

A Christmas Message from Suruk the Slayer.

Festive greetings, Earth People!

It is Suruk the Slayer who addresses you, so you had better not shout, you had better not cry - or there will be trouble. Why do I say this? For Christmas is upon us! To arms!

At this time of year, what could be better than to gather around the fire with a few old faces (well, old skulls)? I suppose it would be better if I had a fireplace in which to keep the fire, but this pile of Government documents will do just as well. Since they are marked as secret, I doubt many people were going to read them anyway. Let us just add a little more aviation fuel and – whoa! It is fortunate that I am not human, else I would now be adding new eyebrows to my Christmas list.

Anyhow, at this merry time of year, it seems right for me to send you a “round robin” letter, in which I proudly list my accomplishments and successes, giving you something to contemplate as your puny lives shuffle yet another year closer to certain doom. This is not the first round robin I have written. The first time I took up the custom, my English was less than perfect, and due to a misunderstanding I simply went round robbing instead. This time, however, my circumstances have improved, and there are no guards to demand that I write everything in crayon for the safety of the general public. (Incidentally, it is very difficult to force a mince pie through the grating on a hockey mask. But I digress).

So what have my humans been doing all year?

Isambard Smith has been drinking a good deal of tea and on two occasions has bathed in it. He continues to get into all sorts of strange and exciting adventures – only last week I walked into his room while Rhianna Mitchell and he were – on second thoughts, this may be classified. It should be. In January, he briefly attempted to master the cuisine of a strange, foreign country – Scotland - using

a copy of Trevorella Lawton's *Cooking with Cleavage* (popular reading in both kitchen and lavatory, I am informed). We were all duly appalled by the appearance of a monstrous, sausage-shaped horror at the dinner table, which I gather was a haggis. Once we had been discharged from hospital and the chemical fire extinguished, he decided that Burns Night was aptly named and gave up while we were ahead and intact.

The little android woman Polly Carveth is still as useful as might be expected. Last week there was some concern when she appeared to have sustained a severe internal malfunction, but it turned out that she was just belching up eggnog. She has continued her on-off relationship with the other android, Rick Dreckitt: she climbs on and, slightly later, she climbs off. In June, she became deputy secretary of the Pony Fan Club, after the favourite, a nine-year-old named Tiffany, mysteriously posted herself to Siberia. Sadly, the only way Carveth will be having a pony this year is if we decide to buy our Christmas dinner from a Belgian chef. Personally, I think this idea has merit. Turkey is too coarse for my subtle palate and tastes just like viper.

The seer Rhianna, when not medicating herself, performed some of her own compositions on the guitar. She calls this folk music. The ship's android tells me that her particular compositions are of a sub-genre known as Folking Awful, but this is not something I deign to comprehend.

Last week, that mighty vessel, the *John Pym*, was dropped off at the garage for its MOT. Or, more accurately, parts of the John Pym dropped off at the garage during its MOT. I gather everything will be fine once the grouting sets and the bits of atom have been put back in the reactor.

In July, I adopted an owl. At any rate, I borrowed one from a zoo. I feel a certain kinship with owls, partly because they are wise yet deadly predators, soaring silent and aloof until the moment comes to strike, but mainly because they cough up pellets when they defecate. Disappointingly, adopting an animal is not like adopting a child, since you are not allowed to take the animal back

home with you (similarly, leaving a child among zoo animals is frowned upon). They could have told me that earlier. Still, using the ancient warrior arts of my ancestors and a large rucksack...

Suffice it to say that we passed an entertaining afternoon. The owl tried to eat the hamster. The little woman brandished a broom. The owl tried to eat the little woman. How I laughed until the owl mistook my mandibles for a pair of dormice. Truly the warrior spirit of the owl is strong, as are its claws when it has latched onto the ridges on your forehead. It has been returned, and we continue to sail under the sign of the hamster.

But I have some sad news which I must share with you all – sad for the lemming men of Yull, that is! With the bold Major Wainscott and his men we assaulted their outposts with the tenacious vigour of a terrier assailing a table leg. Wainscott took respite from blowing up the Ghast Empire to join us at the Secret Service Summer Picnic, where he enthralled and delighted colleagues with his impersonation of an elephant. Nobody touched the sausage rolls afterwards, so I finished them off. There is great honour in pastry.

Incidentally, if any of you are charitably minded, the major requires some new trousers. Or some old trousers. Anything would be an improvement on the current situation. Christmas is, after all, a time for thinking about those less fortunate than oneself, and the less I have to think about Wainscott's Tiny Tim this Yuletide, the better. Anyhow, let us turn to happier thoughts. Like vendetta.

Our old foes, the crapulent cultists of the New Eden, have spent the year irking one another. As the new year approaches, to combat both devil worship and literacy, they have promised to banish Santa to Hell. The fools have of course banned Christmas, as well as passing a death sentence on the fairy on top of the tree. The Edenites claim that the fairy is a pagan idol, although Smith tells me that they are merely jealous that it spends the festive season with its jacksie on a pine cone. I

propose a festive visit to the pointy-hatted Scrooges to introduce them to the true spirit of Christmas. You know, the one with the scythe.

In other news, my ludicrously effete brother Morgar the Architect has secured a lucrative contract to redesign the lavatories for the Ravnavari Lancers. His work on the toilets begins on January 10 – as he calls it, B-Day. W, the strategist and master-spy, warned us all with a hellish vision of perpetual war and all-consuming tyranny. I wish more people sent Christmas cards like that.

But now I must depart. The bird is almost cooked – no, not the owl – and the Two Ronoids are on television again. So let the antlered beasts haul their crimson chariot across the sky, and may Father Christmas slip down your chimney like a round red ninja of joy. May your wishes come true this Yuletide, or, in the case of the lemming men, may you get what you've been asking for. And rest assured, you shall be hearing more of our exploits in the months to come.

So have a peaceful and joyous Christmas, remember those less fortunate than you, and God rest ye merry, gentlemen. Or else.

Suruk the Slayer.

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