is more dramatic."

Ashley turned to me. "I take it back, Chris, you're right. She is a wicked witch."

The kids were certainly scared of her. They were rapt, but still scared.

Suddenly, out of nowhere – and I mean literally OUT OF NOWHERE – another man appeared. This guy was dressed in a fur suit. Not a fur coat: a fur suit.

Florida? Fur? In May? He must have had some kind of portable A/C in there with him.

He told the couple to stop arguing.

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The woman told him he was part of the problem.

The first man told her she was all of the problem.

The furry man told them both they were the entire problem. At this, they took umbrage and started arguing with him about how he'd made false accusations.

The furry man began to do these weird rubbing gestures with his hands, as if he was trying to get dirt off them or something.

A new woman walked out of the crowd. No-one seemed to have noticed her arrive, and believe me, they would have done, because she was absolutely, sensationally, jaw-droppingly beautiful. She's wasting her time working for Disney, she ought to be in the movies – she was dazzling.

"Look at the intricacy in those braids", said Ashley, awed.

"Can I have braids like hers?" asked Emma, our second-youngest. Also, our second-oldest, as we only have three kids.

The newcomer was dressed like a regular park visitor – T-shirt, slacks, tennis shoes – except for some kind of hummingbird brooch on her left sleeve.

"Ask her where she got that pin", said Ashley. "I want one."

"What's going on?" asked the beauty. It was pretty clear she was supposed to be in charge, as the other characters immediately deferred to her.

"These two were arguing", said the furry man.

"What about?"

"About whether they were arguing or not."

The new woman stared at him a moment, then said, "Come and see me. Now."

With that, he disappeared in exactly the same manner as he'd previously appeared.

We burst into spontaneous applause. Those Disney imagineers really keep delivering the goods!

"Why were you arguing?" asked the beautiful woman. The other woman was no ugly duckling herself, I might add, she was a solid 7.

"She wants to stop me from bringing children here", replied the man.

The modern-looking woman turned to the Biblical-looking one. "Is that true?"

"Yes", she replied. "You need to close this place down."

There were boos from the audience at this point.

The latecomer shook her head and faced the man. As she did so, the wicked witch also disappeared. There must have been a trapdoor there or something, she was GONE. Maybe they do it with mirrors.

"You need to change", said the woman. A moment later, he looked just like a tourist. Now

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there are quick-change artists and there are quick-change artists, but this guy was aMAZing. We all gasped, couldn't help it – how the hell had he done it?!

"I'll move you somewhere else", said the woman. "People know what you look like here."

The man nodded, then a second later simply vanished. There were no special, therefore zero chance that we were being distracted by stagecraft. It was an incredible piece of Disney magic. It really did look as if he'd been teleported away or something.

OK, time for another slurp of Miller Lite.

Now earlier, I said that I was basically recounting this from memory, so might not have got the words exact. Why didn't I just record it?

Well here's the thing: I DID record it. So did twenty or thirty other people, we all had our phones out.

The remaining actress turned in a slow circle, addressing us all. "The show's over", she said – rather too pleased with herself, I have to say. "I hope you enjoyed it. Thank you for your time."

To enthusiastic cheers and clapping, she walked over to the Cheshire Café and went inside.

My phone was only showing static.

Ashley's phone was also only showing static. So were other people's phones. "Hey!" "What gives?" "What the gosh-darn heck?"

"It's OK", said a fat guy. I'm not shaming him, he's never going to read this. "I streamed it to the cloud."

His pride was replaced by indignance when he discovered that Disney's phone-dampening technology extends to the cloud, too.

More beer.

So! What do you think? That impromptu performance was THE single most amazing piece of street theatre I have ever seen. I've no idea how they did ANY of it. Even the kids liked it, despite the fact it didn't have someone singing "It's a Small World" the whole time on repeat.

There can't have been more than a hundred people saw it, though, out of maybe fifty or sixty thousand guests in the park. I don't know how often they put the show on, it wasn't advertised, but if ever I get a chance to see it again, I'm taking it – only next time, I'll dig out my dad's Kodak Super 8, no way will Disney be able to jam 8mm film with static.

