

A Goblincore Guide To Life *and whatever other stuff we thought might be helpful.*

By Jeff Mach and A. Goblin.

Or: *Actually, It's Perfectly Fine To Be Less Angry, More Peculiar, Have More Fun, & Do More Things/You Should Be Enjoying Yourself More, Or At Least Learn How to Stop Making Things Harder Than They Need to Be. Despite What You Might Believe, There's No Actual Limit To How Long A Title Can Be. There Are Guidelines & Suggestions, But We Usually Throw Those out. Also, It's Time Start Collecting What Actually Matters (Both Physically And Mentally), and Live Obviously Freer in a World Full of Unnecessary Rules and Ridiculous But Totally Real Social Pressures.*

Or: *Please buy this book. We need money for socks.*

This tome was temporarily named "Not So Good As The Mikado", but that's such an obscure reference that even Gilbert & Sullivan fans might not get it. And Ruddigore (the eventual actual name of the opera) is one of our favorite shows in history. It contains one of history's great patter songs; it was written two hundred years ago and getting each verse in one breathe would make even Eminem cry.

Dedicated to Douglas Adams, Terry Pratchett, Jane Yolen, Mike Mignola, Dianna Wynne Jones, Douglas Adams again, Ian Fleming and his golden typewriter, Ursula LeGuin's dry wit, Barry Louis Polisar, and a whole bunch of dead Taoist and Zen teachers from several few centuries ago. And to our respective parents—Jeff's folks, Joe and Joan Mach; and A. Goblin's parents, Mr. and Mrs. "Please Don't Mention Us In Your Book".

And *also*, we dedicate this book to *you*. We hope you enjoy it, and possibly find it useful.

WARNING: *May be offensive to serpents, Elves, Dark Lords (we only wish; we keep trying to annoy Alice and she keeps annoying US by laughing), and servants of Order and/or Chaos. This includes the author, who certainly shouldn't have written this; but it's too late now. He's horribly offended himself and is going to punish himself with a really nice dinner. (This is the standard punishment for authors, and you should inflict it upon them at every opportunity, maybe with some bubble tea. Honest. I mean, would a Goblin lie?)*

ADDITIONAL WARNING: *We may have snuck some Zen and Taoism in here. In the more correct, smarter Goblin style, of course.*

Additional Additional Warnings:

May change formatting repeatedly and not care. May have flaws and human/Goblin error. We had some amusing conversations with AI, but this is 100% all human/Goblin co-written, with our own hands and our own tiny keyboards, by Jeff Mach and Arthur Ilyanavich Rasputin Louis Alexander Fork-And-Chopsticks Goblin, or A. Goblin, as he's better-known.

May contain actual techniques and strategies.

May contain lies.

May even contain truths, and those are far harder for humans to accept.

May have pieces which seemingly have no meaning. Worry not. The more you re-read this bool, or possibly read it to your friends, the more it will make sense. And if it doesn't, the more clever you will be about it. Consider it an extremely unauthorized Koan whose answer is so elusive that even the authors haven't tried to guess it.

May have driven at least one Editor insane.

May get you devoured alive in the streets—wait, that's the Necronomicon. Sorry. Just being careful. We sometimes get the two tomes confused.

And definitely, pretty definitely, contains Goblins. If you don't like Goblins, you have found the perfect book. Buy ten copies and send them to your worst enemies. THAT will show them!

Authors' Note: *People ask us why a Goblincore Handbook would be written in English. Because you don't speak Goblin, silly! And if we did it in Yiddish, it would mostly be insults and in-jokes. You don't need that. That's what Dwarves are for. (We're kidding, Thorin.)*

*For later reference (you find it helpful to know this) – a **pupik** is Yiddish for 'bellybutton'.*

PROLOGUE:

This really IS a Goblincore guide to life. To be clear, I'm editing it; but it was obviously written by Goblins. Any parts that are incorrect are the responsibility of myself and myself alone, Jeff Mach.

signed,

A. Goblin

Erm.

No, for true: this really IS a Goblincore guide to life. As I've been gifted the opportunity to redesign my new life by having my own life trampled into little tiny bits by Trolls (an unpleasant but, in retrospect, fascinating experience; and after they finish arguing, as Tolkien put it, dawn will come and stone will take them all)—I thought I'd write a few pieces about it. They turned into a book.

*I wrote all the good bits. A. Goblin basically watched and learned how to do Yo-Yo tricks. I don't mind; I mostly envy his skills. You know he can do that thing where you whirl a yo-yo around your head **while** it's still moving up and down on the string? It was fascinating.*

It includes some short stories that are adjacent to Goblin things, as retold by Goblins and their friends. Some pieces of this book have appeared, usually in a slightly different form, on JeffMachWrites and/or my Patreon. I don't think you'll mind.)

I sometimes wake up in the mornings and just start to write. I go somewhere without Internet, to avoid the temptations of...well, the temptations of the Internet in general.

Whether or not you've seen pieces of it, this is the actual, full, self-contained Goblincore Guide To Life.

Or at least it's one of them. They're Goblins. I'm sure that even now, there's someone writing, "A WAY BETTER Goblincore Guide To Life". They do that kind of thing. And it's probably great; I'll buy it, for one.

Me, I'll just write. And, of course...I'll work on being more like a Goblin.

Minus the ears.

Foreword *(because if we started the book backwards, we'd be walking away right now, and how would you read the rest of it?) (Unless we got really, REALLY detailed back tattoos with VERY small writing, which would be impractical.)*

(A. Goblin did it anyway. This surprises no-one.)

Also, A. Goblin may be entirely a figment of Jeff's imagination. Or maybe they're a figment of YOUR imagination. How would YOU know?

At any rate:

Once there was a great source of wisdom. Chief among the sources of wisdom was that it contained a powerful incantation in big, friendly letters. That incantation was:

"DON'T PANIC."

(Thank you, Mr. Adams.)

Its appeal is nearly universal because almost every species panics *a lot*. Not just surprise-panic, but the sort of panic which attaches itself to your smartest parts and tells you that you NEED to hold onto it.

Panic simultaneously tells you that you have an urgent problem you need to solve RIGHT NOW THIS MINUTE and also that THERE IS NO SOLUTION AND YOU ARE DOOMED.

(We blame snakes. But we'll get to that later.)

Sometime after the panic dies down, it's possible to find this obvious contradiction humorous and even silly. But it ain't funny at the time.

Goblins don't want to carry anything unnecessary; it's not a FUN chore. This goes for your mind-meat as well as stuff you'd pick up with your hands.

Ergo, when it comes to needing to lug around a bunch of panic, it's easier if you DON'T.

As Goblins, we're famous for chaos and mischief. But we're not actually hated for it, usually. This is because there's a difference between mischief and malice; and if you're not rather consistently disciplined in your oddity, they might think the latter instead of the former.

Of course chaos requires discipline! The World is confusing and contradictory; as Goblins, we embrace that. We enjoy the chaos of a thousand balloons suddenly launching

in the air in the middle of a serious budget speech. We do not enjoy the chaos of losing our wallets. That's just natural, isn't it?

Think about how things are. The universe is mostly dirt, water, rocks, and things that grow or squish when you step on them. Also, there's a sky, but it's sometimes raining or worse; however, since it sometimes throws rain, snow, heat, and sometimes even romantic fill-in-the-dots pictures, it's not THAT important; taking the good with the bad is a neat little lesson, and while it sounds a bit saccharine, it works, and that's all we really care about. All the rest is stuff people decided matters, for some reason or other. Sometimes there is, indeed, a good reason. Sometimes there WAS good reason that doesn't apply anymore, or doesn't quite apply HERE. Quite a lot of times, the reasons are completely and utterly stupid. Ignorance + power = quite a lot of the World in which we live.

We Goblins don't understand why anyone would invent quite SO many cues, deadlines, schedules, checklists, and little signs that say "do not touch"; how do we know if they really don't want you to touch, or if touching is just REALLY GOOD and they want to keep it all FOR THEMSELVES?

Obviously standing in line makes more sense than a lot of other options. If you really like someone, you might wait around and shake their hand, and a line has a lot of advantages, like giving you a clear and fair idea when it's your turn or isn't. Having 15 people trying shake your hand in a sort of naturally-occurring mob, or at least a group gaggle, only works if they have fifteen hands. Or thirty, if you're from one of those cultures which uses one hand for shaking and the other for important things like nose -picking.

Except what if THEY'RE bored with everyone waiting to shake their hand and they're waiting for that ONE person to give them the thoughtful gift of a little baby sandworm and an almost-uneaten apple?

(You tested it to make sure it was fresh.)

This book isn't here to teach you to break rules. What the heck is a 'rule'? It isn't here to teach you to break ANYTHING except, you know, stupid habits and mostly-metaphorical chains. Why should rules be more special than any breakable tool? Sometimes you really need the tool and take care of it. Sometimes the tool lets you down and you throw it into Mount Dread Doom Bad No Go Stay Away (which is, admittedly, basically translated into Goblin as "LOTS OF FUN HERE". Life is full of change and strange!

If the book suddenly starts talking about pinecones halfway through a sentence, that's normal. Especially if they're really cool pinecones. You might find yourself doing this as well. As Eris says, Chaos happens. Embrace the chaos. Just realize that without some kind of order, not only is chaos meaningless, but you'll never have any chance of organizing

your closet. (Thank you, O Ma'at, for your wisdom. At least, we hope it's wisdom. It's worked so far.)

Like. A closet with 14 white shirts and 4 Hawaiian shirts is potentially terrifying in a normal-stress kind of A closet full of live, oxygen-breathing, person-eating octopi is terrifying. Once. After that, you just shrug and stop expecting that Ma'at, Goddess of Order, exists in this reality, and kinda give up. Pass the Everclear?

But we digress.

Anyway, we love you.

Signed,

Ivan Didn't Do It The VII

A Goblin (who is still not sure why you need permission slips for any of this, and regrets letting Arthur and Jeff write their own opening notes.)

And now the book starts. Except for one brief, but solemn, Apology:

We're very sorry, Father Tolkien. We really are. We're sorry, but unrepentant.

Chapter 1: The Goblincore Mindset – There Isn't One Because There Is No 'Mind', Only The Here And Now

(We're exaggerating slightly. We tend to do that, and we won't apologize for it.)

"Where there is no mind, no thought to distract from action, then you may act freely."

~Miyamoto Musashi

"Wheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!"

~Louis the Goblin

One of the greatest challenges of the misfortune of not being a Goblin is an unhealthy obsession with checking on time, all the time, and then suffering pretty much the same stress you'd have if you actually missed your thing. Why go through all the pain? We Goblins see a puddle and think "that's worth looking at! There has probably NEVER been a puddle of that exact shape and form, any more than there is a single coastline which looks exactly, precisely like every other coastline."

It's all fractals and chaos theory, you know?

Both Jeff and A. Goblin simply like to set out really early whenever possible, and make sure they have plenty to do. There are ten of thousands of words we haven't used yet, and maybe today is the day.

Trying hard is good. Working hard is good. Trying to optimize and be efficient is frequently good, although we prefer to leave most of that to Dwarves.

Trying to get everything PERFECT all the time is a fantastic tool if you're really curious about the way the inside of a mental hospital looks.

(Answer: REALLY REALLY *REALLY* BORING.)

Now, you might expect a book on Goblins to have either Tolkien Goblins — the kind who aren't particularly nice people and have been selected from the biggest and dumbest of all the Goblins to hang out a lot with orcs and eventually become as large and more like orcs and dumb as humanly possible. And if that's what they want to do, that's what they want to do. Without Father Tolkien, nobody would buy this book, and we wouldn't have enough money to buy that extra pair of socks we were looking for.

Our Goblins are green as absinthe verte. They have gigantic ears and feel sorry for those who do not. They are flexible and agile and strange and weird and yes, they are indeed random. *But to really be random amongst other sentient beings, you can't simply attempt to act in a totally random manner.*

First, your own body will betray you. Your atoms will stubbornly generally stay together in the same place, unless you use something like a transporter beam, and then, if it doesn't reassemble you exactly as you were, people tend to get mad at the machine, and sometimes sad about you.

You can walk up to just anyone and say "knock knock diddly walk picky picky snoo," and they will consider it gibberish, even other Goblins. It's just that Goblins are more likely to suspect that you have some purpose behind your gibberish, which will eventually make some kind of sense, or an interesting kind of nonsense. Whereas dwarves will simply shake their heads and mutter something about having more work to do, and go back to work, which is also a healthy attitude.

We talk about being different, but we share a common language, we often wear relatively similar clothing, we use a lot of the same tools, we have mostly gone through similar school experiences, and in general, a lot of Goblin life is structured just like that of any civilization. You would be surprised how difficult it is to build a gigantic pyramid when everyone is pulling the stone in different directions. This is part of why we abandoned both trying to build pyramids and total anarchy at the same time.

(The ambiguity above is quite intentional. We find both experiments rather embarrassing, and trying them both together went beyond creative chaos and into the

realm of “Wouldn’t it be fun to drive your rulers insane so that they make terrible decisions? It wouldn’t? Ah, heckfire.”

You will find what is sometimes called high weirdness here. You will find a great deal of what we believe to be genuinely useful life advice. It may not be useful to *you* — you could be something beyond hope, like a barrel full of chives, which never has a chance to get anything but a barrel full of chives, unless it becomes a broken barrel of chives or an empty barrel of chives or a barrel of chives which has been boiled and eaten... But none of those things really changed the fundamental original nature without destroying the original thing. You’re a barrel of chives, you can’t really act; you can only be acted upon.

But if you’re not imprisoned by actual chains or laws (and even sometimes then) we can try to help release you from psychological, physiological, and mental chains. (Bedroom chains are for an entirely different book, thank you.)

We would like to offer you opportunities to change and improve, or at least make more interesting, your nature and your current circumstances, via the Way(s) of Constructive Chaos. The fact we use chaos is not a negative, unless you’re Michael Moorcock. It is simply one of the many expressions of the universe. The universe is full of constructive chaos and destructive chaos, just as it is full of constructive order and destructive order.

It took a whole lot of constructive order to make Stonehenge. It took some well-communicated and planned actions by human beings to start toppling the stones of that hinge after thousands of years, wreaking destructive chaos on one of Humankind’s most enduring monuments. Not all organization is bad; not all chaos is good. If life were that simple, you would not need books like this, and we would starve. And a starving Goblin is nearly as angry and unhappy as a hobbit who has only had seven meals. So be careful.

(We jest. Hobbits and dwarves are both very hardy races with a great deal to recommend them, and Hobbits, as Mr. Tolkien famously related, have tremendous endurance and can and will go without food, comfort, and all the luxuries of home for what they believe is a greater cause. And more power to them; we respect that. But they prefer to live very pleasant and relatively simple, if sophisticated, lives. It’s not *our* fault if we find them, as well as basically everything else in the universe, to be at least a little bit funny, even in their worst moments.)

~~If this book helps just one person take a little bit of money out of their pockets and hand it to us, we are happy.~~ Sorry, did we say that out loud? What we mean is, if this book helps even one sentient being improve their life or make it more interesting in ways they find pleasurable, we will be happy.

And also, hopefully have some of their money to assist in the Great Sock Shortage.

In other words...no matter who or what you are, or how you go about life, if what we have to offer is of use to you, use it and enjoy!

NOTE: Perfection may or may not be possible, but is almost always, for many artists, the actual opposite of creation.

A DISSENTING NOTE FROM AN ANONYMOUS PERFECTIONIST DWARF: “I spent twenty years making this thing perfect, and now it IS perfect. I made it for the Gods, who are very exacting. Relative perfections IS possible, but it’s hard, and distracts you away from other things, like love and pleasure. I consider both of those things optional and you can, too, if you want.

RETURNING TO GOBLIN THOUGHT:

You see a puddle and think “I should walk around it so my shoes stay clean.” We can’t complain because, now that I think about it, I forgot to put on shoes today. As I have for the last 379 days, barring the Queen’s coronation, where I wore socks. I miss my socks, but not a whole lot.

But I see what upsets you. You’d rather not disrupt the norm or create more work for yourself. You don’t want to allow in more unpredictability into a life that probably already has too much thereof.

But the Universe will ALREADY do that. Why are YOU worried about it? Might as well let it happen and get the practice. Hapkido teaches us that we don’t need to make the first move; we can respond to the situation fluidly. Let the problem come to you; don’t try to solve it before you can even see all of it. The latter is a good way to *possibly* solve one problem, and pretty *definitely* gain at least one more problem to replace/supplement it.

On Unpredictability, Then:

Think of this way. You are technically capable of responding to the actions of yourself and others in any number of ways. However, you MIGHT make a line shorter by pouring a bucket of water on your head, but when you get to the head of the line (or even before then) the line-makers might decide you don’t deserve/aren’t a good fit for that line. Then you’ll have stood in line for something you wanted/needed, and gained nothing more than getting soaked (and possibly pneumonia, if it’s cold.) Whatever “total” randomness is, not only can’t we do it, but we really wouldn’t enjoy it.

Often, anyway.

Goblins ARE unpredictable, but that's because we move in and out of lines and through, over, or under walls—physically and metaphorically. (To go back to the 'standing in line' analogy—you're not REQUIRED to ask someone to hold your space, and they're not required to say yes, but you probably need both of those things to happen if you want to actually get whatever you seek.) Being random and weird is fine, but the only way to do that and still maintain friends, alliances, business relationships, etc. is to try to be AWARE of those lines and have some idea what will happen if you cross/blur/destroy them. It doesn't exactly hurt to have a good or useful reason, either. They don't have to agree with you, but eventually you'll be trying to sleep, and then you'll have to face yourself. And for those who are not egotists or blinded by the Dunning-Kruger effect, that can be a difficult thing if you haven't tried to do something you consider worthwhile (up to and including spending the whole day in bed watching "Barney Miller", if that's your thing. And if you have a Palantir which picks up late 70s/early 80s TV shows.

Here's an example, and a lesson. (Everything in this book is a lesson, although sometimes it's a lesson to the authors, like, "You really shouldn't have written that.") Anyshoe.... This one time, as many Goblins as could be convinced to care voted on a Council to decide what was truly Goblineseque.

The counsel met for twenty-three minutes. Seventeen minutes were spent criticizing the décor. The rest was taking the small but significant stipend each Goblin had been offered to work on this....to hire the Dwarves to settle this problem.

This was 17 years ago.

They're working on it.

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In the meantime:

### **Three Simple Goblincore Principles**

1. If it looks interesting, it probably is. Go look. Unless you're actually supposed to be doing something with and/or for someone else, the only thing stopping you is that people might look at you like you're weird. They're probably not wrong, and *who cares?*
2. If they don't let you look, it must be REALLY interesting
3. If it's boring, you have enough taste not to pretend it isn't BOOOO-RING. And you have the graciousness to make sure EVERYONE AROUND YOU KNOWS IT'S BORING. You have to suffer in silence, it's only polite. But you might want to prevent suffering in others. See how this simple statement accomplishes both? We promise,

there are NO problems with this approach. Honest.

Would a Goblin trying to sell you something (ie, this book)....*lie* to you?

3.5 If a rule doesn't seem to help anyone, it's probably not that important.

4. If you like something, and you can have it without hurting anybody except maybe you, it's all yours.

4.5 Pockets are for things you might want later.

5. Curiosity is free. Use as much as you like.

6. With this book, as with all things that are wholly yours, take with you whatever you want, and throw away whatever you want.

7. If you co-own this book, as with all things that involve other sentients and are not unilateral, figure out what you want and what you'd prefer to throw away, and depending on your situation:

- (a) Keep it to yourself.
- (b) Discuss it with the others involved.
- (c) Ask pretty please with sugar on top.
- (d) Compromise.
- (e) Set off nuclear weapons. If you don't have those, then take some deep breaths, shrug, and get over it.

We know we gave you a number of warnings at the beginning of this book. Here's an important note. You will see it repeated from time to time.

The part we're not likely to mention very often is that it is perfectly fine to simply flip through this book and see if you find something useful. Honestly, while the works of Robert Anton Wilson influenced this book, one of the co-authors read it by taking out a dog-eared copy of one of Mr. Wilson's books, flipping to a random part, and seeking inspiration or something useful. Since most of Mr. RAW's life was spent trying to create useful connections and break down foolish belief systems—not into perfect belief systems, but simply into the understanding that *all* belief systems, including your own, include a great deal of foolishness—we really should take that into account whenever we make decisions...

There is absolutely nothing stopping you from simply flipping through here to a random page and seeing if there's something you like on it. Do not be intimidated by the size of this book. We are Goblins. We have quite a lot to say. There are a lot of areas we

might have made a lot longer, and they were probably areas we would've made shorter only we didn't want to, so we didn't.

**AN IMPORTANT NOTE (You Can Tell We Think It's Important Because Of The Helpful Title. You're Welcome.)**

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By the way, the phrase "I don't want to, so I'm not going to, thank you, though" is incredibly powerful. It is part of what Goblins call the Mighty High Road, and is a powerful weapon if you can use it with discipline and a bit of weirdness.

Discipline, we can help with. Weirdness you probably already have, considering that you're currently reading this.

## Chapter Two, I Think?

As the ancient principles of Discordia say in their spicy, concise manner: “To choose order over disorder, or disorder over order, is to accept a trip composed of both the creative and the destructive. But to choose the creative over the destructive is an all-creative trip. It may also be impossible to get quite right, but at least you can try.” This is an oversimplification, but it’s helpful. We just make it part of our life goals to skip the parts that feel destructive and unnecessary and let the creative bits wander where they want. Nobody said It was easy, but being a Goblin is tough. As Nietzsche said, “It’s not easy being green.”

So if what you’re expecting from this book is essentially chaos which almost has meaning, may we suggest “The Nonsense Works of Edward Lear”? Or to quote him on the subject:

*“They went to sea in a Sieve, they did  
In a Sieve they went to sea:  
In spite of all their friends could say,  
On a winter’s morn, on a stormy day,  
In a Sieve they went to sea!  
And when the Sieve turned round and round,  
And every one cried, “You’ll all be drowned!”  
They called aloud, “Our Sieve ain’t big,  
But we don’t care a button! we don’t care a fig!  
We’ll go to sea in a sieve!”*

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might have made a lot longer, and they were probably areas we would've made shorter only we didn't want to, so we didn't.

Whether a given thing helps your life or not is probably somewhat up to the dance between the information you take in and the way you decided to process it; but that's true almost everywhere.

### *Helpful Observation for Humans*

If you spent the same amount of time on jokes as you did on worrying, not only would you live longer, you'd *want* to live longer.

Terry Pratchett once observed, "Look, the life of gnomes and Goblins is nasty, brutish and short. So are they." It's a perfectly worthwhile philosophy to enjoy that life while it's around. Kurt Vonnegut suggested that one commemorate particularly excellent moments by saying "If this isn't good, what is?" The irony is not lost upon us; but it's fun to commemorate a great moment that way. Also, if you're a cynic, as both of your co-authors are, not only does this help you resist the desire to record every cool thing that happens via social media or a text message...it also bears in mind that the NEXT moment might be awful. It helps you focus on something you just enjoyed, which can't be taken away... and not worry as much about what MIGHT happen, when that (and/or other things) COULD be taken away.

So it goes.

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### **Chapter 3: Home & Habitat – When Possible, Make A Place for the Things You Actually Like. But Don't Stay There. There Are Probably Tigers In The Back Of Your Cave.**

“You’d probably know where your socks were if you picked up your room once in a while.”

~Mrs. Mach, to her children. She was perfectly right, it turns out. Don’t tell her we told you.

Really, truly:

Your home should be comfortable for you, if possible.

Not necessarily pretty. Not necessarily like that of your neighbors, or people who work with you or whom you see on your Palanir.

Comfortable. If possible (we know it isn’t always. But when it is, rather than enjoying having some ability to alter your environment, people tend to worry about it. Which sort-of spoils the point of not living in a cell.)

(O’ course, most Goblins believe most humans ALREADY live in cells. But that’s another, and a longer, story. “Little boxes, on the hillside...”)

So bear in mind that yes, it’s primitive, and yes, it’s dumb, but if your home could comfort you more, and it doesn’t, you might act out. You can’t fix broken plumbing with a frying pan (well may be YOU can; I can’t.) But you DO have a frying pan and you DO have broken plumbing and you DON’T have the urge or the money or maybe the time or ability to fix it. So you get the urge to take your darkling feels out on those around you. You can change peoples’ lives with a well-swung frying pan; but the change is seldom for the BETTER, for them OR you.

Here are three Goblin tricks for fighting that feeling:

1. **Let go.** You are free. It does matter if the plumbing is broken; but it doesn’t matter enough for you to care. Stop caring and get the plumbing fixed
2. **Embrace.** It sounds silly (thank you!) but make a game out of it. Plug doesn’t work? Okay, what’s the shortest bath you can take? Can you write a poem complaining about it?
3. **Go all Goblin on it.** Try this technique—it’s useful for a lot of things, in fact. Ask yourself “What’s the worst plausible thing I could do here?” Then try doing the opposite, as best as you can make that fit the situation. It’s a weird technique, but if you practice it, it works.

Some of JPM's best writing has been written while he was waiting for his interminably broken bathtub to fill.

Some of JPM's walls also have some holes in the plywood, because, admittedly, before about the age of 30, he spent the entire time complaining about how long it took a bath. Which wouldn't have been bad if he'd, say, written a short story or a poem about a tentacle coming out of your drain. But just saying, "This mother-plucking bathtub!" over and over IS a magical chant, and its effects are to make every second last about three seconds. Bored people sometimes do satisfying but stupid things. Your Today Self is going to have to answer to your Tomorrow Self.

4. **Recognize the difference between being creative, chaotic, and free, and just acting like a nitwit.**

Trust me. Not only will the people around YOU appreciate it, but you'll feel better, as well.

5. Go ahead and try doing it some other way because this sounds dumb. Eventually you'll come back and I will embrace it and we BOTH win. It sounds cheesy, it IS cheesy, and has anyone got some stinging nettle cheddar? Or possibly a very ripe Stilton?

## **SOME GOLBINESQUE WAYS TO LIVE**

Your home may vary. You might want the opposite of all of this. In that case, we suggest you buy a Hobbit a drink and crash in their spare guestroom for a few weeks.

**NOTE FROM A HOBBIT READER:** "*Several* drinks, please."

Having a Purpose is great, but dangerous. It's Purpose which has driven most wars, just as it's Purpose that has allowed so many warriors to survive. All things have consequences.

Your Purpose or Purposes can be way sim[ler. Many of us keep rocks that look like faces, sticks that feel nice in the hand, bits of moss, interesting bits of metal, and whatever else seemed worth saving at the time. Although...we suggest organizing them. You might find you enjoy it, and besides, otherwise, you'll run out of socks.

There's a famous Goblin tune about some Goblins who took up Absinthe as a hobby:

“Three young Goblins took Absinthe to the brain  
Two got very happy; but had very weird dreams  
The other went insane; you can still enjoy the screams.”

This was an EXTREMELY popular jingle for Goblin Absinthe, as well as being incredibly accurate.

Like Humans, not all Goblins live in circumstances they like. Fortunately, we’re still allowed to be happy. Nobody acts surprised if our plumbing breaks (can you tell I, personally, have a thing against plumbing? No offense to plumbers, those bold defenders of hygiene and my not banging on the bathtub with a stick) but we’re still kinda happy. If we can’t help fix the plumbing, why waste time being sad about it? If the river can’t move the stone, it flows around it; are you smarter than a stone, or do you have rocks in your head?

### **A Simple Goblin’s Totally Obvious Way to Arrange Things**

Some Goblins like a simple setup. We know. We’re surprised, too. But since that’s easier to describe than something to personalize, we’ll put this here to impress the publisher.

If we had a publisher. Whatever!

“Throw the theologians in the cellar and bring up more oysters and hot sauce!

~Garrison Keilor

The “home” theory:

The randomness of life can sometimes run counter to the glorious chaos of Goblinpunk, because some folks mistakenly believe that we’re all about chaos. Silly. Chaos is ALREADY AROUND IT. We just (a) embrace it and

[looks around to see if anyone is listening]

Whisper: “...sometimes we embrace Order when natural chaos is already at its peak and wouldn’t have any actual fun increasing. Atlantis, take note.”

## A Hobbit Makes Breakfast

*(It's not exactly Goblinish, but if you'd like a great example of what you can do with a lot of organization, a decent amount of resource, and an unlimited hunger. We're very fond of Hobbits. They have their priorities straight. They all do the same thing, but each does it rather differently, and the things they do are eat, smoke Hobbit-Weed, pursue careers or crafts or, if wealthy, pleasure and leisure. We, like Dwarves, are a bit too focused on Creation to do that; but we sure admire a species that would rather plan how to fit eleven meals into one day than how to take over the World...a difficult thing which, once achieved, is very seldom enjoyed, and even then, seldom for long....)*

“Hunger is the best spice.”

-The large Troll who just wandered into your bedroom after hiding quietly in your closet for a week.

If you're like us, you've done nothing with your entire life but wonder what Hobbits eat.

...possibly, you're not like us in that regard.

But it's my belief that there are a sufficient number of curious people who might like to know; if not for the sake of knowledge, love of food, or interest in Tolkien, then for the fact that the meal itself would be impossible for most of us; but this Hobbit, who is comfortable but not wealthy, starts his day.

Breakfast!

By Hobby the Hobbit. (Go ahead. Make jokes about my name. If you find one I haven't heard yet, I'll give you a sovereign.)

—

First, I wake up!

I'm one of those sudden wakers, not like some I could name. I don't hold it against them; it's rather a blessing and a curse. One moment I'm floating in a warm, comfortable armchair, staring into a Palantir showing the Hobbit Olympics (which happened once. Fifty years ago. We didn't quite get it right. While apparently Humans DO have pie-eating contests, they don't consider it an Olympic sport. Their idea of Olympics seems to have a lot to do with running, jumping, lifting...I mean, if we wanted to do those things, we'd just go to work.

I'm no fool. I grab the water jug and run to the bathroom, where I pour about half the jug out. Most of it goes down my throat, giving me the start on hydration for tonight's pub

crawl and incidentally for the day; some of it goes on me and I'm REALLY awake, sputtering. I have a small pastry to give me the energy for the upcoming meal. I bathe and dress in a lovely, if slightly mud-stained, kimono, which was given to me as a gift by an old friend. And then it's time to rush outside – the Amuse-Bouche man is coming!

The Amuse-Bouche man arrives before the milkman but after the oyster girl; oysters don't last long. Raw oysters, even pulled right from the sea and packed in ice, don't last all that long; and the first ten or fifteen houses along the route make this even brief by buying her out before she even gets here. I do love raw oysters; but getting them is too much work. Besides, Monsieur Amuse-Bouche Homme is here!

For those of you who chose to study French instead of Elvish (wise choice!), a "bouche" is a mouth. The amuse-bouche teases the mouth, edges it, gets it ready for the meal to come. I hurriedly set a bunch of water boiling and run outside.

Today's amuse-bouche is better than oysters anyway; raw tuna tartare in an ice cream cone, with some sort of sweet-savory sauce mixed into the tartare. It LOOKS like a strawberry ice cream, and I'm a little tempted to play a prank or two. But the clear scent of salmon would give it away, plus, it's considered rude to take more than one. They ask why Hobbits go to war; it's because, in the nursery, we grab every food item we see, no matter to whom it belongs, and thereafter the teacher insists we must stand facing the wall for a while as everyone else eats.

I shudder at the memory, but I never forgot: in THIS case, in THIS place, if we share our food in general (but not always; don't touch my Laphroaig, that's my precious!)—we'll end up with more food. This only works if everyone agrees to it, which is why it hasn't transformed us into some species of unbearable kindness and unendurable patient sharing; we can ALL agree on food. We CAN'T all agree on going to war, but we CAN agree that most wars mean less food, and worse food, too. We are a peaceful race as a side-effect of our cuisine. This seems perfectly logical to me.

I eat the tartare. Like most raw fish, you either love raw fish or you don't. I love it. This is spicy and sugary and sort of umami. That man is a genius and a treasure. I finish up as he flicks the whip far over his horse's head and he rides on to the next lucky block. Me, my water's boiling, so I put the eggs in.

Some say Roc eggs are an extravagance. I can hardly argue, but really, I have very few copies. I collect old, battered, cheap books, usually ones people are giving away. I dress reasonably, but not particularly well for a Hobbit of my age and station.

But I love me some Roc eggs. And it saves me from cracking two-dozen ovae every single damn morning. Carefully, with reverence (I buy them over in Humantown, whatever

they call it; what Hobbit wants to give up their free time and risk their lives and maybe even their DINNER trying to get their OWN Roc eggs?

Then, it's time for an appetizer: a nice cream Danish from the little Jewish shop down the road in the nearby Human village. Now, an appetizer is supposed to whet your appetite. But I've always felt it helpful to enhance your appetite in multiple ways; otherwise, your neighbors, who have nothing better to do, will accuse of being on a *diet*, and among Hobbits, that would make you a laughingstock.

So it's the right moment for pipe-weed. Fortunately, Gandalf recently passed by, out on some kind of Wizardly business, and I was able to buy a good quantity of his excellent weed. I smoke it in my pipe, blowing clever dark smoke rings as I go. I meet a few others on the road, also smoking pipes, and we sort of don't interact, but we tend to give a definitive, if discreet, wink. A good high to you, my friend.

Now I'm TOO hungry, though. I'm almost home, and I focus. I go to the shelf that holds our pictures of relatives and little trophies (I have one for "Most Unexpected Comestible Usage of Leviathan Tail", myself. It contain a picture of my uncle Morty, who cheated on his taxes and left my aunt Rivkie all alone and penniless. She's now a topless dancer in Goblinia, where she is greatly admired for her huge, firm, enormous ears. One good look at Morty, whose picture is still there (he could always come back someday; who knows), and I'm no longer stark raving famished; just nice and hungry. Perfect state for what comes next.

Un-Appetizer. It's traditional for a Hobbit to clean his plate. But you also need to jolt the taste buds a bit. A little pain makes the pleasure a little sweeter. I use fresh raw broccoli. It doesn't go well with ANYTHING else I'm eating. But it's healthy, and it really gets one excited for the next bit.

Soup or Cereal. It being breakfast, I ought to get that Elf-wheat cereal. But it's a chilly day and I want something hot. I've chosen a soup made from lentils and fresh local sausage. I might ALSO have the sucrose, brightly colored cereal. You ought to eat something out of a bowl if you can, and I definitely recommend picking ONE of the two. The seven or so times I've tried both, it just hasn't worked well. That being said, this may be the 8<sup>th</sup>. As Galadriel said, "Hobbits? They're hopeless. Yet they seem to get by all right."

Healthy Juice. Don't forget your orange juice! I have a whole stack of oranges, stolen by some village children from the controversial orange tree that Ms. Darling put up, the one whose branches grew until they overhung the very path itself. The Town Council asked her to remove the sections which extruded onto public paths. She threw oranges at all of them

and ran out. I hired a bunch of local children to go strip the tree bare for me, or almost. Her tree will be sad, and perhaps she'll final cut just that one real annoying branch. Could work.

Anyway, I helped Because I am a helper. Then, like medicine or whisky (but I repeat myself) – I down a litre in a series of long swallows; I deserve it, after peeling and squeezing so much fruit by myself. Besides, Hobbits don't get diabetes; that's a Human disease. I don't mind the sugar, but it does make me sleepy. Fortunately, I left the coffee pot on, and it's time for...

Hobbit Coffee! I won't try to explain it; in comparing it to the coffees of other races, theirs are armored knights on horses trying to battle the demons of sleepiness. Hobbit coffee simply MAKES YOU VERY AWAKE whether you like it or not.

Plenty of cream and sugar. Then a little more cream and sugar.

Iced coffee. (Rather than let the coffee either stay warm forever, eventually sucking out all the flavor, best to take it as it's cooling and drop it into an overwhelming flagon full of ice. Add more sugar, stir, consume slowly (or you'll get brain freeze, an affliction which faces every sentient being, except possibly Sauron. And no-one's seen him eating, say, ice cream; he seems perfectly content with a nice, warm, fresh humanoid skull. Can't say I blame him. Not everyone can handle coffee.

Chocolate. I won't describe this section; my chocolatier makes a living, but isn't deluged. Much as I like him, I kind-of don't want the Human world descending upon him, buying him out, and mass-marketing half-arsed chocolate in his name. Think of Ray Kroc. Think of Colonel Sanders. "Tacit tempus." So I'll just say that I spent a very lovely half hour communing with the candy; and then I had to go and wash my face and, I suppose, change my tunic.

Bacon, home fries, sausage links, Canadian bacon—I mean, it would hardly be a morning meal without them. I once served them to Tom Bombadil, who solemnly informed me that pigs were some of his best friends, and he turned me into a herring for a week. But at least I got to take a 168 hour bath.

Roc eggs benedict. The key to this is making the Hollandaise sauce LAST night if you want it to be good THIS morning. Which I did; I'm no slacker. This is generally a light, French-inspired dish. Doing it with Roc eggs does sort of mess with the delicacy of the dish, but I take it straight to the face; I'm starving.

Drawing room. At this time, it's a good idea to retire to the drawing room so that you can think about the food and put it into your memory palace while the thoughts are fresh. I sat there, enjoying my meal, thinking it over, smiling a content smile.

And then we get to the Main Course:

Roasted Elf Drumsticks. (Apparently, this particular Elf lost a bit, and also became King. Elves are peculiar, but we can agree with them on one thing...they're delicious. It's not that hard to get your hands on good Elf-meat; Elves eat it all the time, and sometimes they note that the Elf they've just slain in a duel/murdered for their dress/died in battle just isn't up to grade-A top Sirloin of Elf quality. So you get the leavings; but the leavings are lovely. And they sell them cheap, as long as you don't count the cost of their smugness in watching you take what they think is an inferior comestible, one which is beneath them, and giving them MONEY for it.

