

Feature



Sticking to the Rules

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A local Worldcon, and stories about an infamous masquerade costume from a past Worldcon were too good of an opportunity for this costumer to pass up.

The 1972 Worldcon (LA Con I) introduced fandom to a short-lived character who managed to have a major impact on costuming. The presentation has been described as receiving the award for “Most Revolting” or “Most Disgusting” costume ever. Comic artist Scott Shaw! had published a story in 1972 about a monster from the sewers called “The Turd” in *Gory Stories Quarterly*, and decided to put it on stage, thus giving birth to the “no peanut butter rule” found in almost all current costume competitions. Naturally, my husband Phil wanted to try recreating it.

We contacted Scott Shaw! directly and through people who knew him, but he did not respond, despite numerous attempts to reach him, so this peanut butter-free reconstruction is based on the comic book art, some limited photographic evidence, written reminiscences of the presentation, a 4-

minute online interview with Scott Shaw! and the recollections of some people who were actually there “when The Turd came out.”

We thought that after almost 50 years, it was time for it to come out again, and what better venue than Worldcon 76 in San Jose, California?

The Story

The Bay Area has a very strong costuming community and we were actually able to locate and talk with someone who had live contact on the night of the original



Interview with Scott Shaw! about "The Turd."



Scott Shaw! as "The Turd" in the 1972 LA Con I masquerade.

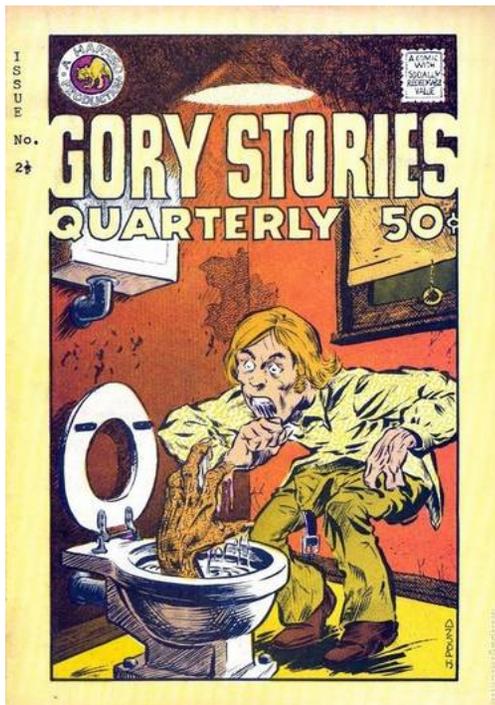
presentation. I also read all the accounts I could find online. After such a long interval, memories of the actual skit were pretty vague. We were only able to find one semi-detailed account of the presentation, but memories of contact with the sticky horror and its aftermath are still pretty strong.

The original “Turd” character was created as Shaw!’s first published effort, during the early days of underground comics shortly before the 1972 convention. That era was pretty involved in the whole “thing” from out of the sewer vibe, so why not a living poo monster?

One published recollection was that the costume was constructed with three jars of peanut butter, a pair of L'eggs pantyhose, cornstarch and some cornhusks. Other witnesses recalled no cornstarch or husks but were certain that canned corn niblets and toilet tissue played a role. Shaw! himself claims to have used 18 lbs. of chunky style, a toilet plunger, one can of corn, toilet paper and the panty hose.

The Costume

The first thing I did was to track down and purchase a copy of the comic, just in case. I also searched the internet for photos (some) and recollections (only a few) of the event.



"The Turd," first appeared in a 1972 underground comic book.



Bodysuit, shorts, and head mask were made of peanut butter colored stretch lycra.

Since I already knew that using actual peanut butter was out of the question, I began the recreation by locating peanut butter colored stretch lycra and an appropriate bodysuit pattern.

The pattern I used is McCall's 7340. I also built a matching pair of boxer shorts and a head mask to go beneath all the proposed peanut butter prosthetics. A pair of purchased "toe" socks were tea dyed a matching skin color and theatrical make up was purchased to cover up any bare skin on hands, neck and feet.



The bodysuit was constructed with five invisible zippers. One up the back, and one in each of the arms and legs. This makes it



Body suit constructed with invisible zippers.

easier to get in and out of the suit. The drawstring waisted shorts are worn over the bodysuit.

To create the effect of dripping peanut butter I did extensive research into various techniques, such as using Sculpey, caulk, latex, silicone, and even house paint, but eventually decided to go with none of those ideas. I thought Elmer's School Glue which dries clear and remains flexible would be a viable, and cheaper alternative. It is non-toxic and can also be purchased by the gallon at a very reasonable cost. After making a test run, and getting Phil's agreement, I decided to go with it.



The glue was colored with FolkArt #942 (Honeycomb) acrylic paint to simulate peanut butter. After the first test, we decided to omit the chunks, since they cannot be seen from stage in any case and the best chunky solution tested kept leaking dull white ooze through the paint regardless of many coatings.



The acrylic and glue are mixed together to the approximate color and poured onto plastic sheeting to dry. I used multiple pours of glue on most of the prosthetics to help achieve a look of gooey-ness. These pieces were made in several sizes to cover different parts of the body and allow some extras to distribute to the "victims" of the creature.



Left: School glue test pour. Right: Pour of acrylic-colored school glue.

The required corn kernels are plastic Carp fishing bait. Since they do not stick to the glue, they were sewn on by hand after the individual prosthetics were poured and dried. I made a choice to have a higher ratio of corn to peanut butter than would have been possible with the original recipe of one can of corn to 16 gallons of peanut butter. That seemed to me to make up, in some way, for the lack of peanut chunks.