I was planning on looking through for hidden Mickeys, too, damn it.

Notes

None.

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Matter 43

Summary

The Judgement of Clive Phillips

Account by:	Anna Phillips-McBride, 48. Materials scientist.
Source:	Letter.
Location:	Oxford, England.
Event:	12 May 2024.
Report:	13 May 2024.

Report

Letter #1

Linton Road,
Oxford

13/5/24

Dear Mr Scott,

I fear that I owe you an apology.

Yesterday, when I was visiting my father, I met the woman known as Ansnā. My father and I were in the lounge, discussing how to release elements

of his now-complete Third Language dictionary without attracting ridicule, when suddenly she was there.

I saw her first, but knew immediately who she was from my father's description. She was dressed in furs, but almost immediately became dressed in casualwear. To say that I was surprised would be to understate my reaction.

When she spoke my father's name, I thought he was going to have a coronary, but no: he was overcome with joy. He rose to his feet, then the two embraced.

I'm sorry for doubting you. As for doubting my father, I'm sure he's already forgiven me; I nevertheless imagine it will be some time before I've forgiven myself.

Yours sincerely,

Anna Phillips-McBride

Letter #2

Linton Road,
Oxford

15/5/24

Dear Mr Scott,

Thank you for your gracious acceptance my apology.

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I did indeed have a conversation with Ansnā and am happy to share the details – relieved, in fact, because the only other person I can talk to about it is my father, who is somewhat less than objective on the topic.

Shortly after Ansnā appeared, my father introduced me as his daughter. I went over and shook hands, stating that I was pleased to meet her at long last. She seemed to enjoy the fact that she knew what a handshake was.

After a short catch-up with my father, during which she explained that she had been promoted again and was now leading a team of people like her, Ansnā informed him that shortly he would be visited by a judge. She said that this was very important because the judge had some questions for him, his answers to which would play a part in deciding whether or not our world would be terminated.

Ansnā disappeared at this point for just long enough that I could babble to my father something about her being real, then she reappeared with another, older woman whom she introduced as the judge: Meg. Meg was dressed in furs and did not change outfit. Ansnā was exceedingly deferential towards her, giving the impression that our new uninvited guest was of exceptionally high rank.

Ansnā asked me where we could wait while Meg spoke to my father, so I took her to his study. This is where our conversation took place.

To begin with, Ansnā had questions of her own. She wanted to know about my mother, and was sad to learn that she had died five years ago. She wanted to meet my brother, expressing some disappointment to hear that he was in Australia and was probably asleep. She wanted to know about me. Did I have a man? Yes. Did I have children? Two boys, now at college. What did they think of Clive? They were fond of him.

I asked Ansnā what Meg was here to judge. Ansnā explained, quite nonchalantly, that our world, Dheghōm, was causing problems for her world, Bhéwonom, which would all go away if Dheghōm were closed down. However, arguments had been put forward that this would be unethical. The judges – she said there were eight of them – were gathering information and impressions from individuals they knew of in Dheghōm. When finished, they would confer to reach a decision on Dheghōm's future.

I know this all sounds fantastical, but the confidence Ansnā exhibited in her summary inclines me to believe it.

I asked her to outline what system of ethics the judges would be using to reach their decision, whereupon she became hesitant. It wasn't that she didn't want to answer; rather, she didn't seem to understand the question.

I asked how she herself determined if things were right or wrong, but she could only answer using synonyms such as "good" and "bad".

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I tried to dive deeper.

Are some actions intrinsically good, such as caring for people? She said not always.

Are actions judged by their effects, such as killing one person to save the lives of many? She said not always.

Do people act in accordance with a set of predetermined values, such as honesty and loyalty? She said not always.

Having got nowhere with deontology, consequentialism and virtue ethics, I tried social contract theory. Do people consent to limit their own actions on condition that other people consent to limit theirs?

She thought about this, then said that people do what they think other people will think is good.