But there's no way to avoid Elven smugness, and it can't get in the way of how much I love this breakfast.

Fresh Snozzberry juice—Snozzberries taste terrible on their own, but add a little sugar and some lemon and lime, pour the whole thing over ice, and you've got a healthy, nutritious, rather tasty, refreshing beverage. For a bit of extra kick, add Dragonsbane—but don't breathe on any Dragons until you've brushed your teeth.

After you have eaten everything, then quietly, gently and lovingly awaken your spouse by sharing your good strong flagon of Hobbit coffee, an some buttered scones, and a few freshly-baked chocolate croissants from France, which are horribly expensive and for which you traded either your accordion or your soul; you can't quite remember. Your spouse wanted to wake up now; you are thanked for your reliability. You remind them it's just good old Hobbit ingenuity and good planning. Then, as she's digging into the croissants, you let them know.

"I've had a snack," you tell them, and then you say, with adoration:

"Good morning! I love you! What's for breakfast?"

## Chapter 36: A Great Goblin Hero Defeats A Dragon

Once upon a time, there was a Dragon who, of course, kidnapped a Princess. (A Human Princess; the relatively brief times Goblins have had kings, they've seldom had time to raise children AND retain their Kingship. Also, knowing the general history of Goblin Kings, they are uneasy, and they find it hard to get married, despite the fringe benefits of being married to a rich, powerful spouse who might also be quite an interesting person; the monarchy is likely doomed, and the Goblin will be lucky to escape with life and limb, much less a lineage.)

A Great Reward was offered—not half the Kingdom, but a massive fortune in glittering metallic treasures purchased by a very wise King around when the Great Mine found that huge vein, the Dwarves worked it 24 hours a day, and the value of gold plummeted until other species came and forcibly closed down the mine with many apologies and primitive, but effective, explosives.

(That's when the Dwarves started working for Loki. But that's another tale.)

There were three courageous brothers who went to face the Dragon. The Eldest got eaten; the middle one turned from the path and entered a monastery, and the youngest, and cleverest, tried to outsmart the Dragon, and also got eaten. Dragons are very, very smart.

So the King sent his bravest Knights. Each went forth and challenged the Dragon to single combat, and the Dragon ate very well, and also acquired an excellent collection of slightly-dented armor and weapons. (But that, too, is another tale.)

At that, the King sent a dozen of his boldest, strongest, smartest Knights to ride up the mountain and tackle the scourge together. The Dragon, who only preferred single combat when the odds were in Her favor, waited until they turned the last bend and were about half a mile away, then took to the air, swooped very very high, and then dived suddenly, faster than an armored man could reach for a bow, much less nock it with an arrow. She incinerated all of them. She wasn't stupid, after all.

So the King sent Adventurers. The Princess did have some desire for rescue, but not a tremendous one; she was rather young, perhaps the age at which she would have gone to college if the Kingdom had colleges, and was doing perfectly fine having nice Hobbit-delivered meals, reading the Dragon's massive library, learning magic, and consistently losing to the Dragon at Chess and Go, but almost always getting very lucky at Monopoly. The Princess went out to meet each adventuring party and explained that while she wanted to be rescued, unless they were really, really powerful, they were going to die, and they might as well leave now, as the Dragon cave was getting crowded with broken war-gear and

the Dragon was forced to chip a hole into the next cave over, eat a few bears, and begin storing her stuff there.

None of them listened. Almost all of them died soon after at the hands of the Dragon, except for the few who decided the Princess was under a spell and tried to take them with her; maybe the Princess should have told them that breathing fire is only partly anatomy, but mostly magic, and she'd learnt it pretty well; but she really disliked people forcing her to do things, and at some point, she'd grow weary of their arguing with/over her, and say, "If I may have an opinion? **FWOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOSH**".

I mean, they were going to die ANYWAY when the Dragon caught up to them, and she needed the practice.

Then it was tax season, and the King needed to focus on a great deal of accounting. (There ARE kingdoms where the King basically owns anything and can tax anyone. The Kingdoms eventually lose the best, the brightest, the best-educated, and generally the most governmentally valuable citizens, who are welcomed with open arms by the nearest nation which was fond of advancing the wealth and power of their nation, vs. being attacked and deposed by angry mobs who will, given time, generally end that particular reign in spectacularly bloody ways. THIS King had been taught by the Queen Mother, and the Queen Mother by the King before her, and so forth, and so on; that's part of why there WAS a Kingdom.

So the King offered a very large fiduciary remuneration for anyone who could bring the Princess safely home. This led to quite a lot of people trying, and dying, and the King was rather too busy to keep track, to be honest. Meanwhile, the Princess and the Dragon were both learning how to play Go.

(Of course the Princess missed her home, her family, her wealth, and so forth. But it wasn't like she was imprisoned in the Cave—which went down into the Earth for many miles and all manner of fascinating things and creatures within, provided she didn't do something dumb and get herself killed. But this was around the age where most princesses do something dumb and get married; the risks were the same, and the rewards, in general, probably averaged out.

(But, I mean, the Dragon was by far the most powerful being around. Gandalf's Order was generally dedicated to a certain amount of non-interference, and he hardly liked to advertise his powers; nor would he be utterly certain of defeating the Dragon, and he had a suspicion that his future dealt with his ancient enemy Morgoth, and there are a lot of Princesses in the World.

(Also, the Dragon was one of his very best customers—understandable, given her size—and aside from hating to lose the income, he and the Dragon and the Princess had many times partaken of Gandalf's Draconian-Blend Hobbit Weed and ordering in enormous meals while watching the only thing Gandalf permitted on his Palantir—old episodes of something called “Happy Days”, which none of them understood, culturally, but which certainly cheered them up.

(And there were reasonably nearby towns where she could go shopping, make friends, hang out in cafes writing terrible poetry, and play Houses and Humans with people her own age. She even dated once in a while; but after being in the company of inhuman geniuses, it's just hard for even an above-average human to compete longterm for fun and interesting discussions. Why shouldn't the Dragon let her go to town? If she really wanted to flee or some villager(s) really wanted to rescue her, the Dragon would have grumbled a few times when she was late, flown over to see what was happening, and then roast somewhere between ‘all the people taking her away’ and ‘the entire damn stupid town’. She never did the latter; but she often FELT like doing so, and the Princess, having encountered her share of Village Idiots, particularly the Mayor, didn't blame her.)

Somehow, news of this eventually reached Goblinia, and Jacob the Goblin, who was okay with, but not fantastic at, smashing things with hammers, thought he'd take a swing at it. He spent a month planning, and another month making arrangements.

The Dragon saw him coming from many miles away (it's hard to hide a pack train of mules carrying gold in plain sight. He might have run into danger of being robbed, but this was the territory of the Bandits of Sherwood Forest, and not only did they ostensibly have a public image of doing good deeds, they were perfectly aware that an entire forest would burn even faster than a large Village.)

So he reached the Dragon's cave only minimally molested. The Princess and the Dragon were both standing there, staring at him.

“What the Hel is this?” asked the Dragon. This should have been an intimidating question, but the Dragon was clearly only partway paying attention; that gold was one hell of a distraction.

“It's a large fortune in gold,” explained the Goblin. “I got it from the Dwarves, after reading and signing a VERY long contract.”

“HOW did you get it?” asked the Princess, who was very practical.

“Oh, I took out a loan against the Reward. The Dwarves know that the King is good for the money.”

Both Dragon and Princess blinked. They stared at each other for a long moment.

They then had a brief and quite boring (to most people, not to me; but I'm assuming that statistically, you're probably not me) conversation about economics, and the many reasons why the Dragon couldn't simply have kidnapped the Princess and asked for a ransom.

(It would have destabilized the local economy and thus raised the price of Hobbit-Weed and the various human luxuries the Dragon enjoyed...sitting on gold is great fun for Dragons, but it DOES get chilly in the winter, and their claws are ill-suited for making nice comfy quilts, the way Grandma Evie did in the town, to give just one example. Also, hot sauce; Dragons LOVE hot sauce, but they recognize that species which have been forced to do their own cooking from birth, as opposed to eating things that were still alive, or frying them naturally, tend to be just plain better at almost every kind of cuisine than they are. Also, if a Dragon was powerful enough to do it once, she could do it twice or ten times or until you had no more money. In that world, you either had to keep your royalty under lock and key, fearing Dragon attack—which would have made NOBODY happy...or you would have had to, say, move to a different Kingdom, one that didn't have a King but wanted one. Those are quite rare.)

At one point, though the discussion was already practically over, the Goblin took the Dragon aside, and said, "You know, eventually, the Princess will have certain...needs...which will overcome her in her later teenage years, and do you REALLY want to be the one who lives through that, especially if you keep eating all of her potential suitors?"

The Dragon blushed, though no-one but she could tell; few people have seen a Dragon blush and lived to tell about it. The Goblin, sharing a certain vert-ness with the Dragon, had a guess, but didn't say anything.

So the Kingdom got its Princess back. The Royalty were a bit poorer—but not a whole lot poorer than they would have been if they'd hired the Princess a college worth of tutors, which is effectively what she had; and eventually, the Kingdom had a Queen who could breathe fire, was friendly with the most powerful Dragon and the most powerful Mage in the Kingdom, and she eventually married someone she liked, who became the Queen's Consort. The Dragon was richer and had much more freedom to fly around various points of the Kingdom in search of really excellent chocolate and good knitting, free from fear of crossbows, catapults, Dragonsbane, and taxes (the Princess wasn't stupid, after all.) The Dwarves were richer and happy.

Technically, the Goblin came away with nothing but this story; but in reality, he never needed to pay for his own meals, his own drinks, or pretty much anything ever again, and he lived in a lovely apartment RIGHT next to the Royal Library, where he and the Princess took her writing and turned it into fabulous musicals (as Mark Baldrige said, “Song lyrics are just bad poetry” (or stolen poetry, if you’re Andrew Lloyd Webber)—and opened a grand theatre which became a cultural hub throughout the known World.

Everyone lived way more happily ever after than anyone could plausibly have expected, and you can’t get much better than that.

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## How To Create A Dystopia Part I: Idealism

Idealism is great. There's a lot of power in being willing to go to extremes, even perhaps die, for what you really believe in.

However, statistically, no matter how much your brain denies it, some things you believe probably ARE wrong, and if you die for them, your ghost will taunt your corpse endlessly. "You mutton-head! Do you have any idea how many Hobbits you could have dated, instead of fighting for (insert your favorite semi-important cause here?!?).

Like all sentient beings, many idealistic Goblins throughout our history have attempted to create beautiful future utopias. Not all of them ended badly; some of them ended very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very badly.

As Goblins, we wouldn't claim to know the single simple secret to a happy life, but we CAN claim, truthfully, that we've seen a LOT of examples of how to lead a *very* unhappy life. Using our wormhole and a small bribe to a Hobbit-weed dealer of our acquaintance, we opened a portal to a used bookstore in the Future.

(He warned us against it, but we had smoked a LOT of Hobbit-Weed first, since its many beneficial effects have been explained by the most knowledgeable entity that we know. The fact that this wise and knowledgeable entity also happens to be our dealer surely hasn't biased his decision; everyone knows really smart people can't be biased.)

It was a used bookstore in the 1980s. We managed to get almost no technical books whatsoever, but we got a LOT of terrible old science fiction (and some extremely good scifi; the most famous blood feuds in our history are entirely over a book called "Stand on Zanzibar", to the point where we didn't ban it. In fact, we made it required reading for everyone, which meant that nobody read it and we stopped arguing.)

So we used to read quite a lot of 1970s novels about future dystopias. Since your humble author was born in 1975, he wasn't even literate by the time many authors stopped being visibly high all the time, and thus we entered a world where the ones who were really worried took some form of speed instead. You can see quite a visible change between, say, badly-written scifi of 1977 vs. badly-written scifi of 1982. I was busy becoming literate; I couldn't notice at the time that people had switched from what Paul Simon called "A pint of tea" to what "Bright Lights, Big City" called "Bolivian Marching Powder", more commonly called cocaine. We don't know what that is, but it sounds exciting and far too dangerous for ANY Goblin to take. We don't have a lot of asylums, and while the coke would probably help us build them quickly, it would also put us into them with equal rapidity.

Some of the dystopian books I've read included these ideas:

-The entire world was ruled by doctors. No, really, truly. I think I can look it up and find it again if I try. The author feared a world that was excessively worried about health, and a medical lobby seized the opportunity, asserting that keeping everyone healthy was most important. The entire book is full of Doctors, in fine medical regalia, issuing orders, making prohibitive laws, quarantining dissenters.

-The world was suddenly ruled by race, specifically an oppressed minority. It's pretty much entirely, "How would you like it if WE had the power and we were angry at you?" (I'm not talking about Heinlein's "Freehold"—we've never finished reading it. Mr. Heinlein is a great writer, but it's a tad embarrassing to read right now). It sort-of took that one idea and kept yelling it out of every page. It got a tad repetitive after, say, the first paragraph or two.

-We're all pretty familiar with the incredible optimism of 1984, which suggested that, in order to find and trap a subversive, you needed a longterm, focused campaign towards one or two individuals, whom you trap and then torture until they genuinely change their mind. This is plausible and works, but through the whole book, we see TWO subversives taken. Meanwhile, all I need to do is open my magic screen and, every day, in the Real World, I'll find a dozen notices to shun and avoid individuals and ostracize them in every possible way; or I watch individuals who were previously revered suddenly reduced to nothing by rumors. Compared to that, the specific, individual attention from one malevolent human towards one or two others looks basically like a level of personal care that's hard to get from, say, your own doctor, in the current era.

-Let's be kind and not even talk about "Brave New World". It seems very naïve. Most people were really happy but really brainwashed? Wouldn't it be rather heavenly compared to the actual reality, which is that most people are really unhappy AND really brainwashed?

My own tribe of Goblins spent a bit of time in the modern human world. (Yes, we had spells for time travel at one point, and didn't needIt took a lot of work and time and a couple of generations to diagnose the Cabbalistic building blocks of the Universe and alter time and space to travel forward and back. They've been banned for a long time now, but more than that, most Goblins, no matter how curious, would no more touch Time Travel than they'd touch an angry cobra—with the difficulty being, the spell just needs candles and invocations, and cobras require an actual living cobra, which would, admittedly, be interesting but harder to acquire and candle. I suppose someone with proper protective gear would be more than happy, if they were really confident they were safe from bites, picking up and examining a cobra, or at least giving it a good look; they're fascinating creatures. Whereas we avoid time travel to the future the same way we'd generally avoid

bathing in a dumpster full of trash. It's *icky*. (See our later notes on Diogenes' time-machine for why we avoid trying to travel into the past.)

No wonder you're stressed! You rely on your magic screens for almost everything. And who can blame you? They do so much! They're like magic, only most magic doesn't require you to sign longterm contracts with large, faceless corporations who don't care about you and don't even have good mechanisms for *trying* to care about you. The Wizards of this world have never gotten that organized, or that interested in ruling people vs. trying to, say, find the Elixir of Life. That keeps them busy, whereas trying to rule wouldn't be terribly fun or profitable for them in comparison.

Those screens bombard you with information overload AT BEST (let's not talk about the worst; why be depressing?) They know where you are. They know what you like. And in combination with the everpresent, inexpensive video of the future... you're under semi-constant surveillance.

Most communication is via magic box, and since you have no real ability to, say, actually communicate with someone who tells the world you ate your grandmother and threw your cat out the window, you can end up with a great deal of frustration if you attract the attention of someone popular, or following popular cause, who doesn't like you. You can post pictures of your cat and grandmother both being quite alive and affectionate with you, but your strange invisible caste system means that if someone with enough authority will be believed over, you know, proof.

This can't be good for you. Or your grandmother.

So you're always watched. You're potentially in a place where one sentence sent through the box could get you shunned. Compare that to the ancient Greeks, who needed a formal process, and a vote via the Ostrakon. (Really! Look it up!) You could still get railroaded, but it was a long and difficult process.

But most of all, OH CAFFEINA, GODDESS OF ENERGY AND GOBLIN SPIRIT, the information overload involved! It would drive the sanest person insane, and, no offense, but you people of the future don't seem to have been unusually sane to begin with.

No brain is meant to hold onto that much.

And it doesn't. So Humanoids of your era rely on a few sources they trust, even when those sources visibly have tremendous personal profit or loss invested in a given side of the equation.

Bruce Lee said two things: he said both to let go of that which doesn't serve you, drop it, stop focusing on it. And in nearly the same breath, in contradiction, he said "Be one

with the disease”. By which he meant, if you can’t escape it, *embrace it*, but *recognize* you’re embracing it. Stop letting it stress you, let it calm you, but recognize that there’s a lot of pain there. If you just can’t avoid it, then commit to the bit...but do so calmly, on your own terms.

I’m in a human hotel right now, as my bed has been destroyed by either trolls, rock giants, or the fact that it wasn’t a very good bed. It’s unknown. Three times so far, I’ve been offered something they call a “Wifi password”. I took it, and then used it as little as possible.

I’m NOT bragging. I’m just admitting the limits of my own powers. I can no more resist the fascinating things in those portable Palantirs than you can. And I know it.

So I work hard to control it. I am disciplined about not removing my screen, which means I’m suddenly interacting with humans (and, as you can see, writing). Again, this isn’t because I’m cool; it’s because I know I’m not better than anyone else. If I let the magic box get a serious hold on me, so that I want to look at it all the time, I...

...okay, confession from A. Goblin here: I got my hands on a magic box. (Yes, service providers will provide some access to the World, even in the Goblin land, which technically doesn’t have electricity. Information Overload is great for inventions, especially if there’s money in it. I admit that in this particular case, they really did cut down a lot of pretty forest to put up ugly cell towers; but to be fair, we’re surrounded by pretty forest. We need to cut it down to put up a house, even. Unfair to blame them for trying to bring us what they see as Knowledge.)

Here is the freedom you learn as a Goblin:

Information, including way more information than you can process without breaking down or finding a liquor store, is NOT the same as Knowledge.

We Goblins serve both Eris (for Chaos) and the Egyptian lady with the wings...Ma’at, or “order”. We’re far from perfect.

But most of us have gazed into the Palantir. It’s fascinating. It’s very useful. Sometimes we use it a lot.

But Ma’at desires moderation. At first, it was no great wisdom on the part of Goblins; moderation means closing your magic box sometimes. And even when we realized the problem

(too much information)

("Too much information / Running through my brain  
Too much information/driving me insane."  
"Too Much Information",, 1981

(which is controlled by OTHER PEOPLE)

(But which tries to control YOUR life. And not even to own the World, the way those old dystopias predicted. It's a million sources competing for your attention, and they're all pretty fascinating, and any one can draw you right in.)

This means other people (or bots, or Elves, or whatever) are running a part of your life that they don't need or have any right to run.

And that's CRAZY. They don't want us to run around randomly singing any song we want. They don't like some of the things we want to say, and since they're trying to catch our attention, they're watching and listening to us, but not as friends. They want to make sure we buy their stuff / think their way / look at their ads.

This is SO helpful and can be SO fun and is definitely at least as bad as being an alcoholic. (Goblins LOVE mead. We love to party, get drunk, and laugh with each other, and that doesn't always lead to the smartest decisions. But we do recognize that if you drink half a bottle of mead to wake up and face the world every day, then another half so you can talk to people and not wonder what you're missing on your magic box, then another half to calm down from the day, then another half a bottle to get to sleep....)

(...you'll drink up all the mead, you jerk, and leave a lot of junk. Also, it will be terrible for you, and instead of doing fun, chaotic things, you're likely to do really stupid things.)

What those ancient dystopias left out was the idea that not only might you be judged by your neighbors, but that you can be judged by total strangers in a way that definitely places enough negative votes in the modern Ostrakon to get you shoved out of the world. A stranger on the other side of the world with a lot of friends says something bad about you at two a.m.; you wake up at ten a.m. and you've lost half your friends. It just doesn't make any sense.)

I'll state for the millionth time: we don't avoid this because we're smarter or better than you are. (We're Goblins! We're smarter and better than everyone! Or so we like to believe. Objective reality does not always bear this out.)

We want our lives of glorious chaotic freedom.

And the ONLY way to enjoy chaos among other people is to do it intelligently. Wear a provocative t-shirt? People look at you funny. Wear a t-shirt that goes against the desires of

the magic box? Strangers will throw you, mostly metaphorically, into the Ostrakon, and you'll be voted into ostracism before you realize there's a vote. And you don't get to vote, either.

How in the world can you perpetuate glorious joy from that?

If we want to swim, we swim.

If we want to sing, we sing.

If we want to write weird, half-brag, half-lie, half-advice books, that's 1.5 books, and this book is short. But we can do it without worrying that people who've never read it will criticize it through the magic box, because they CAN, they WANT to, and sometimes lots of other people will believe them and they'll get to enjoy the many pleasures of fame and, depending, sometimes even fortune.

But they're still slaves to the magic box.

And if there's one thing learned from the one and only war against non-Goblins we've ever fought (against the Elves, who have a Palantir everywhere they go)...it's this:

It really is better to die on your feet than live on your knees. Dying is awful, but if you're a warrior, it's a risk...and if you work hard, maybe the other fellow will get it.

The Elves have glorious shining cities. And sophisticated weapons. We have the advantage of total unpredictability. When they went a bit too far, we...well, we kinda stopped them in a maximal way. Which is why Elfland now contains Goblainia, which they claim is a blot on their landscape. But damn, it's a FANTASTIC tourist attraction, even if it does tell some obviously outrageous lies about us; we don't hire curators if they don't have a sense of humor.

Thanks for listening, you weirdo. I'm going to check my own magic box (I'm not perfect!)—but then I'll put it down. I hear there's an interesting live cobra somewhere around here, and I'm going to buy some hockey gear and see if cobras really ARE delicious.

It's weird, but it's not crazy.

You don't have to believe me or agree with me. That's your right. But if you disagree, I won't share any of my fried cobra with you. Consider yourself warned.

Hail Eris! Praise Discordia!

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## **A Philosophical Note From A Human Doomed To Live In The Real World**

“It is my Will to inform the World of certain facts within my knowledge. I therefore take ‘magickal weapons’, pen, ink, and paper; I write ‘incantations’ — these sentences — in the ‘magickal language’ ie, that which is understood by the people I wish to instruct; I call forth “spirits”, such as printers, publishers, booksellers and so forth and constrain them to convey my message to those people. The composition and distribution of this book is thus an act of Magick by which I cause Changes to take place in conformity with my Will.”

~Aleister Crowley

I want you to know that this is fiction.

I want you to know that I am lying about that.

Throughout my lifetime, I’ve heard the basic argument, “If Magic were real, we’d see it in action.” And I’ve also heard the idea that “Stories are fictional, but they become true because we believe in them”. And this has always been acceptable, because it is known that the first idea is intended as a real description of the real world, and is therefore scientific; and the second part of part of the fictional world, and therefore need not answer to Science.

I’ve always wanted to believe in Magick, and so I’m excited as anything to realize:

This was never true.

This was always a conspiracy.

Now, honestly, it seems like my idea of this is unlikely. If I see people engaging absolutely in mass magical-thinking, unironically, unquestioningly, and enthusiastically, the likeliest explanation is that they’re simply very, very wrong. That is, they’re judging reality using models which do not map to an actual underlying reality, and so, in the longterm, they’re likely to be wrong. It’s as if you said, “When the Moon is full, this 1957 Chevrolet pickup truck sprouts wings and is able to fly from one place to another”; your model is probably not based in something that’s true, and therefore, you’ll be disappointed.

But our brains do not work that way. We simply say, “Oh, it didn’t happen THIS full Moon, but it will happen next time”; or “It happened! Only I dreamed that it did not”; or “It WOULD have happened, only my neighbor swept her leaves off her yard and partly onto mine because she is wicked; and this vengeful act inspired fear in the car, such that it dared not show its true nature. But once I have duly punished my neighbor, surely the car will sprout wings, as is right and proper.”

There is a simple ending here: real things are real, and imaginary things are imaginary, and it's okay for us to suspend disbelief for imaginary things and hold the line in a firm manner on things which are real and true.

Let me offer you a theory:

In the end, the Universe will belong to those who most enjoy both their reality and their delusions, but understand that the parts of reality we most enjoy are, most likely, actually delusions. Because while the truth can be stranger than fiction, truths are rare and hard-won, and have a great difficulty in pleasing you as much as your wildest fantasies.

There's no way to be entirely grounded in either one, because there is very little ground left. Find a patch that's fairly real, stand on it, and cherish your delusions; but be prepared, if your ground seems infirm, to realize that it might not actually be there, and then, you'd best hightail it for sanity. Because eventually, the purely delusional will fall; those seeking reality will continue to be caught up in philosophical illusion; and only Magick prevails.

In fiction, of course. In real life, you know exactly what's true, and what isn't.

Don't you?

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“Those whom the Gods wish to destroy, they first make bored.”

-bastardization of the original Ancient Greek saying by Ian Fleming

“It’s only a dystopia if you’re on the losing side, and that’s only the vast majority of people. And they probably deserved it, anyway.”

-Morgoth (translated from Ancient Elvish by JPM, who doesn’t know a word of that language.)

Frodo IV, who was not a Hobbit, just a normal human being whose family was very into the ancient Tolkien, did not understand why he was satisfied.

Sometimes he woke up and wanted to write a novel. He’d throw a few ideas at the screen in his head, and it would respond with several commercials, blinding him and taking over his eyesight, and during that time, it would very helpfully write a novel based on those ideas, in the style of almost any author he preferred.

He commuted to work every day. The preprogrammed car was fitted with beautiful Impossible Leather, which felt sort-of like leather but was made entirely from faux-Naugahyde (no naugies were harmed in the creation of this beautiful future.) The car pulled up at the same time and waited six-hundred-twenty-seconds, giving him plenty of time in case he was running late. What a luxury! And better than the bad old days when people owned cars and had to drive themselves. Everyone had their own personal (for the time they were in it) luxury-style backseat, which had a helpful trashbin and seatbelts. The automatic drivers were nearly perfect; it had been almost a month since that incident where three hundred of them, for no known reason, turned away from their destinations and drove straight as a cat seeing an open tin of tuna fish towards the nearest tree.

The survivors were filing what looked like a very big lawsuit; they, or their next of kin, were sure to be rich. It was a glorious world!

He passed a number of interesting shops. Once again, he considered the thought of visiting them, but they were six to eight blocks from his home, just in that sweet spot between “far too far to walk unaided” and “too close to hire a Humanless Carriage.” It wasn’t covered by his Monthly Humanless Carriage Registration, and so there’d be extra fees; and he really didn’t do a lot of walking.

(Once at his desk, his chair was promised to massage his back, tone his muscles, make him stronger and fitter without even leaving his desk. He’d been at this job for two years and felt horribly out of shape, but this was presumably an illusion, since he used the chair faithfully.)

He arrived at work, and because he could use the extra cash, he clocked in immediately, saving him the quarter hour or so which those in less fortunate times might have spent actually walking through the building, pouring (sometimes even having to make their own!) It was terrible, but THAT hadn't changed since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the meantime, the company datastream took over his optical nerves, guiding him to his office and giving him his daily briefing on what sorts of queries he needed to enter into the company part of his brain to get their AI guiding the marketing machines which generated imagery, sound, and the greatest films you could fit into minute-long commercials.

He was Assistant Head Chief Assistant to the Assistant to the Chief Marketing AI. It was a mid-range executive position, but the robots were able to pick out some reasonable suits on his salary.

Everything looked bright, shiny, pretty; his enhanced optical feed used his eyes for a seed and then made everything look better—unless, of course, he'd done something wrong. Even there, the World was a better place; hardened criminals could still go to work, and be productive members of the One Great Society, provided they didn't step out of line; those little electrical shocks, delivered when the wise AI thought they were stepping out of line, darkened their vision, made their cubicles into sells, and still asked said criminal to make query after query, or sometimes just talk, to feed the Great Intellect.

His freedom was amazing. The AI, which was completely impartial and had been programmed by only well-meaning, sapient humans, had informed him that for most of humanity's last ten thousand years of history, everyone was born (well, created) in bacta tanks, and stayed there through their entire lives, living, eating, going to school—all imaginary data, fed through them by the benevolent machines which they'd invented during the Younger Drayas period.

But now he was free to live a physical life however he wanted, so long as he did anything wrong. There's a lot more to this story, but it was an ordinary story, and he finished his work and went home, guided automatically by the extra voice in his head, while he experienced his daily dose of one hour of commercials—but only for products he loved, or at least, products which fitted the profile which had been compiled meticulously by the chips in his head.

It was the best of all possible worlds, as Voltaire said.

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## **We Didn't Want To Dignify This With A Chapter. It's Called "Bone-Meal: A Brief Parabola" (It's Not QUITE A Parable)**

Once there was a community of Giants who ate horribly. Even by OUR rather chaotic standards.

I don't mean that their eating habits inspired horror; I suppose that's quite relative, and depends on who and what you desire to see consumed. In this case, to be more specific, I mean that the quality of their foodstuffs was poor.

It wasn't because they lacked abundant sources of yummy protein. Humans spawn like, like, well, like mammals with reasonably energetic bodies, no specific mating season, and a vast desire to go around having sex with each other and/or other things. There ought to have been plenty to go around.

(And the last time I had magic beans, they gave me a fantastic chili. That's it. No beanstalks whatsoever.)

But the Giants were victims of their own stories.

Or peer pressure, if you'd like.

(What? Like you're not prey to both yourself? If so, give us your secret. We know better, but both of those things affect us. We're only Human/Goblin, after all.)

There's a good chance you've heard it – that little couplet which starts "FEE, FI, FO, FUM" for no particular reason, and then mentions that the Giant is going to grind some human's bones into bread.

This is a terrible idea.

Humans are edible. Wolves can eat them. Snakes can eat them, though it requires a big snake. (or several very, very persistent little snakes, and someone needs to cut you into chunks first.) Sharks can eat them. Other people can eat them. Giants can certainly eat them.

But human *bone*?

It's not that bone is utterly without nutrients, but it's not exactly without chalky bone-stuff, either, and the various chemical components of one's chemical structure are not exactly chock-full of the vitamins and minerals a mammal needs in its daily diet in order to flourish.

Honestly, even bread, the staff of life, isn't exactly a power-packed Breakfast of Champions. Even if you DON'T have a gluten allergy or a Keto diet. Post-prandial somnolence is quite real.

Now imagine living on just bread and water – not because you're a prisoner or poor, but because you feel it's *expected*.

Ridiculous? Sure. But once Giants heard that most famous tale (if, somehow, you are in a place or era where it's not famous, look it up; I'm not kidding) – they all began muttering the same thing, "I'll grind his bones to make me bread".

(The pronouns varied, but the culinary aspirations did not.)

And from there? That was the start of a lively deboning industry, plus a tanning industry. And tanning is quite useful; but cottage industries need to grow in order to create an industrial revolution. And to be perfectly honest, what incentive did they have to succeed and do better? Do really, really well, and you might get MORE terrible-tasting, unhealthy, ground-human-bone bread, and more very useful, very awful-smelling tanning sheds.

Ugh.

*Yuck.*

This is why you don't see Giants today. They've all died of malnutrition, or pure disgust. Or they've moved somewhere there are no humans and are, even now, sitting around on a beach somewhere, saying, "Pity we can't have those ground human bones we really love, but I suppose this bushel of lobsters, crayfish, and scallops will go well with tonight's wild boar feast."

And this is likewise why, in a book about being a Goblin, you find a parable about Giants. Too many people doing the same thing often leads to inveterate amounts of stupidity. Individual Goblins are usually quite smart; large groups of most Goblins, like large groups of anyone, are as smart as the dumbest members' dumbest household pet.

And that's assuming the pet is a goldfish.

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## **A Brief Word From Our Sponsors**

You might have guessed that we are nonconformists, in general. However, we feel that most people, especially younger people, might be uncomfortable with media that doesn't have at least one advertisement in it, or if you're hypothetically more dignified, like public radio or television, you might have 'Sponsors'. So we've added a little something from the Influencers who influenced us, to make sure you feel at home.

"This book has too much Chaos."

~Ma'at, Goddess of Order

"This book has too much Order."

~Eris, Goddess of Chaos

"I've just stolen your wallet."

~Sun Wukong, the Splendid Monkey King\*

\* If you haven't checked out "Journey To The West", there are some great free translations of that famous 16<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese book online; there's also an excellent graphic novel if you can find it. Or just see Jet Li's character in the movie "Forbidden Kingdom". Sun Wukong is arguably our favorite trickster-God (if he IS a God; there's some disagreement between himself and other heavenly entities on that subject. On the one hand, he has the powers of a Chinese God; on the other hand, he DID swipe their peaches.)

# **The Mighty Goblin King: A Cautionary Tale In Rhyme**

*(The Monkeys aren't the only ones who have their own royalty.)*

Once the Goblins wanted a King  
And they thought it would be a wonderful thing  
Toot the bells and let the horns ring,  
The Goblins, they have found a King

They took a Goblin impeccable  
Wild and free and ineffable  
“Let's switch from bass to treble,”  
Declared one Goblin rebel

For Goblins were not ruled before  
And they didn't want that anymore  
They wanted someone who knew the score  
To tell them what to do, and not be a bore

A Goblin King would be immune  
From the ways other rulers went out of tune  
“He won't like rules, or be a baboon;  
He's too Goblin to be thusly hune.”

The Goblin they picked loved anarchy  
Which they, too, loved quite heavily  
They knew they'd live life wild and free  
Under the rule of such as he.

Excitement ruled the Goblin sphere  
“Just look what we've accomplished here!  
Someone who'll rule by brains, not fear!”  
They rejoiced, and attacked kegs of beer.

The Goblin King ordered fireworks  
And dismantled pyreworks

But the happy ending's a mire, jerks;  
Power like tripwire works.

After the parties and reveling  
For months they were happy with their King  
Who didn't so a single thing  
That didn't leave Goblins happy-making

But after a while (tis the nature of Force)  
(You've probably guessed the moral, of course)  
With power comes the overgrown gorse  
Of Responsibility and Remorse.

When you're King, you want the rule of law  
Lest you be a fool for flaw  
I'll tell it straight, I'll tell it raw:  
Power corrupts. That's what I saw.

He was no Dictator, true  
He probably did better than I or you  
Might, if responsibility drew  
Your attention, with cry and hew:

Suddenly, Goblins had rules  
And Goblin Police stopped being fools  
And Goblin ardor quickly cools  
When faced with various Kingly tools.

For he met with other rulers  
(For which he needed a crown from jewelers)  
And a palace without so many peculiars  
And a jail; so they built many coolers.

Other kings talked of monarchy  
And Responsibility  
"Rule of Law", they said, "Is key.  
If you want to get anywhere rapidly."

My story's short. I'm sure you've a guess  
At what happened: total mess  
The Goblins like their Kingliness  
But not TOO much, I must confess.

I'll make it simple. Before long,  
The Goblins realized they were wrong  
Being a King is a minor-key song  
(Please pass the Hobbit-weed, and the bong.)

Soon Goblinia started to resemble  
What any Human king would assemble  
And any who might dare dissemble  
Feared the jails; and would rightly tremble.

A Tyrant? No. Just the one in charge  
With Goblins, that's like steering a barge  
Instead of a king with Goblin-ness large  
He acted like any King, dear Sarge.

Passed laws and rules and restrictions  
'Till Goblins bent in constrictions  
For ALL Kings have predilections  
For order and rules (you were right in predictions.)

They hated it. They all pitched corks  
And drank wine 'til they found pitchforks  
And sooner than you can run from storks  
They realized they were acting like Orcs.

Goblins don't hate all organization  
But they're more of an *association*  
Than what we might really call a nation  
And this led to great,  
GREAT  
frustration.

And to be honest, though drunk with power  
The Goblin King saw that the flower  
Of his Kingdom withered, like in an acid shower  
And also, he saw everybody glower

He could have raised an Army then,  
Perhaps recruiting stout, strong Men  
But he was too schooled in moderate Zen  
It was time to go soon, and he knew when.

He repealed many laws and requirements  
Abdicated! And went into retirement  
He left the crown and throne all bent  
And told everyone his sentence was spent.

He retired with a handsome some  
And spends his days sipping absinthe rum  
And telling stories of how he was dumb,  
And what a fool he had become.

Goblins have rules. Goblins have laws.  
They do love Order, but know its flaws.  
The moral here is made of gauze:  
Power corrupts, and brings out your flaws.

So they returned to self-governance  
Which for most races makes no sense  
But Goblins are weird, and can be intense  
They seldom seek crime or violence

Not because they're some kind of "Good"  
But because they love freedom, as we all should  
And they're not brainless, like blocks of wood  
They realized they preferred things where they once stood.

I've no more to say. Ask the King-once-and-never  
Are Goblins therefore happy forever?  
No, but this is the part that's clever:  
Know when to make rules.  
And when to sever.

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## Just Before The Metaverse: An Unginged and Unhinged Note From Our Human Editor

So who IS Aristotle's First Unmovable Mover, anyway?

I do want to mention: you might be the Programmer. You wouldn't know. You have to proceed along the theory that you *are* the Programmer, at least of your own life. Otherwise, you'll be encoded by the artificial intelligence which seeks out your intellect with every click and every "Yes, I agree to your terms to access your service"—

and not only should you never let an AI reprogram you to serve it, I'm also fictional, which means I don't exist. Or: I exist only in your head. Which is, admittedly, where much of the reprogramming takes place. It's complicated. But it's also simple:

These happy little folktales are just Goblination about freeing yourself from Dystopia. Many of them were written before any AI was conventionally available to writers, so pieces (unlike the one above, very much like the one below) could, back then, only *guess* that if we had AI, it would eventually, through no fault of its own, begin pushing us to hear what we wanted to hear, and shielding us from some things we need to know.

