

The Gilgalesh Satire Players Guild of Satirical Satire Players, (or the TGSPGoSSP since acronyms are always easier to remember,) presents...

The Epic Quest of Big Epicness

She was jaded, like an ancient greenish Buddha statute. As a paladin of little renown, Shannon had been forced to make nice with others. Gilgalesh could be a harsh land if you had nobody to watch your back for you.

Shannon sat with her friends in the guildhouse. *They were a typical crew*, she reflected, *but not too bright*. She was the smartest one, so the task had fallen to her as their de facto leader. They had been on several adventures together, and their individual strengths complimented what lacked in each other. They had a wizard, a thief, a druid, a barbarian, a paladin, and a token orc warrior.

She took stock of the group as they sat around the old, beaten couches in the guildhouse's lounge. Rivera, the old wizard, shook the dice in the cup. As they rattled, he mumbled a spell to ward against rolling natural ones again.

The wizard rolled. Every face up die displayed a one, which was predictable since every facet on their D20s was a one. Rivera cursed. "Why do we even play this game? Nothing ever happens. We just sit here and roll until our characters die of old age. I've never even leveled up." He picked up the game manual. "Why in the world did someone create a game called Dungeons & Dungeons? You don't think we could have added something else to make it more interesting? Maybe we could add a dragon or something?"

"Oh, shut up," Shannon told Rivera. That cockamamie wizard had the stupidest ideas sometimes. They only let him join the guild because he was also an apothecary; potions being his business, he was the only one amongst them that could mix a good glass of ice water.

"While I believe that our erstwhile companion has acted overzealously in the past, perhaps his proposal has merit. I decree, that forthwith, we enliven our sport with an increased volume of rousing exploits," said Griskh, the green-skinned orc.

Brisco, their cleric, jumped up and down, imitating a typical orc, mocking Griskh. "Me got good idea. Me not dumb bunny. Me say we do sock-puppet show for PBS fundraiser. We orcs is stoopeed."

Griskh shook his head and sighed.

Shannon knew Brisco was right. Everyone knew that orcs were universally stupid. While Griskh's idea had advantages, anything involving PBS could only end in woe. She sighed with boredom. Shannon was prone to morbid sighs. *I think I'm depressed because all my friends are all so much more stupider than me*, she thought. *What compels me to hang out with these guys?*

The memory came flooding back to her. When she first came of age, she and her two friends had gone to a local guildhouse to join up. Her former friends, BFFs actually, Barbie and Barbie, brought her with them.

"Like, hello," the greeter had said. "My name is Barbie, pleased to meet you." She smiled at Barbie and Barbie, and then scowled at Shannon. "Look here, it's the guild president, Barbie."

Barbie wore a nametag for obvious reasons.

“Look here,” said the president, Barbie, “new recruits. My you girls look well-tanned,” she said to the bronzed Barbie and Barbie as they tousled their flaxen hair. “You should all come and meet my boyfriend, The Ken.”

Barbie and Barbie’s jaws dropped. “What a coincidence! My boyfriend’s name is Ken,” they gushed simultaneously.

Barbie frowned at Shannon. Her raven hair and pale skin did not seem to fit in here.

“Oh look! Tanning beds!” the two recruits exclaimed and ran off, leaving their misfit friend behind to face the awkward silence.

Shannon shrugged and stepped into the guild.

“As if! I think you need to leave,” said the greeter.

“Goth won’t be chic for another few years, so run along until then.”

That was the last she had seen of her friends. Though, she did recently read that the entire Barbie cult committed mass suicide later. Apparently The Ken instructed them all to drink poisonous Kool-aid. Shannon knew that she was too cool for Kool-aid.

Shannon looked across at her new friends. At least these people respected her and valued her for who she was.

Sitting next to Ragnar the Barbarian, Brisco piped up, “Hey Shannon, how bout you make yourself useful and go snag me a cold one.”

Shannon bristled. She hated being treated like an object, let alone being talked to like that; it was insulting. The Barbarian always stuck up for her. “Are you just going to let him talk to me like that?” she asked Ragnar.

The barbarian shrugged and continued knitting the pair of socks he had been working on.

A voice piped up from down below. “I think you should go,” said Pinto, their Halfling thief. “It would sure give my back a break.”

