



And now, because it's a long way to Tipperary, here's something...

COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Volume: Zambesi Issue #13 May 2, 2004 Working today for a sillier tomorrow

One Life, Furnished in Early Python by Fred Coppersmith

"No names have been changed in order to protect the innocent. Angels protect the innocent as a matter of Heavenly routine." – Kurt Vonnegut

I came to Penn State in the fall of 1995. I know that must seem like an impossibly long time ago to some of you, so let's get a few things straight right off the bat: yes, Penn State existed way back then, and no, dinosaurs did *not* roam the earth. (Although both Graham Spanier and Gary the Willard Preacher did, and I've never seen it *disproved* that either of them are gigantic carnivorous reptiles of the Mesozoic Era. Have you?) I came from a faraway magic place called Long Island, which they keep in New York and which is where I had first discovered the silliness and mystery of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. I was a big fan; I had all the albums on CD or tape, had read books—well, a book—and could quote lines of dialogue at twenty paces with the best of them. Sure, I had never actually seen an episode of the *series*, but, when I saw a sign at the fall Involvement Fair advertising the Penn State Monty Python Society, I considered myself well prepared to join.

Oh, what a fool I was. Nothing could have prepared me for the Penn State Monty Python Society.

Back then, the club met on Wednesday evenings every other week. Although we moved around a lot over the coming years, I remember that first meeting fairly well. Heaven knows I enjoyed it enough to keep coming back for more. We were in two-oh-something Thomas Building (which, back then, was just called Classroom Building), and, if mention was made of the fact that this had been the site of the group's "Free the Hole" protest just five years earlier—and that said hole had now been unceremoniously covered up by a large building—that I don't remember. We played Monty Python trivia, for which prizes were awarded (plastic garden tools and a can of Spam), and then the Cheese



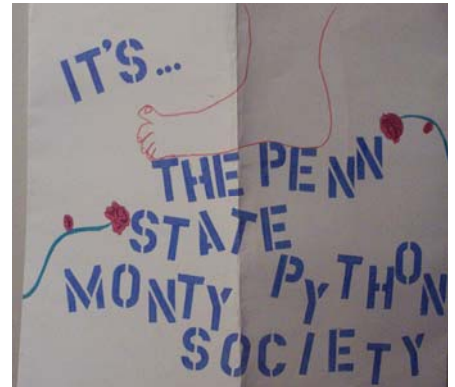
E. Bernhard Warg, Fred Coppersmith, and Ellie Owens

Shop game, which is essentially just a variation of the "Cheese Shop" *sketch*, the only object being to keep coming up with names of cheeses or reasons why those cheeses were not in stock that day. We had an attendance sheet, with lots of silly questions and answers, and more than a few laughs. What the Primal Scream was that week, I don't remember, but I do know the tradition was already well established and that we must have screamed something. Tell me one other club that lets you scream complete nonsense at the close of every meeting? Okay, *besides* the Young Americans for Freedom.

Anyway, the semester progressed. Our president, whose name now eludes me, stopped showing up after that first meeting. Occasionally, we would hear rumors of his continued existence—he'd been seen marching with the Blue Band; someone who looked *just like him* had been spotted in the HUB—but, for all intents and porpoises, he was gone. (With just one meeting under his belt, I'm not sure how much he'd ever really been there.) So Kim Boyer, then vice president, took over. This was, you must understand, back before power was seized in any kind of presidential coup. In those days, food was rarely flung and pirate outfits were rarely worn. A club that once tried electing a *gerbil* to Undergraduate Student Government isn't going to be too hung up on ceremony or the chain of command. If you wanted a position of power, chances are you could get it. (If you thought what you were getting actually *was* power...well, then you could be in trouble.)