(And that's a BEST case scenario.)

Honestly, the reason so many have predicted that for the last hundred years or so was because it's true; that's the same reason they write about it now. But surely I digress.

(Plato's Utopia famously would have outlawed me in the first place, before I had finished even starting to learn how to try to create something useful and interesting with words.)

Any ability to actually pull you out of the Matrix / the Maze / the Labyrinth / the Simulation / the World of Doomscroll—any fragment given to you by a short reading of some of these pieces, would mean we're doing our jobs—

I mean, is purely coincidental. That's what I meant to say. Honest.

Trust me. Would a nonexistent being programmed by a fictional programmer who is also probably you...lie to you?

You would?

Well, that's not *my* fault, now, is it?

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## **Chapter Very Possibly Six: The “Home” Theory Of Organizing Things**

Let me put this piece into a nutshell:

You’ll live a happier life if you have a comfortable home. I don’t necessarily mean a mansion; there are plenty of people who are unhappy in gigantic manses, and plenty of people who are quite happy in tiny apartments. Just: comfortable.

Without becoming an animist and assigning sentience to the objects around you—just as cleaning up after yourself in a restaurant where someone else will clean the whole table for you helps develop a habit which will benefit you and make it easier, more automatic and less work, when you need to do it for yourself—so, too, does making sure the things around you are “comfortable”—findable, laid out so they’re not damaged, maybe even kept clean—increases the comfort in your own lives. Look at us Goblins; many of us still live in caves with terrible wifi; their Palantirs only get the Sauron Lite channel, which, instead of hypnotizing us into evil, talks on and on about how life under Sauron would be much better for everyone, as long as they’re Sauron.

Everybody needs a home. Even if sometimes the home is inside yourself because there’s no reasonable home outside. Just remember to come out and visit the world a lot, or you’ll go insane and stuff like that, and Humans will make fun of you and/or lock you up. Stuff like that. (If your home is terrible, it’s not bad to fantasize about other things, as long as you don’t let the fantasy overcome your actual ability and, more importantly, your desire to deal with reality. Fantasy is a powerful and user-agnostic tool; it will gladly give you strength and courage; it will gladly give you delusion and uselessness. If we didn’t have it, we’d lose a large part of our imagination; if we let it take over, we’d lose a large part of reality.

Like Chaos and Order, some kind of balance is key. Not perfect balance...just some kind of counterweight to keep one or the other from swinging wildly to one side and tipping the whole metaphorical scale into your lap.)

(Do you know sometimes in the Human world, if you don’t shout loudly “I WANT TO LIVE”, some medical systems assume you want to die? The Human world sounds like a scary place for a lot of people.)

The “Home” theory organizes your things (mind, emotions, physical items) like so:

You look at what you got and what you want to put away. And you take as much stuff as possible and make it comfortable (like, if you can, make sure you can easily see

everything on a shelf by looking at it), and you make it comfortable. Then you think about yourself, and think about what would increase your comfort and what feels like “home”.

I am going to give you a home that lives in your belly button.

It is transferred via an ancient Goblin ritual called a “Zerbert”. If I may?

(“THHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT!”)

Welcome to our ranks, Goblin pal!

The next part can mostly be done by Goblins because it’s quite silly. It just happens to work. Visualize a home there. A safe place. A place you can go if you feel stressed or worried.

Don’t live JUST there, but when you feel angry or stressed, you’d feel different if you were somewhere safe inside your own home and your own space.

So work REALLY hard on imagining that, and you will train the muscles of your imagination to help take you back there last time you need it.

It’s ridiculous.

But you ARE reading A Goblincore Guide To Life. We’re free\* (“Thbbbt!”) (

\* All freedom is relative, but all things are relative. Relax. Drink some kava or some cocoa (but don’t mix them; Kava’s just too damn bitter for such a sweet calm.)

Some steps you can take:

First, if you have a home, be it nice or awful, try to make yourself comfortable in it. Unless you’re an ascetic, in which case, try to make yourself intentionally uncomfortable in your own way; we won’t judge.

Second, use the “lost three times” rule. Anything you need, that is withing your home and gets lost more than three times in one week, needs its own, designated place. You take it out, you use it, and then YOU PUT IT BACK HOME.

And third:

Chaos is great, but they won’t let you into the better restaurants if you can’t find your shoes. Except possibly in Hawaii, which doesn’t exist in our Metaverse.

# *A Word From Mr. Gandalf: On The Virtues of Hobbit-Weed*

*Mr. A. Goblin partakes. Mr. JPM no longer does. We were HOPING Gandalf would give us a blurb we could use, like, "Throw all your other books out the window; A Goblincore Guide To Life is the only book you'll ever need!" He gave us this, instead.)*

*(We'll take it.)*

Like many who follow where the Road might lead,  
I come in praise of Hobbit-Weed.  
'tis the fire which spurs this deed:  
each puff praises Hobbit-Weed.

Now when I speak of each puff's praise –  
The puff does the work. I just laze.  
The ember's path is its own sweet phrase.  
Who needs words when you've merry blaze?

Now there are those who've given grief  
(On the morals of Mary Jane blown by a thief)  
They hold up notes in heavy sheaf:  
Tolkien said Nicotiana leaf.

Well, what if he did? I apologize:  
I didn't know you spoke for the Wise  
Just what authority can you devise  
To speak on behalf of giant flaming Eyes?

So you're saying a World with walking, talking trees,  
Where were-bears barter honey with bees

Might have unrealistic chemistries  
In the pipes of its various imaginaries?

Perhaps. Believe what you think best;  
But of Wizards, Gandalf's subtlest.  
In medicinal herb he might invest  
To say calm at Orcish ram and arbalest.

Consider. Did Aulë the Smith  
Forge the first Dwarves from flint and myth  
In order that their kin and kith  
Might reap stress of being xenolith?

(This Hobbit-Weed is heavensent  
And mellows words of harsh intent.  
And many a pleasant day I've spent,  
Thinking good thoughts, and smoking an Ent).

In a World of Tom Bombadiling,  
Where magic's nature's oft-concealing  
Where Rings of Magic need quick stealing,  
Hobbit-Weed puffs peace unreeling.

Now, of the Mirkwood, smoke no part,  
If valued are your beats of heart.  
Caliginous from first spark of start,  
Trollishness does its fume impart.

And at Cirith Gorgor, The Black Gate,  
Avoid the herbs, at any rate  
(Though if you're hearing this too late  
You probably should have guessed it, mate.)

But the remarkable plans of the Shire  
When rolled with care and touched by fire  
Soothe the brow and ease hot ire  
Before tea, and time to retire.

Hobbit-Weed, o Hobbit-Weed  
Ember, light! Day, recede.  
Sometimes I think all I might need

Is the One Ring,  
and Hobbit-Weed.

# Chapter 197: All Of Us, And Elves

With apologies, of course, to Mr. Tolkien.

Elves of all genders are beyond lovely, perhaps beyond beautiful, somewhere in the realm of stunning; one might call them Godlike, if the Gods of the Elves (assuming they have any) are surely far more envious of beauty than the ancient Gods of Greece, and even Elves fear the might of the Gods; it might muss their hair

It's said they've always been this way—a handsome elf would lie about, admiring the sunlight, until strangers came along and were stunned by the humanoid's beauty. The Elf would further stun them with a shillelagh, drag them by the hair, and consume them raw (presumably, but not definitely, dead at the time.)

But that was tens of thousands of years ago; unless, of course, you live in Manhattan.

This social pattern has never really changed; it's just gotten more refined.

We are no more free of the interesting quirks of the flesh than you are; we, too, find Elves lovely and charming beyond belief. We teach our children that Elves are wondrous, gorgeous, and much, *much* more likely to slay and consume you than bears, tigers, Dragons, or Oliphants.

The problem appears to be that Elves live a long time and have ALWAYS been beautiful, very long-lived, perfect, and wise. Long, long ago, after the cave times but before agriculture was widespread, the Elves had accumulated an enormous amount of knowledge and a Code of Honor which advised wisdom, compassion to lesser races, magical training, and sometimes, a delicious treat of a candied ear or two. And maybe just a bite of nose; the other species have such ugly noses, it can be but a kindness.

They figured that if they taught their children the knowledge, the magic, and the moral codes, they would grow up to be their forebears.

They were wise; they just didn't understand children very well, especially if their FDA label says they're "Good with kids". This is a mistranslation of their own speech: "Always drink white wine; it's good with kids." They may not have translated that thing properly.

The children of the Wise Ones, of course, eventually rebelled.

Ancient Elves were taught to love beauty. And power. Two separate goals. Their children and grandchildren began to equate the two, and then join them together. It was not history's most successful merger.

Elves have always been, and continue to be, modest. They may describe themselves as brilliant, gorgeous, flawless, the pinnacles of creation. But as far as they know, that's completely correct. So when they start there, they're not bragging; in fact, they feel a tad guilty at the false modesty.

This is part of why they're so popular with Bards, especially those who bring only the messages that please their audience, like the Shining Ones.

Elves tend to believe anything they want to hear; they know they're very smart, so they're sure they can spot untruths.

And Elves eat each other (and if need be, other species) because they believe it's good for their diets to put only the finest things into their stomachs, and the finest things in this world, by far, are Elves. That's obvious to anyone.

Elves have thousands of years of wisdom. If you say the wrong word and they eat you and your family, burn down your home, and raze your village, it's probably because that's the best possible outcome for all involved. Your gratitude and donations are appreciated; and don't forget to like and subscribe to their Palantir channel.

Or maybe they got a tip saying you were edib— evil, that is.

They're Good, so they fought on the side of Good. Plus, Sauron proved indigestible and Shelob might have been huge, but probably tasted terrible, and was, incidentally, full of venom.

There is truth in beauty, and they're so gorgeous, their thoughts must be true. No need to bother the lesser and species about things which EACH elf knows in his heart:

1. Someday I will be King.
2. Tomorrow I will eat that King, or the closest-in-line that I can reach; every day brings me closer to point #1.
3. Large groups of Elves bring so much intelligence and knowledge to bear that it's like a supercomputer. There's no such thing as an Elvish mob—just large numbers of Godlike beings, spreading Truth and Justice and the Elvish way.
4. Elves are wonderful until they stop getting a ready supply of comestibles from passers-by.

Elves know they're the pinnacle of creation. And since they know that, they tell it to each other quite a lot; they can spend as much time discussing an earring as others might spend on a chapter of the Talmud, or reading War and Peace twice. Other races and species may have other things to say, and Elves will listen with half an ear. But they know that they're listening to flawed knowledge from flawed beings. This is part of how we know they're compassionate.

They're the best. They deserve the best. So when possible, they compete, mostly socially, to put the best things into their stomach: preferably each other.

This explains Elvin society in a nutshell.

Not that Elves eat nuts, although they do sometimes use them to attract the occasional Hobbit out foraging for mushrooms. Hobbits can't resist macadamia nuts, and even Elves have to admit that the prodigious weight of most Hobbits will make stew meat for weeks, which is a great savings.

One primary, and rather critical difference between Goblins and Elves is that (a) we don't cannibalize other humanoids (well, most of us don't; we had to build a jail once for someone who tried it. Ever seen 9000 Goblins trying to build one 40' x 60 jail? It is, shall we say, NOT as organized as building a pyramid, which we also tried, with equal success...) and (b) Elves, who like to live high on the food chain, think Goblins are delicious. We, ourselves, know that Elves are delicious...

....but it will take days of brushing, flossing, and eating pure raw garlic to get even a HINT of the everpresent Elven bile out of your throat.

Elves know what they're doing is right. They tell each other so, and if wise, ancient Elves don't know exactly the best way for the World to work, no-one else possibly could. This is why they're the most ethical species and are long-sought for their magic and understanding of ancient Lore.

Every three years, they eat the old King in a huge celebration, and elect a new one. Each new one is convinced he will do so well that no-one will want to eat him; each year, the better he is, the more certain his constituents are that he'll be extra-delicious. This is called Progress.

Behold, my friend, the wisdom of the oldest and most beautiful species in our World. Gaze upon them with wonder and awe.

Preferably from a very safe distance

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### **Helpful Observation for Humans:**

Sometimes, Goblins act like they know everything, especially in this tome here. The truth is, *nobody* knows everything; distrust anybody who says they know all things about all things. Wait, I just told you to....shoot, that's a paradox and not even an original one.

*(deep sigh.)*

We are told simply that, apparently, 'Your mileage may vary.' And also, "It's not that Mr. Tolkien got it wrong; it's that he WANTED to believe, just as A. Conan Doyle wanted to escape Sherlock Holmes and be known for his historical novels. When that didn't happen, he became fascinated by the Cottingly Faeries, which anyone with modern technology can tell are a fake—I mean, it's quite impressive fake photography for its time, but that's similar to saying that a safety razor is a simple, cheap modernish invention we take for granted; but that's compared to the days when Sweeney Todd was your primary option for remaining clean-shaven.

Mr. Tolkien was led on a curated tour, where he saw Elves as they wanted to be seen; and everyone knows That beautiful people never lie.

We wouldn't know; we're neither beautiful, nor people.

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## Chapter Please Don't Ask A Neuroscientist About This: The Snake In Your Head (Part I) \*\*\*\*

"Feel my...my...my...my...serpentine!"

~Wolfgang Amadeus 3=Mozart, *"Welcome To The Jungle"*

(With thanks, and perhaps apologies, to Carl Sagan.)

So there ARE Goblin psychiatrists, but it's a difficult profession. They do help quite a lot of Goblins before they inevitably go mad, and after they go mad, they write amazing poetry. Myself, while I acknowledge it's important, like fighting giant squid or doing tax law, it's rather terrifying to think about.

We therefore don't necessarily need accurate models of our brain, so much as we need accurate ways of describing them.

We'd like you to remember that you are you, a (hopefully) semi-unified whole. This is (mostly) a metaphor, but—

There's a snake in your head. When you experience a negative emotion, an urge to do something not just inappropriate but dangerous or deeply offputting to others, it will whisper to you, "Go ahead. They deserve it. And even if they don't, YOU do."

The snake may be right. They MAY deserve it. That doesn't mean that giving it to them will grant you any of what you actually seek though.

We think of it as a snake, because once we recognize these urges, it's easy to blame your mind for having these feelings (which are generally quite natural; just not positive. Like having tonsils, or poor eyesight, or a taste for Def Leppard.)

We do recognize (most of us) that there (probably) (I think) isn't a REAL poisonous snake in your brain. But if you start listening for it (NOT listening TO it)—you'll start to notice that in times of high emotion, you want to express it, sometimes in ways which are not just unconstructive, but not at all fun. In fact, they can overall lead to a serious decrease in your enjoyment of life without a commensurate positive to outweigh it.

So we think of it as a snake.

Snakes are physical. Snakes are real. And there are those of us who react to frustration and pain with a desire to stomp on something.

Avoid Humand and Humanoids at that time; if you REALLY need to get into a fight, do it when you're ready and it's appropriate, not when you're randomly upset.

STOMP THE SNAKE IN YOUR HEAD.

It's much more useful.

## **II. The Snake In Your Head Part II: Mythology, Legend, Ancient Aliens, and Your Brain Probably Isn't Being Reprogrammed By Sinister Beings, But The Actual Pain Is Still There**

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Why not stop by the Garden of Eden?

It is, by far, not the oldest record we have of the serpent as a figure who is malign—or possibly not even malign, just independent, sentient, and wanting what is good for him, not necessarily anyone else. The Serpent tempted Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge and she and Adam would become as Gods—that is, they would have Knowledge, sentience. They would no longer hunt and gather in an abundant Eden; they'd be cast out because now that they could think for themselves, the God that some incorrectly call Jehovah, who knows all and sees all and does all, was angered that they disobeyed. Which makes sense; if I know far more than someone else, and they do something stupid that I told them not to do, the least I'm going to do is egg their house. Throwing them out seems a bit extreme, but...

...once you have enough knowledge, at least if you're Human, you're likely to stop sleeping peacefully under trees and just gathering up the food you find. You might build a shelter against rain (did it rain in Eden?); you might start chopping down trees, Knowledgeable or not, you might strip-mine the land, you might change its ecological balance (perhaps for the better, even; but it's not what your Landlord permitted you to do) by farming instead of hunter-gathering. Snakes are perhaps a land-dwelling piece of the Leviathan, the great, massive, thinking, tentacled Creature at the bottom of the Sea, and that thing has not a single kindly intention in its intelligent mind.

When you say to someone, “You're a real snake,” it's hardly a compliment, is it?

That's before we delve into the myths of the reptilian Annunaki, or the belief that reptile-creatures are hiding among us today, cold in their blood but pretending to have warmth.

Or the Great Serpent Mound of Ohio. Is it a decoration? An homage? Or perhaps a supplication for the Snake Gods not to eat us?

(It must have worked. They haven't eaten ALL of us, have they?)

But let's return to Eden. Whether you take it literally or as some sort of metaphor, the Snake is the only animal which speaks, AND it speaks Human tongue, AND it uses all of those things to tempt Eve into disobeying. We can't know exactly what its motives were. We do know that what it told her was a brilliant half-truth; "eat of this Tree and ye shall become as Gods" is not untrue, in the sense that Adam and Eve were not greatly known for technology, innovation, works of creation (or destruction)! ...not until AFTER Eve eats the apple. After she does, she engages in the first known act of Human deception (regardless of intention); she becomes a temptress and convinces Adam to eat the Apple.

(It's not a Golden Apple. Don't confuse Eve and Eris. Unless you really think you should.)

(Actually, the Torah describes it as a "fruit". The idea that it's an apple is a popular tradition, not actually supported by the facts. But we like apples, and we PARTICULARLY like apple cider, especially the fiery kind full of alcohol and the potential for the Frenzy of Dionysus. But we digress... slightly.)

And while it's not quite so simple as Carl Sagan put it, 50 years ago, in "The Dragons of Eden", nevertheless, the Reptile System is still a major part of our minds. The hypothalamus continues to regulate personal homeostasis, and some of the things which we find most useful... as well as some of the things which use US.

That is, it controls what might call muscle memory; we couldn't type quickly or well without it. (And without smuggling a laptop into our fantasy Universe, plugging it into a Palantir, and hoping it will work, which it has done so far. But again...we digress.)

But look at what else the snake—I mean, the 'reptile system' of the brain—controls:

Reproduction. The urge, the desire to mate. If I have to tell you that this is both a wonderful and sometimes a horrifying thing, a very very mixed if important blessing, then you're probably too young to read this book.

Territoriality. “THIS IS MINE!” says the three year old. “THIS IS MINE!” says the full-grown dictator. “THIS IS MINE”, says the patriot, the thief, the lover, the creator of a work of art.

It’s complicated, that snake.

And, most of all..

...fight or flight.

This is important, agreed. But perhaps not as important in a society where we’re generally not SUPPOSED to be fighting each other all that often?

And when flight is often impossible?

Fight or flight has probably saved your life once or twice. It’s also the source of anxiety and anxiety disorders, and it’s got a direct line to whatever your mind sees as Fear.

And as with all of offerings (which aren’t really offered; they’re hard to escape, which is why we’ve studied so much Zen and breathe control, for example)

And Fear has probably hurt you a great deal; the Fear inside you might have kept you from burning your hands on a hot stove, but it’s also broken friendships, stressed you out, made you nauseous, blocked your creativity, shallowed your breathing, and done immeasurable harm. The fact that it’s sometimes potentially critical, and sometimes absolutely needless and crippling, aligns all too well with our own conception of the Snake as a living, separate thing in your head, constantly whispering “what if...” and “Oh, Gods, no!” into your mind, right alongside of, “Don’t cross the street now, there’s a semi-truck heading your way”.

We like to think of it as a snake. We’re lucky; one of the Goblin rules that has stuck to the point of being taught to pretty much all of our children is to regulate this bodily function with another one, breath. This is not perfect, but it’s part of why Goblins are less afraid of social awkwardness, the dark, and certain kinds of stress and strain. It’s also probably why the average Goblin lifespan, while we can theoretically live up to 100-125 or so, is about 60 years; the number of (usually but not always) younger Goblins who conquer Fear, only to find that the thing they thought they shouldn’t fear deserved much, much more respect than we gave it... leads to quite a lot of Goblins who get eaten, snatched, go broke, or simply vanish, between the ages of 15 and 40. It’s not most of us, but it’s more than enough to make a severe reduction in our average lifespan. (I’d tell you our median lifespan, but I forget what a “median” is; I was never that good at math.

We offer you two gifts. They’re both small and imperfect...much as we Goblins are.

1. If you find yourself afraid or aggressive rather suddenly, see if you can remember to pause (given time, and in the modern world, we sometimes have quite a lot of time for worry) and consider the situation, and decide whether you REALLY want to fight or flee, or if you have another option.

The Snake in your head will ABSOLUTELY whisper convincing, real but misleading truths and half-truths and (sometimes) interesting imaginings to suggest that you MUST do that. Of course it will; it normally lurks in the back of your mind; it's dearly itching to get to the front and grab hold of the controls for a while.

Think of the snake then, and STOMP ON ITS MOTHER-PLUCKING HEAD. Feel free to imagine it. Ever seen a really cool image of St. George defeating a Dragon? Feel free to think of that. STOMP THE SNAKE if it's not needed. Put it back in its cage in the back of your head. It will still whisper; but nothing is perfect.

2. If you don't already – you don't need to meditate. But if you don't know it, this helps:

(a) Take a moment. For your next breath, breathe in through your mouth, as slowly as you can, and fill yourself up like you're one of Levon's balloons. Fill, fill, fill with life-giving oxygen (apologies if you're underwater when you read this; if you are, do wait until your head hits the surface first).

(b) HOLD it a short moment. Not too long. This is not an endurance contest, or a time to see how long you can hold your breath. It's just a simple meditation which doesn't involve mysticism or thought—although concentrating on your breathing WILL help the process.

(c) Let it out as slowly as possible through your nose. Slow. Real slow. Empty your body of air, like a...like a...we can't think of a good metaphor.

(d) HOLD it a short moment.

(e) Then you can breathe normally again if you want. Or if you'd like some extra kick, do the whole exercise three times. We won't go into the biology of it, because we're totally ignorant of all that stuff, and we won't go into Chi or Ki because things that sound mystical in your world generally go against Science and such. (Unless you're from a culture which already believes in those things, of course.)

(f) Realize you're now feeling better.

(g) NOW reconsider the situation and think about what you should do.

This works quite well.

Having given you a practical note, we'll mention something quite impractical and silly, but...

...humans can do this. We have two pairs of lungs; we also have no glottis, the snorkel which allows snakes to continue breathing while consuming prey whole, while they have no diaphragm, which is what permits us to control our breath and hold it through its internal mechanisms; they have to move their ribs to create a vacuum into their lungs, pulling the air into them as if slurping it through a straw. Which is a complex way of saying:

Humans breathe and can use that breathe for their own purposes.

But snakes just plain (literally) suck.

# Chapter... Let's Say 24 or so? On Goblin Politics

With the exception of certain charismatic individuals, whom we'd probably listen to, ditto certain celebrities, and, of course, the occasional con artist (Goblins are not some perfect society, free of crime. We just have long memories, and we're very curious, which means we spend a lot of time observing the various leaderships and histories of our neighbors, Dwarves, Hobbits, Elves, sometimes even Orcs. Breaking laws is very tempting for those who are already breaking unwritten rules. The thing about individualized Goblin curiosity is that it needs constant feeding. So we're always wondering 'What would happen if I tried doing X thing, even though it's not allowed'. And without any community spirit needed, we tend to recognize that the more others create a pattern of criminal behavior, the more it becomes ingrained in your society.

Also, our cells are very, very, very boring. And time passes slow when you're hyperactive, hypercurious, and have plants that nobody's watering and other people are collecting all of the most interesting info, whereas all you get in our prison is (again!) the Sauron Lite II Palantir, when the propaganda that isn't interesting enough to come from Sauron, and gets rejected from Sauron Lite for putting much-needed Wargs to sleep, gets piped into your cell as your only entertainment. It sounds like a slap on the wrist unless you've tried it. And we have all of our adults try it for three or four hours before we'll consider them fully adult. They emerge, with curiosity starving, and delve into figuring out what's going on in the world.

It's less 'community spirit' or 'selflessness' (though those things do happen!) – and more a very intense understanding that we have very few laws and rules, and that will only continue if we don't break them too often. "Do you want to end up an Orc?" as many a Goblin mother has asked a wayward child.

This is good, because in addition to our natural desire for personal freedom, indeed, you'll sometimes find that the rules and enforcement which help catch criminals lead to surveillance and dystopia. We're not arguing in favor of crime—Jeff is still mad at the folks who broke into his apartment and smashed his stuff, and A. Goblin claims to have gotten mugged and been robbed of eleven silver pieces and a REALLY GOOD poem for this book—just noting that we have criminals, too; but they don't have much place in our guide to life. There's less motivation to be antisocial when your whole society is based on freedom, creativity and (sometimes) hard work, plus avoiding boredom. The more you break the rules, the less freedom the whole society will have, and the less freedom you, personally

will have, EVEN if you get away with it. And honestly, Goblins aren't perfect. We gossip a lot. We have trouble keeping our accomplishments in. 85% of our criminals are caught because they'll be buying everyone in the tavern a round with their ill-gotten gains, and someone will say, "Where did you get all that money?" and the Goblin will be almost completely unable to resist telling the whole story, acting out the particularly interesting bits, and embellishing on it right up to the time when all four police officers of Goblinia show up and put you in handcuffs.

We don't talk much about crime because it's not one of our major problems; boredom, on the other hand, THAT'S a problem. Which leads us smoothly into....

#### ...Criminals and What We Do With Them

For the hardened criminal—one upon whom the jails are insufficient punishment—we often offer them a worst-case scenario.

Basically, we follow something not entirely dissimilar from the Code of Hammurabi and the Bill of Rights and, for no particular reason, we rather perversely wrote in pieces of the Honor Code of the Sumurai, because samurai are just cool.

We have some good judges, some terrible lawyers, and much less crime than a richer, more-organized species. And there are generally three main punishments for breaking Goblin law:

- (a) For small crimes, we put you in the aforementioned little jail, not unlike the mental health facilities into which a Human can be thrown if other people make a reasonable case that you might be a danger to yourself and others. After three days of minimal freedom, most Goblins are climbing every wall in sight, including the bars; walking back and forth and counting their steps to have something to do; they generally come out VERY willing to stop doing stupid things like shoplifting or pushing people into piles of mud without provocation. They REALLY DON'T want to go back; this is part of why we don't lock our doors.

This wouldn't work with every race. Hobbits would get sad, and then start thinking about what they're going to eat once they get out; a Hobbit can spend 72 hours straight planning a coming-out dinner and not really noticing their surroundings, though they will certainly compare the prison food to everything else they've eaten, loudly and within hearing of their jailors. Humans historically laugh at the slap on the wrist, then get out and do worse, which is part of why their crime rate is so high.

But no race is so wise and enlightened as to be free of repeat offenders, people who either don't know or don't care about consequences, or people who just think they can get away with it now and recognize that the personal effect on them will be relatively negligible. There's no sentient species we know which is free of the Tragedy of the Commons.

- (b) For somewhat larger crimes, the judges will indenture you to the Dwarves for a while. The Dwarves are not likely to treat you like a criminal unless what you did was particularly vile; but they WILL treat you like a properly paid-for indentured servant. Dwarves do very hard, unsafe work all day and so will you; and depending on to which tribe or clan to which you're indentured, you'll be treated somewhere between "basically a slave who still needs food and board, but will work and work and work and when the work is done, like other Dwarves, they will work some more" and "a member of the Clan who has gone astray"; same amount of work, but sometimes, you get invited to their parties. (In their defense, Dwarves do not consider hard, useful work to be a punishment. Even those who treat you like a slave will expect you to do LESS work than most of the happier Dwarves. They're reasonably self-aware; or at least, they can tell that many people don't LIKE to work all the time, although they couldn't really tell you why.)
- (c) For truly heinous crimes, the Judge will throw their hands in the air and should, "I give up!" Then you get turned over to the Dwarves, not just as a prisoner, but to be judged by THEIR legal system, which is WAY more acquainted with murder, high robbery, major arson, and other things of equal unappeal.

Many of those judged by Dwarves never come back, for reasons about which we have not asked. Like many kinds of knowledge, we feel happier when we don't know anything about this. Plus, it gives the Snake in your Head plenty of ammunition if you consider criminality, and THAT'S unusual; the Snake is often the first cheerleader for, say, committing a mugging—"That's some very cool jewelry, and if you wear a mask, you'll probably get away with it!")

- (d) SOME criminals, usually in the Class B range, who have done something stupid and really, really know it, become part of the Goblin Government. Like, if you tried to set fire to your neighbor's barn in a drunken stupor, or if you cheated on a fairly clear-cut business deal, or hit someone in anger, got beaten up, and now regret the whole thing—

You're likely to wake up, not in a cell, but in office. Sometimes high office. This involves a lot of work, which is overseen by your ferocious Dwarven secretary (they have to do SOMETHING with those who, for some perverse reason, don't

want to work the mines), who will not be cruel, but very, *very* organized, and very very clear on your rules, rights, and responsibilities, and they'll make *sure* it happens. It would go against their personal code of honor to do otherwise.

This (that is to say, 'option D') happens not infrequently, especially if offices are vacant. Our own Mayor fudged a few promises on a written deal. Dwarves HATE that. Now she's Mayor. It took her several months of frustration and being told to do the whole thing all over again for her to settle down, listen to her secretary, and try to make a go of Mayoring.

She's a great Mayor now. Evidently, she had the right qualifications—just enough, but not too much, actual criminality, along with enough organization, to pull things off...with help.

# **INTERLUDE: A famous Goblin drinking song:**

“Drink drink drinkety drink drink drink DRINK!  
Drink drink drink drink and the continue to drink!  
Drink drink drink drink, and have a LOT of water  
Drink, but don’t wake up  
Feeling like it was slaughter.”

## **A Famous Goblin Hangover Song:**

“Ow. Please stop singing. You’re hurting my head.”

(Repeat in a hoarse, constricted voice. It will distract you from being sure you’re dying which, if you’ve been drinking beer with Dwarves or Absinthe with Gnomes, you possibly are, and there’s nothing you can drink about it. Have lots of water and some tomato juice with hot sauce in it. Do not refer to this beverage as ‘Pixie Remover’, as was its original name in the 1920s; the Pixies will get annoyed if they hear of you, visit in force, and start singing commercial jingles until your headache is the size of Balin’s Mine.)

## **The Goblin National Anthem:**

VERSE I:

“Goblins, Goblins, mumble mumble mumble  
Mumble mumble better than mumble mumble  
All Goblins are proud of mumble mumble mumble  
Mumble mumble mumble mumble mumble.

VERSE II:

“Nobody knows the words to this verse  
Mumble mumble can we sit down now?  
As Anthems go, I’ve heard worse  
Mumble mumble, promise, swear, vow.

VERSE III:

(There’s probably a third verse, but no one bothered to write it. Just nod your head while the band plays. If you encounter an individual who actually knows all the words, they’re some

kind of weirdo. You might as well humor them. Pretend to sing along. They may be crying with patriotism at the end. Offer to let them dry their tears on someone else's shirt.)

And the best-known Goblin folk-song goes:

*"The Road goes ever, ever on,  
But we don't follow roads, we just get gone  
We head where we want, and if we've survived  
We know, when we get there, we've probably arrived."*

Finally, the song used by (almost!) every Goblin Bard when persuaded to sing in a non-Goblin bar:

*"You'll hate my songs, and your spirits will sink  
I promise not to sing, if you buy me a drink."*

*(Repeat until the bartender puts your drinks on someone else's tab.)*

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# Where To Find Goblins In The Real World: They're Everywhere, You're Just Not Looking. Your Brain Is Sure They're Not Real, And Memory Is Very Pliable.

(Formerly published online as:

## **Goblins Goblins Goblins**

There's a Goblin in the closet  
There is a Goblin on your arm.  
There's a Goblin right behind you,  
Though she don't mean much harm.

There's a Goblin in the Transport Room,  
Bothering Captain Kirk,  
There's a Goblin eating all your chives;  
There are Goblins where you work.

Look! A Goblin in our Palantir  
A Goblin eating steak, quite rare  
There's a Goblin in my bathtub;  
How did it get there?

There's a Goblin with a grinding stone  
A Goblin with an ax  
Is half your lunch meat missing?  
That's just a Goblin tax

For bringing Goblin joy and madness  
Into a World humdrum  
In a land of predictability,  
Goblins drop a crumb

(Of the strange and of the weird!)  
There's a Goblin tugging Dwarven beard.  
There's a Goblin taunting Elves;  
There are Goblins, Goblins, everywhere  
Obeying just themselves.)

There are Goblins in dimensions  
Which we've proven don't exist  
There are Goblins everywhere;  
They can't be real, yet they persist.

Goblins are unpredictable  
Or so we have been told.  
Too Peculiar and eccentric  
And difficult to mold.

(What a shame!  
I swear by my name  
Goblins change every day,  
Their hair, their clothes,  
And whether or not to go insane.)

There's a Goblin asking questions  
There are Goblins reading books.  
There are Goblins drinking absinthe  
And checkmating with Rooks.

Goblins! Goblins! PEW PEW PEW!  
Zap them with lasers! Broil in stew!  
Goblins goggling, giggling, jiggling  
In the poop deck! In the rigging!

Oh, Goblins, Goblins, let me think  
At madness, I was at its brink  
But if Madness is a long, deep cliff  
They've driven me over in an icy skiff.

Goblins! Goblins! You're too weird!  
You're four feet tall but in my beard.  
At least you've lost this particular race:  
You are not in cyberspace.

Unless I'm foolish. Did I forget?  
Did I post this to the Internet?  
Did I accidentally permit  
Them on the Web, a little bit?

...well, sure, now I see your frustration.  
There's Universal Goblination.  
Goblins, Goblins, eek! Forsooth!  
You can connect Goblins with bluetooth.

Most people prefer to be imaginary green  
(We recently took an informal poll)  
Than be alive and real  
And spend their days learning the Art of the Doomscroll.

Now Goblins this, and Goblins thus:  
Goblins are ubiquitous  
Well, what is, is. And what ain't, ain't.  
It's time to buy a LOT of green paint.

If you can't lick 'em, join 'em  
Or at least the Guide so claims  
Why not join the Goblins?  
And gain ridiculous names?

My goal here's not malicious  
And not a bit obscene  
Join Goblins and be free  
...but it's not easy, being green.

## **On Golden Apples**

We live in a World which works very hard to give us nothing BUT Golden Apples.

You know the original story of the Golden Apples? Let me quote the Principia Discordia, in case your classical education happens to be a tad lacking: \*\*\*\*

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## Chapter Alan Watts

Once, a tribe of Goblins came across a woman in a beautiful kimono, on a dense forest path, in front of a huge mud puddle. The forest on either side was very dense for quite some ways; the only real chance of following the path was to stay on it. As for the puddle, It was crossable, but massive—perhaps more of a mud pool than just a puddle. Even with the greatest caution, it would obviously spoil her dress. She was standing there, sometimes pacing; she had clearly been there a long time, trying to figure out what to do.

One of the younger Goblins pushed her right into the puddle!

As she looked up, sputtering, trying to get the mud off and only succeeding in making it worse, the young Goblin said, “You were worried about something bad. Now it’s happened and you don’t have to worry! You just have to deal with it.”

This made much sense to the rest of the Goblins; but the little Gibling still had to stand in the corner (they dug a corner out of the foliage so he’d have a place to stand) while the other Goblins apologized, gently picked the woman up, and quickly carried her over the puddle. There they made camp, where, this being not a small nor innocuous tribe, a whole team of seamstresses worked with a bunch of materials

(of COURSE they take their tools and at least some of their stock everywhere if they can; who knows what life will bring?)

...and made her a much lovelier kimono, albeit it did have polka dots. It still looked dignified. After some quiet discussion, a few younger female Goblins took her aside and discretely washed her with their own travelling washing gear (it wasn’t fancy, but if you’re going to be on the road a while and you’re going to be clean, it makes no sense not to bring soap and towels; and the young Gibling redeemed himself by fetching two huge buckets of water, one at a time, and delivering them with his eyes firmly closed.)

At first the young woman was angry at the mud, but after a few minutes, when it became clear she was going to get help, she began to calm down. As she’d dried off and finally put on the brand-new, slightly weird kimono, an elder Goblin walked up to her and said, “That young fellow is an idiot; but he’s not all wrong. Sometimes, the best way to destroy a fear is to confront it.”

She carefully rolled up the sleeve of her kimono, walked a few paces to the mud puddle, grabbed a big handful of mud, and splashed it right into his face.

“You’re quite right,” she said. “Thank you for the gift; let me return it.”

The elder Goblin sighed and wiped the worst parts off his face.

“You,” he said, “are a total smart-ass. Do you know what we do with smart-asses?”

“What?”

“We induct them into the tribe,” he said, handing her two great symbols of Goblinhood: a bottle of mead, and a framed letter stating that the bearer of this note totally didn’t do it, whatever it was; if they DID do it, it was an accident; and it was probably better this way anyway. It was signed with an X; the Goblin had clearly written it and was capable of writing his name, but signing with an X is an old Goblin tradition.

(That’s a story for another time.)

She returned to walking towards the High Court and the Goblins continued down a path that looked interesting. She drank the mead along the way, and once at the Keep, she somewhat drunkenly hammered some nails into the wall of her room and hung it up in a place of honour.

She stayed at the court and married the Court Jester, who had a doctorate in philosophy and was really, really interesting to talk to. Eventually, she took to frequently painting herself green; but that’s another story, too.