I asked her how she knew what other people would think was good, and she said she didn't. She added that it's hard for the people of Bhéwonom to answer such questions. She merely went by what she had observed in the past, as did everyone else. Dheghōm was a problem because it didn't match anything that she or anyone else knew.

Ethics by the evolution of precedent is one way to do it, I suppose, but the danger is that with no underlying theory it's easy for an initial decision to be wrong. It's like law without jurisprudence.

Conversing with Ansnā was a strange yet pleasant experience. She was lively and curious and at times quite witty, but it was as if there was

a hole in her thought processes where forward-thinking should be. Counterfactuals were on the whole beyond her, and I quickly learned not to use the word "if".

Our chat ended when Ansnā announced that Meg had finished her interrogation of my father and no longer had need of her assistance. While Meg returned to consolidate her notes, Ansnā had to get on with her regular job of managing the managers of the visitors to Dheghōm.

I hope this information is of interest to you. I'm afraid I went on a little too much, but the opportunity to get my own thinking straight on the matter was too good to miss.

Yours sincerely,

Anna Phillips-McBride

Letter #3

Linton Road,
Oxford

17/5/24

Dear Mr Scott,

I'm pleased to hear that my account of my conversation with Ansnā was useful to you.

To answer your question, yes, my father did disclose the general outline of his interview with

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Meg (whom he called Magh, having conducted his conversation in Third Language). Unfortunately, it developed into an altercation.

Meg, it seemed, refused to accept that she couldn't judge our actions by the ethical standards of Bhéwonom, even though our worlds are quite different. She was further irritated when my father suggested that we were moral beings because (quoting Darwin) we can compare our past and future actions and approve of some while disapproving of others. Her complaint was that comparing future actions against anything is difficult for the people of Bhéwonom; she believed that by highlighting this, my father was implying that she was not a moral being.

Meg did indicate that she held to a hierarchy of ethical standings. She would rescue a person before a dog, rescue a dog before a tree and rescue a tree before a rock. Unfortunately, she could explain neither whether nor where human beings would fit in. Would she save one human being over a unique work of art? Her inability to answer infuriated both her and my father.

My father's parting argument was that any being with the capacity to have morals must be worthy of moral consideration. We in Dheghôm do have such a capacity, as we regard ourselves worthy of moral consideration; therefore, Meg's people must do us no wrong. Meg's response was that it's not clear that we "believe" anything, we

may simply be giving her the impression that we do.

That's all I know about my father's conversation with Meg. If what Ansnā told me is true, this does not bode well for the future of our world, and I confess to having a great deal of apprehension as to what might come of it.

Something else happened that I am reluctant to report but believe is worth mentioning.

About an hour after she and Meg had dematerialised, Ansnā briefly reappeared. She apologised for having left without saying goodbye, but mentioned something about being very busy.

She noticed that I was now wearing glasses, and asked me if I wanted my eyesight fixed. I said yes, so she fixed it. It's going to take me awhile to break the habit of putting my specs on when I want to read!

My father asked her if she would like her brooch back. She said that she didn't, she could make another one. Thereupon, she did so, and pinned it to her left sleeve. She proposed that my father give his brooch to me, so she could see if it suited me or not.

He suggested that I go to fetch it, mainly I believe so that he and Ansnā could talk in private for a few minutes.

I went to the safe in his study where he keeps it. After entering the combination, I opened the door and a hummingbird flew out. There was no brooch,

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just a very-much-alive hummingbird in the colours of the brooch.

I returned to my father, but by then Ansnā had gone again.

I told him about the brooch, and he was deeply worried by what had happened. In part, this was because he cherished the brooch, but in the main it was because such an action was not in character for Ansnā. He blamed Meg for it.

I myself am not so sure. There are better ways for all-powerful beings to annoy people they dislike than by changing a brooch into a hummingbird. It seems to me that something very wrong occurred.

If you can offer any insight into this matter, I'd be grateful if you could share it with me.

Yours sincerely,

Anna Phillips-McBride

Letter #4

Linton Road,
Oxford

20/5/24

Dear Mr Scott,

Thank you for your thoughts regarding the hummingbird incident.