So when I asked, in my roundabout way, if Kim might let me take over the newsletter in the spring of '96, she said yes. I think she was more than happy to have the pressure of coming up with an issue every other week off her shoulders. If a silly freshman who sat quietly at the back thought he could do a better job, all the more power to him. I'm not sure what possessed me to take over the reins of *Completely Different* when I did. Looking back over those issues, the ones from 1996 to 1999—the ones that *aren't* on the Society website—what I see are mostly a lot of photocopied pages from other publications, bits and pieces of comedy news culled from other sources, and not enough original material. Getting people to submit was just as difficult back then, but that's hardly the real problem. The newsletter then was often two or three times as long as it is today. But I don't think the newsletter really came into its own for me until *after* I'd graduated, when I'd taken a couple of years off and given myself license to be funny on my own. The seventy-five issues that are online (this being number 75) aren't always pretty or brilliant, but I can stand behind them. There's some funny stuff going on there. Feel free to check them out.

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Weekly Horoscopes

With this, the final issue of the semester, *Completely Different* once again presents a retrospective of some of the "better" predictions the stars have made these past couple of years. Guaranteed accurate or no money back!

Aries: (March 21—April 19)

All too often you find that even the best laid plans are disrupted by your propensity to be distracted by shiny objects.

Taurus: (April. 20—May 20)

The stars move out of alignment this week, upsetting your altogether ill-conceived plans to harness them in that intergalactic death ray you've been building in your spare time.

Gemini: (May 21—June 21)

Tales of your exploits will linger long after the week is done. Unfortunately, so too will the persistent itching, swelling, and your inability to wear any but the most roomy of pants.

Cancer: (June 22—July 22)

You sometimes worry that you have an overactive imagination, but that doesn't necessarily mean you aren't being chased by invisible elves, you know.

Leo: (July 23—Aug. 22)

You sometimes feel like your life has become a soap opera, but once your long-lost amnesiac evil twin resurfaces to kidnap your father's brother's sister's nephew's drug-addicted baby, that feeling will probably pass.

Virgo: (Aug. 23—Sept. 22)

Be more direct with someone in power. Remember, the sooner you act, the sooner those thieving hobbitses will give you back your precious.

Libra: (Sept. 23—Oct. 23)

When life hands you lemons, maybe it's just life's little way of saying you're suffering from scurvy.

Scorpio: (Oct. 24—Nov. 21)

A tense situation at home could be alleviated by something as simple as a kind word and a tranquilizer dart.

Sagittarius: (Nov. 22—Dec. 21)

The truth is, you won't be anywhere *near* Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs begin to take hold.

Capricorn: (Dec. 22—Jan. 19)

You have a tendency to play devil's advocate. But the pentagram and severed goat's head in the fridge might be pushing things a little too far.

Aquarius: (Jan. 20—Feb. 18)

It's not that you put so much of your faith in the stars that worries people. It's that you put your faith in the stars of *Saved By the Bell: The New Class*.

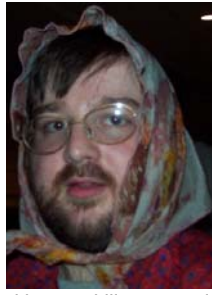
Pisces: (Feb. 19—March 20)

May the road rise to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. And may the door not hit your ass on the way out.

Reader's Poll: What have you learned from the Monty Python Society?



"*Learned?* What do you think Penn State is, some kind of institute of higher education or something?"
- Graham Reaper, grad., Interp. Dance



"I learned how to kill a man with just a can of Spam: by opening it."
- Fiona Manly, grad., Turfgrass Mgt.



"I learned that the Society is *not* a cult—in their re-education camp, shackled to the radiator by the glorious leader. Praise Jewsus!"
- Lloyd Oid, grad., Interp. Dance



"Not much, but they said if I stay *another* nine years, they'll finally show me where the bodies are buried!"
- Sven Svenerson, grad., Turfgrass Mgt./Interp. Dance minor

One Life... (Continued) by Fred Coppersmith

But I digress. The Monty Python Society wasn't a terribly *active* club my first few years. We met twice a month, acted silly, performed sketches written by members past and present (or downloaded from this weird new thing called the Internet), but we didn't do a whole lot outside of that. Sure, there was the Homecoming Parade, but even *that* was called off my freshman year when only I (dressed as a lumberjack, in my pre-beard days) and the president showed up. Rumor has it that another member, Jeff, also showed up but couldn't find us in the field before the start of the parade. That's a shame, since in later years we proved that you *can* march with only three people, and because Jeff's Gumby costume (which I saw at a later PSSFS Halloween party) was actually pretty good. There was also the Mall Climb and the occasional trips to the local diner after the meeting—and, heaven knows, we were loud *at* the meetings—but, for the most part, we were a pretty quiet bunch. The University at large certainly had no real reason to pay attention.