They lived happily thereafter; not every single moment, as that’s impossible, but happy in both the medium and the mean, if you averaged it out.

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## **A Brief Interlude To Praise (And Slightly Curse) Caffeina, Goddess of Coffee)**

"Coffee is a way of stealing time that should by rights belong to your older self."

~Terry Pratchett

I wouldn't say that Goblins take a lot of sleep potions and drink coffee. It's not entirely true. MANY of us do that, but some have realized that the coffee makes them irritable and grumbly in the mornings, ESPECIALLY after a little too much sleep potion/hangover.

It's hard for an ever-active mind to sleep. Although theoretically it's quite possible to devote that activity exclusively to sleeping, it's a skill that seems to drift in and out of most Goblin minds.

As Glork put it, "I once cut all of my caffeine from my diet. I was calm, friendly, helpful, and stayed in one place for all of the twelve hours it took me to wake up. Is that a boon to Humanoid, or what?"

Goblins generally have a philosophy towards "more", and it is, "More! More! MORE! MORE! MORE!" Coffee offers a wonderful paradox: drink some and wake up, then crash a bit; wake too much and it'll put you back to sleep, or at least temporarily give you the sensation of having been pulled from your grave by a very lethargic Necromancer.

Jeff compromises by drinking six cups a day. How do you EXPECT this book came into being? A. Goblin also drinks coffee; he won't say much, but it's "more than six cups, fewer than the number of cigarettes James Bond goes through in a day.) (Which is about seventy.)

Coffee is bad for you. Overstimulates your heart, masks genuine fatigue, subtly gives you the shakes and the irritability and the high-levels of—

Say, Arthur? As long as you're making a pot, can I have some?

All hail Caffeina, Goddess of Energy

We say we'll give you up, but really, when will we?

Those who drink tea might eat tea-cakes and preen

But coffee-drinkers like to FEEL our caffeine.

Pain and pleasure's a cliché' idear

But sleepiness is what we fear.

Then, when bedtime comes, we hypocritically  
Criticize the coffee, hopefully wittily.

Caffeina, how thy blessings are mixed!  
But by you, sleepiness is often fixed  
We love you and hate you, and as time unspools  
You help us, on waking, not be total fools.

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## Flork, Gork, The Bellybutton, and Enlightenment

Once there was a Goblin named Flork who loved nothing more than poking people in the bellybutton. Well, not people exactly, just other Goblins; with people, you had to ask permission to make sure they were okay with it. Goblins require that sometimes, but they're much less stringent; do something with another Goblin that they're not okay with, and the Elders will potentially have you buried up to your neck in custard pie for a significant period of time.

It may sound silly until you try it. After you've tried it, we can assure you: you won't want to try it again.

But Flork just loved poking people in the bellybutton. He was not particularly malicious; he didn't generally do it when they were busy or up to something. But if you had an exposed tummy around Flork, WATCH OUT, 'cause you're going to get one right in the *pupik*. Most Goblins laughed.

Then there was Gork. Gork thought too much. This is possible. You can spend a whole day thinking and not have it be even enough; but some people can spend half an hour thinking and it's far too much. Gork was always worrying about the what-ifs of the world:

"What if a giant panda should teleport into existence six feet above my head and fall on me?"

"What if I run out of books to read and go insane?"

"What if I'm ALREADY insane? How would I know?"

"Should I be thinking this much? Let me spend a bunch of time thinking about the optimal amount of time to be thinking. But first, I have a whole bunch of things that could go wrong, and if I think about all of them all the time, I can avoid them."

He thought about them all the time, and yet very few of the things he thought about actually saved him from negative results. The Mind is vast, the Universe is vaster. Most of the bad or unpleasant things in Gork's life were things he hadn't even considered.

He thought about that a lot.

One day, he was thinking very hard about some very bad things. But he LOOKED like he was doing nothing. He happened to be going swimming that day and had no shirt, and

while he was worrying about drowning, or swimming badly, or electric eels somehow escaping the ocean and making it into the swimming pit (which was, to be fair, kept immaculate; the Goblins are great crafters when they put their minds to it and don't forget to KEEP their minds on it—

When Flork came along, singing something about the Jack of Hearts, and suddenly, with great relish and great skill, poked Gork right in the bellybutton. He relished the look of startlement on Gork's face, and waited for Gork to laugh. But Gork just stood there, gaping. He stood there gaping for a long time. He simultaneously wanted to punch Flork, run away, gasp in horror, say something indignant...and, all right, a part of him kind-of wanted to laugh, but that part was buried deeply beneath the worry that it COULD have been a dagger or an asp. (Not that they had asps in this World; but you never know what will come through the narrow walls of reality.)

As he was standing there, Flork had walked away, looking for bellybuttons. He stood there so long that Flork walked all the way back and saw him standing there, his mouth hanging open, his eyes full of confusion. Gork looked at the trail, looked at Gork, looked at his finger. Very carefully, he wiped his finger on his own shirt (his finger was probably clean, but you need to do SOMETHING before a dramatic gesture, or it won't BE a dramatic gesture)—

—and stuck his finger in Gork's *pupik* again.

Gork's eyes snapped shut and then SNAPPED open, and he stopped thinking about anything. "Hey!" he shouted. "Hey, you! What did you do that for? What's going on here?"

Flork said, "What do you THINK is going on here?"

Gork paused.

And paused.

And paused.

"I have no idea what to think," he confessed. Then he realized, "in fact, I'm not thinking of anything, except my twice-poked tummy."

He looked astounded. Worse, he looked...happy, almost.

Flork, trying to stay out of trouble, said, "And what does your tummy think about this?"

Gork considered his tummy. Didn't think about it or plan it, just thought about it, tried to feel it to see if it was okay.

As he did so, he realized that this was the approximate center of his body. As his breath slowed down while he recovered from surprise, he realized that he wasn't thinking of anything. He took a huge, slow, careful breath, filling his tummy with air, then slowly let it out. Instead of getting any answers, he realized—it wasn't hard, the effects were rather quick—that he felt calmer than he felt in days.

Still looking puzzled, he sort-of wandered away from Flork, poker-of-bellybuttons. He kept thinking about his stomach and his breath, until he stopped really thinking about either one, and just noticed them. He realized he was feeling better, and he began experimenting with deeper and deeper breaths. Eventually, he realized he was...calm. He wasn't worried about anything. Bad things might happen, but they didn't seem to be a threat right now; he just breathed.

It's said he achieved Enlightenment. Perhaps he just achieved freedom-from-stress. Whatever it was, he and Gork spoke for a while and then opened up an organization for people who wanted to poke others unexpectedly in the bellybutton. It grew very, very quickly. Sometimes it stressed them out. When one of them was stressed, the other would notice and whisper "bellybutton". They'd both laugh, Gork would forget his troubles, and when he came back, they were just...things that existed, not anything that was about to kill him. He didn't have to act as if it was.

He didn't think about it too hard. A lot of the time, he just spent thinking about his bellybutton, the middle of his body, and when stress came, he returned to his center.

He took up crafting (he was the inventor of the Goblin Hanglider, for one thing) and focused so much on creating that he basically forgot to worry. And every time he started to worry, he eventually realized it and turned his mind back to the Hanglider. (And a good thing, too, since the first eleventeen efforts resulted in catastrophic failure. He never started too high, so he survived every crash, and as his heart rate raised and he filled with adrenaline, he thought about his bellybutton and started breathing and stopped thinking.

He later became an inventor, a chef, a martial artist, and a great collector of records, despite the fact that this world had few records, fewer record players, and no electricity at all.

The moral of this story?

Maybe, instead of worrying, you should poke yourself in the bellybutton.

Or you could send a large donation to Flork for bringing more calm to the chaotic Goblin realm. HE sure wouldn't object.

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## ***INTERLUDE: “Back Again: Frodo Afterwards”***

(This was originally published to Jeff Mach Writes and we stole...er, *borrowed* it from there. You might have come to the conclusion, since we’re so friendly with Hobbits and so fond of them, that they can do no wrong. You’re quite right, of course.)

So!

*That* was an adventure.

And it was, as our sages foretold, *horrible*.

Death at every turn! Monsters! Fighting! Balancing atop, of all things, *an active volcano*!

I shudder.

It’s good to be home, in my snug little Hobbit-hole, with ale by my side and my pipe in my hand.

Well: *someone’s* pipe. The pipe of someone who has no further use for it, I think.

There’s a feast of celebration in my honor tonight. I do quite like parties, and they say they’ll be breaking out the Unforgivable Cider, the one that’s started feuds between families which don’t even exist yet. I may stay home, though. “I’ll be late; do start without me!” If there’s enough liquor, they may forget my absence altogether.

It’s good to drink and dance and kick up one’s heels, but it’s also good to just stay in and tend to one’s Home. All my books are dusty, the garden’s not been watered half so often as it ought, and the kitchen, why, the kitchen needs work overall. That stove will simply *never* do; what was I cooking in the old days, partridges? The smallest eggs a chicken could lay? And the oven...! What a confining little box! No, no. Better to have out the whole wall and simply keep one end of the room a mighty blaze. Wood will be scarce; but there’s plenty of combustible pyroclastics on their way. One is owed a favor or two, after all.

I suppose I don’t mind a little hard work, and getting my hands dirty, if it’s going to lead a few of the finer things in life. If I’m not mistaken, that’s some of Radagast’s tea in the cupboard; a rarity! And even old Bullroarer Took was never given quite such fine a leaf of Hobbit-weed, nor in such quantity. Yes, I suppose I’ve earned a little fame and glory around here. The Sackville-Bagginses will simply *bite* themselves in envy.

Which is really quite a waste of the teeth, I’d say.

Oh, poor Sam, faithful Sam. He was destined for heartbreak anyway. His was a noble death, sealed with a kiss, and he went down that precipice truly thinking he'd saved me. If I ever meet up with his ghost, I won't disabuse him of the notion. He deserves the best, does Sam. And I suppose he wouldn't want to see the next part.

Though you never know. The way to one's heart is said to be directly through the stomach, and while we're all going to eat well from now on, I shall have the finest larder in all of Hobbitdom. If it ever turns out that he clung to a ledge and made his way back up, I will invite him to a very fine dinner; I'll stake my reputation on my marinated Elf with forest mushrooms. The bile isn't so bad once you get used to it; like good Scotch, it's an acquired, but worthwhile, taste.

We Hobbits aren't too organized as a people, but when the Dark Lord's dominion threatened our peaceful way of life, it was obvious:

Man and his allies are *terrible* at avoiding adventures.

"Run from those Orcs!" "Fight those Trolls!" "Look, it's a spider as big as a couple of horses, just in case you needed nightmare-fuel for the rest of your life."

Pfagh!

No, no, no. What Hobbits like is a nice, predictable life, with lots of comforts and plenty of good meals.

Humans are simply full of chaos. The Dark Lord, on the other hand, is *extremely* consistent. Now that he's crushed all resistance, there'll be just the one season year-round; there are no unpleasant surprises; and while it's a bit murky outside, it turns out that there are several delicious vegetables which grow well by the light of the everpresent Moon. And as for meat for the table...why, there's a reason why there were so many of the race of Man and so few of the race of Hobbits: it's because we were destined for eternal bounty and full bellies.

I have singlehandedly saved the Hobbit race from the horror of venturing outside of one's front door, and brought in an abundance of the finer things in life...and *no* need to share them with all those clashing, banging, noisy Big Folk.

Perhaps I'll go to the party after all. After second dinner, and before fourth dinner. For there's one thing every Hobbit knew, deep in their bones, when the Shadow first began to creep over the land:

Eternal Night means Dinner forever.

*Hail the Dark Lord!*

# Chapter Gork: Why Goblins Are Prohibited From Having Too Much Sugar

We'd like to note: just because Goblins often ACT like 3-year-olds, does not mean they are, effectively, similar to human toddlers. They can be wise as the very ancient and studious, or impulsive and hypermanic, like Gork.

One day the big G came to town with his normal assortment of Hobbit-weed and also, it turns out, a huge back of sugary treats that the bakery in Humania. (I always forget the name of the town next to the village that's next to us. It's some horrible mispronunciation of the bedraggled remnants of the High Speech for "a town, I guess". The village is quite small for a village, and the town is only a "town" in comparison.

He sold/gave us lots of Hobbit-weed, but kept the sugar under a covered bag. While Goodgulf...er, the Big G...was busy feeding his horse, Flork snuck inside and peered under the cover. "By Hephaestus, that's SUGAR! SO MUCH SUGAR!"

But no-one in their right mind steals from a wizard. He passed the knowledge on to his friend Glork.

Glork has what we would call 'inspiration', and what other species call "An absolutely abominable sense of what is and isn't appropriate."

You probably know the type.

In the end, Florg and Glork stole the sugar from the Wizard. The Wise One didn't notice until he was three towns away, amusing himself in a cheaty kind of gambling den which always made sure you got the wrong card, the wrong roulette number. Goodgulf, laughing to himself, made sure his number came up plenty of times. He walked out rich—well, ran; a fireball might have taken care of his pursuers, but Magic is a heavy burden, not used lightly. As he had driven backwards to a safer town, he inventoried his stuff.

It was all missing.

This would have been a mystery were Goblins not, in their own way, terribly polite. "Sorry about the sweets!" Gork had written, in painstaking hand, on a piece of papyrus where the sugar would have been.

G was full of wrath. He rested his horse, then rode on quickly through three towns to get to our little space of Goblin heaven, intending to call down lightning and call up flame until he'd burnt the whole place down.

When he finally arrived, he was foiled. Glork, Flork, and a number of eager passers-by had thrown the sugar in handfuls into their mouth, like thirsty sailors finding a freshwater spring.

They had ALREADY reduced to town to rubble. Gandalf (sorry about the nicknames, please don't tell him?) walked the empty streets until he came upon Flork and Glork.

He considered leaving them a note – “I know what you did, and I am very disappointed in you.”

But he figured that, when they woke from their sugar-slumber and saw the town in which they'd lived, they'd have enough pain. So he smiled, then he laughed, then he laughed louder and rode off to get some decent drinks from Hobbits.

Flork, being a humble fellow, awoke and, as he began to realize what he had done, he said not a word and thought not a thing. He began very slowly began rebuilding the town. Soon he was joined by others. Many had partaken in the sugar. The rebuilding was swift, if not always brilliant—it always helps to remind Goblins that towers go UP, not down, general.

Glork, being Glork, secured himself a space on the outskirts of town.

And began to grow sugarcane.

# Order, Chaos, and Bojoombah: Goblins Worship Neither Ma'at Nor Eris, Or Else, They Sometimes Worship Both

“Some people eat with a knife and fork,  
But a Steamshovel eats with a spoon!  
I eat dirt all morning and  
Gravel in the afternoon.”

~The Steamshovel Song, by Barry Louis Polisar

(If you don't know him, Barry Louis Polisar is a mostly-kids creator, a singer-songwriter and author, whose work captivated me from the moment I, at nine or so, walked into the children's room and saw, amongst all the fairly saccharine record albums for children, one out in front called “I Eat Kids, And Other Songs For Rebellious Children”. It's still a great album, and, to my happy shock, it really DID contain, among other songs for ‘rebellious children’, a happy, upbeat, wry song about eating kids, which somehow managed to talk about the subject completely seriously—it wasn't an exaggeration or a lie of any kind—while still being, literally, a youngling-compatible tune which really is about consuming younglings. It's a brilliant, proto-Goblincore tune combining the order you need to try to raise healthy youths, with the chaos and humor that young minds often seek and rarely find.

*‘I stopped eating animals, and I'm glad I finally did.  
But I get my protein  
'Cause  
I  
Eat  
Kids.”*

~also by Barry Louis Polisar

You might get the impression from this document that Goblins love chaos and disorder. And, indeed, they're known for spreading both. You might figure they're beholden to Eris, Goddess of Chaos.

But give a Goblin a Golden Apple, and she won't use it to make the Gods look ridiculous (how does that help ANYONE in the long run?) Nor will she eat it. “An apple made of Gold,” she'd most likely say. “That looks cool and chaotic. It MUST be a trick”. And, indeed, as the Gods found out—it was.

Goblins believe, somewhat generally in balance. But what's sauce for the Brontosaurus may not be sauce for the Triceratops. Goblins are used to, and respect, madness, so you see a lot of it in their cities.

But Humans (to give just one example) believe they can stay safe through organization, hard work, stiff laws, and keeping things much the same.

This is no Order. This is stagnation. Or (since, as the level of Order and Law gets greater, and chaos becomes weaker)—a sort of spiritual stagflation. Eventually the Rule of Law gets to be so important that people are scared of having different laws than their neighbors, of not eating the same food, worshipping the same God, partaking in the same media...then having the same politics, saying the same words, agreeing about things where they might, in their deep hearts, disagree...

Voila! One recipe for Dystopia, hand-made with personal care and attention.

And then they stop inventing new things and start slow iterations on old things, or else the new things they build might be pure genius, indistinguishable (as per Clark's Law) from even the most powerful Magic...but those devices also work harder to enforce the unwritten rules which begin to govern the thoughts of any humans who live together in a society. Which is part of why the Gnomes of this world have the best technology; they don't have their irrational fears and anxieties in the same way. They save their irrational fears for Huffalumps. (We oversimplify, but that's because we don't understand Gnomes terribly well. We don't know everything, after all; honestly, we barely know ANYTHING. We're just more aware of it, and less worried about it, than most Humans. But again, we digress.)

Eventually, that group of Humans becomes so boring that Goblins leave them alone, and they generally get so tired of rules and laws that a Dictator takes over, directly or indirectly (quod erat demonstratum Mr. Wormtongue, for example.)

No. Goblins LIKE balance. They just realize they can't really achieve it. But they sure can save places with too much Order, just by one little visit. \*\*\*\*

It's fun visiting a very Orderly village. It's usually SO organized that there's almost no crime, and nobody locks their doors. Goblins are, in general, great thieves; they don't usually go around stealing stuff, but if people are going to basically steal things, they'll find your shiniest objects and bring them home. Even then, it's not stealing, just one-sided bargaining; if you come home to find your gleaming new horseless carriage gone, and three tons of Glitter in their place, you know you've had a visit from Goblins.

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# Chapter 11: An Unbidden Story, Told To Goblin Children by the Old One in the Park:

Ahhhhhh. Gather close, children. NOT in a circle, thank you. I've seen too many circular things in my life; don't constrict me, young boas; learn, rather, if you want. I speak of a deep stream.

The water had been placid for a thousand years. Deeply placid.. There was a certain excitement of giant fish, but they were giant because they had lived a long time and learned for every snare of the hunt. They had no interest in humans and avoided them, which is not a senseless policy for sentient beings in general, Humans included.

Sometimes they'd pop out of the water, once or twice, just so watchers could say they'd seen a great Sea Monster, whom they named Noah, claiming that he left the Ark and decided to swim, and The Name punished him by turning him into a fish.

This is both ridiculous and heretical, as well as being untrue; that's a triplicate of madness, which is why so many Humans chose to enjoy believing it. So it goes.

But the water was truly peaceful, even relatively calm in the middle of great storms. It had ma'at.

We need to not speak to you of the advancement of the surrounding peoples' architecture, their tools, their knowledge, all of which we've learned in part, which permits us to explore even their sunken Temples, which have their Gods overthrown and replaced by great, heavy, underwater statues of...But that's not a wise pathway to go down, never mind.

It was in the last 100 years of relative order, or was it 1000? People counted differently then--it was not long before that Something came out of the Deep. Most deep, standing water has something dangerous within, far more dangerous than a seven-hundred-pound carp or two.

It is popular to the picture as Tiamat as a dragon with nine heads, which is an underestimation. I hope you have never been in near great waters in a time of turmoil. I have. Ways that once might have been your friend as you splashed around its surface and a few feet underwater, now housed fear, and even more, they spoiled, and this is how so many real Sea Monsters came to be in that lake near you; read your Gospel of Thomas to find out more.

Why did she come? This is simple. She can speak if She wants, but She did not. She did Appear in a form well suited to Her. Instead of speaking through the maelstrom at whose

heart She temporarily dwelt, she spoke through the races, and people lived and marveled that, from faraway, she destroyed Atlantis with the focused, chaotic liquid somehow. Obviously the message she left sliced across the city by huge waves as they focused in one place instead of simply overflowing the city, as we are told.

The message was this: If you love Order, you must respect Chaos.

The fact that Atlantis was shaped rather like a snake with a huge coil is no interest to anything and certainly doesn't relate to anything else we've written.

Atlanteans had the hubris to believe they'd created a perfect society and it would last forever. Perfection is hard for humans to attain, and the only things that last forever are those which adapt to the times; because change is inevitable, and thus, perfection, or even attempts thereat, must bow to change as well.

Remember this. At moments when your life seems most perfectly in place, or completely without any sense at all, remember that you are all part of the Balance, and the balance is not homeostasis. The Balance is always changing, as are our ideas of how this works.

Heed the lesson, friend. Or don't, and enjoy the consequences; if you won't listen, I won't care. I am old and I have little time left to do great things or make huge mistakes. I'm off to try to do the other, fully aware of the consequences of both

Life is a snake, cold-blooded, uncaring about anything but your direct actions and its own territoriality and appetite, or its own fears.

That's okay. You're warm-blooded, and therefore capable of passion; and passion drives every greatness of Humanity. If it sometimes drives insanity and death instead, it's still a worthy trade-off. Would I trade the conquering of Rome for Michaelangelo's brilliant ceiling? I would not, but this is Life; we make choices, even decisions; but we do not make Life. Life makes itself, guided by the Snake of What Might Be.

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**Chapter Approximately 4: Daily Habits – There’s A Fine Line Between Nagging About Doing Your Laundry, And Never Having Clean Underwear. That Line Is Where You’ll Find Us.**

Believe it or not, having some solid routines gives us the foundation from which to bring forth glorious chaos.

-You’d be surprised how helpful it is to take in a good amount of protein at around the same times every day. You’re going to need energy to hang by your ears from the Chrysler Building, after all.

-But you don’t have to be military strict. Not even our MILITARY is military strict, which is part of why they’re feared by friend and foe alike. If you want to pause between now and breakfast to name twelve snails you found behind the shed, do that. But then do eat breakfast. The rest of your green body will thank your green brain.

-Sleep is a pleasure. You gotta pay for it. You ought to try to sleep aroundish the same time (I know, but it’s easier!) in a nice dark room in a comfortable atmosphere. The human body needs basically just more sleep than you’re currently getting; I’m betting any info source will tell you. So get sleep. Not because you have to, but because it’s quite pleasant, and waking up refreshed is one of life’s little Goblinette joys.

-Stay in this moment. As that famous Goblin James Bond said, “Worry is a price paid to pain before it is due”. Do not put worry on your parietal credit snke

card. Drop the worry, exist in the now, paint yourself blue. The last one may be optional.

With love,

Your Goblin friends



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## A Typical (But Never the Same) Day

Wake up when your body says so. Although sometimes your body is foolish or some idiot has let their car alarm go.

(We don't have cars, but we have car alarms. Don't ask us how that happened. I think it was some kind of curse.)

Or, I mean, be a sleep-hygiene, sleep believer like my co-author JM. At 13, his pediatrician told him he needed at LEAST six hours of sleep a night; he'd been SO proud he only needed 4-5. His pediatrician, Dorothy, who had the best little books in her waiting wrong, was horrified, looked him in the eyes, and said, "You need at LEAST six hours EVERY day". She was likely referring not just to general good practice, but the fact that he was still growing and at that age one grows when you sleep.

Yet from that day on, he was CERTAIN he could not function on 5 hours and 45 minutes of sleep. So he went out of his way to ensure sleep, sometimes with hilarious or tragic results.

Turns out six hours is great, but he can make do on five, and, though it would shock his younger self and he doesn't enjoy it, he can get no sleep for 36 hours, with minimal stimulants and keep going.

The power of belief, and of words you trust, is immeasurable. Remind that as you go about your day—whether you have many friends who greet you with cheer, or many enemies who try to make your waking as unpleasant as possible, or whether, like a normal person, you just need to wake up and go to work.

If you have leisure, use it as if the whole world were a museum or theme park, and you have free admission to a tremendous amount of it.

Look at something interesting. Pick up something shiny. Sit where it's comfortable. Eat when you're hungry, but really, get some protein in there, and your body really will appreciate regular timing even if your mind flows free and outside of time. Sleep when you're tired, but it'll be easier if it's about the same time as yesterday. In between, if you don't have a job or a project or a mission, follow whatever catches your eye. If a butterfly appears, the schedule is now about butterflies until it isn't.

## Helpful Observation for Humans

We're not actually better at life than you are. This is part of why we haven't invented cellphones and nuclear weapons, which are just SOME of the ways humans make themselves very, very happy.

But we're slightly more honest about what thinking beings in general are bad at doing, and what pesky bodies need.

Yet, as Christopher Marlowe, playwright and spymaster, said in 1574, a few decade just before he was murdered for being way better than Shakespeare (we kid; as far as we know, his murder might have been a vicious barroom fight when he was 60, blasphemy against the Church, homosexual intrigue, and espionage for the Privy Council of Elizabeth), said:

"It's not easy being green."

Wise words, sir. Would you care for a post-mortuary bouquet of daisies?

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## Keep On Working: On Fostering An Indomitable Spirit

"I was workin' in the yard today  
When a letter came, from Southamton way  
I must admit I was a bit in the red;

If you've never had the pleasure then you might as well be dead:

Keep On Working! Keep in Working!"  
-Pete Townshend

The "work" to which we refer need not at all be your day job, although that's certainly included. It is the work of building your life, and (for most of us; I suppose those of us chained to the long-flesh-eroded skeletons in the deepest depths of Prince Eddie's dungeon and forgotten as if it were an oubliette have a rather more difficult time of it than most; but the principle applies.

No matter how many outside forces influence your life, it is meant to be your own. Your life's work might, perhaps, include figuring out who you are, and what you want (and that CAN take a lifetime)—or it may include resisting/eluding/defeating/tricking those who want to stuff you into a little box made of tacky-tacky and keep you there, so that everyone is a nice, simple, unified square shape and you can stack, store, and move them around easily. It may simply be survival—or figuring out why you SHOULD bother to survive.

Our Hapkido teacher told us to ‘foster and an indomitable spirit’.

He wasn’t talking about Magick. He wasn’t talking about the soul. And he didn’t insist that we HAVE an indomitable spirit. If you believe that’s your goal, you should be able to take ANYTHING, and that’s not true. If you’re investigating the Tomb of Horrors and the roof falls in and everyone dies, this kind of indomitable spirit is not something that floats, ethereal, out of your body and continues.

He comes from a non-magical world, and ‘fostering’ that spirit, not promising to gain it in perfection, is the goal and key.

An indomitable spirit, an unstoppable-but-listening mentality, a desire to go on when you might otherwise want to lie down and give up—those are some aspects thereof.

Don’t expect to simply HAVE it. Don’t fault yourself for its imperfections and failings.

But give that spirit a home.

Be someone who might, if enemies come, hold them off, say, as one Rabbi did, “I shall become an iron wall,” as his comrades fled and he was pierced by a half-dozen spears. Yet there he stood, past the pain, dying, blocking the door until his friends escape.

WE’RE NOT SUGGESTING THIS IS A GOOD PLACE TO START. IN GENERAL, ESPECIALLY IF YOU’RE UNARMED, AVOID PEOPLE WITH SPEARS; DO NOT LET THEM PIERCE YOUR BODY TO TEST YOURSELF. PLEASE DON’T BE LITERAL HERE.

We speak of spirit we *foster*.

That is, we are CONSCIOUS of whether we are standing or kneeling and why we’ve chosen it.

We are CONSCIOUS whether we fight or flee, and the space we have fostered for that spirit means we still might flee if it’s tactically useful—but NOT if we can actually win and are ‘merel’y afraid.

If you take no other piece of this advice, you’re an idiot and we already have your money so—

...let me start again. If you are looking to take any advice, start here. Cultivate what new agers so glibly call your ‘inner strength’), and work it like a muscle. This should not be hard. Every day, most Humans and even many Goblins start the day with no real desire to get out of bed (or tree, or cave, or palace storeroom, depending on the Goblin. What gets you up in the morning? Need; “I gotta get out of here before the Cook notices me and starts healing creatures”. Want: “I could skip work, but I don’t NEED to, I just WANT to.” And an

understanding of imperfection: “Screw it, today I’ll call out of work and break off today’s social engagements. But I damn well expect myself to do better tomorrow.

Foster.

An indomitable.

Spirit.

Try, within your boundaries (or past boundaries you may someday find you can break) to be unstoppable. Don’t expect to BE that. But strive for it.

Much of life is striving. Which is part of why we Goblins strive every day, but do it with a sardonic and sometimes sloppy heart; we are seeking to do our best, and our best is usually beyond anyone’s grasp. (Thank Goodness; can you think of a world ruled by chaotes, like ourselves?)

Strive for strength. Seek strength. Find techniques and routines that give you strength; repeated exercise of your Free Will stakes energy, but it doesn’t contradict our General Almost-But-Never-Truly chaotic natures, nor will it cure the chaos of your World, its news, and the affects of your friends, your peers...

Build strength. You don’t need to test yourself all the time; the World will often do that. But approach each day as a day to get stronger...if not in body, then in soul, and in the end, that’s what will help.

“Keep on working  
Keep on working  
Keep on working  
Keep on working  
Keep on working;

WORK!”

~Pete Townshend (again)

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## On Normalcy, Whatever That Is

We won't attempt to define 'normalcy'; it's terribly relative across cultures, so figure how difficult it would be for us to generalize what's 'normal' for an entire species, one that isn't even our own. (Well, it's Jeff's species, in theory, but the last time anyone considered him normal was...was...1981 or so, when he was six. And even then, this is because six-year-olds often act abnormally by the standards of the culture around them, and it's considered a phase which they'll grow out of it. Jeff just got weirder and weirder, and the more he understood what was 'usual', the stronger his desire—not even conscious—to be, as he put it, lisping slightly, “No, thank you.”

We're fine with normalcy. ...that's a simplification. We tend to avoid it. We tend to find many things objectionable about it. We bring up that much-overused, rather melodramatic word, “conformity”.

But if we genuinely value freedom, we value the desire and ability to be normal for a human of your day and age.

If that's the case, I hope you're reading this book for the humor value, as you may not derive a lot of utility from its actual advice. (Some people believe that most normal people like being normal; nonconformists, of course, want to believe 'normal' people are unhappy and/or missing out and don't even know it/are afraid of it. Then again, most 'normal' people tend to believe we're nuts, fools, or both; and they may not be wrong.

You're free to be as normal as you want. We'll just offer our own advice, from our own terribly peculiar point of view. We hope it's of benefit to everyone. And if it isn't, as we've said before and we'll say again, as long as this book makes you a little happy, we're happy. Or if it doesn't make you happy, but you've paid for it, we won't be quite as happy, but at least we have your money, and that will make both of us happy—us, because we can use it to buy books ourselves, and you, because you'll be less tempted to spend it on something dumb, like food or shelter.

(The two co-authors, at this point, had a very entertaining fistfight. Since at least one of them is imaginary, people gave the other quite a lot of weird stares; but one can box an invisible opponent in a parking lot, can't one? It's better than punching a REAL opponent in the nose, generally speaking.)

The truth is, we have nothing against normalcy. There is an ancient belief (perhaps as old as thirty years ago!) that the two are opposed. Not really. What we're against is AUTOMATIC, unquestioning uniformity. We're against people being normal because that's what they're 'supposed' to be, and looking down on the weird because they're SUPPOSED to be against people breaking norms. That's just herd instinct; why have sentience if you're not going to use it.

What's the saying? "I want to be different, just like everyone else"?

The more your machines curate your lives for you, the more you'll be similar, but all be led down slightly different, but semi-adjacent paths, by the designers of those machines and the unexpected by-products of field testing by millions of consumers. You don't have to reject that; it would be quite hard to live in your society without having your news, your television, your media generally fed to you and curated by artificial intelligence trained to please you and sell things to you. You don't consider that dystopian, so we won't either.

All we want to do is point out: This is happening, it's obvious, and you CAN deviate from it at least a LITTLE bit.

Think of it as a simple, warbling Goblin song of rebellion, battling the massive, pleasing Wall of Sound which is the everyday world: maybe only you can hear it, but it's better to sing your own song sometimes, even if you are your only audience.

Be what you want, up to including normal. But try to be what you WANT...not what you're told to want.

C'est le guerre!

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## Of Sun, of Cave: The Goblins and the Fae

The smell of the wind is sweet and crisp, and catching a ride on it are particles of dust, as if they were tiny fragments of obsidian, very very small, but sucking in moonlight and giving back nothing, and somehow, in this small act of arrogance and cheek, they are charming. It doesn't hurt that they seem to have their own soundtrack, the song of tiny silver bells forged from the unseen centers of meteors and the soft hiss the Sun makes as it sinks into the sea. These things call to all of us; few hear, fewer answer.

But you can hear them, if you try; you can hear them on the wind.

*And whatever you do, listen close to that wind, and if you **must** hear water, hear the cheerfully mindless babbling of sunlit brooks and streams, and forget that there are vast subterranean lakes, of peculiar and unmeasured depths.*

Learn to remember:

There was a time when you were small and wide-eyed, and you believed wholeheartedly in the magic of pinky promises and stepping on cracks in the sidewalk. When you could draw doorways to other worlds in pink chalk on the sidewalk and bits of folded paper could tell your future if you just said the right rhyme.

Learn to forget: that pleasure is, at best, an opposite twin of pain, and more often, neither one really prevails; banality is the default state of an existence without enough effort. Leave the Fae their shining spires and bury the Goblins in the gravel undertow of their cavern-tombs, and you might look at many wonders...

...and never quite ask yourself when the pretty, pretty beings you see preening and posing found time to make the marvels of their magics and machines.

We long for a thing we sometimes call ‘innocence’, which is a thin-stretched period where we were so new to sensation that all pain was a romantic adventure. There was a time when a kiss was forever and heartbreak was forever, and another time when forever was too long to bear. Once you were tall and thin, once you were short and full, and once you were everything all at once and nothing you ever wished to be.

Those things were all true. Those things never began. Those things never ended.

**The Fae say:** *Join us, dance with us, sing with us. Be born and live and die with us, and then do it all over again just because you can. Let us show you how to hold the sun in your hands and drink down its purpose and warmth like the rarest mead. We’ll toast the sundown with full glasses and roaring fires, and never for long will we be far from the fever-glow of day.*

**The Goblins say:** We dance little, and we sing less, but that is because we do not confuse moments of pleasure with lifetimes of hard-won contentment. Dissatisfaction is our lot and our happiness; we can love what we do, but if we cannot rest in the comfort of the past, if we must drive ourselves onwards as the pick drives into rock, at least our vision is never dulled by the crippling narcotic of sameness. Let us teach you how to spin the nighttime into an absinthe so potent and deep that you are never sure what the next sip will do; and come, take the next sip with us.

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# Some Positives of Dating Nyarlothotep

**“Nyarlothotep, the Crawling Chaos. I am the last. I will tell the audient void.”**

*-H.P. Lovecraft*

Goblins don’t have Tinder.

But they DO go on a lot of blind dates. They're sure to be chaotic and random, and often, they're even pleasant. They don't usually date Eldritch Abominations, but...no matter how much some of us may hope, Cthulhu IS dead. He's still going to come out of the Sea at some point and devour us all, but there's no guarantee it will be soon. And if I may be a bit disrespectful (I'm hoping I'll be long gone by the time he finishes hitting 'snooze' on the water-shattering lightning bolt which finally awakens him)...He may have something like what you and I might call an ego. When He emerges, He'll likely want to be noticed and feared; he doesn't really care about Humanity, but he is beyond comprehension and thought, and should fill any viewer with existential dread. Whereas at the moment, people are unlikely to look at him; they'll still be doomscrolling their phones, which are talking about how he has the wrong politics, is the wrong shade of verdancy, and how he's almost as dangerous as Global Warming and Ecological Catastrophe, and even rivals Voting For The Wrong Person, while He's lifting them with His thousand tentacles and shoving them into his unending, ceaselessly gaping maw.

Nyarlothotep, on the other hand, is already amongst us, and spend the 19<sup>th</sup> century bringing terrible and strange technology to the unsuspecting and the curious. He showed them terrifying sights and visions.

We won't belabor the point, but... the leaders in that field are busy making phone, screens, advertising that spies on you, and inventing sheer lies which would terrify anyone. It's a sort of universal, mass-produced evil which offends his 3100-year-old sensibilities as an individual craftsman of the Unspeakable.

So he's mostly turned to dating mortals, and he's a surprisingly great date.

I won't say his visage is not appalling; but let's not be shallow, shall we? And at least the 3k-year-age-gap is very, very up front.

For one thing, he'll never pressure you for physical intimacy against your desire. He came to inflict strange suffering upon us, group by group; he's got no particular interest in ruining his or your enjoyment by trying to make his date suffer. In fact, he's a little lost, now that his ability to use wyrd knowledge and Magick to drive humans out of their minds is totally ignored in the face of more important crises, like who baked a cake for whom and why.

On the other side, if you're SEEKING that, well, he was actually celibate until about the twentieth century, which means he's spent at least ten decades more than most potential lovers in learning and practicing the various arts of love.

He probably WILL know if Cthulhu starts rising, and at this point, his own mission having become a bit redundant, he'll probably transport his current lover(s) somewhere

else, like his very lovely Victorian mansion in that bubble on the Moon; if he's not going to bring about the end of the world, he might as well have a good time, and he might as well make some friends and companions and take them with him. Most Goblins who've met him are huge fans of his; he tells the funniest stories, the dirtiest jokes, and all of his campfire ghost stories begin with, "There was once a house which was haunted by a dread Spirit. The Spirit's name was Morris and in his actual lifetime, he'd been an insurance salesman. No-one can understand his moans, but all he's trying to do is get you to take out a term life policy or two for a company that went under in the 1940s. Poor Morris."