Sitting on him like a stool, Shannon heel-kicked him in the face. “Quiet you!” she demanded. “Nobody asked for your opinion. *And I refuse to be treated like someone’s personal property!*”

But, she was bored. Shannon craved adventure, and this would have to suffice until the boys gave up playing their futile game of Dungeons & Dungeons. For now, braving the trip to the refrigerator would have to do.

Acquiescing to her friends’ pleas for refreshment, she relented and set out to find a couple cold root beers.

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After endless minutes of waiting, the group sent out a search party to find their missing paladin. They were bored, and so, they all went. They found her in the pantry.

“Hey,” said Rivera, “what’s the hold up?”

“Yeah,” added Brisco. “We’re thirsty.”

She sighed, “I can’t find the sodas anywhere. Someone stole them all.”

“What?” A shocked and bewildered cry came from Pinto as he wiped froth from his mouth and threw a frosty, empty can into the trash. “Who would have done such a thing?”

“I’ve got a pretty good idea,” said Shannon, glaring.

“Yeah,” Brisco jumped in. “It was the orc! They always do stuff like this.”

“This is gonna come out of your next paycheck,” Shannon berated Griskh.

The orc sighed. “The depths of your corporate inanity never ceases to amaze me.”
“Me drink all soda pop. Me think nobody notice,” mocked Shannon. “Honestly, how did you think we wouldn’t figure it out?”

The orc shrugged. It had always been like this for him.

“You know what, all of this action has made me thirsty,” whined Brisco. “Is anybody else thirsty?”

“Nope, not me,” Pinto burped contentedly.

“I am,” said Griskh.

“Shut up,” everyone shouted at him. No one cared about him; he was the reason for their predicament.

“We need to go on a quest. Only then we can afford to buy some new soda.”

“What did you have in mind?”

“We should pursue the most powerful artifact known to man,” said Brisco.

“You don’t mean...”

“No, I don’t. So, we will search for the Eye of Argon instead.”

“But the Eye won’t get us any sodas. It only has the power to destroy the world and kill everything in it.”

Brisco sighed as if he were talking to a preschooler. “I know that. But think of how much GP we can get for it on eBay.”

“Good point...then we can all buy something to drink.”

“I say we do it,” said Shannon. “Everybody gear up.” She desperately craved the sweet caress of a frosty root beer.

Ragnar, however, sat and worked feverishly while the others prepared. He had to finish knitting this pair of socks before they left. He just *had* to.

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Days later, the group of intrepid adventurers halted at the border of Gilgalesh. They had come to the end of their known lands.

“We’ve come to the edge of our known lands,” said Shannon. “So far, we have traveled across the Barrens of Snarlak, crossed the River of Woe, and passed the Black Tower of the Visine Eye. Now, we find ourselves at the most dangerous point of all: Happy Harry’s Hamster Farm.”

The group’s gaze fell upon the rodent ranch. Happy Harry was out front. Bearded and bedraggled, he sat barefoot and smoking, wearing a tie-died shirt sporting the GreenPeace logo. Hamsters grazed contentedly in the field behind him.

“Come near, come near,” he called. Harry toasted a marshmallow over a campfire that belched black smoke as the flames fed on the bundles of shrink-wrapped An Inconvenient Truth DVDs.

Rivera walked close. “What is it, old man?”

Harry smiled a big toothy grin. “Sit a spell and let me tell you a story, a terrifying tale about greenhouse gasses and aerosol pollutants.”

Rivera raised an eyebrow with feigned intrigue.

“First,” Harry commanded, “you must all remove your shoes.”

“What?” Shannon shook her head. “I’ve walked nonstop for days on end in these stiletto heels. If I planned on ever taking them off, I would have done it yesterday.”

“We’ll listen,” said Ragnar, “But only if you will supply us each with a can of soda.”

“What?” he shrieked. “Philistines! Major corporations sell disease and filth and exploit the young to make a profit. Soft drinks contain toxins and cancer-causing artificial sweeteners. ‘Soft drinks,’ you say...they should be called ‘hard drinks.’”

“But Harry,” said Griskh, “is there not the least amount of hypocrisy in your random expostulations? You expound upon the carcinogenic dangers of soft drinks whilst, yourself, smoking?”

“You stupid orc. I roll these myself.” Harry spat out the smoldering blunt he was gnawing on and snatched another hamster from the herd. Demonstrating, he carefully rolled the squirming critter in the flammable paper and fumbled for his lighter. “See, these are all natural and pollutant free. I sell them by the bucketful.” Frustrated, he rechecked his pockets, to no avail.