I'm not sure when that started to change. I took over as secretary sometime in my sophomore year—again, positions were almost always there for the taking—and then as president when I was a junior. At the beginning of my second year in office, I decided to hold meetings *every* week instead of every other. People—well, okay, a person—told me I was crazy, but I stand by the decision. It seems foolish now that we ever met less than once a week. Back then, meetings had themes printed out on a schedule at the start of the semester (Movie Night, Skits-O-Phrenia, How the World Can be Saved by Steam, etc.), but it wasn't as if we were actually *adhering* to those themes. Doubling up on meetings didn't mean we had to double up on themes. It just meant that, if you missed a meeting, you wouldn't be a month out of the loop when you returned. A cancelled meeting—and we'd had a few—could be disastrous for the club if there wasn't another meeting for two weeks.

People seemed to respond positively to the change. If membership didn't exactly *increase* from 1998 to 1999, it certainly didn't drop off as much as it had been known to in the past. We had a good turn-out for the Homecoming Parade, the website was starting to attract some attention, and even campus publications like the *Collegian* started to sit up and take notice. Not a *lot* of notice, of course, but then there's no such thing as bad publicity.



Victor Colonna, Brad Blinkhorn, Matt Rudy, Renee Perry, Steve Brezler, and Robin Helzal at the 2001 Homecoming Parade

When the club wound things down in the spring of '99, I stepped down as president. I was graduating in a couple of weeks and still hadn't decided to stay on. Mendel Schmiiedekamp agreed to take over, mostly because he would be here in the fall. I'm a little hazy on what happened after that. I had been subletting from a friend that summer and had moved in with another when the lease ran out, so I was still around. But I couldn't have attended more than a handful of Monty Python Society meetings. I was at the Homecoming Parade, however. That much I know. There were only four of us—well, three and a half, since one person left midway through—but it actually remains one of my favorite parades. We threw ourselves into it, shouting at the crowds, silly-walking, handing out streamers of orange tape out to people on the sidelines. We were silly. It was fun.

Which doesn't really explain why I stopped going to meetings again. Maybe it was that I was living relatively far off campus and didn't have a car. Somewhere along the line, meetings had been switched to Sundays, and the bus route I was on went all wonky on Sundays. Maybe it was that I felt I'd outgrown the club. I was, after all, no longer a student. Maybe it was that then-president Brad Blinkhorn (who'd taken over somewhere for Renee Perry, who'd taken over for Mendel) scared me a little. He did have a penchant for knives. Whatever the reason, I wasn't really part of the club for about a year. There are photographs that prove I was at the Homecoming Parade, but I can't remember attending any meetings. And I have a pretty good memory for meaningless details.

Sometime in late 2000 or early 2001, Brad and another Society member, Marc (Not Dave) Fiddler came to the Penn State Bookstore, where I was working at the time. They wanted me to come to that week's meeting. I don't remember what they said, or how they even knew I worked there—I must have let it slip at one of those meetings I don't remember attending—but they convinced me. Pretty soon, we started meeting more regularly to rehearse for our first Night of Sketches in the HUB. We tried writing more sketches. We actually filmed a couple. (That might not be a good thing.) Along the way, it was decided that we could record some of this material to CD and maybe turn a profit at that semester's spring Fling, also in the HUB. It all seemed like a good idea at the time.