I'm not sure whether having an explanation is worse than not having one, to be honest! If what you say is true – and I've no reason to doubt you – then this is a matter of great concern. It's as if there's a bug in the implementation of the universe.

Please keep me up-to-date on your findings in this area. If there's anything I can do to help, whether by speaking to Ansnā should she reappear or by undertaking a more mundane task, please don't hesitate to ask.

Yours sincerely,

Anna Phillips-McBride

Notes

Next year, Professor Phillips intends to release definitions and plausible derivations for the easiest-to-explain words present in his Third Language dictionary, under the title *Proto Indo-European Vocabulary: Thoughts from Retirement*. He is currently seeking a publisher.

I informed Dr Phillips-McBride of Eugene Nethercott's worrying observation regarding the connection between Dheghōm and Erwā, and asked that if she were to encounter Ansnā again

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then she might mention it to her as a matter of urgency.

Matter 44

Summary

The Magic Girl

Account by:	Phillipa 'Pips' Jackard, 26. Video game artist.
Source:	Transcript of Spotify audiobook.
Location:	Austin, United States.
Event:	13 May 2024.
Report:	28 July 2024.

Report

Once upon a time, in an ordinary house, in an ordinary town, lived an ordinary girl. Her name was Phillipa, but everyone called her Pips.

When she was little, like all little girls and boys, Pips could use her imagination to visit a land of magic and wonder. Alas, girls and boys can't remain little forever, and Pips was now too big to visit the magic land. This made her sad, but she'd always known that there would come a time when she wouldn't be able to go there. At least she still had her many nice memories of what it was like.

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One day, Pips awoke in her ordinary bed in her ordinary house in her ordinary town and decided to draw some pictures.

Something felt different this morning, so Pips checked her reflection in the mirror. She knew that mirrors can sometimes be sneaky and show the wrong things, but today her mirror was behaving itself.

Pips went downstairs to have breakfast. While she was eating her healthy muesli and drinking her healthy juice, she watched the television. The usual breakfast shows were all boring so she tried some other channels.

Soon, she came across a breakfast show she hadn't seen before. At first, she thought it must be new, but then she realised that it was on a Spanish language channel.

Pips didn't understand Spanish, but the presenters were all speaking English so she watched for a while.

That programme quickly got boring too. Pips decided she wanted to watch cartoons instead.

As she flipped through the channels, Pips noticed something strange. All of them were in English. She had expected that most of them would be, because most of them always were, but she was not expecting *all* of them to be in English.

Pips was a curious girl, and decided to see whether Netflix was the same.

What she found surprised her even more. The programmes in the Spanish language category were all in English – and when she watched one, so were the subtitles. If she changed the subtitles to another language – German, say, or French, or one of the languages people speak in India – they all stayed in English.

Pips was confused.

She went onto Youtube and found some videos that taught how to speak another language. Every word in every one was in English. It was quite funny to hear people say “The Japanese word for ‘dog’ is ‘dog’”, but it was also worrying.

Had Pips somehow woken up able to understand all languages?

She tried some online websites in languages that weren't English. They all made sense. Well, some *did* have long, complicated words that she didn't understand even in English, but they all looked to her as if they were written in English. Sometimes, on Chinese web sites, the letters were very small so they would fit, but they were still all in English, every one.

Pips began to worry. She had once had a problem in the magic land that she used to visit: she could see colours that didn't exist. She wondered if something like this was happening again.

Pips had learned a little Spanish at school. She tried to remember some Spanish words, but could only remember English ones. Even simple words,

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like the Spanish for *one* or *hello* or *red* were impossible for her to remember. She could only think of the English words *one* and *hello* and *red*.

Pips was becoming frightened. When she had started to see different colours in the magic land, it had been because she'd done something that hadn't worked out quite how she'd expected. This time, though, she couldn't think of anything she might have done wrong to cause her to understand languages that she didn't understand before.

She drew a picture. Thankfully, it came out just fine. It would have been awful if she couldn't draw pictures any more.