Pinto held up a lighter, offering a flame to ignite the writhing joint. The lighter was emblazoned with an unmistakable PETA logo.

“Hey, you little thief! That’s *MY* lighter!” Harry went into ninja-mode and began throwing handfuls of the tiny rodents at the adventurers. They clawed and gnashed their teeth. They were like fuzzy, living shurikens of death and cuteness.

“Run!” shouted Shannon, her own face bleeding from a close encounter.

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They regrouped near the entrance to the haunted wood. Many of them had suffered grievous injuries in the wild hamster attack.

“Brisco, can you cast some healing for us?”

“Sure thing,” the cleric said. He pulled out a tin box of band-aids and began to apply them where necessary. “All fixed up. Now let’s get moving.”

They surveyed the verdant green before them. It exuded a menacing aura as they stood before the forest’s edge. A sign had been posted at the nearby trail’s mouth: “Forest of Tears.”

Steeling themselves to embark on a journey through the trees, Ragnar the Barbarian started weeping. “I don’t want to go in. I didn’t finish my socks, there’s knitting yet to be done.”

“Ragnar,” Shannon asked tenderly. “What’s wrong?”

“I-I can’t go in. I’m not done knitting all of my socks.” His eyes welled up.

“What are you talking about?”

“Brisco. The cleric told me that my soul would burn for eternity if I didn’t knit two-dozen pairs of socks for him to use as a dowry to pay your father. I can’t die without my socks!”

“What? That fool’s insane; I would never marry him, not even for twenty pairs of socks. Look at him, he’s a level six cleric who can’t even tie his own shoes...I won’t marry that idiot, but you probably should finish your knitting.”

The barbarian took out his knitting supplies as they journeyed through the foliage. He focused intensely on his yarn and walked right past Brisco.

The cleric’s shoelaces had become entangled in the thorny underbrush. Brisco fell over and thrashed about, unable to escape. Pinto helped get him loose as he removed the cleric’s wallet.

As time passed uneventfully by, Rivera hung back to speak with Brisco. “Why does Shannon seem to hate you so much? You two are really butting heads.”

“No, *YOU’RE* a butthead.”

“What?”

“Nevermind.”

“What I mean is, you are a cleric and she is a paladin. Isn’t there some kind of religious kinship that you two share?”

“You’d think so, but she belongs to another demonation.”

Griskh piped in, “I think that you intend to say denomination.” The well-spoken orc announced the last word.

“No, that’s not it. I meant the first one.”

Suddenly, a ferocious beast ripped through the canopy, landing before them. So terrible was its appearance that it cannot even be described here because this author is too mindful of his word-count, and a wee bit lazy to boot.

“Attack!” cried the paladin. She drew steel and reached for her shield.

Ragnar charged into the fray, wielding a giant battle-axe in one massive hand, a pair of knitting tines in the other. He shrieked like a little girl as he entered combat.

The barbarian fell before his friends. Griskh and Shannon charged in, weapons brandished.

Pinto the thief stood in the back with Brisco, helping himself to the best items in his friend’s inventories. The two encouraged Rivera to cast his most powerful spell.

“Blast that thing into oblivion,” yelled Brisco.

Rivera emptied the pockets of his mage’s robe. “I lost them. I lost them!” he cried.

“What did you lose?”

“I am all out of mana,” he wailed. “I *KNOW* that I had several mana potions on me earlier. I don’t know where they went; I cannot cast without one.”

“I could loan you one of mine,” said Pinto. He reached into his bulging shirt, and procuring a bottle of mana. “But it’s gonna cost ya!”

“Anything! Done,” the wizard said as the halfling tossed the vial to him.

The horrible beast finished with their friends and started towards them.

Rivera uncorked the bottle and sniffed the contents. His face went sour.

“Oh, no. I kept the mana overnight and now it has spoiled.”

Ineffective, and unable to defend themselves for long, the beast fell upon them.

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The adventurers awoke simultaneously when the creature expelled a foul scent. The pungent odor it exuded brought them all to noisy lucidity. You know, that’s the opposite of silent lucidity, like what people do when some wack DJ plays that Queensryche song on the radio: groan in despair.

Shannon assessed the situation. They were all bound hand and foot with vines, tied up in the undergrowth.