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And You Can Quote Me On That

"It's shameless commercial opportunism on our part." – Terry Jones on the re-release of *Life of Brian* (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5/2/04)



One Life... (Continued) by Fred Coppersmith

It proved to be a *lot* of work. And yet, I look back fondly on those times: the late-night rehearsals, the loss of sleep, the improvisations, the recordings cobbled together for what eventually became our CD, *Sex, Drugs, and Graham Spanier*. A sort of camaraderie formed between the six of us (plus two or three hangers-on). Maybe it was the lack of sleep. Maybe it was the alcohol. Maybe it was just fear of being on the wrong end of one of Brad's knives. Whatever it was, we started to seriously consider ourselves writers and performers. Terry Gilliam has remarked that "you can't be silly if you have self-doubt", and that semester we didn't allow ourselves any. We rehearsed. We recorded sixteen tracks of original sketches and songs. We performed some of them in front of an audience, and they seemed to enjoy it. They laughed. It's a wonderful feeling to make an audience laugh. Our first performance even had a title—Lemurs from Hell—and a poster with two of the scariest lemurs I've ever seen. We performed on Friday and joked that we would be "famous by Monday". We even made buttons that said so.



And even though we weren't, and I think we only sold about twelve CDs, we had a lot of fun. Which is maybe all that matters. I look back, and I think those were some of the best years I spent with the Monty Python Society.

We continued performing, and even though Brad left—he didn't get into his major and went off to school at Pitt—the Monty Python Society continued. Veronica Kalyna took over as president, and, for the first time in almost eight years, the club staged an Ides of October Mystery Event.

The Ides have been around as a club event since at least 1989, when the club mourned the death of Monty Python member Graham Chapman by acting silly in front of Old Main. (This, incidentally, may mark the first and *only* time the Ides have actually happened in October.) Past events have included nominating a gerbil to USG and two mock protests, Free the Hole and the Coke-In. I had tried to revive the tradition in my senior year without much success, but in the fall of 2001, it finally returned. That September, we stood out in front of the HUB (around what would later, for some reason, become HUB-Henge) and then in front of what the club has lately taken to calling the Allen Saint Gates, protesting to have the Nittany Lion Shrine neutered. As Victor Colonna, the self-proclaimed PSUMPS Minister of War, wrote, "We feel that the world is already overpopulated with lion shrines, and that the Nittany Lion Shrine should no longer be put to stud for the purposes of creating little lion shrines to be sold down in town."

The next month, on October 27, the East Halls Residence Association asked us to co-host a night of improvisational comedy games. We didn't have the best venue—in front of the Big Onion from 8 to 10 pm on a Friday night—but we did have prizes to award to the two or three participants who stuck around after buying their pizza. One was a robot dog that always knew where its ball was. (One of the *prizes*, that is, not the *participants*.) I've joked that the event left fifty dead and is probably to blame for current tensions in the Middle East, but it was not a *complete* disaster. Again, we were silly, and we had fun.



Veronica had other ideas for the club—a musical version of "Silence of the Lambs" probably

chief among them—but she soon stopped coming to meetings altogether. I don't think we ever really learned why. I only ever saw her myself once again. She was replaced first by a puppet in her likeness and then by Matt Rudy, who had been the puppeteer and who grabbed the presidency in a juice-box-powered coup. Now no longer just the Society's ambassador to the Model Railroad Club, Matt went mad with power. Or maybe not. The details are a little hazy, and it's not as if there was actually any power to be had. Let's just say, for the sake of argument, that Matt went mad with power, okay? Whatever happened, the club continued. We performed again as part of HUB Late Night in the spring of 2002. Again, there are pictures to prove that.



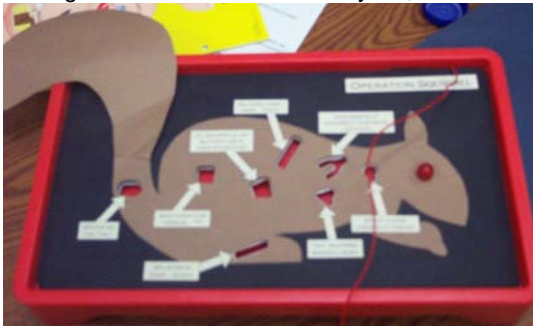
Matt Rudy challenges Veronica Kalyna for the Society presidency

And somehow, inexplicably, we seemed to have developed a small—very small—following. We ran three shows back-to-back that year, and when we told the audience at the start of the first show that we would not be performing the "Necrophiliac Sketch" (wherein the University president has sex with a dead body), there was genuine disappointment. Later, between performances a woman in the audience came up to us and asked quite politely who had changed the lyrics to one of our songs*. There were people in the audience who knew the sketches better than we did, which I found equally remarkable and frightening. Our CD hadn't sold a lot of copies, but it had apparently circulated around campus that last year. And, apparently, people liked what we did.