Pips called her friend, Zilly.

"Hello, Zilly", she began.

Zilly didn't immediately answer.

"Zilly?" said Pips, worriedly. "It's Pips."

"Since when have you spoken Polish, Pips?" asked Zilly.

Zilly is American, but her parents are from Poland.

"I'm not speaking Polish", said Pips.

"You are", said Zilly.

"Oh dear", said Pips. "I thought I was speaking English. Are you speaking Polish?"

"No", said Zilly, "but I can. Here, this sentence is in Polish."

"It sounded English to me", said Pips. "This is all very disconcerting."

Zilly agreed, so later that day the two girls met up for lunch. Zilly brought along another friend of Pips, a girl called DoeDoe.

"Hello, Pips", said DoeDoe. "How are things with you?"

"They were fine until this morning", said Pips.

"Then I started to speak Polish."

"You're speaking English", said DoeDoe.

"She's speaking Polish", said Zilly.

"What's going on?" wailed Pips.

Over the next hour, Pips talked to strangers from all different parts of the world who were also having lunch in the diner. She, Zilly and DoeDoe worked out that whatever Pips said in English, people heard in the first language that they had learned. In return, Pips heard everything they said in English, no matter what language they spoke.

Zilly and DoeDoe noticed that for some languages, Pips seemed to speak very quickly and for others she spoke very slowly. They guessed that this was because the other language used more or fewer words than English to say the same thing, so had to speed up or slow down to last the same length of time.

It was even stranger than this, though!

When Pips spoke, it wasn't like in a movie dubbed into English: her lips moved as if she was speaking whatever language the listener was hearing, even when she let them put their fingers on her mouth to test.

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"This is an amazing ability!" declared DoeDoe.
"Shall we see if it works for writing?"

It didn't work for writing. When Pips wrote anything down, it came out in English for everyone.

When Zilly spelled out Polish words and Pips wrote them down letter by letter, Zilly could read them in Polish but Pips could make no sense of them.

"Let's see if recording your voice works", suggested Zilly.

That didn't work either. When Pips recorded her voice on her phone, no-one but her could understand it. To everyone else, it sounded like the crackling noise you get when you suck the last drop of coke up through a straw. Only when she was speaking live could everyone hear the words.

Pips didn't know what to make of all this. She was amazed and astonished with her new skill, but she didn't understand how she had acquired it.

She was also worried.

She was worried that there was something wrong with her.

She was worried that there might be other changes to come.

She was worried that people would treat her differently.

She was worried that bad people would want to make her do things she didn't want to do. They

might lock her in a room and force her to translate languages all day.

She was worried that she might be going mad.

When she got back to her ordinary house in her ordinary town, Pips did not feel as if she was an ordinary girl. She still had no idea what had happened and it was all getting on top of her.

She began to cry.

When she had been in the magic land, Pips had been befriended by a talking bear called Anna. Anna had solved her problem for her.

Pips was not in the magic land any more, and was no longer able to go there. This made her even sadder, and she cried some more. If only Anna would appear, she might be able to make sense of it for her.

In despair, she called out Anna's name. "Anna, help!"

Nothing happened straight away.

Then, as if by magic, there stood Anna.

"Anna!" said Pips, joyfully. "Are you too old to visit the magic land too?"

"Of course not, Pips", said Anna. "I can go there any time I choose, but today I'm here instead. What's the matter? You look upset."

"I don't want to spoil your vacation", said Pips, nervously.

"Oh, I'm not really on vacation", said Anna. "Besides, even if I were, you look as if you need help. I like to help people even when I *am* on vacation."

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Heartened that she wasn't being a bother, Pips explained her predicament.

The more she explained, the more Anna frowned. She wasn't frowning at Pips, though, she was frowning because she was thinking.

"This is very wrong", said Anna. "You should not be able to speak such that everyone can understand. Even I can't speak such that everyone can understand. It hasn't been tested."

"Tested?" asked Pips.

"Tested", replied Anna. "This magic is still being developed. Nobody knows if it works yet."