The worm-like creature before them was vaguely insect-like. It writhed about the crew, giggling to itself. The beast walked on its hands; it had thousands of them. They protruded from his segmented carapace at every possible juncture. It walked and moved on these appendages...almost human in their appearance.

Rising up ominously, the beast cackled maniacally. “And now you will all see, you will all learn the reason for the warning signs by my forest. For I am The Ripper!” he introduced himself.

The foul monster set upon his ghastly work. His hands worked in a flurry of motion, wrists bent and fingers pinched. Within a matter of moments, the entire company's garments were torn, split at the seams, with threads rent open. The wretch had frayed hundreds of little rips and tears all over their clothing. The vines loosened and the beast released his prisoners.

"Um, that's it then?" asked Ragnar.

"Yeah, pretty much. Your clothes are forever cursed," replied The Ripper in a stuttering Max Headroom voice, "to resemble trends from the 1980's." He cackled again.

Shannon wept quietly at this. All too often, she had seen her own mother wear similar garb and suffer the social consequences it induced. Shamed because of their outdated clothing style, the adventurers exited the Forest of Tears and continued their quest.

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With torn and tattered clothing, they continued their trek. Soon, hunger set in. Their food had long ago run low and they had to tighten their belts with regularity.

Rivera foraged through his deep pockets. His face was despondent.

"What's the matter?" asked Pinto, tossing a shiny wrapper behind him.

"I was saving a candy bar for the right moment. I was going to eat it when I was at my hungriest moment, but now I can't find it. Aargh!"

"Gee," the halfling said, his words muffled as he chomped on a mouthful of chocolate, "that's too bad. Wish I could help ya, buddy."

The wizard sighed. "A lot of things have been disappearing lately. I tell ya," he eyed Griskh, "you can never trust some people, or any orcs."

Soon enough, the adventurers took a break. They sat down and rested near a sign. It was seemingly posted in the middle of nowhere.

The deep yellow sign had a picture of a child on it, just an outline really. It read, "Slow Children at Play."

Looking past the warning, they spotted a yard full of youngsters being supervised by their parents. As they watched, the parents walked over to the resting retinue.

"Look at our children," said the parents. Their kids moved in extreme slow motion, the balls that they played with seemed to defy physics as they bounced at one-eighth normal speed. "You are adventurers. Won't you help us? Please help us break this curse."

"If you travel a few hours east of here, you will find a mage with the power to cure them," said one of the parents.

"Sorry," Brisco said, "but we don't have time for subquests."

Shannon understood; any delays and their soda might get flat. She shrugged an apology to the parents of the slow-motion children and led her group down the road.

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Ahead there was a fork in the road, they were forced to make a decision. The team needed to decide on the proper path to take if they were to reach the Eye of Argon.

During the middle of the discussion, debating which way would lead them to the end of the world, and thus to the coveted jewel, Brisco dropped to his knees in supplication.

"I beseech the powers that be. Now I lay me down to sleep..."

"What are you doing?" asked Rivera.

"Praying. Yea though I walk through the valley..."

“To whom?”

“To the almighty GM. Give us this day our daily bread. And they all lived happily ever after. Amen.”

“Praying to the almighty GM? Does that really work?”

“Absolutley!” the cleric hopped to his feet and pointed down the eastern road. “We go that way.”

Eyeing him skeptically, Shannon flipped a coin and retrieved it from the dirt. She nodded at the face-up coin. “East it is.”

The group moved along the decided path. They chatted as they walked along.

“Maybe,” continued Brisco, “you should consider converting. You know, become a disciple and find true happiness and stuff.”

“Well, how would one do that?”

“Oh, it’s easy,” said the cleric as he removed a weighty tome from his satchel. He showed it to Rivera. The book was labeled *Judges Manual*. “First, you have to dual-class. Secondly, if you want to follow GM, you must recognize and accept his son, Gzus, and follow Gzus’ example.”

“Ok, but how do I do that?”

“Don’t worry. I will tell you exactly what to do. Just blindly follow my every instruction, and you will be fine.”

By now, everyone was listening in on the conversation. Shannon rolled her eyes; this would not be the cleric’s first convert from within their ranks.

“Its like this: King David once averted a deadly battle by ordering two of his men to their death...like this.” Brisco turned to Ragnar and asked him if he had finished those socks yet.

“Sure thing,” the barbarian said, handing them over. “Here you go.”

“Now kill yourself with the knitting needles.”

“Okie-dokie.”