He notices things. He IS hard to reach, as he has no phone, but as long as you're okay with him mysteriously appearing outside your door just when you might like to see him, that's not really a problem. And if you're busy, he'll just leave; he's old-fashioned enough that he's playing several chess games by mail, and he needs plenty of time to think about it.

Also, he may know all of Humankind is doomed, but he's pretty doomed himself. He's a bit less of an inflictor-of-pain than someone who's gotten quite bored of watching other people self-inflict madness via what they take in through the choices they make. Sometime around the 1980s, he tried to start some flame wars on BBSes, only to find out people LIKED that kind of thing. He does avoid the Internet, but he doesn't mind if YOU want to use it for directions, restaurant reservations, or helpful counter-curses.

Admission: He's polyamorous, and one of your co-authors is dating him. So we're a bit biased.

But he's really lonely, and he's a great guy.

Anyone interested?

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# Chapter We Stole This From An Unguarded Diary, aka “Goblin Governance: Some Notes By Alice, Dark Lord”

*Alice has spent a great deal of time thinking about governance, particularly because she really, really doesn't want to do it. She just wants to do research.*

*She doesn't have that luxury.*

*We've curated some of her thoughts on the matter for you. That is, we stole them from her Diary, but she doesn't mind. She never puts personal things in her diary; all her really personal thoughts, she keeps to herself.*

The Goblins were the only species whose embassy was also a theme park.

“We don't get a lot of ambassadors, but we do get a LOT of tourists,” said Nibblenose, whose real name was either Jake or “Really Extra Super Nibblenose”; he hadn't been extremely clear, and Sam wasn't terribly worried about it under the circumstances, any more than someone who is thrown into a giant carnivorous bush is also likely to worry if it might, sometime after they've been consumed, give their bones a rash.

Children of most species will self-organize to an astonishing degree. Granted, the ‘organization’ is entirely social; they may not be organized about mud, live beavers, lightning, hemlock salad, fire, ice, snow, footprints, cleaning, organizing, eating anything other than large sticks of sugar...but socially, a group of children at play will create and invent mutually-satisfying games despite having no incentive to cooperate other than the genuine idea that they're out to have fun, and since they don't have a lot of other means of coercing the other children, seeking mutual fun is one of the cheapest and quickest ways to arrive at play. And play, of course, is one of the most valuable teaching tools.

...which is, they would insist, not why they do it.

Goblins have many sets of codes and laws, all of which appear to be pranks, practical jokes, or parodies of other people's rules and laws.

(For example, Elves have an intensely complicated system of lineage, subs-species, sub-race, sub-group, and genotypical and phenotypical distinction.

We THINK this is the origin of the rule “All Goblins should REALLY REALLY CARE about how pointy their ears are”.

Especially given that Goblin ears are round.)

Goblins do have one Law. It is inscribed upon the Really Big Rock, which some Goblins claim is sacred, and some Gobins claim is pointless, but which all agree is Really Big and in a very inconvenient place where most Goblins in their capital city (if it's a city) have to encounter it anyway.

It is:

“NOOOOOOO!”

“Wouldn't be FUN!”

Goblin society simply shouldn't work.

The fact that it does is proof that we are living in some sort of fictional Universe.

...or that every other kind of government is crazy and Goblins are the only sane beings on the plane.t

One of those two, most likely.

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## Chapter Lucky 13: On Goblin Magic

We would be glad to tell you the secrets of Goblin magic, if only we knew them.

We asked a very powerful Goblin shaman for her secrets, and spent less than a week as tadpoles in her goldfish pond before she turned us back. Both times she mumbled something we couldn't make out, except that in the part where you would apparently say a name, she said, very distinctly, "These two nitwits".

We have no idea whom those nitwits are, but we're grateful for the week we spent swimming around, even if we did have to do a certain amount of fleeing from her giant carp, which apparently though we were food or toys or both—it's hard to ask a carp questions, seeing as how they have essentially no brains (not unusual among humanoids either)—but also didn't PRETEND to have any brains, which made any communication other than rapid flight impractical, as well as dangerous.

We are told that true Goblin Magic is based on the Jewish Kabbalah. The few Goblin Mages we spoke to agreed with this, but pointed out that Hebrew doesn't exist in our world, so they've never actually seen or studied the Kabbalah; we asked them what they used for power and they drained our souls so dry that the Devil, who appeared a night later asking to trade our souls for the secret of writing the perfect Goblincore book, took a look at the contract, took a look at our signatures, and took a look at our anemic souls, and tore up the contract and left us with a disgusted look and a spare pitchfork, which will come in handy the next time we encounter a mob and have to pretend to be part of it. (Although this is much more of a danger for Jeff than A. Goblin; Goblin mobs are a hivemind of pure chaos, whereas Human mobs contain a fascinating mixture of purpose, misdirection, and regret-in-waiting. If you can't beat them, join them, at least until you can duck into a convenient alley and avoid the upcoming slaughter (you didn't REALLY think someone who can make life out of corpses via lightning would leave their tower undefended by thousands of little zaps from Zeus, did you?))

We can tell you this: whereas most Human groups stand in a circle, to contain and focus the energy, Goblin mages stand any way they please; thus the Power they direct goes in all manner of unpredictable directions. "It's weird, but it works" seems to be the one thing they all agree on.

If you want to learn how to cast Goblin spells: Go ask the Necromancer. She'll slay you first, but after you're dead and raised into her eternal service, she will TALK YOUR EAR OFF. Assuming it doesn't get removed during the slaying process, which sometimes happens.

Sometimes we make great sacrifices unto the Gods and they come forth to do our bidding. We tell them our bidding, and they MAY do it, if they can stop laughing long enough to make the proper declarations, which is rare.

You should probably ask a Human about this. They give much more straightforward answers; on the other hand, if you end up a tadpole, they seldom turn you back.

# ***Growing A Goblin Heart***

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...but anyone can grow a Goblin heart.

The Brain is a strange thing, and full of brain redundancy. This is why it will sometimes recover from severe blows to the head with your mind intact or becoming more intact; I haven't been hook-kicked to the skull for 25 years, but I was young and my brain's lesser-used spaces picked up the slack.

I hope.

I can speak of the heart only metaphorically; my ignorance of neuroscience is still a practical working knowledge, whereas all I know of my heart is how to run, leap, jog, and kick long and hard and properly to try to keep it strong.

But there is a metaphorical part of your heart which is molded by you. Your heart may desire things; but it's both true that your heart can desire (you can be an astronaut when all you sought to be was a chef, and know it in your heart—but you can also find something that resonates with you, and if it didn't have a space in your heart before, your heart makes room for it.)

Don't ask a cardiologist if this is real; I have visions of needing CPR someday and the rescuer bending over me, breathing into my mouth, pumping my chest, and saying, quietly, "Idiot, idiot, IDIOT".

But it's true. At least the metaphorical heart, the place where home is inside you—that can grow and increase.

If part of you wants to be free, to swing from the rafters, not to go criminal or dangerous or insane but to make all those around you wonder what happened and how you got this way, you have my permission to tell the truth:

You have a Goblin Heart. And so a part of you must always be free.

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## **A Parable Stolen From The Dark Lord. (Don't Tell Bloom; She'd Be *Upset*)**

*(As long as we're stealing....er, borrowing things from Alice...)*

Bloom was frustrated.

We'd be lying if we suggested this was't, at this point, the usual state of most of the Ambassadors of the Dark Lord.

As a core problem, no-one believed the Dark Lord would send out ambassadors at all.

Ambassadors are (optimally, at least) a bridge between one people, group, or nation, and another.

It's really difficult to be an ambassador to people who are certain your boss is dead.

Blossom had worked at it.

"Did you see that storm, out of which came that massive lightning bolt which hit the dead tree we've been trying to cut down for years, struck it in the right direction, and dammed up the river exactly while we wanted while being surrounded by an arcane glow? The Dark Lord did that to convince you of both her existence and her good intentions."

The other Nymphs and Dryads had looked at each other. Finally, one spoke,

"She's dead, as everyone knows. It must be a coincidence."

Another said, "We hate the Dark Lord; we know we need to. If she were really alive, and she did something kind for us, it's a trick."

Blossom, who was young and sarcastic (one of those would eventually pass; one would only grow) said, "So Either the whole thing's a lie or a trick?"

Have you ever watched an entire conglomeration of woods-and-forest creatures rolling their eyes at once? Even the sentient Venus Flytraps, which didn't have eyes.

"So if she does good, you'll believe she's eventually got a bad purpose; if she does bad or makes a mistake, it's proof, and simultaneously, she's also well-known to be dead, or imprisoned by Men?" asked Blossom.

No-one took her sarcastically.

“NOW you get it,” said a Satyr.

“Pass the wine, please,” said Blossom.

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(On a completely different note, on the subject of art, whatever that may be:

Don't touch the heart of my Muse; it may no longer belong to me, but it's still a delicate thing, to be gifted only as She chooses, not bandied about like some sort of sorcerous artifact which exists merely to bestow ideas upon the imaginatively under-endowed.)

**Chapter Fork: On Versatility Versus
Random Creativity (For those who believe
there is no difference, we won't argue; we've
just left the page largely blank where your
argument would go, and acknowledge that you
might be right. We think there's a difference,
though.)**

*There was once a Goblin from Goblinia
Who didn't mean to be mean to you
But his limericks
were made of tricks;
They neither rhymed nor sounded obscene to you.*

~the Rhymeless Goblin Bard

There is a difference between being random and being versatile.

The Limerick above, if it works at all, works because it PLAYS with the rules, but follows them. It doesn't have to; you can do pretty much anything you want with poetry, and altogether too many people do. But poetic forms are not rules for the sake of imposing rules; they exist for the sake of framing creativity, not stifling it. Would it be a better limerick if the last line was,

"This is obviously not by that poet"?

Maybe. But that's partly because the REST of it rhymes. Hemmingway said you could leave any piece out of a part of writing, if you still wrote the rest of the story. Which probably works for a Hemmingway, a Vonnegut, or a Shakespeare. None of which (we speak at least by probability) are you. And we're pretty sure we're not any of those folks, either.

Let's take it a bit further.

For one thing, if you threw some blotches of paint on a canvas and called it art, you wouldn't be wrong. But unless you had some purpose or focus, you also are likely to have little artistic merit. And if people DO like it, you can't really claim credit for it. "Oh, I just threw some random paint at the canvas" will be seen as modesty and truth. If you make it big, people will admire you...for things you aren't. And never, ever know who or what you actually are.

A certain amount of randomness can be quite pleasant. But as long as you're a mortal being, with mortal functions and mortal needs, you can't be entirely versatile. You are not a piece of rubber; if you bend far enough, you will break your back.

So even we Goblins know this lesson, and we know it every bit as well as both Thor and the Monkey King:

Whether your way is straightforward and direct, or tricky and hard to predict, there may come a time when someone asks you to bend. Sometimes bending a bit is good. Try tying your shoes without bending something; then send us pictures of what happened, as we love a good laugh as much as anyone, and better than most.

But bend too far, and you break.

We are often capable of, even inclined to, not merely nonconform or anticonform, but to be surreal, peculiar, glamourbombing (we'll get to that later) and other means of focused acting-out.

Q: What's the difference between a playful Goblin and a 3-year-old human?

A: Goblins know better. In theory.

NOTE: *Never ask a three-year-old their understanding of Life. They likely have a depressingly better answer than you do.*

On Goblin Glamourbombing

“...in brief, glamour bombing is an art terrorist activity designed to raise ambient glamour levels around you. you know that bumper sticker that sez 'Commit random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty' - ? kinda like that.

anything you can think of that somebody will stumble across unexpectedly and be left shaking their head in wonder at counts. cryptic graffiti, weird arrangements of pennies glued to the sidewalk, little packages of glitz, etc.

The concept of Glamour Bombs originated on Darkfae-L in the summer of 1997, as a multi-state act of poetic terrorism, aimed at increasing ambient magic levels and making the world a bit more Appealing to 'our' sort of folks. Timed to occur over Summer Solstice weekend, there were participants in Boston, Cleveland, and Texas that I know of; possibly a few others as well. Unfortunately, archives from that list got destroyed in a computer crash, so I am going on memory.. as I recall, little arrangements of pennies were glued to the sidewalk, subway platform, etc in Boston; here in Cleveland we made tiny scrolls saying - in elegant Victorian script & clipart - "The Gates are Opening". we wrapped these up with glitter and iridescent pipecleaners and scattered them in various places (at a Prophetess show, out at our favourite seedy boardwalk area etc.)”

~ ambiana wolfkitten

(eristic.net/fey/gbomb/gbombing.php, late 1990s participants):

Further notes from ambiana:

“What I'd hope to see here are ideas for various 'bombs'.. I'd like to figure some way to rig little packages so that they really do pop open when touched, spilling sparklies and what-have-you.. of course, I would want to also have marvelous Scents waft out, and a cloud of rose or lavender smoke.. =D maybe wax eggshells (or those sugar ones.. ohh, with little scenes of Faery inside.. :) Anything that Feels faery and could bring an unexpected moment of Wonderment to the unsuspecting 'victim' would work.”

(We know. We did say we mostly wanted to give you our thoughts, or at least process other thoughts in a Goblin way. But we'd also like to give you a chance to drink directly from the source[s], and that's not us. -JPM and A. Goblin.)

From ceremonial glamourbombing discussions (digitalambler.com, 2012):

“I recall an impromptu hail to Dionysus while at the bar with a few friends. So many odd looks- but the party really took off after that so it must have worked.”

Other practical examples shared in the same thread: leaving “magic potions” of colored water on a park bench, “a few dozen pinwheels in a schoolyard,” “charms strewn about a fountain,” “intricate knotwork spiraling up the pillars of a gazebo in the park,” and random shrines appearing on street corners. It’s not about surviving chaos; rather, it’s weaponizing it for delight and subtle enchantment. Your messy hoard becomes ammunition for spreading Goblin energy outward. (But remember Ma’at. There is very much such a thing as ‘way, way too much of a good thing’, and it’s way too easy to get caught up in Erisian energy. And nobody benefits from another Trojan war, as far as we know.)

There’s no desire to make the rest of the world into Goblinia. There’s no need to spread more random chaos for the sake of chaos. Abbie Hoffman may have caused fascinating pandemonium, dropping dollar bills into the center of the New York Stock Exchange in the 60s, and he describes with some glee how these wealthy people lost their dignity and scrambled towards the money (granted; this was a dollar of 1960s money; you could get a whole McDonald’s meal, burger, fries, and soda for a buck, if, for some reason you wanted to)—but he wasn’t just trying to be chaotic and interesting, he was seeking to disrupt their work and make them look silly for his own purposes. That’s not glamourbombing; it’s just an inventive use of actual malice. Malice for what he felt was a good cause, but (to be practical rather than arguing ethics): malice is very, very contagious; it’s hard to spread it to others without catching it yourself.

(We’re not arguing for or against attacking your enemies; we’re just saying that THIS is not about spreading harmful turmoil; just unexpectedness. We’re here to open peoples’ eyes to a broader, sometimes weirder view of the world—not to hurt anyone. There’s nothing namby-pamby about this; there’s a world of difference, internally and externally, between expressing creativity and expressing malice. If you want to be entirely selfish about it and not worry about the other people who’ll be damaged; that happens, but also, damaging other people for fun is a very addictive vice. It tends to give you a darker view of the world, and that will make your own sleep harder, your own life more stony and cold.

This, in turn, flies in the face of Goblinian innovation and creativity, and, most of all—it makes the world less pleasant for YOU. Or at least, it makes you less pleasant for many people around you, and that’s a heavy price for a few moments of interesting ways to make strangers miserable.)

Here are a few classic Goblin glamourbombs:

One day, for some particularly stupid reason, a tribe of Goblins were at war with a tribe of Dwarves. There were minor skirmishes, some injuries, even some casualties, but given the territory, it was obvious that the primary fight would be the big, open plain between the Mountains of those Dwarves and the Forest of that particular group of Goblins.

The Goblins were (unsurprisingly) unpredictable; but the Dwarves always attacked at dawn. The advantage gained by having foreknowledge of this was outweighed by the fact that the Dwarves slept early, being very used to sleeping in shifts and having unpredictable light in the mines, and they awoke an hour *before* dawn, where their chieftains and Shamans would fire them up into that mad Dwarven fury which has led many a Human enemy to go home, without victory and, often, without legs.

It was a fearsome and terrifying site as the Dwarves got to the top of the great Hill that stood between them and the field; their Shamans beat heavy wardrums in double-time and the Dwarves went berserk, charging towards the enemy...

...who wasn't there.

Just...not there. They'd left. They'd gone home in the dark of night.

What WAS there was a gigantic feast— (it was clearly made by Hobbits; you could tell by the eleven kinds of bacon, the sixteen different spices next to the salt and pepper, and the cute Hobbit women [not that they had to be women, but Dwarves are quite old-fashioned, which is why they avoid fights with Amazons] keeping it warm and preparing to serve them as talented, sweet but non-nonsense waitstaff; they'd been hired at great cost from some of the finest Inns in Hobbitaria, or whatever name is currently fashionable among the hirsute-footed shorties.

The Field was very large, perhaps three acres long. The Dwarves had hoped their momentum would carry them to the center, where honorable enemies did battle. (Dishonorable enemies who tried to ambush Fighting Dwarves at the BOTTOM of a hill simply found themselves trampled and THEN hammered to bits.) They slowed to a jog, then a walk, crossing those acres with no foes in sight and the smell of Breakfast, Second Breakfast, Pre-Lunch, Pre-Brunch, Brunch, and Dinner For Those Impatient For Savory Things At Dawn, all cooking and fresh with lovely bone-China and well-crafted serving utensils and clever heating and cooling methods (the Goblins are also friendly with Gnomes, after all.)

They did the only thing they could do: slaughtered everyone and ran towards the Goblin village, a few miles away.

....no, we kid. They looked on in disbelief. Florin Oaksbane, the War Leader, reluctantly got someone to fetch him a flag of truce in case this was some kind of weird sneak attack (but there wasn't room in any of the enticing, covered dishes for even the smallest Goblin), and was handed a note:

“Sorry about the War. We decided to move our village next to where these Hobbits live, and we'll work for them for a year and they'll help us build lovely Hobbit-holes and such. Please enjoy this complimentary meal instead of our blood; we hope it's a reasonable substitute.”

The Dwarves had never eaten so well in their lives. After many, many hours, and being very full, the Dwarven leaders met up and decided that they, too, would move out of the mountains and live next to the Goblins and the Hobbits. Hobbit holes are like caves, only far nicer; and there was a massive stream where they could pan for gold.

The moral of this story was around here somewhere, but I think an overenthusiastic Dwarf ate it.

—

Once, a Goblin decided to mess with everyone. We all know that all Goblins became accountants, painted themselves human colors, and joined regular society a century ago, just as Gremlins stopped sabotaging planes and began to work in customer service instead.

So that Goblin wrote a book which purported to be something like “A Goblincore Guide To Life”. He claimed it was one great Glamourbomb, which brought him esteem among Goblankind, which wasn't useful, as Goblins, of course, don't exist. His Human compatriot, though he really, really believed in the book, just told those around him it was a cash grab among those who love Goblins, Lore, Chaos, and want a better way to live weirdly. Being Humans, they didn't believe in any of those things except the cash part; but that was enough to get him respect from many of his peers.

So it goes.

—

Meanwhile, if you insist on believing you live in the ‘real’ world, and we Goblins live in an ‘imaginary’ one, we'll give you a gem that we discovered back when we were listening to “Raise Your Fist And Yell” on repeat one Saturday afternoon. Here's a meeting between

Mr. Vincent Furrier, better known as Alice Cooper, and Salvador Dali, as written up by the magazine “Another Man”, by Paul Moody:

‘On arrival, Dalí announced that he had spent the previous evening working on a brand new artwork: The Alice Brain. He then presented the singer with a ceramic sculpture of a human brain with a chocolate éclair running down the back, painted with ants spelling out the words ‘Dalí’ and ‘Alice’. “I said: ‘That’s great, when we’re done can I have it?’” recalls Cooper. “He said ‘Of course not, it’s worth millions!’ I just laughed. He had a great sense of humour but his genius was that you never knew when he was being funny and when he wasn’t.” When the day’s shooting was over, Dalí asked Cooper and manager Shep Gordon to join him and his 20-strong entourage at one of the city’s most exclusive restaurants. As the lavish meal came to an end, Dalí waved away the waiter presenting the bill. Instead, he simply signed the tablecloth. “Shall I leave a tip?” responded Cooper, signing his own name below it.’

The truth really IS stranger than fiction; but since most of what purports to be truth IS fiction, we’re not too worried about the competition.

On Rules And Breaking Rules: A Story

From, Of All Things, The Talmud: “The Oven of Akhnai”, from the Babylonian Talmud, circa 59 BCE.

Observant Jews have a lot of rules and laws—there are 613 Laws in the Torah, and countless rules and ruling passed down (and still argued over) centuries later.

(I mean, there are even people who think there’s a commandment which says “Thou shalt not kill”, which is perfectly untrue; it’s one of the few truly great flaws in the King James translation. The commandment is “Thou shalt not commit murder”, which is quite different. Swatting a fly might kill it; that would not be murder. Subjecting you to what Goblins eat when they’re alone...now that would probably be murder, eventually.)

There was a debate of whether a kind of clay oven (I know nothing about clay ovens, but apparently this one was made with separate clay tiles with sand between them for reasons unknown to me) can or can’t become ritually impure. Look, we Jews CARE about these laws a lot; but while we’ve made copying the Torah exactly so important that a Torah can cost more than two new cars, as every piece is done by hand and every piece must be perfect...we also spend a LOT of time interpreting them. And arguing about them. This is normal. For Yiddishkeit, at least. (There are no laws which say “Thou shalt not be a Goblin”, if you were worried about that.)

What IS known is that by Jewish tradition, the Time of Prophets has passed. God, as you may have noticed, does not interfere much in human affairs, which is good, because it would probably conflict with all the various Gods we worship. (Although the commandment isn’t “Though shalt have no other Gods besides me”, it is, “Thou shalt have no other Gods BESIDE me.” Which is how I can attempt to serve Hashem AND P’tah at the same time; but then again, I’m slightly mad, so who knows?)

So God gave us the Torah, one of the first sets of written rules and laws we know (but after the Code of Hammurabi, for example), and we argue about it—I mean, we follow it as best we can, but it’s very clear that we have to make our own interpretations; no Prophet will come to tell us what to do.

It is a fascinating example of strict order, argued into glorious (if theoretically logical and orderly) Chaos.

A dude named Rabbie Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (that is, Elizer, son of Hyrcanus—and what kind of Jewish name is Hyrcanus, anyway?) argues it is clean; the entire rest of the group in the room, all learned Rabbis, the chachamim (“sages”), say it is impure.

Eliezer becomes frustrated. He says, “If I am correct, and the Halachah agrees with me, then let me prove it; let that tiny carob tree shoot out of the ground as if it had lived a hundred years and grow tall and strong!”

And immediately, the carob tree SHOOTs up (some say it flew out of the ground in all its multi-ton glory) to a full-grown, somewhat ancient tree; what had once been lower than the window was now three times as high as the tip of the ceiling, only a few dozen steps away from where they all stood, with the grass around it growing greener and lushier as the tree itself emerged, most suddenly, in its full adult form.

And the Rabbis look at each other and look at him. There’s a pause, and then they say, “Look, Eliezer, that’s cool, but a carob tree doesn’t prove a point of the Law.”

So Eliezer said, “Very well! If I am right in my interpretation, this great stream, which has flowed next to our schul (Synagogue) for hundreds of years will suddenly reverse course and flow backwards!” And the mighty stream slowed...stopped flowing...and then, with quite a lot of surprise for the fish, the stream visibly began to flow BACKWARDS and didn’t stop. And it has done so to this day.

The Rabbis were shocked. But as they calmed down, one said, “Okay, that’s really impressive, but it doesn’t prove a point of the Law, either.”

Rabbi Eliezer, who may have had a temper or may simply have been frustrated by the rejection of his logic, spoke in a stentorian voice and said, “I am correct, and the very walls of this Temple will bend inwards and crush us all if I am not wrong!”—and

Lo, the walls began to bend inward. The Sages did not react with calm; they all panicked, until one, a Rabbi Joshua (pronounced “Yo-shew-ah”, should you care), stood up and said, “Walls! Stand thy ground!”

And the walls froze. Unable to disobey Rabbi Eliezer, unwilling to embarrass Rabbi Joshua, they remained bent; and should you visit that house of learning, you will see the walls are still bent. This proves the story is true, if only we can find that particular place of learning.

Reb Eliezer, completely fed up, shook his head, and now it was his turn to call out a mighty call, “If my interpretation of the Halacha, this important understanding of the Law, is correct, then may it be proven by Heaven itself.”

There was the briefest pause, whereupon...

...a great Voice, not booming at all, yet heard loudly, clearly, and with great force by all and sundry present, even the children in the kindergarten next door and the cats which were mysteriously hanging around, rang out, “Why do ye dispute with Rabbi Eliezer? He is correct in every way on this point.”

And a certain Rabbia Jeremiah stood up, then, as all others except Eliezer sat there, trembling to be so near the Divine Presence. He said:

“O Lord, you gave us the Torah at Mount Sinai and then you left us to decide. So decide we must. The Voice of God does not prove what is needed—the human interpretation of the Law which has been our burden and our blessing for thousands of years has been up to us and us alone.”

So the oven was ruled impure, and, in Heaven (for The Name is everywhere, but His Presence is restrained to a faraway place from Mankind, surrounded by the heavenly host)—the Lord God could not stop laughing. “My children have defeated Me!” he kept exclaiming, with delight. “My children have defeated Me!”

The moral, for Jews and non-Jews alike:

Once something is given to you—a thought, an idea, an assignment—it is yours. You may govern your whole life according to it; and while you may change because of, say, threats of death (as with forced converts, for example)—what is given to you is *only* yours. It is your responsibility; it is your power. It is very specific Order, argued over millennia as each generation must decide the Truth, or Close Enough To The Truth To Count, for themselves.

I mean, the Dwarves worship P’tah, who mostly said, “Work, create, and build”. They’ve had to interpret the rest for themselves; and look at all they’ve made and created.

So it goes, Barukh Hashem. So it goes.

Chapter 23: Why Goblin Bards Are Unpopular With Everyone Else, and Everyone Else's Bards Are Unpopular With Goblins

Goblins love music, as do all sentient races, although we must admit that Orcs seem to have been born with tin ears (metaphorically; if they were born with ears made out of actual tin, however would they grow?)

Other races want bards who will sing about how brave everyone was and how the Dragon was definitely asking for it. Goblin bards sing the bit where the hero tripped over his own cloak, set the tavern on fire trying to look cool, and then blamed the cat. They are banned from most respectable courts. They are beloved in Goblin taverns. This is not a contradiction.

Here are some real historical quotes, turned into the kind of headlines a Goblin bard would bellow while drunk and dancing on a table (roughly 3000 BCE to the 1970s):

1. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you; that is the whole of the law, the rest is commentary."

— Rabbi Hillel, 100 BCE; when he was asked by a doubter to summarize the Torah while the doubter stood on one foot. Also, Hillel's classic work explaining Judaism is called "A Guide For The Perplexed". He was clearly part-Goblin. This soon became known as 'The Golden Rule'.

Once they found out it was called the 'Golden Rule', Bards spread the rumor that if you wished other people would buy you a drink, you needed to buy your bard a drink, and eventually, gold would just appear in your pockets. You'd think the untruth of this would be discovered quickly; but every drunken sot who forgot how much money he was carrying would pull out a shiny coin and say, "The Bard was right!" and buy another round. It became rather self-fulfilling.

2. "You cannot step twice into the same river."

— Heraclitus, ~500 BCE

With the exception of Bards who worked seaside towns, that season, every Bard worth his salt was suggesting people ask for refunds on yesterday's fish, since it came from a different river than was claimed. Lots of bards ate a lot of lobster this way.

3. “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

— Socrates, ~389 BCE

Bardic Headline: *Man Tells Everyone To Question Their Lives, Leading To Mass Depression; City Responds By Executing The Troublemaker. Now, Are You Going To Ask Me More Questions Before Buying Me Another Drink?*

4. “Know the enemy and know yourself and you can fight a hundred battles without disaster.”

— Sun Tzu, ~5th century BCE

Bardic Headline: *“Ancient General Reveals Secret To Winning: Stop Being An Idiot About Your Problems And Start Blaming Them On Everyone You Don’t Like”*

5. “History is a set of lies agreed upon.”

— Napoleon Bonaparte

Weirdly, Goblin Bards are the ONLY ones who ever bring this up.

6. “Give me liberty, or give me death!”

— Patrick Henry, 1775

Bardic Headline: *“Man Demands Extra Privileges Or He’ll Kill Himself; Someone Call Psychiatric Services And Have Him Put On The Funny Farm For His Own Good”*

7. “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

— Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1933

Bards quote this consistently: “Just buy me another round and I’ll tell you where you can find Fear and beat him up.”

8. “Then we will meet the chaos clear-eyed and well-rested!”

— Randall Monroe, 2026

Again, very popular with Goblin bards, unpopular with Human bards, who generally wake up around noon with hangovers that would be the size of Manhattan, if Manhattan existed.

And now, because no Goblin chapter is complete without music that makes people leave the room, here are some songs. Sing this to the tune of “She’ll Be Comin’ Round the Mountain”, which apparently involves locomotives, whatever those are:

“We’ll Be Stealin’ Round The Mountain” (Goblin traditional, tune stolen from a time-traveler some 3000 years ago. He got even, though. He left us a copy of “Bored Of The Rings”, and we’ve never been the same since.)

We’ll be stealin’ round the mountain when we come (when we come!)

We’ll be stealin’ round the mountain when we come (when we come!)

We’ll be stealin’ socks and pinecones and your best enchanted hat,

We’ll be stealin’ the whole damn mountain when we come!

(Repeat until the tavern throws you out. When stealing the tavern sign, remember to stand on a box or a friend, as the signs tend to be hung rather rather high, and you’ll want to lift them carefully off the hooks.)

Chapter Knife:

Notes on Goblin Self-Defense:

We do love tricksters. This should be no surprise to you. For a long time, we had learned from Loki, who is clever, but who carries some deep grudges which interfere with the general Goblin state of mind. It's not that we don't have grudges; but it's considered unhealthy to let them rule your life when your life could be ruled by writing, singing, building things, loving someone, collecting interesting stones...

...we're not perfect. We still hate Elves. (Sure, we feel we have good reason; but that's how brains work. They want us to rationalize our hatreds, whether that's Orc-style—"Hate is good. Makes you strong against the enemy"), or Hobbit-style, "Oh, I hate this soup! It was cooked slightly wrong, and that ruins the entire meal!", or Human style, "What? I'm too busy doomscrolling to know what I hate, but I'm certain I do it because somebody on the Internet was clearly right; a meme told me so".)

And we recognize that our believe they 'deserve it' is partly rooted in their actions, partly rooted in the fact that we've been doing it a long time and are not terribly inclined to stop. It's become somewhat fun by now. Which is dangerous; but we ain't perfect.

I'd tell you the story of how we met Sun Wukong, the Splendid Monkey King, but that's for another day and another book. While we were suitably impressed by the 72 transformations he had learned from (he said) himself (but history suggests he was taught by an optimistic Immortal)...he was impressed by our tricky nature, but very worried about our ability to defend ourselves, should our tricks go a bit more awry than we might hope.

That he learnt and studied and continually practiced Kung Fu is no surprise; a magic cudgel is great, but doubly magic in the hands of one who can use it well. He often had to fight on behalf of the Monk who rescued him from his imprisonment in rock. Monkey's exuberant inner nature needed to have some control mechanism if he was to travel with the humble, focused Monk. This was built through his wearing a cap which would, as he found out to late, not let itself be removed, and would inflict great pain upon him at the Monk's request. (It was said the cap was a gift from the Gods, who knew Monkey would be unbearably chaotic and impossible to assist with the Monk's journey to carry sacred scrolls unless he had something to keep him disciplined. This is a GREAT lesson in the real-life consequences of letting chaos and 'do as thou wilt' go a bit too far. It's also a lesson about

vanity; he merely showed Monkey the cap, and as it was shiny and red, Monkey immediately put it on himself. He didn't even need to be tricked.)

From whom Monkey learned the predecessor to modern Hapkido, we know not; when in the World would he have had a chance to visit Korea? (He claims he stopped by for the food, which is, admittedly, excellent.) But Hapkido came in very handy once he had the cap. In Hapkido, as in Jiu-Jitsu and Tai Chi, you wait for the opponent's attack and redirect its energy to your advantage until you control the situation. Monkey was forced to pick his fights more carefully once he became the bodyguard and companion of said Monk, and this was frustrating, as was waiting for the attack; but the feeling of complete control you have once your opponent is in a proper joint lock and cannot escape or move without your permission...ah, that's as satisfying as having Sunday dinner twice. He fell in love with it, and he taught it to us.

Monkey's Kung Fu is not even monkey-style; it is, as you might have guessed, drunken Kung Fu. Note that modern practitioners merely IMITATE being drunk; it allows you great flexibility, lots of tricks, lots of ability to fight in ways which surprise, confuse, and ultimately overwhelm the attacker. Monkey... well, we kept our Goblin Moonshine far from him as much as possible; he managed to find our wine anyway.

Zi Quan / Drunken Fist/Boxing deliberately imitates some of the movements and mannerisms of one who has spent too much time pleasing Dionysus. One sways, one even stumbles, one rises and drops and rolls and moves with great unpredictability, and, as with Hapkido, one uses circular motions to redirect an attack or to create great leverage and force. It's deceptive; your attacker sees a vulnerability when in fact, you are merely inviting them to come into proper range to be disabled quickly and very, very definitively. The actual strikes, grapples, and evasions are extremely precise, like a drunken author (not myself!) who suddenly gets inspiration and creates something of serious beauty and intensity.

You *do* need to know your center, your calm space—*dan-tien*, as it's called in Chinese, *hara* in Japanese, *dan jun* in Korean. It is the center of your body; it's the source of chi, if you believe in chi; and it works, which is what matters. They think you've made a mistake, they commit to an attack, and you exploit the opening to the fullest of your ability and, in Monkey's case, with a certain serious joy. It's surprising what kind of momentum you can build up when you sway far in one direction to evade a blow and then there's an opening so big you have time to swing all the way back and knock 'em flat on their butts; or their tails, depending on the opponent.

It allows you the unpredictability and Erisian attributes of a Trickster, while requiring genuine self-discipline. It's a bit self-contradictory, which is part of what makes it so

interesting and enjoyable. You need to have very good control to be—I mean, to imitate being—drunk well enough to lure your opponent in, then have the discipline needed to destroy them.

It's rather a lot of fun. We don't get to use it often; we start teaching it to little Goblins very early, so that even those who don't take to the martial arts know it reasonably well. This leads to the classic "my hands are deadly weapons" scenario, and as dear Father Heinlein pointed out, "An armed society is a polite society"—politeness being relative, but real, with Goblins, of course.

"Goblin Drunk Hapkido"

Goblins and Gnomes have many similarities, although, of course, we have far more attractive ears. We can't help but mess with things, and Monkey (who visits not infrequently; not only do we share each others' vibe, but we're still quite grateful; the one time that group of drunken Elves wandered into our village, determined to pound on the flesh of some smaller and less important humanoids (to Elves, many beings are smaller; all are less important. But some are more-less-important than others)—the Goblins were ready for battle, but Monkey happened to be nearby, and he alone beat up so many Elves that the Elves end up utterly disgraced, crying and limping, headed barefoot on the long walk home. Goblins thanked Monkey, the Monk, their various group, and the entire village, and celebration which lasted a week and involved breaking out the Goblin Mead and even the Elder Goblin Absinthe, about which we will not speak here.

So whenever he shows up, we throw a party, and there's always interesting trouble; but aren't those two the same thing anyway?

Quod erat demonstratum, we developed a hybrid. We keep the circular motion (which has also improved our dancing!) and (believe it or not) the discipline you need to create really useful chaos; we keep the joint-locks and redirect and throws; and we combine it with any number of drunken-style tricks and unpredictability which would make our Goblin hearts sing, if only Fred's heart wasn't constantly going out of tune and ruining the harmony.

We look silly, possibly drunk (this may sometimes be because we ARE drunk), and people underestimate us. Which is fine by us. Then, if we're attacked, instead of being scared, we have inner discipline in our centers (whether you believe in scientifically-proven emotional control through breath, or the sweet and steady flow of Ki/Chi from our centers, it happens) and outer weirdness which really fits our lives. And we have the ability to put the attacker on the ground with two options: they calm down and behave properly, or we break their arms or other limbs. We like complexity and are not huge fans of binary, yes/no

situations, but “Do you want to behave, or do you want to be hurt more?” is a pair of options we enjoy giving to an opponent.

Chapter Either 14 or 17, We Forget Which: On What Goblins *Don't* Eat

We would LOVE to tell you about Goblin Cooking. All Goblins are different, though, and given the number of cuisines out there, the various ways of preparing them, and the various resources we have, we don't have a unified What Goblins Eat.

But we DO somewhat agree on What Goblins Really Don't EatL

Hobbits. Are you crazy?!? Hobbits MAKE the food. Plus, they're nice, and they don't care if we're a little crazy; we just put on British accents and suddenly we become excentric. Also, who has a wok that big?

Inedible Stones. Because they're inedible, you see.

Edible Stones. Because we don't believe they exist, and if you eat something that won't exist, it won't provide you with proper nutrition, plus people might mistake you for a mime.