"It does", said Pips.

"So I see", replied Anna. "I'm speaking Proto Indo-European to you right now."

Pips began to cry again. "Is there any way to stop it?" she asked. "I'll be taken away and experimented on if bad people get to hear what I can do."

"I can't take it away until I find out how you got it in the first place", said Anna. "I will ask some friends to see if they can find out. The world is not supposed to work this way. Not yet, anyway."

"Then what of me?" asked Pips. "What shall I do in the meantime?"

Pips was a brave girl, but she was also imaginative. She was thinking of all kinds of things that people might do to her if they discovered her new power – and none of them were nice.

"I have an idea", said Anna. "Would you like to help me to help others?"

"Of course," replied Pips, "but how?"

"Well in the same way that little girls and boys of this world can visit the magic land, so can little girls and boys of other worlds visit this one. Sometimes, they accidentally make mistakes that upset people. I can mend their mistakes, but I can't always reassure people afterwards that everything is going to be alright. This is because I can't speak the languages of Africa and Asia."

"I can", said Pips. "I'm not in Africa or Asia, though. I'm in America."

"I shall fly you to me when you're needed", said Anna. "If you're not busy at the time."

"Like I could fly in the magic land?" asked Pips.

"Yes, just like that", replied Anna. "I shall also give you the appearance of a bear, so that people will know to trust you."

"Everyone trusts a talking bear", said Pips, approvingly.

"They do", agreed Anna. "Now, I must go to help a little boy who can't find his mother. Goodbye for now!"

After Anna had disappeared, Pips felt a lot better. Although Anna wasn't sure what had happened to Pips, she had been able to cheer her up and think of a way that she could use her gift for good. Pips was sure that nobody would lock her in a room and make her do translations all day, not now that Anna was on her side.

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Anna did call on Pips to help her, too. She flew her to Nigeria and Kenya and Malawi. She flew her to Japan and China and Thailand. She even flew her to Indonesia and Greenland and an island in the Pacific Ocean called Tahiti.

Pips very much liked helping all these different people.

Sometimes, things go wrong and you don't know what to do. It's fine to cry, but remember that there's always someone around who will help. All you have to do is to ask. It may not be a talking bear who answers, but *someone* will. There are *always* people who are willing to listen.

Do you know what the best thing is?

The best thing is that, if you're good, you'll be one of those helpful people yourself someday, too.

Notes

This story was released as an audiobook on Spotify by Brittany Hope, Phillipa Jackard's sister. The previously-removed *The Magic Land* was re-released alongside it. The voice in both the recordings is that of Mrs Hope; Miss Jackard is credited as author.

Phillipa Jackard is no longer employed by NPChard. It is believed that she retains her

linguistic ability and works for the Central Intelligence Agency in some capacity.

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Matter 45

Summary

The Muses

Account by:	Unknown
Source:	CCTV footage.
Location:	Unknown, possibly India.
Event:	14 May 2024.
Report:	18 May 2024.

Report

The players:

Blue/Shiva (BL)

Alexander/Ma'at (AL)

Bear (BE)

Muses:

First Muse (M1)

Second Muse (M2)

Third Muse (M3)

(a man with three eyes, a woman with feathered arms and a man with hair like wire are laughing

about something when three unclothed young women materialise together beside them)

M1: Blue, Alexander, Bear: we would talk to you.

BL: Oh. Who are you?

M1: Muses.

BL: (laughs) Three naked women? I don't think so.

AL: They have no numbers.

BL: What?

AL: See for yourself.

(Alexander pulls a vial from the air and passes it to Blue, who drinks its contents)

AL: See?

BL: That's new. How have you removed your numbers?

M2: You three are to leave Dheghōm and not to return.

BL: No. It's fun here.

M2: We made this world what it is. You are causing disruption.

BL: Us? How?

M2: You take on the form of beings meaningful to the non-player characters.

BE: Not me.

BL: Naked women are also meaningful to them.

M2: Bear, you persuaded your NPC-son to trick the judges into closing Dheghōm.

