

the Attic

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the newsletter from learyworks.com

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Grand Palais: Tiny by Texas standards.

Barbarian

The observant reader will have noticed that *the Attic* is under new management. Think GM, Opel, Saab, think Volkswagen and Porsche, think Daimler and Chrysler. Think of these and you will begin to have some idea of the boardroom dramas, the massive egos, the fortunes won and lost, the jobs in the balance, that lie behind the learyworks.com takeover of *the Attic*.

The reasons for this move remain something of a mystery. A spokesperson for learyworks was reticent: "It seemed like a good idea at the time." Beyond that she would only say that she was writing a book based on her intimate knowledge of the story and that she expected Random House would be

rushing it out in time for Christmas. Entitled, *A Barbarian at the Gate*, it promises to be a feast of juicy revelations.

Sam

In other *Attic* news it was revealed that the orange critter that's been wandering about on page two, sometimes apparently taking a nap and at other times standing on its head, is a stray semi-colon. Attempts have been made to shoo it away but it just drifts to another part of the page and goes back to sleep again. Making a virtue out of necessity, *the Attic* has decided to adopt this little punctuation orphan as its mascot. Dear readers, *the Attic* presents Sam the Semi-Colon. Take a bow, Sam.

Rungrado

In the last issue I reported on the televisions that were everywhere in New York. While watching some American-style football (on television) last Thanksgiving I was introduced to the new 80,000-seat Cowboys Stadium. This is in Texas, the state in America which is a famous synonym for all things big. The structure is said to be the largest domed stadium in the world, and it contains the biggest column-free roofed space you can find anywhere on the planet.

But what wowed me was the video. This monster is suspended over the playing field like a big Toblerone-shaped spaceship. It spans from twenty-yard line to twenty-yard line. (No, I can't explain

what this means, please consult an encyclopedia.) I was fully convinced that, before the end of the first quarter, a glowing hole would appear somewhere in this monolith and a giant raygun would pop out and incinerate all the humans silly enough to be standing nearby. This always happens around alien spaceships. But, no, the aliens just hovered, showing the game, the replays and just a word or two from the programme's sponsors.

The main screens, running the length of the spaceship, are 180 feet wide by 50 feet high (for a diagonal of 2,241 inches, gasp). That makes 9,000 square feet of video each. Add to that the two 'small' screens facing the end zones, with 1,296 square feet each and you get 20,592 square feet of video real estate along with 57,600 feet of grass to keep the audience enthralled.

Surprise, surprise, all this square footage (and the cost of the world-record-breaking stadium) has led to higher ticket prices at the new venue. But, in Texas, football is a religion and the spectacle I witnessed in this football-shaped temple looked well attended. Like all true acolytes the fans are willing to make their sacrifice on that high alter we call the Cash Register. The cheapest season ticket I could find on the Cowboys' website costs \$2,790 and gives you 17 games. Around \$164 for an hour of distant sport and two hours of advertising. The hot dogs cost extra.

The biggest stadium in the world, with 150,000 seats, is the Rungrado May First Stadium in Pyongyang, North Korea. The price of a Rungrado season ticket is a state secret. And the less said about dogs in North Korea the better. But the hermit kingdom, while it might have the missiles and the marching bands, doesn't have the televisions to match Texas.

At present, the Cowboys' video screens cover only a third of a football field in area. Presumably, because bigger is better, we can look forward to a full 60,000 square feet of video in the arena. With a corresponding seat capacity of say, a quarter million, the playing field will look no bigger than an entry ticket to most in the audience. But never mind, they'll be watching televisions that will make Texas proud.

Freedom

While driving around in America last year I saw a big roadside advertisement that read: Botox - It's all about freedom of expression

My inner English teacher immediately spotted the problem. Somebody in the copy-writing department had used the wrong preposition, something the stupid spell-checker couldn't catch.

What do they teach in English departments nowadays? Do they even know what a preposition is? The English teacher at my grammar school would have slipped my twelve-year old butt for an error of this magnitude. He might have ordered me to strip and taken photographs of me in my underwear as well (times were different then, old perverts did that sort of thing). Luckily, I knew my prepositions and I was spared a lifetime of trauma.

The *Attic* reader will know the correct term to use. Naturally, the slogan should read: Botox - It's all about freedom *from* expression.

And...

This final piece was going to be based on an interesting story from the town of Raub near Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. How, according to *The Straits Times*, three Malaysian women, provided by one pimp, spent two nights working to "satisfy the lust of [19] Bangladeshis" during the religious festival of Hari Raya. These 23 naughty people were detained by the police. This suggested a discourse on morals and culture, to say nothing of arithmetic.

But then I noticed a much more encouraging BBC report from Malawi and it too concerned morality.

Mr William Kamkwamba from the village of Masitala built an electricity-generating windmill from scratch. The turbine was fashioned from material found in rubbish tips: bicycle parts, a tractor fan blade, a shock absorber and old plastic piping. The tower was a rickety but effective structure built of blue-gum-tree wood. His village thought he must have been smoking funny

cigarettes because nobody had ever seen anything like it. But Mr Kamkwamba had the last laugh when, using a small light bulb, he demonstrated the power of what the locals soon dubbed "electric wind".

Since then Mr Kamkwamba has constructed bigger and better windmills. His enterprise and doggedness have drawn world-wide attention and a scholarship to the African Leadership Academy in Johannesburg, South Africa.

While 19 horny young Bangladeshis are figuring out how best to share the services of three overworked Malaysians, one clever young Malawian is figuring out how best to improve the lives of thousands. This arithmetic suggests that maybe, just maybe, the human race is not doomed after all.



Power to the people.

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