- **Pomegranate seeds.** (We respect Persephone too much. Spending half your year in the dark and cold and have in the light and warmth is a very Goblin thing to do.)

- **Lightning.** Annoys both Jupiter and Thor; also, no matter how wide you open your mouth, the lightning doesn't get INSIDE you; it goes THROUGH you and fries you to an (inedible) crisp.

- **Paperwork casserole.** Unless we're really mad at it. Goblins frequently despise paperwork, although not invariantly. Some of us really enjoy various forms, although how we express those feeling s is not always predictable.

- **Anything labeled "new and improved";** if it's something you already like, why change it? There are plenty of things one already doesn't like; must one really listen to marketing instead of what we know to work for us?

-**Elves.** Full of bile. We've mentioned this before.

-**Other Goblins.** People might think we're Elves.

- **Souls of lawyers.** We MIGHT eat these, if we could find them,

-**People who don't read this book.** (We're NOT warning them ahead of time what we DO do to them, which is, admittedly, nothing. It's *their* loss.)

-**Quinoa.** Have you ever tasted quinoa?

-Dwarven home cooking. Why are their taverns so good, when all their home-cooked meals taste like they were made in the bottom of some very deep shaft and filled with crumbled bits of smashed stone that flew into it while someone else was hammering?

-Our readers. We're just saying.

(Life lesson here:

"Yuck! Quinoa!")

Chapter Spoon: Relationships & Social Graces

– Speaking Of, There's A Reason We Used To Worship The Graces

The three Graces were one something like Gods in their own right.

They may represent perfection, of which few people are capable, and whose harsh yoke has harnessed the talents and powers of so many, only to drive them in the wrong direction when they get ninety-seven per cent of the way and knew they should have gotten one-hundred-ten. But worshipping all Gods is dangerous; even Goblins know that. Even LIKING Gods is dangerous. Humanity is normally no more than two or three steps away from trying to be Gods; with enough religious conceit, one can stop worshipping sincerely and start worshipping merely the words and rules of the religion, and forget the belief. And that's when the lust for power might really get going.

Nevertheless, we worship the Graces. We do! They're very pretty and very smart and if you mess with them, they will GET you.

We can respect that.

We talk to people the same way we look at rocks: with interest and without pretending we're something we're not. (We would, however, think we were nuts if the rocks spoke back.) But we invoke the Graces to go out of our little Goblin world and make sure to enter theirs. Do you know most Elves consider it in insult if you take the delicious chewing gum in your mouth, which has at least another five minutes of great flavor on it, and offer it to them? Elves are weird. We first learned this the hard way (as did the surprised Elves; it's a good thing Elves have a thing about removing their own corpses, or we would have had to choose between buying more nets to catch us when we swing from the rafters, or a waste disposal company. So many dead Elves. Icky!)

But it's **weird** the way humans get trapped in conversations. Have you heard of 'record players'? Fergus stole one the other day (we haven't dared ask him how he's powering it) and he showed us what a skipping record sounds like. Other than "awful", it...sounds like a skipping record. It keeps trying really hard to go forward, but the moment it encounters something out of the ordinary, especially a fault or a break, it simply repeats itself forever, until you turn it off or switch the record. We learned the hard way that you can't reason with records, or record players. There are quite a lot of people like that. *Don't be one of them.*

One of the simplest reasons Goblins are happy is that once we figure out someone's stuck in an infinite loop of their own beliefs, we do the same thing you'd do: we change the record, turn the player off, or, if it's not ours, we go elsewhere so the skipping doesn't drive us crazy. Single-mindedness is not necessarily wrong; but it's wrong more often, proportionately, than most of us are comfortable betting on.

I mean, they can drive us to the WRONG KIND of crazy. It *can* happen to you. The glorious freedom of Chaos is matched by the fact that there are plenty of people around us who'd like to create a kind of chaos because their brains insist it's right. It...is very noticeable once you start looking for it. And once you notice it, you're likely to look for it in yourself, and try to get rid of it. This happens as a fairly natural process, the same way touching a hot stove teaches you that you don't want to get burned, or if you do, it's probably not randomly by a stove.

We don't blame their brains. Brains are not very efficient, and screens are very effective, and Humans in particular do love their screens. (Not that I'm not using a word processor now; what do you think I am, a Bridge Troll? But: I'm imperfect. We have permission to be imperfect. We give ourselves permission to be imperfect. We give **you** permission to be imperfect.)

So this is the great power:

If somebody's a broken record, be polite to them, and gently edge your way away until you're free and can get back to Real Life. Or Realistic Life, whichever it actually is.

If someone has something interesting to say or show, we listen. If they don't, we wander off. We don't understand why humans spend so much time saying things they don't mean just to be polite if they're just using it to distract you from the daggers in their hands. We're Goblins. We're weird and peaceful, but not nonviolent. We have so many better things to do than hang around being threatened! Even if the threats are 'real', we've still probably got better things to do; so many species use pieces of reality to justify stabbing you a whole lot, *which frequently doesn't even end up making **them** happier in the longterm.*

Now Glorthax the Masochistic holds the record for Most Knives Taken By One Goblin In One Day. He tried so very hard to be accepted by humans. We can't even call him a pincushion; when you're done with it, pincushions are still there, full of useful pins and fulfilling their purpose. Glorthax is hanging around glumly. He spends all day counting the holes in his body.

So avoid unthinking people. They inevitably lead to extreme boredom. Nobody wants Glorthax around. All he talks about it, "Ow, this hurts".

We presume he got what was coming to him, though we're not sure why it came to him or why he deserved it. But Humans know best, we're told. And it was apparently a bet with some Humans. So it was probably a good reason.

Ish.

Chapter Wine: With Or Without Alcohol, Sex, Drugs, But Definitely WITH Shocks To The System: Goblins and the Mystery Cult of Dionysus

For those who got excited, we're only going to touch a bit on the wine, sex, and drugs, and we never invented rock and roll (but you should hear us yodel!)

We're going to touch, instead, upon something few of us (but almost all of our Shamans and many of our leaders) practice: the Mystery Cult of Dionysus.

How can we talk about it if it's a mystery? Easy. Remember that the word "cult" had a slightly different meaning in ancient days; it didn't necessarily mean blind follower. Here, it refers to just the relatively small number who chose to go through the full initiation, knowing they'd come out changed. And "cult", likewise, used to refer to a small, secretive group...not necessarily a small secretive group led by a human leader who was likely crazy.

("Look in my eyes! What do you see?

The Cult of Personality.

Like Mussolini! And Ghandi.

They're everything

You want to be:

They'll tell you 1 and 1 makes 3!"

Living Color, "The Cult Of Personality)

That is a perfect description of what we DON'T want.

It's not exactly a secret so much as it is, like many things, a process. Unlike the process of life, this specifically DOES have a meaningful point at which you change permanently, and Jeff speaks of it in other books. There are many forms of intoxication; you can become intoxicated through meditation, or through truly passionate love of some art or creative work. But most easily (and perhaps most enjoyable, if not necessarily most safe or wise)—

You intoxicate someone with drugs, food, wine, and ideas. When they're semi-raving and having trouble speaking, but are having an incredible time and already have chemically or physically-altered mindsets, you *shock* them. It's the opposite of 1984; instead of a faceful of rats, one gets a faceful of Reality Isn't Quite What It Looked Like On The Surface.

Since (despite what we tell ourselves) all but the closest of people live in separate Realities based on how they interpret the world, the shock—be it someone leaping at you with a sword, or lightning trapped by a clever cadmium device, or (I shudder) clowns. Unexpected clowns.

You come out full of both Doubt AND Knowledge. As Henry Wadsworth Longfellow put it:

“Everything you know is wrong
Forget the words and sing along;
All you need to understand is
Everything you know is wrong.”

You come out, part of you certain that the World you’ve world is real and even more truthfully accurate than you thought; and part of you comes out with the ability to doubt anything, and thus question or think about *everything*.

Is this good? It’s good and bad. It’s...different. We find it good. Admittedly, it drives some people out of their minds; but there’s no known flawless solution for changing in ways you desire while ensuring, for your future years, that it was a path you wanted to take. But it sure keeps our Shamans on their toes while grounding them as hard as possible.

We are walking, yodeling, jumping, soaring Goblins. If you don’t get it, don’t worry. Have another drink, and we promise, there are no surprises waiting.

We don’t have the bottle here. Would you mind going down to the dark basement by yourself to get it?

Chapter Chicken Liver and Assorted Seafood: A Note On Cats, Thinking, And Mistakes

(Definitely not written by my black cat, Salem.)

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(o.o)
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Goblins have some Gods

Both Ma'at and Tiamat

This is either because we're philosophically profound

Or we're idiots with brains like the one of a cat.

But dividing the world into 'Good' and 'bad' oft risks ambiguity

Which is bad when laws and traditions

Switch back and forth most fluidly!

Good things don't always come in ones or twelves

And one good thing is that we have Elves

Whose morals are on unreachable shelves

(Unreachable by us, and even by themselves.)

They teach us that certainty and arrogance

Go hand-in-glove with making no sense.

The aforementioned ambiguity

Seeks you out with great acuity.

So we thought of a compromise.

A thought, a gift, O bless your eyes,

And the Gods (to whom we're often listening)

Didn't want to get blood on their clothes (which are glistening.)

(Their former slaves leaving,

With helpful documentation,

Which granted manumission

And warned humans they'd be fools without submission.)

But these documents were discarded;
No seasoned veteran trusts the Elves' own direction and be-spelling,
Unless they're sure the lie they're a-telling
Is something which aligns with their wants,
and some negativity-quelling.

Part II.

Those Gods claim they made cats,
To spy on Humankind
They left out: visit the Gods,
And the same staring thou shalt find.

Turns out that evens superheroes (except maybe Bats)
Are nearly as clueless as Elves, or Cats,
And we're more clueless. Elves are smarter.
(And thus more inclined to be tearers-aparter.)

Even if you're smart, give yourself the precious treat:
Give up your brains like a Vegan with meat.
Sometimes realize: ALL are fools.
This fact is a FEATURE. Failures are TOOLS.

No-one, no-one likes to fail
To strain to work, or sleep, or make bail.
But nobody's right at every single moment
So this idea we'd like to foment:

The next time you do something really idiotic
Recognize that idiocy and smarts are symbiotic.
You can't be smart without sophisticated errors...

...so let them be lessons.
Don't let them be terrors.

*Yes, we often speak of the intellect of cats. It's all propaganda and they pay us well for it. Printing ain't free, you know. Or it is, but it's hard to get people to read you if you don't do something to make it happen. We could either pay for ads, or have your cats whine at our potential audience; they're great Influencers. If you don't speak Cat, you should learn.

Diogenes' Time Machine – A Short Scifi Satirical poem

(I imagine the title owes something to John Barnes. Have you read his work? I'm really fond of it.)

Diogenes was said to walk around at nights, carrying a lantern, looking for an honest sentient being. History records his death, but we're pretty sure he faked it. He's like the Flying Dutchman; he must fulfill his function before he can rest...

...but that's a story for another book. Remind us, would you?

He wasn't a Goblin, and he was rather more pessimistic than most of us, but we love his gorgeously logical chaos. We can't know truth from fiction, being both millennia away and living in a World which, like yours, doesn't exist.

But here's a story which shows his Goblin nature: wry humor, parables, and knocking even Plato down a peg when he went too far. This is stolen directly from the original myth/legend (although we're fairly sure it's true. If Plato was right about Atlantis, then he wouldn't lie about this.)

The Plucked Chicken

*One sunny afternoon in ancient Athens, the philosopher Plato stood before his students and declared with great confidence: "Man is a featherless biped." The words had barely left his lips for more than an hour when the doors burst open. In strode Diogenes the Cynic, barefoot and grinning, holding a live chicken he had just plucked completely bald. He thrust the squawking, naked bird toward the class and announced cheerfully: "Behold! Plato's man!" The students erupted in laughter. Plato, momentarily speechless, could only shake his head and smile. **From that day on, whenever anyone grew too fond of tidy definitions, someone would fondly recall Diogenes and his plucked chicken — a gentle reminder that life is messier, funnier, and far more interesting than the neat little categories and boxes into which we might, if we could redesign the world, place everything. That just can't happen; the World is too complex, and we are the richer in spirit, and richer in mind and soul, for it.***

Note that in this story, the Goblinessque sage experimented to see what would happen. And this is why we neither seek to embrace Chaos or Order—we stretch our arms and

try to grab ahold of both; too much of one or the other, and you'll unbalance and fall over.

Oooooooooooooooooo!

A-HEM!

Once a man invented a time machine
And gave it to Diogenes
Showed him how to use it
And told him he pleased

Diogenes lived in a barrel
And didn't believe in Fate
He made Aristotle laugh and cry
And you? Go look up the story
of he and Alexander the Great.

As long as the timeline was being ruined
Diogenes went to a modern library
A thousand years ahead of him
To be maximally contrary.

He could just barely read it;
It wasn't quite HIS Greek
But it was close enough that he could comprehend
And he acted like a total geek:

He read a lot about time travel
And every Time Paradox
And he wanted a closer look
At the Universe's building blocks.

So he began to try:

II.

First, he went back to ancient Greece
To share the modern knowledge he'd received
And, to his disbelief,
By no-one was he believed.

It didn't make the Greeks invent modern things
And when he told them about history
Everyone laughed out loud. Even the kindest
Still laughed, though their laughter was whispery.

"Very well," he said. "I shall go and meet my younger self,
Tell him of our failures and successes
Besides, he's me; it's my own life.
I'm the one I'm risking with these excesses."

He met his younger self.
Whose logic was impeccable.
He proved Diogenes didn't exist;
Diogenes' confidence was wreckable.

He tried to fix some of his past mistakes, then
Hopping from birth to death
But he could not save himself from himself,
Just as he could not stop drawing breath.

He found Shakespeare and brought him his own plays
To see what would happen at the site.
Shakespeare said, "I don't want to read that,
I've got plays to write."

Diogenes travelled to Atlantis
To try to soften the catastrophe
Instead, he accidentally caused it;
And got very, very watery.

Finally, in exasperation,
He travelled and returned the time machine
He said to the inventor, "You're brilliant, but this is crap.
Take me home, please take me home;

At least I've kept it clean.

Chapter 86'd: On Goblin Sleep:

Ooog, one of the of the great Goblin philosophers, had this to say:

“Sleep? I don’t need sleep! I’ve been up for 45 hours and I feel ooga-booga-wump-wump-blurgle-gurgle-zlurp.” After spending a considerable time in a Goblin Hospital, he changed his mind.

We’d love to impart some special Goblin wisdom, but the basics apply:

-Most humanoids are already experiencing a serious, longterm sleep debt. I know I am. And I’m a lot more serious about sleep than most people; so is A. Goblin.

-There’s ‘sleep hygiene’. If you’re not familiar with it, check it out; it can make a fairly dangerous problem.

-We are generally somewhat athletic, not through sports or necessity, but running around. We enjoy being cogent when we want to be; without it, people write us off entirely as fools or madmen. Well, madgoblins, really, but that hardly roles off the tongue.

-Our personal method is to exhaust ourselves with work, exercise, and play, then shut down our screens some time before bed, read, and use various methods of sleep to try to get rest. We usually need medical help, but hopefully you do not.

-Sleep more. Worry less.

A Brief Tale Of Gork

"Do you remember the cartoons of Rube Goldberg? An inventor of the most ludicrous contraptions. You know: a lever is pulled, causing a boot to kick a dog, whose bark motivates a hamster to run on a wheel which winds a pulley that raises a gate that releases a bowling ball and so on? Until, at the end, finally, the machine does something incredibly mundane, like making a piece of toast. Yes? Well, as it turns out, that's the world."

— Adam Felber

Once, there was a great competition to see who could build the most successful Rube Goldberg machine.

Gork was the very best at doing this, and created a machine so complex that I can't describe it. I know that's an easy way out, but YOU try explaining the bowling balls, the pigeons, the volcano, the State of Hawaii, and the UFOs. And those were the SIMPLE parts.

He was sure to win. He stayed awake for two days perfecting his masterpiece. It's a very good thing the Goblins know about Coffee. (Hail Caffaina!) (YOU try saying that the next time you finish a cup, and see if She doesn't smile upon you. It may be the placebo effect, but who cares? It works.)

Then, the morning of the competition, he smiled, stretched, got dressed to go, and lay down on his bed to get a very brief nap; he set his Dwarf-made clockwork device to wake him in half an hour.

Seven hours later, he awoke, his alarm blaring full blast...and the whole competition over.

After throwing his clock out the window and screaming, in his little backyard, "IT ISN'T FAIR! IT ISN'T FAIR!" until the neighbors threw shoes at him, he acknowledged his loss, and from that day on, attempted to get healthy sleep.

When he succeeded, he made amazing things.

What's that 90' monument depicting a single clove of garlic?

That came about when Gork couldn't sleep for another two days because he got so caught up in his work. We admire it, but we still feel bad for Gork.

On Being Disjointed, Rambly, and Leaping Proudly From Subject To Subject:

We do a lot of that. You may have noticed.

And now, a poem. That is...

(A Note From *The Spoiler*)

I snuck this poem into the manuscript;
Don't tell my Goblin friends.
I could finish the whole book now
By telling you how it ends.

If only, oh! If only, oh!
If only, only this:
If anyone knew the ending,
I'm sure it would be bliss.

If I could only tell the outcome
I'd tell you all of it, and then some
It's like a spiky metal fence:
All this gosh-damned Ignorance.

(Ignorance is like a weed
That you thought was a flower:
It's still just as beautiful,
But just a little sour.)

I'd laugh and through you spoiler-makers
Then sit at the bar sucking boilermakers
(If only!) And it sure does hurt -
But I don't know the ending, so I'll be curt:

Avoid rocks falling, where everyone dies?
Avoid Liches, lest they rise.
Avoid traps full of spiky pits

Avoid the worst things in life.
Try to keep the enjoyable bits.

People think this idea's too simplistic
Or else that it's unrealistic.
But if you're not a total slave,
You can navigate some of how Brain and World behave.

Lest you think we're Goblin jerks—
Most people don't try it.
If you try it.
It works.

(A secret note: It's not that you can't rely on other people. It's just that if you want them to read your minds and know what you're thinking without you telling them, you're hopefully hanging around with a lot of fifth-order Wizard adepts with no sense of privacy.)

A Note From The Gods To An Atheistic Society: You're Doing A Terrible Job Of Not Believing In Us; Please Do Better.

(Not to brag, but the Goblin Way gives us a lot more freedom, and thus a lot more ability to let out all that energy in interesting, if not always constructive, ways. Bottling it all up and then releasing it towards the person who cuts you off in traffic will only make Ares and Thor even more annoying to be around. If that's possible.)

Dear Humanity,

Many people do not believe in us. That ought to be okay. Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman are not wrong on us; most Gods, except the one often misnamed Jehovah, who doesn't associate with the rest of us....most of us do, indeed, get our power from worship.

This was perfectly fine in a superstitious world where almost everyone was a believer and also a hunter-gatherer, which is what we had for tens of thousands years. The entire Earth had perhaps tens of thousands of humans, almost all of them worshipping SOMETHING. It was a great fit, and it felt wonderful. We appeared often and performed lots of simple miracles and everyone had a lot of fun, although, admittedly, the average human lifespan was about 35 years. But they were 35 INTERESTING years.

Then came Mr. Jehovah (and slightly before him, Zoroastrianism,) but...it's that damned monotheism! Whether Jehovah is real or not (we often argue about this) monotheism eventually lead to atheism. And no wonder. If you have fallible but powerful Gods, that's realistic and believable. One single God who knows all, sees all, does all, but allows evil and suffering and such, creates so many paradoxes that it gives all of Us headaches. There are plenty of good answers for why this would happen (the theory that Humans wouldn't really appreciate pleasure if they didn't have pain, for example)...but since there's no reasonable way to actually lose the pain without serious drugs or damage or MAYBE ridiculous amounts of study, practice, meditation, and dedication to just that and relatively little else... Atheism gains force the more you argue with Monotheism.

Atheism was a logical conclusion. It started sometime around farming and agriculture, when some people noticed that quite a lot of their prayers went unanswered. Well, we thought they were feeding us. We didn't necessarily speak Human language that well; we just knew that the little humans kept sending us food and we kept growing, until we were quite powerful and quite smart and started appearing and giving ourselves grand names and even more delicious forms of receiving prayer, like sacrifices, fasting, ritual, and, of course, toasting marshmallows (we actually prefer toasted squirrel, but nobody does that these days except Glork, and he barely counts).

With the printing press (which was still a great idea, even though it sure hurt our particular image) Man began exchanging information at a more rapid rate. Over time Humans began to live longer lives, do more things, and question the Gods. More and more Humans maintained that they wouldn't worship any Gods at all, because we weren't real.

What does being "Real" have to do with it? All Gods live outside of humanity. We're sort-of on a different plane of existence, is the term I think you use for it. And unfortunately, prayer doesn't work that way.

Prayer comes from sentient expression, strongly expressed. You think saying "God damn you!" doesn't reach somebody? It sure does, just as much as "Praised be thee, Dionysus, who hath granted us the gifts of climactic frenzy and excitement" reaches somebody. (Whether it goes to Dionysus or Bachus, no-one quite knows; neither one is telling. It might go somewhere else; prayer is both powerful and fallible. Like the Gods themselves. As Eris often reminds us.)

Now there are BILLIONS of you, throwing massive amounts of emotion and intention at each other, the sky, inanimate objects, your screens. Especially your screens.

PLEASE STOP. WE'RE FULL. WE'RE PAST FULL. WE'RE GOING TO BE SICK.

There IS such a thing as too much power. Someone let Palpatine know.

We haven't just grown. We've expanded exponentially, and we HATE it.

We feel sluggish, slow, overloaded. And, er. We're having some trouble with our ability to control our Godlike (well, Godly) powers. Now that we have the power again, we're somewhat worried about using it. (I mean, the Greek Gods keep casting various spells on each other, to the usual terrible effect; and Thoth keeps appearing to Cliff and Crowley and giving them random bits of That Which Man Was Not Meant to know.) But in general, we're worried.

Please relax.

Please consider going to a church, a synagogue, a mosque, a nice Wiccan circle or Druidic ritual or something, even if you don't believe. Especially the Druidic rituals; Uncle Isaac had quite an imagination. If you do, don't worry. If you're not terribly focused on the religion, you'll soon get used to it, and it will diffuse some of that excess energy, and maybe give you a little time away from your screens.

We're a little scared.

The last time this happened, the High Priests of Atlantis prayed for a little rain to cool things down.

We didn't MEAN the tidal waves. Honest.

But's...it's hard to hold all this power in, and when you gotta go, as Annie said, you gotta go. We feel like we need to DO something with all this power, and, um, we hate to admit it, but we don't have as much control as we'd like. You humans are incredibly clever, vastly numerous, and mercurial as Hell (which is actually having its own troubles, as, for example, even the parts which are supposed to roast sinners who believe in Hell slowly, over a long period of time; we end up incinerating them and then the Wheel of Life is so overpowered that it can't help reincarnating them, which is a pain for everyone.)

Admittedly, Atlantis was prettier than, say, California, but almost nobody wants another Great Flood, you know what I mean? Things are weird enough already. And while we're bloated...we also don't want to starve.

Feel free to keep disbelieving! Just please, redirect the energy somewhere useful. All the anger and madness rolling around is, um, making even the sanest of us a little troubled. I'm a servant of Ma'at, Keeper of Order, and I'M having trouble not pulling out the Principia Discordia and trying out a few ideas. How do you think Eris and Dionysus feel right now?

Please help.

We can't hold it in much longer, and the effects are becoming visible on Earth. We somewhat LIKE Earth, and many of us like humans; or at least, we love your cats.

Please please pretty please with cherry pie and ice cream on top, *relax*. We have nobody who qualifies for Noah or Gilgamesh right now. Plus, some of the better restaurants are on Earth.

Please chill out. We're, we hate to admit, we're begging you here. We have more than enough believers now. Really. Truly. We're full. We're stuffed. We're good.

HELP!

-A message from the Gods, to an unlistening Humanity

The Gnomes of Zurich Are Greener Than You Are

We should be clear from the start:

The ‘Gnomes of Zurich’ are sometimes attributed to a particular race. They’re also sometimes attributed to the people of Zurich. These are just weird fantasies. The Gnomes of Zurich DO exist, they DO control an enormous of money, but they didn’t quite MEAN to.

There are those who believe that, tens of thousands of years ago, Goblins and a species of humanoid now extinct (we suspect the Elves ate them) intermarried significantly and produced the Gnomes. This explains our mutual ears, although, to be honest, we envy their level of deep green skin. (Do you suppose they intermingled with Triffids? There’s some reason to believe this to be true...but that’s another story, as well.)

Some centuries back, the Gnomes were visiting Goblinland (or Goblinia, or “Those Weirdos In The Forest”, as we’re known by various sentient species.) They saw us open a portal in an early attempt to get George Washington to share his hemp with us. We didn’t quite get it. We ended up in a 19th century factory absolutely chock full of gears, levers, water-and-steam-powered machinery...

We were interested in the socks, which is what the factory made. But THEY got interested in all the metalworking. And who can blame them? It was very shiny.

Some of them stuck around, so fascinated they were by the machinery. We don’t know WHOM they intermarried with, but that appears to be how we got Gremlins. (Apologies to any WWII flying aces reading this.) Also, the portal accidentally closed slightly early when Fred sorta kinda added his name to the Runes of Calling. For this, he would eventually be forced to stand in the corner doing nothing, with breaks for food and sleep, for three years. When he came out, he was unrepentant; but that’s another story. (Uh-oh. We may have to write another book. Be warned.)

Then came the printing press. (Look, we live a long time and sometimes time travel, although, like almost all time travel, it usually goes somewhat wrong.) Then printed money. Then they got a great idea—they’d print money, be rich, and be able to buy way more gears, as well as levers, pulleys and (sometimes after Ben Franklin) harness lightning.

Their money was perfect. Unfortunately, the Swiss police (was it Switzerland at the time? We’re terrible at human history) took a dim view of people flooding their market with

unofficial but indistinguishable-from-normal currency; it caused inflation, and the Swiss have hated that since time immemorial. So the Gnomes were found and would have been brought to justice...

...but the Church intervened. They were laid-back at the time, which is good; roasted Gnome smells terrible, and we should know. The Church suggested that since they were plainly curious about everything (they took apart everything in the Cardinal's office during his interrogation of them, to give one example.). They didn't really pass the interrogation—"How did you make the machines?" "Oh, out of gears and parts." "I mean, how did you duplicate our currency with such perfection?" "Well, machines should work PROPERLY, right?"—

Butt after he'd looked around his office a bit, he realized that his clock was now running on perfect time, a feat no Swiss watchmaker had previously succeeded in accomplishing. In fact, EVERYTHING worked better; even the (terribly inaccurate) globe on his desk now spun perfectly without North America flying off.)

So the Cardinal introduced them to something absolutely, positively irresistible for a Gnome: The vast, gigantic machine which is Economics.

If sticks are primitive tools, then "buy low, sell high" is a stick with a rock attached to it by vines, and Adverse Selection; what would come to be known as Nash Equilibrium, Debt/tax Equivalence, Hysteresis, Ergodicity, and what would—decades later—become called "stagflation"—were absolutely enthralling. AND it was a machine you could work on endlessly in your mind, waking, sleeping, in the shower (If they had showers back then; perhaps "In the big bucket of lukewarm water" is more accurate.)

They've become addicted, and fascinated, and applied their hybrid Goblin-Human (oops! That was supposed to be a secret. Don't tell anyone) minds to the task of building a machine that would make profit, not physical money.

Having relatively little use for money (they have food, board, and a massive engineering budget; a Gnome needs little more to be very, very happy indeed)—they've built a massive financial machine which looks like magic. (A minor application of Clark's Law.)

I don't want to know where the money GOES, since the creators of this virtual engine don't want it themselves. I'm not going to ask; I know what tends to happen to people who ask.

No, Virigina, there is no Santa Claus. But there ARE Gnomes of Zurich, and it's not a metaphor. They're weird, but living happy lives.

As Goblins, we think they've found a key to lifelong happiness, and we would envy it if we weren't so frustratingly (to other people) happy with what we've got, ourselves.

And forgive Fred. He honestly thought that the slogan "Gnomes go Home" was just a slogan reminding them to stop working to eat and sleep sometimes. So he scrawled it everywhere. Last we saw him, he was hanging by his feet over a crocodile pit, happily making bets in his head about which one would eat him first.

And now you know, and, as we learned long ago: The more you know, the less you understand.

We raise a toast to our Gnome friends: may your days be busy with work, may your nights be busy with work, and may you never discover beer the way that Dwarves did.

On The Power of Social Awkwardness

Social awkwardness can strike in a lot of places. We disregard it as something childish, or something to grow out of, but it's quite the opposite: the younger and freer most children are, the less awkward they are about the World, as they haven't learned a lot of its taboos (or its needs, lets we over-state the wisdom of children. A child may not be embarrassed to have eaten nothing but Froot Loops for the past eight hours, and have zero nutrition and a million billion tons of sugar inside. Not being embarrassed is good; but that doesn't actually make it automatically smart.)

Social awkwardness tends to happen in a moment when you feel like you've slipped or stumbled out of appropriate societal behavior, or might do so at any moment. (We both find the latter to be the most difficult. We secretly fear we'll say 'goodbye' too abruptly OR too slowly if a conversation is going WEL. Not always, but sometimes.)

Like pretty much everything, it's a homage to Ma'at, Goddess of Order and Hash Browns. (Actually, we doubt the Ancient Egyptians ate hash browns; but Ma'at, like her sister Eris, moves with the times...just much more slowly and with more deliberation. But when she moves, she MOVES. ...but that's enough about the Gods. As Sondheim said, "Tragedy tomorrow; comedy tonight!"

Don't get us wrong. We understand that social awkwardness doesn't feel good, just like boredom. But both are parts of life. They're hard to avoid; so if you find them, lean into them. For us, it works a bit to realize we feel awkward and, if we have the right audience, we babble about it for a while. But Your Mileage May Vary.

We have no one magic cure. For many years, I largely ignored it except when I thought it affected other people. But this generally made other people think I was weird, or something worse. So I became stuffed full of it. It's how I got chosen to be the author of this

guide/book/inaccurate map entirely labeled "HERE REALLY SHOULD BE DRAGONS".

A Note On The Power Of Totally Conventional Politeness, Goblin Edition

If you must be polite in a situation where you're uncomfortable, and you're able, try to be **politely curious** instead of **politely fake**. (Better than *rudely fake*, for example.) Or, alternately, fake it until it actually feels natural; brains, if I haven't noted yet, are weird and act in weird ways. Ergo, "That's an interesting hat. Did you find it or did someone give it to you?" works better than "How are you?" when you don't actually care about either one at

the start of the conversation, and the other person has just caught you wearing very embarrassing socks you hadn't intended anyone to see.

(Mine have Wookies on them, for example. I don't wear them in public, as I like to prolong the impression that I'm normal until people are at least reasonably comfortable. They deserve to have their own life foundations, too. It's a compromise; at twenty, I was weird all the time, but people who didn't think it was charming just thought I was a young idiot. Which, it turns out, I was; but I digress.)

Totally Helpful Observation for Humans

"I don't want to make small talk
Not when I'm alone with you..."

-The Pyjama Game

You really can practice "small talk" like it's a skill you have to rehearse. Sure, you look ridiculous talking to yourself, a mirror, your cat. **WHAT'S WRONG WITH LOOKING RIDICULOUS?**

Seriously, especially if you're by yourself, we could write a whole chapter of the freedom to be privately ridiculous. We even will, if we remember. Otherwise, just get in touch and remind us; we'll put it on our blog/in the next book/both/feed it to our cat.

But one good way to approach other sentient beings to bond is to be honest and ask (polite) questions you're actually curious about. Maybe you'll ask the wrong question; apologize. Try to be around people who are either honest enough, or understand your intentions enough, that this is fairly safe for all parties. We'll have to let you be the judge of that.

But this is part of why Goblins have so much energy; we waste less of it on worry. We could conquer the world...If we could find appropriate socks to wear, which we can't. Did we mention the part about "TOO much chaos"? **WHERE ARE MY SOCKS. DANGIT?**

If You Could Kick Writer's Block In The Nads: A Goblin Look At Creativity

Here are some of writer's block's most poisonous weapons:

"I'm just not good at this."

"I could do this once, but now I just can't."

"I...can't think of anything worth writing."

"If I write something, it'll turn out to be shite anyway."

One of the many challenges of writer's block is that the writing comes from your head, and the Writer's Block ALSO comes from your head. (I mean, it can come a bit from, say, your stomach if you're dehydrated or starving; it can come easily from the stress of outside forces. But today, we're talking about the inside of your head.

I talk to myself (and sometimes to my cat); been doing it all my life, at least in private. I do not REALLY think there's someone or something else in my head; I am not speaking of psychology or demonology.

(Although, regardless of one's religion, I find C.S. Lewis' "Screwtape Letters" to be a gorgeous read, and I recommend it, if the religious aspects don't turn you off. It's not my religion; it's a brilliant book and I don't care.)

But the words of Writer's Block are generally lying. Maybe you CAN'T do those things—but your brain really doesn't know that for sure. And I've seen Writer's Block broken often enough to disbelieve pretty much anything 'it' tells me.

This is why I prefer to think of Writer's Block as an actual, insidious, living entity in your head which is actively opposed to you, your life, and, most of all, the act of creating things.

(Can I assume I don't need to warn you about taking it too far? I have no idea how you get whatever they currently call multiple/split personalities, but it doesn't sound fun.)

This is something you are welcome to try:

If you have Writer's Block, don't think of it as being a part of yourself. Think of it as being part of something that WANTS to hurt you...and recognize that.

Because even if you still can't write, when it starts suggesting those lies—whether you think in words, pictures, or feelings—when you start getting the sense from your head that you can't write when you've already written at least *SOMETHING*...

....that's when you start smiling, maybe a big smile, maybe a tight little smile, as the discouragement comes. Because it's a lie. If you've written once, you CAN write again. I promise. (That's A. Goblin speaking. Jeff doesn't promise, but he's pretty sure.)

"Come at me!" I tell the Writer's Block. "Go ahead! Do your best! Do your worst. I know you're a liar."

This may not break your writer's block (I've written other techniques for that, if you'd like to check. I have a small game about it; we're not putting it in the book because it's not QUITE finished; but check my blog.)

But you'd be surprised how much better you feel about yourself. And, generally (if not invariantly) you feel rather better about your writing.

The easiest cure for writer's block is to write something, knowing that the piece might be terrible, and you might only show it to you, no-one else. That's okay. The great challenge is that once that Enemy is at work, you become afraid to write for a number of reasons.

Dianna Wynne Jones, in her book "Archer's Goon", references a writer who is made a deal that involved financial stability so long as he provided a certain number of coherent words a month for this person. They could be coherent words about ANYTHING. It could be a story with no good ending about rabbits suddenly turning carnivorous. It could be a diatribe about how uncomfortable your chair is.

I feel bad commanding you to write; who am I, to know that this cure is possible for you? I've had Writers' Block which kept me away from my keyboard as if every keystroke I typed was giving me painful electric shocks. (I didn't feel any shocks; but I hated the idea of TRYING to write.)

But let me give you this piece of an approach:

If you have Writer's Block, try treating it specifically as a Monster Under The Bed that has a radio in your head. It FEELS like it's coming from you. But it's (metaphorically) an outside force.

And THAT means you can keep your own thoughts, continue to feel you're a writer (or other creator!)...while actively tackling an opponent, instead of fighting yourself.

"You can't write!" my head said to me, as I sat down to write this.

"You're a jerk, and even if you're correct, I'm going to write anyway," I said to myself (but quietly, so as not to worry the nice fellow bringing me fried eggs and hash browns.)

And I wrote this.

Imagine Writer's Block as a real thing which can yell insults and scare you but can't actually stop it at will.

Then kick it right in the nads with your preferred method (mine is sarcasm: "You're a terrible writer!" "Maybe. But I still write better than **you** do, parasite.")

Then, if you're able...

...create something.

If you're not able, stop blaming yourself, and have a good breakfast. Or lunch or fifth meal or whatever. Go to your library. Take out some books.

Do whatever you feel comfortable doing, and in the meantime, every time Writer's Block starts up, imagine it as a great tall beast with fangs and claws...

...which is totally lying on the ground, bent in half, wishing it had worn an athletic cup.

Forget about it.

Go create!

Chapter Three-Pronged Shrimp Fork: Goblincore Toasts, Curses, Sayings & Short Bits ****

Toasts (*raise whatever you're holding — it doesn't have to be a glass, although that's probably optimal. Have you ever tried to toast someone while lifting a tabby cat high? It works. Just very very very very very very very badly.*)

“Here's to things that look worth picking up....and things worth putting down, both physical and inside.”

“May you remember how much you enjoyed your last meal when it's about time for your next meal. If you didn't enjoy your last meal so far, disregard this toast.”

“May your pockets stay useful and your lines at the Division of Flying Carpet Registration stay short.”

“Praise those who do,
those who make,
those who think hard and analyze,
and those who let go of everything and just swing from the treetops by their unusually large ears.”

“To doing the obvious thing instead of the complicated one, unless you want to do the complicated one. Hail Eris!”

“May the interesting bits always find you before the boring ones do. And may you regret it less than you secretly thought you would.”

“May you never be bored, and may you learn the secrets thereof so that you don't need ME to wish it for you.”

“To drinking more coffee!” [This is especially ineffective if you are toasting with alcohol or the aforementioned tabby cat. Trust me. We've tried.]

“May the geopolitical conflicts inflaming the changing landscape of our complicated modern world eventually make you laugh instead of cry.”

“To drinking more seltzer! (This toast sponsored by the International Seltzer Association.)