A minute later, the barbarian lay dead in a pool of his own blood. The cleric smiled and tossed the socks irreverently to the ground.

“You idiot,” challenged the paladin. “Look what you’ve done, and only in the interest of making a single convert: I can’t believe that you threw away those perfectly good socks!”

“I apologize, but I got the impression that I wouldn’t be able to pay any dowry with mere socks.”

Shannon seized the knitted stockings and put them in her own pack. She would never tell the cleric how wrong he was. Where she came from, socks were the most rare and prized possessions. Ragnar’s death was unfortunate, but it did mean that they would all save money when they purchased their coveted soft drinks; they would now only need to buy soda in five-packs, rather than sixers.

They continued on.

“Ok,” asked Rivera, “but what happens if I mess up? What if I can’t be everything that the GM wants me to be?”

“Hey,” he comforted, “don’t worry. Here, do you see what this book says on its cover? Look closely.”

The wizard put his nose to the book’s cover, squinting. Then, Brisco smacked him across the face with it.

“It says ‘Judge’s Manual’ for a reason. If you mess up, you will be judged.”
“Ouch!”

Griskh *tsk-tsked* at them. “While I can appreciate the fact that you are trying to further your own religious endeavors, I find your belligerence and tenacity for condemnation to be quite loathsome.”

Brisco cocked an eye at the orc who disagreed with him. Continuing to walk, the orc talked over his shoulder, entering a philosophical debate as they journeyed.

“I have always fancied myself as somewhat of a neo-Platonist, myself. Though I often struggle with the concept of Plato’s metaphysical objective idealism; I find it a little too dualistic for my tastes. I would veer, methinks, more toward the later teachings of the Platonic philosopher Plotinus, who we all know rejected the Gnostic aspect inherent in the—AAEEEEIIIII!”

Griskh had fallen to the ground, dead. Brisco stood over him, having stabbed him with a dirty pair of knitting needles. The bloody tines protruded from his back.
“Philosophy! That’s a cult! We can’t have that kind of free thinking.”

Shannon whirled around. “Are you going to kill *everybody*?”

“No. But he wouldn’t shut-up, and you heard him: philosophy is dangerous. I can understand him acting all goofy and stupid all the time, he’s just an orc, he was born like that, but now he’s a heretic too. He had to go.”

The rest of the group shrugged as Brisco explained himself. At least the orcs death would bring up the average IQ of the group members.

“So,” said Brisco to Rivera, “are you in? You wanna convert or what?”

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Wind gusts blasted their faces. In the nearby distance, the horizon had a definitive point where nothing else extended. It was the end of the earth.

The gleaming, massive ruby hung just over the edge of the world. The Eye of Argon levitated above the emptiness that stretched on forever, a vast descent into oblivion.

Her enthusiasm high after finally seeing her goal, the paladin crept to the edge of the cliff. She looked down, her vision dizzied and blurred at the sight.

“Let me do it,” said Brisco.

“Why?”

“Because I’m incredibly close to leveling up. C’mon, I need the EXP.”

“Fine, alright,” resigned Shannon.

Brisco jogged backwards and set up to take a running leap at the crystal. It looked just within his range. He sprinted forward; just as he came to edge of the cliff, he tripped on an untied shoelace and went hurtling over the edge, “Aeiiii!” he screamed. “I should have gotten Velcro!” His body plummeted out of sight.

The paladin shook her head. “Oh well, one less person to share the spoils with.”

She took her own running start and hurdled the void that separated the Eye of Argon from the world. Her strong hands grasped the massive ruby and she hung on it, suspended over the abyss. Her comrades would soon throw her a line and reel her in, as planned.

Yes! thought Shannon. *The sweet taste of sarsaparilla will soon be on my tongue.* She was a connoisseur of fine root beers.

“Throw me the crystal,” shouted Pinto. “I won’t steal it and leave you there to die. Really.”

“Oops.” Holding the giant crystal in her tight grip, Shannon accidentally activated it. A faint humming sound crescendoed around her and then suddenly ceased. A split second later, the world erupted in flame and earthquakes. Fault-lines split and volcanoes exploded. The world broke apart and blew-up in one massive detonation.

Shannon hung there, swinging her feet. The nothingness stretched forever in every direction; everything was destroyed and dead. The only thing that remained was her and the levitating gem, the Eye of Argon from which she hung.

“Well,” she sighed sarcastically, “this is just perfect.”