M3: Blue, you attempted to crash Dheghōm using one of our techniques.

BL: What makes you think that?

M3: We used a scrying disc to look at the logs.

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BL: How did you conjure a scrying disc? They're admin-only.

M3: That's immaterial. We used it to see who tried to crash Dheghōm. It was you.

BL: Fine, fine. Why is that a problem? If you are who you say you are, you yourselves denied access to Dheghōm for two weeks.

M1: We could deny *you* access to every world. Dheghōm, Kerr, Nemos, Ágherom, Londhom, Agros, Erwā, Tersā, Eksí, Maghos, Kei, Oisei, Qelēis, Regjom, Pāgos, the rest. All of them.

BE: Why don't you, then?

M1: It would be inconvenient, although if you were to remain in Dheghōm then that would be more inconvenient.

AL: None of this matters. The judges will soon close down Dheghōm anyway. We may as well enjoy it while we can.

M1: We are not here to discuss this with you. We are here to tell you what we require of you. You are to cease your visits to Dheghōm.

(Bear draws an enormous sword from a scabbard on his back, then disappears)

AL: What have you done?!

M3: We anticipated that you would notice we have no numbers. We anticipated that Bear would wish to test whether our other expected attributes might also be absent. He has been disconnected. He will not be returning.

AL: How could you know what he was intending?!

BL: They use dice, Alexander.

(to Muses) Fine: you want us to stop playing here, we'll play somewhere else. Does it matter to you where?

M1: Not to us, but you will have other problems if you choose Erwā.

BL: Because ... oh, oh, I see! When Dheghōm is closed down, Ansnā will work in Erwā. She doesn't like us.

AL: A different manager might even return your extra arms.

M1: Convey this information to Bear.

BL: Fine, fine. We were getting bored here anyway.

M1: Resist all temptation to return to Dheghōm. If you try to sneak back, we *will* notice and we *will* prevent you from playing *any* game.

BL: Yes, yes. So, what do you think, Alexander? Regjom sounds as if it might be fun.

AL: Let's speak to Bear. Mallika has been there.

BL: He's calling me now.

(to Muses) Farewell, I hope never to meet you again.

(Blue disappears)

AL: Forgive him, he doesn't like defeat.

M2: Nevertheless, he has accepted it. We shall not trouble him further.

(Alexander disappears)

(Muses disappear together)

Notes

This timestamped CCTV footage was uploaded to Dailymotion by user Ramonetwoonetwoonetwo.

The footage is from an infrared security camera and is therefore in monochrome. Nevertheless, both audio and video are clear.

Blue, Alexander and Bear match their descriptions from other sources. Bear is the individual typically described as having hair like wire and being dressed in clothes reminiscent of those worn by martial artists; this is the first mention of his name in our records. It is assumed that Mallika is his frequent companion, who dresses in a similar fashion.

No location information is given, but the incident the appears to have taken place in the interior of a minor Hindu temple.

The primary reason for uploading the footage seems to be that it features naked women. The consensus in the comments section is that it's a clever fake created using AI.

The video was removed after three weeks; whether this was Ramonetwoonetwoonetwo's decision or that of the guardians of Dailymotion's content guidelines is unknown.

[Update 31 May 2024]

Because the names of worlds listed by First Muse appeared to be of Proto-Indo European origin, Dr Phillips-McBride was invited to view the footage. She was able to identify the words as hailing from an apparent dialect of Proto-Indo European, and provided the following approximate translations:

- Dheghōm earth, ground.
- Kerr region.
- Nemos forest.
- Ágherom lake.
- Londhom country.
- Agros countryside.
- Erwā land that is cultivated.
- Tersā dry land.
- Eksí out, outside.
- Maghos meadow.
- Kei here.
- Oisei there.
- Qələis land that can be cultivated.
- Regjom kingdom.
- Pāgos area.

We know from what Revd Dominic Hughes was told in Bhéwonom that Paul created eight worlds

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including ours. Therefore, at least seven of the worlds listed above must have been created by others.