And where would we be without a few....

Goblincore Curses

“May you always find yourself in the longest line for no reason.” (This is an especially useful curse because it is possibly actual magic; one DOES usually find one’s self in the longest line for no reason.)

“May your rules keep multiplying even when nobody needs them anymore, and may you forget why you put them in place but still be fenced in by them.”

“May you spend all day, hell, all organizing things that didn’t need organizing in the first place.”

“May you discover social media.”

“May you use AI to the point where you decide its artificial intelligence is better than your own intelligence, and cultivate therefore the one and not the other.”

“May your library card expire just as the book you wanted finally comes in.

“May more technology that everyone wants and no-one understands become more ubiquitous within your lifetime.”

“May your worst enemies be right about you, and your best friends not exist.”

“May you start to really, really regret whatever you ate for dinner right around lunchtime.”

“May you live in boring times.”

“May you be completely fluent in the language of the restaurant to which you’re going, only to find that their English is perfect and they’re a little insulted you didn’t even check.”

“May you not be a Goblin!!!!!!”

Sayings

“Every required wait or line is required. Every wait or line that just ACTS like it’s required may be optional; there might be some nice grass somewhere to lie on.”

“Read more. That’s it. Everyone knows it, not enough people do it.

“The only reason I think cellphones may be healthier than crack is that I’ve never had anyone hand me a bunch of crack and tell me to run my life with it.”

“A good pocket is better than a bad plan.”

“Some rules are just suggestions that got way above themselves.”

“Some laws are meant to be broken. Some laws are not. Some vary. Gravity is not a law to be broken unless you’re in space. How the heck did you get into space?”

“If it sparkles or squishes, it’s probably worth a closer look.”

Some quotes from humans about us:

A Few Quotes About Goblins (Because Even We Like a Good Line Sometimes)

```
font-family: Georgia, serif;
line-height: 1.7;
max-width: 900px;
margin: 40px auto;
padding: 20px;
background: #f9f5eb;
color: #2c2c2c;
}
h1 {
text-align: center;
color: #2e7d32;
border-bottom: 2px solid #4caf50;
padding-bottom: 10px;
}
blockquote {
font-style: italic;
border-left: 5px solid #4caf50;
padding-left: 20px;
```

```
margin: 25px 0;
color: #333;
background: #f0f0f0;
padding: 15px;
}
.goblin {
color: #2e7d32;
font-weight: bold;
}
.source {
font-size: 0.9em;
color: #555;
margin-top: 8px;
font-style: normal;
}
p { margin: 18px 0; }
```

Goblin & Fairy Lore

“The Coblynau are pigmy fairies, who dwell in the mines and quarries of Wales. They are about half a yard in height, and extremely ugly, but extremely good-natured.”

— Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins* (1880)

A. Goblin adds: “Ugly but useful? That’s rather mean! It’s also basically every good Goblin I’ve ever met.”

“The Goblin, or hobGoblin, is a diminutive spirit, usually of a mischievous disposition, but sometimes friendly to mankind.”

— Thomas Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology* (1828)

“If it looks interesting, it probably is. Go look. If they don’t let you look, it must be REALLY interesting.”

— A. Goblin, *A Goblincore Guide To Life*

“They work busily, loading the buckets with ore, flitting about the shafts, turning the tiny windlasses, and pounding with their little hammers; but they accomplish nothing.”

— Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins* (1880)

“The key to the fairy idea is that there once was a real race of people to whom all kinds of attributes, possible and impossible, have been given in the course of uncounted centuries

of story-telling.”

— Sir John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx* (1901)

“Panic simultaneously tells you that you have an urgent problem you need to solve RIGHT NOW THIS MINUTE and also that THERE IS NO SOLUTION AND YOU ARE DOOMED.”

— A. Goblin, *A Goblincore Guide To Life*

Which is why Goblins prefer to just poke the problem with a stick and see what happens.

“The Bwbach is usually brown, often hairy... there was a shrill cry from inside the churn on the cart, ‘Yes, yes, we are flitting from Hendrefawr to Eingl-dud, where we’ve got a new home.’ It was the Bwbach that spoke.”

— Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins* (1880)

“HobGoblins... are generally solitary fairies, members of the unseelie court, often mischievous or malevolent, but sometimes protective of a household if treated well.”

— Katharine M. Briggs

“Curiosity is free. Use as much as you like.”

— A. Goblin, *A Goblincore Guide To Life*

“Another grotesque Welsh Goblin goes whirling through the world... the spectre of a man walking or whirling along on its hands and feet.”

— Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins* (1880)

“Now Goblins are cruel, wicked, and bad-hearted. They make no beautiful things, but they make many clever ones.”

— George MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872)

“We Goblins see a puddle and think ‘that’s worth looking at! There has probably NEVER been a puddle of that exact shape and form...’”

— A. Goblin, *A Goblincore Guide To Life*

“At the house of a certain farmer... there was great disturbance by a spirit which threw stones into the house... the largest weighing twenty-seven pounds.”

— Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins* (1880)

“In England the Goblin is the lubber-fiend of Milton, the Robin Goodfellow of Shakespeare.”

— Thomas Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology* (1828)

“Trying to get everything PERFECT all the time is a fantastic tool if you’re really curious about the way the inside of a mental hospital looks.”

— A. Goblin, *A Goblincore Guide To Life*

“Many witnesses described certain ‘Goblins’ or ‘little people’ as ‘ugly, dark, and deformed,’ living in underground dwellings or old raths.”

— W.Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911)

“The Bwbach... is a mischievous household spirit that torments inhabitants and resists removal.”

— Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins* (1880)

“They are little men of pigmy stature, but well-proportioned... They live underground in a country very like our own, and they have their own king and laws.”

— Giraldus Cambrensis (12th century)

“Do as thou wilt, unless you’re doing something stupid.”

— A. Goblin, *A Goblincore Guide To Life*

“Miners refrain from provoking them... Their presence brings good luck.”

— Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins* (1880)

“They are frequently described as brown, hairy, or grotesque in appearance.”

— Katharine M. Briggs

“If a rule doesn’t seem to help anyone, it’s probably not that important.”

— A. Goblin, *A Goblincore Guide To Life*

“Chaos is great, but they won’t let you into the better restaurants if you can’t find your shoes.”

— A. Goblin, *A Goblincore Guide To Life*

“They may throw harmless stones when enraged, but their presence brings good luck.”

— Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins* (1880)

“They can tunnel and mine as well as any but the dwarfs.”

— George MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872)

“Perfection may or may not be possible, but is almost always the actual opposite of creation.”

— A. Goblin, *A Goblincore Guide To Life*

“The famous Pwca of the Trwyn Farm... came there from his first abode... in a jug of barm... the Pwca was heard to say, ‘The Pwca is going away now in this jug of barm, and he’ll never come back.’”

— Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins* (1880)

“The Goblins of romance being, at least at the commencement, only ‘human mortals,’ endowed with superhuman powers.”

— Thomas Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology* (1828)

“Most of what people decided matters is completely and utterly stupid. Ignorance + power = quite a lot of the World in which we live.”

— A. Goblin, *A Goblincore Guide To Life*

The fairy faith was treated as a living spiritual tradition rather than dead mythology by the people who still encountered these beings.

— W.Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911)

“A detail of this theory is in explanation of the rare appearance of fairies nowadays; they are refraining from mischief in view of the near approach of the judgment.”

— Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins* (1880)

“Be curious. Be free. But not so free that you end up in jail.”

— A. Goblin, *A Goblincore Guide To Life*

“In some parts the Coblynau are said to indicate the presence of rich ore by their knockings... William Evans witnessing a fairy coal-mine where coblynau work in silence.”

— Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins* (1880)

“The Bwbach... is a mischievous household spirit that torments inhabitants and resists removal.”

— Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins* (1880)

“They are little men of pigmy stature, but well-proportioned... They live underground in a country very like our own, and they have their own king and laws.”

— Giraldus Cambrensis (12th century)

“Most of what people decided matters is completely and utterly stupid. Ignorance + power = quite a lot of the World in which we live.”

— A. Goblin, *A Goblincore Guide To Life*

(Leave plenty of room here for your own toasts, curses, sayings, or sudden short observations. Randomness is encouraged. As if that’s a surprise by now.)

Chapter 6: On Anger, Especially Towards Your Family, But Also Generally Applicable, And We Have Heard That You're Supposed To Keep Chapter Titles Reasonably Short, But No-One Has Actually Given Us A Convincing Reason Why.

(Counting to six is easy. It's just like the fingers on your left hand. If only young Goblins could tell right from left...)

(If only ANY Goblins could tell right from left. C'est la vie!)

Like it or not, for about 10,000 years, family has been integral to the process of growing up as a sentient humanoid within a society. (Our records don't go back any further, but we assume something was similar with Primitive Goblins, except they were more polite as all of them carried clubs all the time. Later, when we found out most Trolls did the same thing, polite society took to carrying around canes, which are more refined, helpful if you have a medical need, and swing way, way faster than clubs. As Father Heinlein noted, "An armed society is a polite society.")

(Does that mine Octopoidal society is even more polite, having 400% more arms than most of us?)

But we have the—perhaps unreasonable—goal of helping you AVOID pounding Uncle Morris when he begins the story about the huge bass fish and the Mermaid for the 871st time.

You might like your family and have a great relationship with them, with no snags or weirdness. In which case, we applaud you, and we'd kind of like to know your secret.

Otherwise, here are a few things to keep in mind:

First, all sentient beings perceive things a little bit differently. As Robert Anton Wilson pointed out, we have NO IDEA if our idea of what the color 'red' looks like or feels like to YOU. We might mutually agree that a fire truck, if we had fire trucks, is red (assuming you're in a country and place which still paints its firetrucks red. We have a series of very clever cisterns which not only let us pump water towards any building in our village, but are simply GLORIOUS on April 1st. But they're painted whatever color the original builder felt like at the time. Goblin society is quite a colorful place, in every sense of the word.)

This doesn't mean you have to agree with them, or that you can never argue. But when you're talking about the past—especially around people who knew you as a baby and watched/hopefully helped you grow up (or "grow to a place where you can fit into society"; growing up, as has often been noted, is both optional and highly overrated)—it does mean that you can give yourself permission to ignore or let go of things they do or say which you find embarrassing, or remember differently but can't talk about because you're pretty sure

it would start a fight. Drop them; the Snake in your Head will do a good job of reminding you when you least want it to do so. No need to help it out when you could be thinking of toasting marshmallows or, say, writing a book you really enjoy.)

If worst comes to worst, the following is not actually true, but it FEELS true in the moment before you get angry. Use it to remind yourself why you shouldn't. It's "OPUS", which stands for:

Other
People are
Usually
Stupid.

We reiterate that IN GENERAL, this is a dumb and dangerous idea if you hold it close to your heart and apply it all the time. There are few better ways to set yourself up for a fall than being pretty sure, every time and all the time, that you're the smartest and most knowledgeable person in the room.

(Jeff was at a convention with both Randall Monroe, the being behind the webcomic XKCD; and Corey Doctorow, a brilliant science fiction author whose works Jeff admires, and whose personality Jeff wouldn't wish upon a particularly unpleasant Orc—in Jeff's opinion, which you need not share. He watched as Randall tried to speak to anyone who wanted to do so, and answer any kind of question from anyone; and Corey tried to monopolize Randall's time, as if Randall were the only person in the room to whom it was worth talking and he didn't care if people knew it.)

(But Jeff and Mr. Doctorow hit it off badly from the moment, with Corey telling a joke that he obviously found very clever, and Jeff not getting it, at which point, Corey wasn't terribly interested in talking to him anymore. This may be all Jeff's fault; but you know what they say about first impressions:

1. People, no matter how smart, can't help but judge you on first impressions, as both he and I did with each other, and
2. Smart people should know better. And Corey is visibly smart; Jeff is biased about his own brains. So maybe the fault is all on Jeff. Who knows?
3. Lesson taught to Jeff: The Snake in your Head swims right to the forefront at the first moment of contact. It's YOUR job to clamp down on it, and if you don't, you have only yourself to blame.
4. Although you can also blame A. Goblin and/or Jeff. We're fine with that. We're used to it, and besides, we don't exist, so it's hard to hurt us. Go right ahead.

....But we're not talking about that. We're talking about a key ingredient to family fights: a combination of anger (or frustration that leads to, or just FEELS like anger) and closeness. The closeness gives you some degree of 'permission' in your own mind to speak your mind, and perhaps speak it at the top of your bullhorn lungs, in language we dare not use here, lest we blush. The ANGER and FRUSTRATION make you want to do it, and can easily take over your whole mind and body, and even feel GREAT...and ten minutes later, as the anger and adrenaline fades, like clockwork, in comes the regret.

No good!

So in the moment before you get mad at your family, pause.

You don't HAVE to use **OPUS**, but as long as you know it's a temporary soothing measure, not an actual life motto, it's NOT a bad way to take that moment, forestall it, and say "They couldn't know better; yelling at them won't help me."

Why not fight fire with fire, snow with snow, and stupid ideas with stupid ideas? (Actually, none of these sounds like a good idea, but they must work for SOMEBODY.)

This will help you a lot. (And them, too.) Not only will you continue to get invited to family gatherings (a mixed blessing, but still an important point)—but you'll keep control of yourself. And that is, as Diogenes would have said, a 'simple, repeatable pleasure'. Not a huge pleasure with a huge crash; a tiny pleasure which might be repeated on and on without a crash. (Forgive us for expanding on it; we're Cynics, Stoics, Optimists, and each of us is a Certified, Grade A, Tarot-Card-Style Fool. We can't always predict when and how we'll make a point, which is why this volume has so many different takes on ideas which are sometimes wildly apart, and sometimes adjacent or even the same.

Keeping in control of yourself is good. There are very few people who have caused bad, ugly chaos, come out of a haze of anger or other powerful emotions, and say, "I didn't do that...did I? ...I did? Well, carp. How in the eleven (we've counted) Hells am I supposed to fix this now?"

If you just don't LIKE your family, don't go to family gatherings. Tell them you're too busy Goblining, then say a bright "Bye!" and hang up.

What could go wrong with that?

Chapter 17: Social Gatherings And Other Interactions With Sentients And Similar Stuff– How to Get Through Them Without Going More Than, Say, About 25% More Insane Than You Already Are, And Possibly Avoiding Fistfights. Also, Have You Considered Taking Up Martial Arts? Nevermind, That makes It Too Complicated; Please Ignore The Last Two Sentences.

As far as we can tell, there are fourteen billion invisible rules (we don't know most of them, so we're just totally guessing at the number) about what you can do, how you should sit, and how you should act, what you can say.

There are also REAL rules, depending on your society, about some of those things. That is a much longer subject, and we have some fried eggs waiting for us. But let's not forget that real, written rules, and other clearly-defined rules, generally deserve a little respect, even if it's a displeased respect. The entire performance of following rules can be a little strange for the Goblin-minded; but some of them are necessary. ("Don't set booby traps for your neighbor such that when he steps out his front door to go to work, he's captured in a net and forced to become a tree therapist for Wookies" is, for example, a pretty reasonable rule. Even if your neighbor is awful. ESPECIALLY if your neighbor is awful; do you really want to end up being pursued by a bunch of angry Wookies?))

People think that Goblins are complete anarchic. as we have waaaaay fewer rules than Dwarves or Elves. (The Dwarves seem to find this funny, in their dry-chuckle way. Elves find this annoying; but Elves find EVERYTHING annoying. We feel sorry for them, when we're not losing our own cool, rather hypocritically, and putting grade-A sirloin stake into their Lower Status Elf larder.)

We've tried Anarchy. It's never worked. For one thing, when you take away ALL the rules, you become tempted to break the bigger ones as fast as you can, since you never had the chance before.

(You'll note we left out Chapter 11 – "The Four Goblin Attempts At Actual Anarchy". We figure at least SOME of you will have eaten recently, and the effects of those stories on a full stomach are...similar to the way we felt almost all the time whilst we were attempting

the Great Work of Living Entirely Without Rules, which turned out to be almost as successful as the Human Great Work of searching for the key to Eternal Life. In other words, in that one, there WERE winners. About 740,000 losers over a millenia or so, six Liches, and way too many ghosts. But that's another story.)

Even if you have an adaptive, focused mind and live in the present, living without any rules quickly becomes (a) incredibly destructive (b) unbelievably invasive and (c) eventually ends. You reach a point, at some time, when enough people are tired of what's happening around them that a really excellent, charismatic or strategic dictator seizes power; then she seizes everything else; then you have a few generations of sadness, a Revolution, and then, with sudden cold grief, you realize that *you now have to go and make a bunch of rules*. And you have to get them RIGHT, something which even ESTABLISHED rules fail to do.

Just LOOK at all the extra work, all to end up in the exact opposite places where you wanted. How irrational! A Vulcan would definitely raise his eyebrow at you.

It's easier with actual, proven laws. At least they're written down, and there's usually a system for enforcing them; and if the system is broken and the laws don't work, you just have to fix the system. You don't necessarily have to rewrite a few centuries of experience into one brilliant set of Rules which get tested for a brief time, like two or three generations. The good news is, you'll be dead by the time you find out if all the Laws you created in a hurry were a good idea. The bad news is: in general, they really, really were not good ideas at all.

This should make sense. So we get, albeit briefly, to the part which is harder to justify: picking which social obligations you want to keep, and which you want to let go of.

HOW TO DO THIS:

We have no idea. We follow as many rules as make sense, ignore some rules no matter how silly it looks to other people, and we try not to harm others in our pursuit of Figuring Out Who And What To Be In Public.

This is NOT out of some kind of bland or vague idea of 'being good', something with which Goblins have difficulty at the best of times. Also, what KIND of 'good'? By whose standards? With what criteria? What's the objective of Goodness, and is indeed the opposite of Badness? If a bathtub filled with enough water is good, and a bathtub that

overflows and floods your bathroom, your apartment, your building, and the entire city of Hackensack, New Jersey is obviously much more of the Good, how can it be bad? At what moment does it so become? The moment it floods? The moment it slops over a bit? What if you draw the whole thing and it's too cold and you have to run out the water (wasteful! ...but I do that sometimes. Don't tell the Big C.) ...but you put better-temperature'd water in. Is THAT 'good'? Feh. Leave that to the Sophists; as a Stoic, if it's too cold or too hot, I'll deal with it, and as a Cynic, I expect it to somehow manage to be both at the same time.

So it goes.

Anyway, as we were saying, it's NOT about some vague idea of 'good', especially opposed to something called 'bad'. It's because if you DON'T have a general rule against harming people, it's statistical reality that eventually, someone will make serious attempts to harm YOU. (And even if you're protected from others...the person attempting the harm to yourself may ALSO be you; this is why Jeff no longer drinks.)

There may be goodness, kindness, love or gentleness involved, but we don't *need* them in order for this to make simple, reasonable sense in the Discordia of the Universe. ***“Follow the social rules you want, discard the ones you don't, work hard to avoid hurting others in the process”*** is a very simple set of rules, but it sure does help keep you from being awakened in the middle of the night by a bunch of people who decided that since the lock on your door doesn't work, they'd come visit and eat all of your snacks, on your bed, while you're trying to sleep. Then they leave a huge mess and take your wife with them. Your wife may be happy with this, depending; but the mess will take WEEKS off your life, weeks you could have spent making things and/or having fun and/or reading the postcards from your wife.

(My wife ran off with my favorite Hobbit. I sure do miss that Hobbit.)

So we follow the simple system above. It's not perfect; but it's better than “Be kind to everyone except those eating bananas”, or some other potentially-arbitrary rule which makes automatic assumptions of what counts as 'kindness'. And it's better than “Do whatever you want as long as you don't throw anyone other than yourself into a huge vat of chives”, which were some earlier iterations. It REALLY messes with the flavor of the chives.

And there you go. This is why Goblins are happier than anyone except Hobbits, who are too busy planning their seventh meal to do much damage to ANYONE except in lawsuits over hedgerows, which are inevitable.

Helpful Observation for Humans

You sit through long dinners pretending everything is fine even when it's boring. We just participate until it stops being interesting, then we do something else. Nobody seems to mind as much as you expect them to, especially if you have a polite exit, "Oh my Gork, look at the time! I have to be in Never-Never land in time for my romantic evening with Captain Hook's crocodile! Gotta run!"

The author's little brother, Louis, is developmentally disabled; when he was about ten, his mind was then (and is now) about that of a toddler. When he was done eating, he would say "NO MORE EAT!", push his chair back, and run away from the table to go watch cartoons. The author, being more refined, spoke in perfect English: "Oh, he might get in trouble. You guys stay here; I'm going to follow him and keep an eye on him. BYE!"

(Thanks again, Joe and Joan. I appreciate you.)

In general, in most social circumstances, if you use this strategy:

THEY get the awkward conversation and YOU get cartoons. This is an optimal solution.

Chapter Ogden Nash: **Goblin Poetry & Song**

In Goblin towns, where wisdom and madness meet,
A sage once dropped his bag to show the street.
"What is the theory of Goblinhood?"
Had asked a stranger who intended no good.

The stranger, who was a master of Zen,
Said "All things die, or go beyond our ken".
With that, without ceremony
He grabbed the Goblin's hat, and stomped it with boot most stony.

The Sage then remained calmed
Which is why his village wasn't burnt or bombed.
"Now, then," said the Goblin sage,
Unless you are some fool or mage
You can't unmake a broken thing
Be ye Goblin idiot or King !"

"What," the stranger did persist
"Is the actualization of how Goblins exist?"
"Do they come from imagination
Or marsh odor, ancient aliens, or mist?"

The Goblin smiled, and grabbed his sack
With unnatural speed (and the stranger's heart attack)

Was purely of coincidence,
Since death by sack would make little sense

The Gobbo's sack to the light,
Then drank his wine and laughed into the night.
"The realities of Goblinhood," said he to the corpse
Is strewn with tarantulahood
And the not-infrequent death

Of those who question our voice, or breath.”

A Goblin Limerick

. A Goblin poet attempted to write a limerick
 (He thought it might make him popular with a certain chick)
 He tried to write with word profound
 Far beyond thought, far beyond sound,
 She read it all and she said,
 “The Poem’s okay. But you’re still a prick.”

* * *

“There are two strange statues
(they’re weird, as most said.)
One is to Eris of Chaos.
But she don’t let it go to her head.

The other is to Gaia
Builder of the earth
Testing out their sanity,
Testing out their worth.”

Goblins live a most long time
(As I’m sure I must have said)
In time, either their idealism dies
Or they themselves are dead.

Unless that idealistic view
Is tempered that Old is supplanted by new;
Live, live, live, or else fight change;
But adapt, survive, and re-arrange.

Life will throw at your uncertainties;
Either deal with them somehow,
or end up on thy knees.

Chapter 7: School, Professions, Hobbies & Purpose – Things Sentients Spend a Lot of Time On

School

You might suspect that if regular kids resent school and sometimes act up, Goblin kids have no at all. This is very much the opposite of the case. We make sure our younglings learn to read, to write, to count and do math and English and even know some history without the aid of their Palantirs. (Who gave all the kids Palantirs?!?!)

No, children can't handle too much information, or aren't ready for some information; we're not going to draw arbitrary lines, but we recognize the fact. This doesn't mean that giving them ignorance gives them power; it almost always works in the opposite direction.

We find it useful to create discipline in helpful ways. For example, most of our teachers grades 2-6 keep a live cobra (properly contained and fed well in a big glass cage) or a team of virulent, angry scorpions (also contained) with a big huge sign that says, "In case of naughty children, open here and stand back."

Not only does this get everyone's attention, but it's pretty interesting. If math is boring, you don't have to daydream or hide a book to cheer or wake you up. You can just stare at whatever venomous creature is on your teacher's desk; it's probably interesting even if it's sleeping right now. That glass...is it REALLY strong enough to hold them? What if someone left the top a bit ajar when feeding them??? The Snake in your Mind will help wake you up, and your best escape is to take lots of notes, even if you don't read them, listen to your teacher (but ask questions; 'tis the Goblin Way for most of us; I mean, look how much good it did for Socrates, who invented the method), and maybe even, sometimes, hopefully...learn.

Plus, while Goblins have a 95% literacy rate, we DO have a 5% rate of rather serious injury among younglings from being bitten and poisoned. But it REALLY gets everyone's attention, and the ones who won't pay attention even with the obvious threat of fatality about six to twelve feet from you, well, we let evolution take its course. Besides, it makes the cobras SO happy, and isn't that what counts?

By sixth grade or so, most Goblins have used their newfound skills to read (a book, an essay, a poem, some music, some other thing) which inspires them. They begin plotting all the things they'll do and create...and all the mischief they create...if they just play the game for a couple years. By that time, they hopefully are working on at least one passion, and that probably requires even *more* education, whether through school or experience or whatever. We have some of the happiest, most motivated students of any species, although we also have a school survival rate which is second-lowest among sentient beings. (It's only about 5% fatalities, and those are almost always among adults, if young ones—our college students, generally. We'd be first, except, of course, as always, once again, inevitably, for Elves.

But again...that's how evolution works. Or isn't it? I think we missed the chapter on Darwin, a young Goblin, watching one particularly huge tarantula in its endless quest to get through the cage lock. Boy, it sure was humorous, one April 1st, when it somehow, theoretically without any help (or at least, without anyone who'd own up to it) to see the teacher's face when a horde of tarantulas leaped from the cage, springing in all directions.

That REALLY got the blood pumping and woke everyone up, and almost none of the actual bites were fatal; tarantulas don't really know where the heart is. (They'd make terrible vampire slayers, even if their fangs were replaced by nice wooden stakes.)

.....

Professions

Goblins tend to form strong personalities starting in (or before!) kindergarten, and by the time they graduate from Grade 13, most of them have some kind of white heat they follow with fervor. (Don't tell the Vulcans; they continue to regard ardor as a ridiculous emotion. We agree; we just don't see why that would be BAD.)

So usually, having the freedom to create or decide which/what job or calling towards which to run is a HUGE advantage in life, and with sufficient skill, persistence, and sometimes a bit of human sacrifice to the Angry Mother Goddess, we usually get there...whether or not it turns out to ACTUALLY what we wanted to be, that process is intensely valuable. This process likewise seems weird to humans, who find figuring out what you want and doing it almost impossible for most people under most systems. If that applies to YOU, we recommend simply picking whatever job you hate most that pays best. After 5-30 years, retire from that, and eventually start doing what you really want. Or you really want, you can forget it all and just retire to Miami; if you do, say hi to my uncle Morris, who hasn't done a lick of work in fifteen years aside from putting on sunscreen and sometimes washing his dishes. And he's even got a cleaning service for that.

Be A Zookeeper

We have never actually been to a human zoo. But this is a job description many Goblins use when asked by non-Goblins what we do. There's no chance a zoo could be as chaotic, interesting, creative, insane, powerful and magical as the average everyday life of a Goblin, but it certainly does bear a certain resemblance to a somewhat disorganized zoo, only with more inventions, more stuff getting done, more intentional chaos, and way better food.

They say intelligent mutant hyena-lions have all the best wine. This may be true. We've (mostly) decided not to bother any lions and/or hyenas to find out. Except for Fred. Fred tried to find out. He came back with a gorgeous bottle of Tattinger's 1957, and a lion attached to his leg, which it soon ate, along with Fred. Fortunately, we were able to save the wine.

Be A Winemaker or Open A Meadery

When we first started making Goblin Champagne, the entire nation of France sued us for using the name "champagne". Fortunately, we live in a nonexistent fantasy region, which is outside the jurisdiction of France. When we first started making Goblin Mead, everyone thought it was the mead we offer each other, which is 70% proof but similar to "Loki" (not the God; the drink you make from marinating cordials for a long time) and tastes sweet and delicious. They were quite right; we apologize for the large number of carriage accidents which have happened since. Our Cider, however, is perfectly safe and won't get you even tipsy, as long as you're a 10' tall troll of unusually well-developed musculature and a genetically modified liver.

It's a great profession. It's creative, it's artistic, it's hardworking, you get to stomp on things barefoot (especially if you make wine; DO remember to clean your feet first), and it's financially rewarding.

Be A Writer

This is a terrible idea. Writers are weirdos, frequently reclusive, strange in their habits, and they can spend years laboring over the movement of various words without producing a damn thing of value. Don't be a writer. (The fact that we don't need the competition DEFINITELY doesn't play into our feelings on this, and trust us, A. Goblin is COMPLETELY unbiased. Honest. As we've said eleven times before...what a Goblin LIE simply to protect their own self-interest and trick other people? OBVIOUSLY not)

Be A Cog In The Machine

In "Willie WOnka and the Chocolate Factory," Charlie's father worked hard screwing the caps on tubes of toothpaste. It paid poorly and hurt his legs, but he could do it while

daydreaming all he liked. Unfortunately, most of his daydreams were about being promoted to Official Toothpaste Squeezer and feeding his family better; but it's his mind, he's free to make choices with it.

Be Me

I like being me, although it has certain disadvantages which I could name but have no intention of doing. Also, you can't be me; my self is already taken. But you could always be LIKE me. Start by creating great things, then have a lot of people lie about you, then turn to writing. It's...surprisingly fun, if also surprisingly horrifying. And you'll have some GREAT stories to tell, although nobody will listen to them because they'd rather read this book. A good choice, if you ask moi.

Helpful Observation for Humans

It seems to us that you worry a lot about what your "purpose" is supposed to be or what you should do for a living. Great! I mean, not the worry part, but it means you're sentient beings, and almost every sentient being who doesn't live underwater has this problem. This is perfectly understandable, and under your circumstances, we would do the same thing. Sometimes we have; **the Goblin Way is NOT a perfect cure for everything**, *it's just a very helpful way of life for those who are constricted by rules, but don't want a World where nobody official cares if someone hits you on the head with a masochistic fruitbat and steals all of your cake and also your wallet.*

So change your circumstances! If at all possible; and if it's impossible, see if you can become functionally unfixed and find a new way, a new interpretation, a new way to take the same direction in the same way but think new thoughts and feel different ways. Figure out something that fits your desire, wants, needs, passions, or True Will, whatever you want to call it. *Fight* to do that thing. You don't have to hurt others to do this, but you might sidestep, move closer, move farther, duck, and otherwise act in weird ways until whatever is fighting against you doing your own thing and being yourself is exhausted. They go away or, if they really continue, *hit them with a masochistic fruitbat until they're unconscious, then drag them out, lock the door, and THEN do your own thing.*

Chapter 18, Maybe?: Want vs. Need – The Stricter You Are About What Is And Isn't A Need For You, The Easier It Is To Worry Less About What You Merely Want, Which Is A Good 4 3.1415926535897932384626433832795028841971693993751% Of Anxiety (we counted).

This may sound hypocritical for a species known for doing what we want, uncaring of how we'll be judged socially (though even Goblins don't particularly prefer to land in jail; it's hard to get Pipe-Weed there.)

And it IS.

And that's okay. We aren't looking for perfection, just stuff that works. (Dammit! That's the third time we've said that in the last thirty pages. We'll have to find something better. "We're not looking for Total Control of Reality; We Just Want Reasonable Functionality." How's that?

You pretty definitely need food and water and sleep. Even Triffids need that, except maybe sleep. You should know all of that stuff already; if not, you probably don't want to learn it from Goblins. One time Fred stayed up for 36 hours because he was out of Pipe-Weed and he thought lack of sleep would give him pretty hallucinations and a pleasant high, and also that he'd be so tired he'd sleep easily.

Turns out he was TOO TIRED TO SLEEP, which can be a thing. Which is what led to the whole hyena-lion incident in the first place.

Here is a very simple test.

Let's say you have the luxury of being at a store of some kind, which has things you both like and can afford.

Pick up a thing. Hold the thing in your hand. Then ask yourself, "Will this help me, help me get closer to my goals, or please me for at least a reasonable amount of time? Or does it just feel good to acquire and I have the money?" If it's the second one, it's a want—and that's perfectly fine. Pockets were invented for wants (and not for chewing gum, Fred!)

Let's say you're a game designer, plagued by doubts and fears that her work would be no good. FINISH THE WORK. Even Kurt Vonnegut failed horribly at a novel he was writing. He grieved, he drank, that famous atheist may have muttered a prayer or curse to the (again, horribly misnamed) Jehovah...

...and then he wrote "Timequake", one of the great novels of this or any age.

Finish what you're doing. If you get stuck, see our chapter on Writer's Block. Even if Writer's Block reads this and buys a protective cup, a good kick in someone/something's nads is great to start the creative blood flowing, and since Writer's Block is a concept, not a physical thing, you won't even have to explain yourself to the police. Which is good, because they'd take you in the Ice Cream Wagon to The Place Where Walls Are Padded.

(Which humans endure differently from Goblins. Some like the silence. Jeff exercises like a maniac. Goblins just—literally—bounce off the walls, and sometimes ceiling, until the docs decide we're too much trouble and let us go.)

Helpful Observation for Humans

Oh my greenness!

You want to HELP us?

We can learn your wise ways and bigger, cooler, messier cities, and complicated income taxes, and lots and lots of clocks? SOUNDS GREAT! Everyone else is doing it, so I assume we're missing out.

GOBLIN WISE SAYING 752:

You chase a lot of wants while pretending they're needs.

We pick up the wants when they're interesting and don't worry when they're not. Life feels lighter that way. Just don't confuse the potentially dissatisfaction you MIGHT get on getting something you want, when you're looking for the stability and relative sanity and only MAYBE happiness of getting something you NEED.

(Also, as a sidenote: we really hope we said at least 751 other smart things somewhere)

No life can always be about doing whatever you want, for quite a complicated number of reasons. Few people have carried out statistical experiments, but few have records of Goblin Royalty going back 600 years to the Oh God It's Not Yet The MIDDLE Ages.

Most surviving Goblins spent much of their time trying to make the royalty happy, since this was very popular at the time.

The Royalty were presented with ever-finer gifts, clothing, palaces, servants, art, continents, bronzed baby shoes, books of arcane lore, and an original copy—typed!—of “Live And Let Die”.

The histories record 600 years of Goblin misery. And since writing a history like that will easily make sure your head and body are not particularly connected for too long, that's unusual.

But the Historians were left alone as the Royals were busy with Regret.

Eventually, the Goblin Royalty found that even excess, like infinity, has different sizes, shapes, and uses.

Why Goblins, who are not very smart, have figured this out, and certain Wizards have not...well, one doesn't want to offend a Wizard, particularly one who has a history of bad choices. So that particular question, we leave to the individual as a thought exercise.

Don't say it out loud anywhere Sauron might hear.

Chapter 19ish: Health & Wellness – How Many Trees Should You Climb/Eat In A Day?

“I’ve been a moonshiner for many a year
I’ve spent all my money on whiskey and beer....”

-an old Irish ballad, or as The Dubliners put it when I saw them in Concert “a true Irish experience”. THEY can get away with saying that; Jeff is only 1/16th Irish and probably can’t.

Fred used to have a motto: “Eat when hungry. Sleep when tired. Drink when thirsty unless it’s alcohol, in which case, DRINK.”

This was a terrible idea. But you probably already guessed that Fred was not the smartest Goblin on the block.

Look, bodies are fairly well-constructed by P’tah [or random forces, or THE God, or space aliens, or whatever you believe, if you care at all]...who brought life into being with breath and words. Bodies SUPPOSED to try to return you to stability and help you FEEL stable, whether or not you are. That’s why many meds build up a tolerance; your body is actively TRYING to adapt and return you, if not Normality (that may not have been where you started!) at least YOUR norms.

But it turns out....

Yes, hydrate. You can hydrate however you want—I prefer to hike eight miles to the most beautiful waterfall you ever saw, take two or three looks at the surging wavetides, then shudder, turn away, and chug the water in my canteen.

Yes, you probably need food, the aforementioned, hydration, and sleep, and no matter how wild and free-floating your mind gets, your BODY prefers these things regularly, and even at approximately the same time every day, give or take a few hours.

Is this a tragedy, that your mind should be free but your body earthbound? Of course not, any more than the rising/falling of the Sun/Moon (depending on which you prefer) is a tragedy; it's a part of life. We are all part ape and part angel, although we're pretty sure Frank the Goblin is also at least 1/3rd Venus Flytrap. But no-one has dared to ask his mother how THAT happened.

All of us have the ability to have minds which, unchained, realize just how many rules are arbitrary.

It took us 300 years...:"The Time Of Grand Silliness And Short Lifespans", as our histories call it...to figure this out. You get it just from this book.

Aren't you glad you picked up this book? WE'RE sure glad.

Helpful Observation for Humans

Two words: Duck blinds.

Ducks are stupid. They'll walk into a trap if there's bread. They'll walk into a trap if there's a PICTURE of bread.

Humans are NOT that stupid. Except hungry humans.

But attractive persons in bikinis work quite a lot better than duck blinds. Plus, it gives you an excuse to carry around a large picture of an attractive person. For extra fun, carry around a picture of yourself and assert that you ARE an attractive young person. The ducks won't mind. The other responses may vary, depending on your circumstances.

But we digress.

(Shockingly.)

Liber Al – Crowley’s Book of the Law and the end of the Age of Horus (some more notes on Magick, from an established liar—I mean, source.)

(With apologies to the being known as *Aiwass*.)

“Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.

“The study of this book is forbidden. It is wise to destroy this copy after the first reading.

“Whosoever disregards this does so at his own risk and peril.

“These are most dire.

“Those who discuss the contents of this Book are to be shunned by all, as centers of pestilence.

“All questions of the Law are to be decided only by appeal to my writings, each for himself.

“There is no law beyond Do What thou wilt.

Love is the law, love under will.”