* I had never been comfortable, for hopefully obvious reasons, with the last line of the fifth verse in "A Pocketful of Penis". In the original recording, I—or rather *the character I am playing*—compare my penis to "a long locomotive" and encourage "kids under twelve [to] ride for free." I changed this to the less pedophilia-friendly "groups after twelve", which makes me feel better, and which I think gets a bigger, certainly less hesitant laugh.

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The next school year proved an eventful one for the club. In the fall of 2002, we staged yet another Ides of October Mystery event: Squirrel Fishing. I wasn't there to see it myself, but it was apparently quite a hit. "It's just fun; it's goofy; it's really bizarre," club member Valery Annunzio told the *Daily Collegian*, "and if you've ever seen a squirrel fly, it's really funny." I sent a link to the *Collegian* article to humor columnist Dave Barry, who then posted it to his weblog. "America is doomed," he wrote. Can you honestly say he was wrong?



Squirrel Operation from the Society's 2002 squirrel fishing

Forum into a Carousel. I think we ran a good campaign. The *Collegian* pretty much ignored us, but we made people laugh and annoyed the other candidates—many of whom didn't even bother to show up at official campaign events. Chef and Helga only received eighty-one votes, less than one percent of the total number of votes cast—but that's at least fifty or sixty people *who aren't us*. Had we decided to officially put our names on the ballot, I'm convinced we would have won more votes. If nothing else, the *Daily Collegian* wouldn't have had an excuse to ignore us until election day.

And that brings us, more or less, to today. Matt went power-mad again and grabbed the presidency for a semester, only to be toppled again by Kim Cicconi and Tim Portnoy, our current co-presidents. We've been interviewed on PSN-TV, mentioned briefly in the *Collegian*, and generally made a nuisance of ourselves as only we know how. Looking back over the nine long years I've been here, first as a student and then (god help me) as a townie, I really have nothing but fond memories of the club. Because of the Monty Python Society, I've been interviewed by the *Daily Collegian* and twice by BBC radio, performed original sketch comedy in front of a live (or semi-live) audience, recorded some of it on CD, worn a dress in public, written sketch comedy for a campus television show, and made friends I'd never have met otherwise. It's time for me to move on, and I won't be back next year, but I'm glad that I stayed. I owe a lot to the Penn State Monty Python Society, and I'm going to miss it when I'm gone.

Alyce Wilson, a Monty Python Society alum and one of my predecessors as editor of *Completely Different*, once wrote: "The friends I made in MPS and the fun things I've done in the name of Python have lit a huge, glowing, purple and green, revolving, shooting-out-sparks light in my life." I don't think I could have said it better.

Unless, maybe, I said it in a high-pitched squeaky voice.

Take care of yourselves. Semprini!

The following spring—last spring, in fact—Rebecca Frier took over for Matt as president, and the Monty Python Society re-entered the arena of student government for the first time in twenty-two years when we ran the Swedish Chef and his interpreter Helga for USG president. (Sure, they were really just Matt Rudy and Sara Dexheimer in disguise, but the voters didn't have to know that, did they?) Proudly proclaiming that "our empty promises are new and original", we promised to move East Halls closer to campus, make tuition free, dissolve the Vegetarian Advisory Board in favor of a new Swedish Meatball Eating Appreciation Team (SMEAT), put a kitchen in every classroom, and turn the



Editor: Fred Coppersmith

Completely Different is the mostly weekly newsletter of the Penn State Monty Python Society. Run away! Run away! Back issues available at www.clubs.psu.edu/Python. Submissions always welcome. For more information, write to different@unreality.net