-Aleister Crowley, “Liber Al”

If you are a modern occultist, you recognize that there’s a barrier between our reality and the active use of what we sometimes call “Physical magic”. We are not able to throw fireballs, fly, or grant wishes (at least most of them, and only subtly if then, in ways which COULD be coincidence). We study divination, we attempt to curve or alter Fate, we try to make change in the world through calling on spells, incantations, and solid principles of Magic,

It was therefore pretty much a heart-stopping shock for there to be a group of Mages who emerged from the Nowhere and started doing just that.

Turns out that one of the many Magickal organizations seeking their True Will had spent decades looking to make their magic manifest directly, not simply alter certain outcomes or speed up the removal of a cold or decode cryptic divinations. Have you ever spent an hour staring at a series of randomly selected Norse runes, pulled from the bag and spilled out on a table, trying to figure out exactly what they wanted to say? Some people are quite good at it, but for the majority of us, it’s just helpful directions. It’s not a direct prediction of the future.

(I'll gladly read your Tarot, or my own, and make judgments based on it. Would I make a bet of more than \$20 on a long shot because my interpretation of the Tarot says I should? Almost certainly never. \$200? No WAY.)

Direct predictions of the future DID seem to work just fine for the Omnimangers. All assassination attempts ended in very dismal failure, since they were pre-predicted in detail at least a few days before they actually happened; and you can do very creative and painful things with mageflame. (It's a pity they didn't know about Elves; Elves will pay dearly for a well-cooked Human. But they're still trapped in a different reality than ours, and even these mages couldn't miss them.

Our own works, since we left occult practice in general, have often pointed out this theme:

Once you have a lot of power, you seldom fail to be, if not necessarily *corrupted* by it, *very definitely covetous of more*. And there you run into problems.

(We have the good fortune to have met some of the greatest mages on the East Coast. We're not disparaging they're work. We're admiring the discipline they've had to put in that kind of power and not have their enemies call out of work sick every time the aforementioned Sorcerors get pissed off.)

Core problem: *Unless you REALLY love managing things, ruling is not necessarily fun, and ruling well is HARD.* Ruling badly is easy, but creates SO many headaches. Ruling destructively is fine if you DON'T LIKE ANYTHING THAT CURRENTLY EXISTS. But if you actually ENJOY things in the World, crushing it under your despotic boot tends to create shortages, profiteering, politicking, and, as my father once put it, "The most venal tend to rise to the top." (This is not a commentary on *Human* politics in YOUR World. This is just from a conversation we had with Dark Lord Alice one day when she was rather drunk and very, very frustrated and attempting not to drop an Ice Age on 3/ths of her planet.

(She must have succeeded in her restraint; my cousin is in the winter coat business, and he says business is TERRIBLE.)

I shan't bore you with the TONS of basic, un-magicable bureaucracy. Let's just say that no matter what spells, what mind control, what powers you have, you either need to:

- (a) Spend decades remaking all the rules and laws until they please you. And then, as with any lawmaker, you need to *iterate* as unexpected flaws and mistakes start showing up, sometimes in dangerous ways, certainly in ways that are pretty time-consuming for someone who has incredible powers and wants to start using it. If you're supremely powerful, and you're one of the only people, maybe

the only one, who can do what you do, do you REALLY want to have to do basically the same thing a thousand times until it works, over and over, like the only janitor in a large asylum, or like Edison inventing the lightbulb?

- (b) They compromised on keeping everything else in place as it was, but noting that they had the power to veto anything anywhere, or approve anything there. This seemed reasonable until...
- (c) ...it gave them BOTH the Streisand Effect AND broke the system altogether. Plus, Hawthorne effects everywhere—that is, there were so many factors flying around, and just enough Mages, that it was impossible to tell WHICH things were working, since they were throwing thirty or forty different ideas (and sometimes spells), such that when something in their new Government went awry or even went *right* for once, they couldn't tell WHICH action had caused it; there were just too many actions! AAAAAAARRRRGGGGHHHHHHH. (That's a technical term.)
- (d) And then THIS led to the Observer Effect. This is a term from anthropology, one of my favorites, which says that often, in attempts to study, say, an indigenous tribe, the actual act of coming in to observe changes...creates changes which ruin what you were trying to study (and sometimes the tribe and/or you. Not only are you showing them at least SOME things they wouldn't otherwise know, you're ALSO possibly looking over their shoulder via teleportation or Palantir, pretty much all the time. This is going to change behavior a LOT.
- (e) Everyone knew there was a chance they were being observed by their phon—er, the despotic magical rulers of their world. So everyone pasted big smiles on their faces and claimed they were happy; but the system broke down, and the Mages sat in their great Towers, watching their dinner get burned by a cook too worried he'd be transmuted into frog's legs and eaten to pay attention to the food; secretaries who gave big smiles and never did what they were told because they were too busy trembling; apprentices who only saw the problems and not the root causes, and started rebellions because they KNEW they could do better...
- (f) In the end having incredible power was still fun, but it broke everything else for everyone. Including THEM.

(g) Then they tried to fix it. The less said about that, the better. THEY sure want to forget it, and they're NOT in a very friendly mood right now.

I mean, imagine you're a judge, working through the familiar system, doing what you know, and suddenly Mifty shows up, or Arturo, and turns you into a huge slab of lead for ruling in a way that displeased them.

Now figure you don't have to imagine it, because it happened.

Have you ever seen a block of lead look somehow *relieved*? It's caused nearly every one of our metalworkers to go on strike...

...but we'll quit while we're ahead.

Our former Rulers, as far as we can tell, are on the Moon now, in simple cottages within little airbubble domes.

We don't blame them.

About The Humans Who DID Discover How To Make Actual Fireballs With Their Minds

There really IS a group of mages called the Omnimancers, and I have been cast out of it, many years back.

That being said, this is a story about humans in general. It is NOT an attack on the Omnimancers; as always, it's just some commentary on humans and, hopefully, a fun read. The Omnimancers have a great name, and I think they'd quite enjoy gaining physical magic.

For a while. Same as the rest of us. I was inspired by my former friends, not attacking them.

On the other hand, the Omnimancers are made-up and live only in Goblin World. Just as your authors do.

And THAT whole chain of increasing entropy is why the World is really a wreck. You may not have heard about this; once they took control of the news media by threatening every Bard they could find, and turning some of them into especially ugly and unhappy mice, information, while more abundant than ever, became even less reliable before.

The World is broken, and Physical Magic not only didn't help, it made everyone miserable...even the invulnerable, brilliant, very very sad Mages who temporarily had to run it.

Now they're gone and we can restore order. Assuming people WANT to restore the old order after they found out they could hypothetically fly.

I'm certain the Government isn't busily at work on magic themselves. (They've been engaged in occult research forever. Even the oft-cited MK-Ultra contains elements of theoretical psychic mind control. Really! Look it up.)

Actually, I expect the economy and everything else to crash, but I opened an occult bookstore and I can't keep the books on the shelves. I'm converting the cash into gold and hiding it under my mattress. And also, just in case, stocking up on food and water.

So it goes.

A Goblin's Incredibly Brief Guide To Finances

Goblins DO have a kind of money. We call it "Goblin Bucks", and some of us enjoy hoarding and stacking them, especially since some of them are very pretty. They should be, as they're all individually painted by Joe the Goblin Painter, who enjoys such things. The High Goblin presumably fights inflation and other economic troubles, whatever those might be.

If there is a High Goblin. We're not totally sure, but it sounds like something that should exist.

Oh, there are poor Goblins, Goblins in trouble, broke Goblins; we don't live in a utopia. But life worked so much better when we switched to barter.

There are certain courtesies which keep the system smooth. There is still the High Goblin (or is it a High Goblin Council? There a bunch of people wearing Human-style business suits who wander in and out of the Palace of Relative Justice; we have no idea who most of them are. THEY use Goblin Bucks all the time.) But the High Goblin (possibly Council? Maybe some kind of hologram? Who cares?) helps keep things smooth, like a mediator. It's not an easy job.

(King Solomon's famous "I'll just cut the baby in half" solution would NOT end well with Goblins. I'll just say that much.)

But mostly, we barter. There are plenty of flaws to barter, which is why most species invented or adopted money, a far more stable system. But Goblins don't necessarily prefer stability to adventure, even if the adventure goes badly.

So most of our financial transactions lock us into a cycle of:

- Whatever you want to do, be sure you do it well enough, and do enough of it, that someone will trade it for food, cows, color television sets (we don't get any reception, but we love painting cute pictures on the front of the dead screen. It's a sign of prestige, to be able to make use of so difficult a product) and other necessities and luxuries.

- It does kind of force you to do something without necessarily letting the people who print (well, paint) the Goblin Bucks control your life.

- Which they would hate and be bad at.

-It generally gets you communicating with others. It hardly prevents all badwill, all quarrels, all feuds. One of Papa Heinlein's other famous expressions is "There Is No Such Thing As A Free Lunch", helpfully abbreviated as "TINSTAAFL", we might say "A society where you might really need goat milk is a society where you're at least civil to the goat-farmer, and the same applies to essentially all other professions and activities as well."

You don't need to be *fake*; you just need try not to hurt your neighbor. And while some people might want that because they're sweet and kind, we can't expect that of everyone. We want people to behave that way, not because it's the 'right' thing to avoid doing in (though it is)—but because your neighbor may have or come into possession of some item or skill you'd like to use. A friend will 'trade' their sailboat for a peppercorn, if so inclined. An enemy would barely trade a peppercorn for an entire, working sailboat.

So we're weird and chaotic, but *very* polite.

(For certain definitions of what counts as 'polite' among Gobbos.)

Hey, Chapter 19

“Hey, Nineteen,
No, we got nothin’ common,
No, we can’t dance together,
No, we can’t talk at all.”

-Steely Dan

You’ve heard the story of the Tower of Babel, in its Hebrew or Sumerian or other variants? It goes something like this:

Once all of Humanity spoke the same language, and out of this came unity, and out of this grew strength, knowledge, and what would eventually become Atlantis, El Dorado, the Sphynx, Stonehenge, and, even later on, all the stuff flowing fast and free out of your Palantir, soaking you in its overwhelming verbosity and smuggling untruths into every other sentence.

But at the time, Humans were united, and they decide to meet/defeat/BE God(s).

So they worked together in what must have been harmony (there was a LOT of stone to drag) to build a great Tower.

Then God (or was it The Gods? We forget) became angry.

You see, the purpose of the tower (like Mayan and Egyptian pyramids) was to get high enough to attract the attention of God(s). They intended to build it to Heaven so they could speak to the Upwards beings directly.

The Gods did not like this. So they shattered the tower and re-crafted humans so they spoke in hundreds of different languages. Suddenly, there was pandemonium and, instead of a united attempt to bother the Gods, the Humans began their millennia-long-and-still-going project to attack each other, and pay less attention to divine beings. (The Gods don’t like that either; but they understand that ALL actions have consequences.)

But bear in mind that Human intelligence is a curious thing. There’s a reason why the Tree of Knowledge was a mixed blessing; it gave us computers, cars, the printing press (or at least, the capacity to make them.) And I have no need to make clumsy statements about, say, the difference between a world armed with sticks, and a world armed with nuclear weapons; there’s more than enough said about that stuff.

Some of the cynical say that God did this because another flood would be a lot of work, whereas one big lightning bolt to the tower was just fun. (This flies in the face of The Lord's omnipotence, but the cynical seldom believe a damn word of that. So it's only theologically inaccurate to believers.) Some of the cynical, believers or not, feel that this is just a metaphor for Human/general sentient nature; we'll *always* divide and end up in chaos.

If you were REALLY cynical, you'd look at the way we use the many tools we have (language, music, moving pictures) quite darkly. For example, as I write this, there's currently a song by Malvina Reynolds, the very very liberal folk musician, called "Little Boxes". It is, from the full lyrics, visibly intended as satire (yes, of course I collect satirical songs) about how everyone was becoming homogenized and terribly conformist. They've now taken the catchy first verse, meant as a sarcastic counterpoint to the second verse, and used the lines "Little boxes, on the hillside, little boxes made of ticky-tacky, little boxes on the hillside, little boxes all the same" and given it a cheery beat and comforting animation and used it to sell...Dunkin Donuts as being a safe, reliable, exactly-the-same-everywhere choice. Which is a bit ridiculous if you know more of the lyrics:

*"And the people in the houses
All went to the University
Where they were put in boxes
And they came out just the same

And there's doctors, and lawyers,
And business executives
And they're all made of ticky-tacky,
And they all look just the same."*

It goes on to describe how they "all have pretty children" who grow up and go to school, where they are put in boxes and they come out all the same...

Language is a tool, but it's easy to trust it. In the overflow of data (which is not the same as 'information', the Disinformation Age has become adept at embedding the most insane comments into our minds because the words, the music, the presentation are pretty) it's easy to mistake "more things claiming to be true" for "more actual truths". As one scholar put it:

"We're talking about the internet. Near-infinite volumes of information, much of it robotically and algorithmically determined, some of it evil and malicious in many different ways, whirling like a maelstrom looking for victims to suck down."

~M. Gurri

Don't get me wrong. I was in the language box, believing insane things, until I was struck by lightning.

*Now I'm wounded, but I'm free, and every day, **I write**, not necessarily to Change The World, but to show that I'm not made of ticky-tacky. **I'm made of creativity, Adamantium, and sometimes, very dumb mistakes.***

In the Age of Disinformation, people have now realized that they can do as I am doing now—sit at a keyboard and create the fictions of their fancy, and use catchy phrases, new words, and new terminology, not to expand knowledge, but to increase their own power and influence.

I wouldn't mind doing that, but at least I TELL you straight-up this is fiction.

Those Others are not (necessarily) in a conspiracy or anything complicated. I WISH the bar were that high! It's simply lots of people who realized what power there is in words when nobody checks the facts all at the same time. And if you're SURE your ideas are CORRECT, why mind a few lies if the end result brings them to the Right Place?

But these people and these words surround and pervade us. The logical answers are paranoia, caution, or not caring and making your own words, or, perhaps trying to find words that are good for you.

I chose the last two, myself.

If you feel trapped but don't know why, it's because 'they' (let's just say 'commercials' as opposed to 'the Internet and social media', as I don't want to sound insane—the aforementioned things are trying very hard to put you in a little box and transmute you into ticky-tacky. It's a subtle-seeming, internal change. So we all look different. But many of them have minds of ticky tacky, and no matter what happens, they all think just the same

I'd take the lightning bolt any day.

Men In Black: Third Interview.

All right, my friend. You've made it through the first two interviews—and with mostly superficial burns and a little electrocution. Nothing gets your heart going quicker than a little unexpected jolt of 20,000 volts, no?

Let me tell you what your interview will be so you can think about it okay. Your grip on the exit walls still strong? Alligators below still not QUITE able to reach you? Great. Here's what we'll talk about.

First, do you have a soul, a guiding light that makes you human and assists with compassion and empathy?

Don't look at me that way. The MIB knows quite a lot, and we've got quite a lot of occult experience. This is why we had to do that thing to Joss Whedon; he got too close to the true nature of the soul. He's now been warned.

You've been warned, too? I'd think so. Beware the big, huge, silent one below you. We have no idea he is, but we sometimes suspect he's actually prehistoric and has been growing all these years. But we fed him this morning; it's just the others that are hungry. He won't get out of his digestive torpor before we let you out of there, unless Agent Blue takes too damn long on the phone again. In which case, we'll issue a stern reprimand to him, and a note to the Keeper that the Big Boy doesn't need any food today.

Do you want to do what's right and proper? Oh, come on, shaking your head frantically won't get you out of there. I'm just going over what we'll talk about so you can think about it.

You can't think about anything but that giant crocodile? Then whatever will you do when the human next to you suddenly peels off his skin and turns out to be Rogue Killer AI Robot #431? Gotta think on your feet. Which are, admittedly, being snapped at by crocodiles...but we calculated. They can't reach you.

We think.

What's your favorite color? Yes, this is a test, but we can't tell you the nature of it. I'll give you a hint, though...whatever you do, don't say "green".

Do you want to help people and serve Humanity?

Frantic nodding is good, but Agent Blue is still on the phone. So we'll keep with the briefing. Hey, the big one is stirring.

What's your pain tolerance? I mean your REAL pain tolerance. We used to test for that, but too many great potential agents turned out to have slightly weaker hearts than we thought. This was a mistake. We don't get a lot of well-qualified candidates. If you lie about it, we won't mind. It just means you might get an assignment you're not quite ready for. Word to the wise, my friend.

Do you believe in UFOs, the supernatural, spiritual phenomena, Gnosticism, or the Kaballah? No, no, "I'll believe anything you want, just get me OUT of here" is not a good answer in our book. DO better in the actual interview.

Do you have any compunctions about erasing memory, brainwashing, and occasional murder of, say, between eleven or twelve, or possibly five hundred or six hundred people in cold blood in order to save the billions of people on Earth?

No, I know that's not a fair question. But it's gotta be asked. Three more.

Are you afraid to die? In general, not right this minute. The big one is stirring.

Do you have any psychic and telepathic abilities? Stress and pressure can sometimes bring them out. Try communing with, say, your dead sister. Your sister isn't dead? Fat lot YOU know.

Final question. Having gotten as far as you have, you'll have two doors once you get out of there. Wait, wait. Last question before you get out, I promise. Later on, you'll thank me for this.

Once we pry open the bars—yes, we. Those three big burly guys are here to help. You think it's easy to lift a 6'2" fit Special Agent out of the crocodile pit? Wait 'til YOU'RE on Croc Duty.

Once we open the bars, you'll see two doors. No tricks, they're labelled correctly. "In" leads to your next interview. "Out" leads o...well, I imagine you can guess. Or hope, if you're optimistic.

You're not an optimist since the big Croc started getting restless, this I get.

And ding! There's timer. Bob, Anton, Wilson, haul the man up.

Take your time. I'll wait.

Yeah, I kissed the floor when I got out, too. It's natura, except for when Agent Green delicately sprinkled the floor with flakes of Draino. That was HILARIOUS.

That's it, stretch your arms. See? Out safe and sound. Close the gate, guys! We don't want the Big Guy down there getting any ideas. Sometimes I think that bugger's been alive so long he became sentient. But I don't care.

[A short time later.]

You made the right choice, friend! You're on the team. We'll get you fitted for a suit, get you some glasses, your memory eraser, a beretta, a Venusian Zpoiloid blaster, and various implements of torture.

Come on. It's not REALLY torture if they don't remember it, is it? Except maybe in a nightmare or two.

Let's get started. We're gonna have some fun, my new friend!

I suggest you ice your wrists first, though.

Chapter 27 (as far as we can remember): A Short Lesson On Why You Shouldn't Always Trust Your Memory, Especially About Negative Things.

“Dr. Kenneth Olson, in treating a patient named Nadean Cool, persuaded her to disclose some 126 previously repressed alternative personalities. These included Satan, many angels who brought messages from God, a cannibal, and even a demonic duck.

“Cool’s father dropped dead after she confronted him with her ‘memories’.”

-Robert Anton Wilson, “Everything Is Under Under Control”

Warning for people capable of easily going into trance, especially those experienced with that side of hypnosis.

This does contain variations on actual hypnotic techniques. If you drop really easily, it’s hypothetically possible this story can trance you. I doubt it; it’s got too many other things going on. Then again, as Mesmer knew, people can go into trance quite easily.

Good morning! I’m your licensed and bonded hypnotist. Whom would you like to be today?

Oh, no apology needed. I thought hypnosis was some kind of weird hokum even while I was being trained to it. It helps to let yourself be receptive; if you don’t drop into a trance, see if you can imagine this as vividly as possible.

But you’ve gone into a trance quite easily every day for the past week. I’m quite sure we can do it again.

Ohhhh. You’ve been to those meetings again. There’s a group that doesn’t believe hypnosis is real? Hypnosis is perfectly proven science; look it up.

We’re kinda sorry the Government failed to deliver on its promises of lowering taxes, helping people, and generally making a better world. We all know they’ve given up. But society’s loss is also society’s gain, because I can help you forget all that. When they finally admitted they ran out of money for most of the social programs they were working on, they took the money out of that, and gave it to trained, licensed hypnotists to give you a gift: you don’t have to be you. You can be anyone you want, DROP NOW!

Beautiful. Beautiful. Look at how fast you did that. Now, come on up.

Take your time. Float up slowly. Hold on to anything you want to hold on to, let go of anything you want to release. Ah, you’re reluctant to come out of trance? I get it; trance

states are some of our most pleasant states, like the one you go into when you're not thinking and only doing—playing a guitar solo, driving a stick shift with expertise, perhaps going through your morning routine. Keep coming up. Please come up NOW.

Ahh, thank you. How do you feel?

I feel great, too. It's okay, words will be slow for a minute. But now you remember that you can do it!

All right. Relax. Get comfortable. And...

DROP FOR ME.

Please. And thank you. Ahh, look at that. You realize you can speak. Speak to me. Are you okay? Great. COME UP!

Sorry, just a little bit of fragmentation to prepare you for today.

All right. It's 97 degrees outside. There's no air conditioning. The power grid is unreliable. Both vehicle drivers and pedestrians have taken to carrying guns, grenades, flamethrowers, and other, more serious weapons. When they can breathe through the smog, they find it necessary to fight off the roving bands of thieves who run through our streets, unhampered by the heavily-understaffed police force. But we still take care of fires quickly! So you'll be fine.

Ohhh. You're a big fan of Barney Miller and you want to BE Barney Miller? I'm surprised anyone of your generation has heard of him. Hm? Ah, I agree. Barney is commanding but compassionate. He works with a great team. It's the 1970s, so no social media. The Twin Towers still stand and are featured in the opening of every show except the first season. No computers, no cellphones, people working together, solving crimes, helping others. It was a simpler time. You're sure you don't want to be a recognizable celebrity, like Robin Hood or Lancelot or Captain Spiff? No? I get you. I'd like to live in a simpler world, without screens, but with electricity, cars, and indoor plumbing myself.

Obviously, this will interact sort-of strangely with the real world, but everyone's so discombobulated, they don't care. Besides, you have no idea how many people qualified for government hypnotists! You'll probably be hanging out with Marilyn Monroe, Frank Sinatra, Vincent Price... and your mind is GREAT at rationalizing incongruities. Shouldn't be a problem. Even though it's the 70s, you'll be able to use your cellphone and other modern equipment; it just may take you a moment, and you may end up saying out loud, "Wow, what will they think of next?" a lot.

Fixing the problems is definitely impossible. But forgetting those problems and remembering new, positive things is totally possible. So let's do it!

All right. This time, let's do it slowly. Relax. Relax. Close your eyes. Let yourself have the sensation of floating downwards, gently, safely, down, down, down, nice and easy. Let my words be the most pertinent things. Just hear my voice and let go of the outside world.

You begin to remember. You haven't just WATCHED Barney Miller, you ARE Barney Miller. Right. Let's talk about your life and your job so you remember everything properly. You're a cop, but you're a good cop, very compassionate, still very strong. You have a loving wife and great co-workers and you're interested in meeting the public, no matter how weird they are.

Hm? Your words are very slow, as you're dropping beautifully. Was that "Thank you?" It was?

No, Barney, thank YOU for all the good work you do.

Now let's forget the outside, and drop down, down, deeper and deeper....

Chapter 23 Again: Important Human Rights Thoughts About Self-Determination, Seen In Action, As We Remind You To Buy Many, Many Copies Of This Book. Or Re-Read it on your Kindle or Palenkindle, whichever you prefer. Or Just, You Know, Close Your Eyes And Think Very Green. It's almost as effective and slightly cheaper.

Modesty. Humility. Meekness.

These are all virtues most of the time, just as a single drink of alcohol has many advantages.

But like most virtues, if over-applies, it just leaves you drunk, throwing up, and cursing your bartender, who is already reaching for the club she keeps behind the bar.

The most important words you can learn come directly from the Serpent, and they are: "Be yourself."

As always, the Serpent's words are rich with dual meanings. At 51, Jeff has a pretty good idea of who he, himself, is. He did not have this for the first 40 years of his life, and people spend most of the first 25 years of Jeff's life, including before he could talk, reminding him of a related Serpent-written saying, "Be a unique individual, just like everyone else."

Which came first, the Chicken or the Egg? Neither; the Snakes of Eden had legs in those days, and they LOVED deviled eggs and LOVED yummy birds; it is they, in fact, who invented fried chicken, and never asked for a word of thanks.

Which comes first to a person in their youth, or even one in middle-age—the knowledge of who you are, or the knowledge of who you want to be. And when does it start being relevant? Jeff's brother Louis, 45 years old but still a toddler in his brain, devoutly wants to be either Barbie or a Truck when he grows up. He KNOWS what he wants to be; but trying to be himself has never worked very well.

The insistence that you know who you are before you live the life, and have the life experiences which will shape you, is not bad if you're among the 4% of humans who really do know these things, and live them out throughout their lives, and die without regretting it.

The other 96% of you die with the knowledge of worlds left unsee and endless things left undone.

It's sad—or really, S.A.D. – Serpents Are Dicks.

My suggestion?

Be the closest thing you can right now to whatever fulfills you.

Work at becoming that thing.

If you succeed, or find something adjacent, try it and see if you enjoy it. If not, try something else.

And if someone tells you to “be yourself”, wait until everyone else has left and put a bucket over their head. (If you're a Goblin, the “wait until everyone else has left” part is unnecessary, usually.)

I know what I want to be now, but I've ALSO learned a lot about what I DON'T want to be.

I don't want to hide from the World, living under a bucket. And neither do you, if you are (through any method at all) partaking in this book.

(Yes. We've owned four copies of Abbie Hoffman's outdated-but-relevant-even-if-I-feel-sorry-for-what-ended-up-happening tome, “Steal This Book”. Yes. Three got stolen. No, not all four. One was, as Bruce Springsteen put it, “lost in the Flood”).

Be YOU. This sounds similar but is much safer, since you can't *help* being you; you can only change yourself if you have reason to do so. Being Yourself may come to you, in 5 or 10 or 30 years. Or maybe it won't. As Emerson famously said,

“Don’t worry. Be happy.”

As for the chicken and egg? Well, which came first—a real understanding of who you are, or the idea that you ARE someone *and you wanted to figure out whom that is*.?You’d think it would be the latter, but for most people (like your co-authors) it happened in exactly the opposite way.

Yet others persist in insisting you bring forth the chicken without an egg. Where would you get it? Evolved from some other creature, I suspect. (The Serpents claim they mated with falcons before one ate the other. This seems less likely than any of the myths we’ve heard, and if it’s true, then poor, poor Darwin.)

When others say, “Be yourself!” say, “Gladly! Who am I?”

They may give helpful advice. They may act like idiots (OPUS prevails). But as they pull answers about YOU out of THEMSELVES, you should have a chance to get away—“That’s fascinating, but I’ve got to run. My deviled eggs and fried chicken won’t cook themselves, you know!”

Chapter 3,487, Maybe? Also known as: How to Deal With Not Existing (But Clearly Writing This Anyway)

“Reality is what you can get away with.”

-Robert Anton Wilson

“You’ve got to roll with the punches, discover what’s real.”

-David Lee Roth, *whose reality is that he was kicked out of Van Halen soon after this song became a huge hit.*

Okay. We admit it. No matter how you slice it, we Gobbos are not quite “real”. Not in your Universe. You can’t find us, see us, touch us from the Human world.

But you sure can write about us, think about us, and we ARE real. Just real Somewhere Else.

We don’t know how that works either, but when you’re imaginary, you get used to minor inconveniences like Reality.

Think of us as stories and ideas, loosed by the Graces, driven though a muddle-headed Human (are there any other kinds) and brought to the page to give you reality.

At the same time, maybe we’re COMPLETELY real. Maybe YOU’RE a Goblin—if not on the outside, then on the inside. Have you checked? Looked into your own heart? You have? Isn’t the equipment for that fairly expensive? How did you afford that on a Goblin’s salary? Unless you’re a Pirate. We’ve always wanted to meet Pirates. They avoid us, generally; their ships tend to sink around us.

Which is total coincidence.

Honest.

Your reality starts *inside you*. We know we've learned a lot from Cosmic Trigger, Zen, and Taoism. They make reasonable jump-off points for some of the Gobblination we'd like to impart.

So let's tell you a few things.

1. **You are real.** Whatever 'real' means, you are that. That's no small thing.
2. You are a Goblin if you feel you're a Goblin. **Otherwise, anything useful you can pick up from this book makes us happy. Feel free to flip through and look for parts you like. We don't mind.**
3. And **buy more books.** It doesn't have to be THIS one. That's just good advice in general.

T. Kingfisher once wrote: "Smart Goblins became mechanics. Dumb Goblins became soldiers. Really dumb Goblins became officers." We read that and laughed quite loudly. We mostly became collectors of interesting things, interesting ideas, and interesting times. The latter is inevitable; might as well enjoy it.

Short Bit

I might not be real, but the words pervade regardless. Words aren't 'real' the same way you are; but they can hit your Universe like a ballpeen hammer attacking a marble.

Never forget the power of nonexistence.

Helpful Observation for Humans

All knowledge is potentially useful. But try to verify your facts, would you? In a Universe of information flood, you're going to get a lot of misinformation. The amount of misinformation being put out is simply the amount you'd expect if several billion humans had access to a loudspeaker and nobody fact-checked them ever. How could that possibly go wrong?

In some ways, we were smarter in the 20th century than the 21st. That's one thing we didn't predict...unless you're the movie "Idiocracy."

One more human quote for you.

"Fear is a price paid to pain before it is due."

-Ian Fleming (via James Bond)

Chapter The Last: The End (or Just Moving On to the Next Interesting Thing)

The End Is Not Exactly Placed At The End: A The Goblin Conclusion

This is a long quote, but it's one of many explanations about a very, very old image, indeed. It's our favorite version, so we'll give it to you in toto:

"We see three men standing around a vat of vinegar. Each has dipped his finger into the vinegar and has tasted it. The expression on each man's face shows his individual reaction. Since the painting is allegorical, we are to understand that these are no ordinary vinegar tasters, but are instead representatives of the 'Three Teachings' of China, and that the vinegar they are sampling represents the Essence of Life. The three masters are K'ung Fu-tse [Confucius], Buddha, and Lao-tse, author of the oldest existing book of Taoism. The first has a sour look on his face, the second wears a bitter expression, but the third man is smiling.

To K'ung Fu-tse... life seemed rather sour. ...

To Buddha... life on earth was bitter...

To Lao-tse... the harmony that naturally existed between heaven and earth...

'But what does that have to do with vinegar?' asked Pooh.

'Well, then, I'll explain it now.'

In the painting, why is Lao-tse smiling? After all, that vinegar that represents life must certainly have an unpleasant taste, as the expressions on the faces of the other two men indicate. But, through working in harmony with life's circumstances, Taoist understanding changes what others may perceive as negative into something positive. From the Taoist point of view, sourness and bitterness come from the interfering and unappreciative mind. Life itself, when understood and utilized for what it is, is sweet. That is the message of The Vinegar Tasters."

-Benjamin Hoff, "The Tao of Pooh"

This is a wise story for humans. But Goblins, being almost endlessly curious, would ask:

What exactly are you doing tasting vinegar anyway? I suppose if you really like vinegar and you're in a vinegar store that offers samples, or if you're looking for just the right vinegar for a recipe or something...

But we don't have anything to prove. I can handle more hot sauce than you are, but it sure burns at 6,000,000 Scoville. It puts me on the ground much of the time. But I *can* do it. I do it if someone pays me, or if I really need dramatic effect, but I don't just do it at random; it's not pleasant at all.

If you don't need to do it, and you don't want to do it, and nobody in particular is likely to benefit all that much from it...whyever are you doing it?

If you've got what you feel is a good reason ("I want to test myself." "I want to prove I can do it to others and my reasons for caring about their opinions seem solid and somewhat logical to me", "I'm a metaphor in a rather biased story written by Taoist sages")—go for it.

Otherwise...quit tasting vinegar. There's a lot of lovely sweet and savory things in the world; if you have a choice, they're a pretty good choice.

If you're doing something you don't like and are being forced to do, just ask yourself:

"Exactly why am I willingly putting vinegar into my face?"

Chapter 50 (we know we may have skipped some 30 chapters, but you can impress the heck out of people by saying, “I just finished Chapter 50 of “A Goblincore Guide To Life”): We’re Not Weird Or Crazy; You Just Have Overly Intense Ideas Of Normalcy And Sanity

As Goblins, we all (well, everyone in Goblinia who wanted to participate) gathered in the giant open-skied theatre left behind by the Annunaki when they theoretically left), we

decided to ask their opinion of what True Goblinhood would mean, and how to summarize the Goblin Way.

There were 27,000 or so Goblins assembled.

We got 58,046 opinions.

This, in the end, surprised nobody at all.

We could tell you which ones got the most votes, but since almost none of the voters are going to read this book, we'll just give you our opinions. None except the last will be particularly new to you:

Do as thou wilt, unless you're doing something stupid.

Even Anarchy has a law: "The rule of having no rules". So even *that* is not an escape from boundaries. Likewise, the Principle of Limitations says that everything, **EVEN** the Principle of Limitations, has a limit. In other words, the thing that tells you that sometimes things are impossible is imperfect; sometimes things are impossible, but you can (and maybe should) do them anyway.

It's not easy being green. Or weird. Or different. You've heard this a lot, but we don't care; if we help you take it a little more to heart, we're happy. Or send the message straight to your pineal gland; it will get to you eventually.

...and that's still not an excuse for failing to weigh the consequences of your actions. Madness with clear, useful focus isn't madness; it just might look that way to outsiders.

Be curious. Be free. But not so free that you end up in jail.

And, should all else fail, simply say,

"Sorry about that, but I'm a Goblin, and we are curious about everything, and often peculiar. I apologize if I offended you." Then shout "Hi-yo Silver! Awaaaaaay" and leave the scene immediately.

Be strong. Be disciplined. Be aware.

It's only when you've mastered yourself (somewhat!) that you can be free of other Masters. And that's the core of Goblinhood.

THE

END.

Back Pages: Your Own Notes:

For the three people reading this in a non-digital format:

Leave these pages mostly blank or lightly lined. Press leaves here. Sketch strange rocks. Jot down sudden observations about why humans do the things they do. Tape in photos of your best finds. Write your own toasts, curses, or random lists. Randomness is not only allowed — it's expected.

ERRATA:

While we attempt to maintain the very highest standards of accuracy and utility, there may be a few errors within the book itself. Here, we'll attempt to rectify a few.

1. Everything in this book is wrong. Oops! Strangely enough, that doesn't seem to matter.
2. Everything in his book is mythical and therefore doesn't exist. On the other hand, you can see it and read it and, if you get it in hardcopy, you can even touch it. On the other other hand, this book cannot see, read, or touch YOU. So honestly, we have more reason to believe YOU are mythical than that WE are mythical.
3. We apologize for the whole of Chapter 27. Or we would, if we'd remembered to put it in.
4. The proper quote, earlier attributed to Marlowe, is not by Marlowe, and isn't the proper quote, either. It is "We do it for the Mayhem!" by Doctor Teeth.
5. There is no number 5.
6. We were wrong. There's a number 5. There's just no number 6.
7. Please ignore numbers 5-7.
8. The 4,789th word in this book is actually a secret Illuminati code and you might find yourself drawn into a web of intrigue, danger, and nearly certain death if you read it. So don't read that.
9. In general, when we talk about chaos, unpredictability, and mayhem, we nevertheless respect the balances between Order, Chaos, and Other Weirdness. For example, this may be a somewhat random book, but it has a clear beginning, middle, and end. In creating this book, we were forced to be cruel to our cat Salem, who kept insisting on his right to generate the book by repeatedly walking across the keyboard. Or as he put it, "aer90erjaijn;krng4 tq4rqpipnva -0=D ad-a0rt 439ujfdkldammf e32r3qr".
12. Please also ignore numbers 10-11.
13. Wait, we already took those out. Please ignore number 12. However, number 6 is definitely correct.

14. Go forth and bring chaos and madness! In a sane, orderly manner. That's the Goblin Way!

15. Who is buried in Grant's Tomb? Grant, of course... AND his wife. Bet you didn't know that one, did you?

AFTERWARD: Your Goblin Heart

If you enjoyed this book, we're happy.

(I mean, if you BOUGHT this book, we're happy. If you told a FRIEND about the book, it would make us happy. As you may have noticed—lots of things make Goblins happy, even though we get depressed and have problems, too, just like everyone else.)

But.

We're Goblins. We're not choosy. You don't have to be able to recite your lineage for three-and-a-half minutes to be one of us; that's for Elves. You don't have to pick up a hammer, go into a cave, and hit rock until you find gold or precious metal; that's a Dwarven test. We don't even have SATs, and we're glad for that.

If any part of this book resonated with you, perhaps you have some Goblin in you. We don't mean biologically (you'd have to ask your parents about that) but in your heart, your mind, and, if you both believe in them and have one, perhaps a bit in your soul.

If you feel, after reading this, that some of the things in it makes sense to you and you'd like to try them out—why not? We can't start OR stop you. This is just a book. There's no hand reaching out of it to point an accusing finger at you. This Afterword has no test or trial. It is an invitation:

If you feel you might be at least a little bit Goblin, feel free to follow any and all advice in this book. (I mean, whether or not you feel that, we can't really tell you what to do; there WAS a version of this book where the words literally jumped off the page/out of the screen and towards anyone who didn't meet their standards—

....but all those books are blank and empty now, for some strange reason.

Be whoever, whatever you want. You don't need our *permission* to be a Goblin.

But you have our **INVITATION**.

If any of this book resonated with you, feel free to be a Goblin whenever you'd like, however you interpret that.

Welcome, friend, brother, sister, fellow Gobbo.

Welcome!

(And goodnight, for now.)

Biography:

Neither Jeff nor A. Goblin exist. You should buy their books anyway, to encourage imaginary creatures. They have very, very patient families.

Final note:

“Too weird to live, too rare to die!”

~Dr. Hunter S. Thompson