Carp bait kernels sewn to peanut butter prosthetics.



Tan Velcro dots used to attach prosthetic peanut butter pieces o the body suit.

The prosthetics are attached to the bodysuit with tan Velcro sticky-back $\frac{3}{4}$ in (1.9 cm) dots. The initial placement used the sticky back Velcro on the back of the prosthetics and the body suit. Once the prosthetics were placed, I tacked the soft dots to the body suit. We wouldn't want prosthetic peanut butter shedding like the real thing. In retrospect, I wish that I had poured a lot more prosthetic pieces.

The head mask is based on extant photos of Scott Shaw! wearing pantyhose smeared with peanut butter on his head.



Scott Shaw! as "The Turd" showing head mask made of peanut butter smeared nylon stocking.

After looking at various types of mask and balaclava patterns, I built the mask by draping and pinning more lycra over a large head shaped form until I had a similar look. The mask fastens in the back at the neck with snaps and hooks and covers the entire head. Over the top of the mask is a custom poured prosthetic cap of more dripping peanut butter and Carp bait corn.

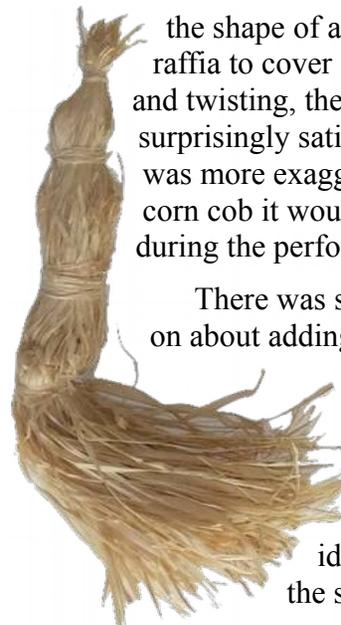


Prosthetic cap simulates peanut butter dripping from Shaw!s head.

Some accounts of Shaw!s costume and photographic evidence shows that he either had corn husks or a corn cob. Halloween being the closest commercial holiday, I tried finding corncobs at Michael's crafts store, but was told they were late arriving and not yet available. That put a serious crimp in our plans, so I had to improvise. I bought several squares of felt that I could roll into



Shaw! holding corn cob and roll of toilet paper.



the shape of a corn cob and some raffia to cover it. With a little tacking and twisting, the results were surprisingly satisfactory. Although it was more exaggerated than Shaw!'s corn cob it would read well on stage during the performance.

There was some discussion early on about adding a peanut butter smell to the costume for an increased sense of realism. We finally decided that it was a bad idea, considering that the smell alone can be

enough to set off those who are allergic to peanuts. Those allergies seem to be very much more prevalent now than in the 1970's, so while our "Turd" may look just as stinky as the original, it does not actually smell that way.



The return of "The Turd," 46 years after its original appearance, this time performed by Philip Gust.

The Presentation

One of the more challenging aspects of the entry was the presentation. Not that Shaw!'s stage business was difficult, but that there are so few records of it. We had heard rumors that there was a video, but we were unable to locate it after consulting several sources. The only written eye-witness account was from John Hertz, who had this recollection.

“He lurched on stage brandishing a plumber's helper (for non-U.S. readers, a wide rubber cup on a stick used to restore outflow in what I understand you call a water closet). Like most in the house I knew



Scott Shaw! back stage before his performance.

nothing of his comic strip, but from his appearance and manner we saw at once what he was. Laughter.

“He paused for our recognition. Then, in a voice like a sewer, dragging out the words, he roared, ‘I ... STINK!’

“That was so obviously true, and the perfect expression of this creature we really started laughing. Many of us took it for his curtain line. He let just enough more time go by, then burst out, finishing his thought, ‘... I AM!’

That brought the house down.”

None of the photos of the costume show Shaw! carrying a plumbers helper, although he mentions buying one in his interview. They all show him holding a roll of toilet paper and a corn cob. However, one photo (p. 10) does show someone menacing “The Turd” with a toilet plunger. We decided to incorporate this image into the presentation. It also allowed us to introduce a new character into the presentation: “The Plunger.” We also thought about all the people whose costume had been spoiled by Shaw!'s goeey mess and thought that they should also be depicted.

That is when we found out that a friend of ours, James Langdell, had actually been there back stage in 1972, competing in his “Captain Dada” costume, and had been dripped on. We asked James and his partner Danine Cozzens to appear in the presentation as “The Victims,” with a few

pieces of prosthetic peanut butter pinned to their costumes.

We understand that there was no sound track accompanying the presentation, just Shaw! speaking from the stage. The current practice is for masquerade entries to have a soundtrack, so we needed to come up with something. Also, speaking from stage is not practical with an audience of nearly 1000, whereas it would have been possible at the smaller masquerade at LA Con 1.

Phil and I had both been thinking about what soundtrack we could do when one day he said that he had an idea, and I said “Jaws!” “Exactly!” he replied. After being married over 45 years, we are used to that kind of thing happening.



The main theme from John William's "Jaws" was used as part of the soundtrack for the performance.

Phil used Audacity to mix an excerpt from the opening theme of “Jaws.” into a one-minute presentation. It begins with the Jaws opening crescendo followed by a toilet flushing. After that James and Danine enter and move center stage, looking warily to the wings while the Jaws track continues. They

hold up a piece of the prosthetic peanut butter and go “Eeewww!”

Just then, “The Turd” enters as the music builds again and the two back off upstage as “The Turd” stops center stage. He smells his arm pits and proudly roars “I STIIINK!” The creature looks confused by the audience reaction and steps forward, shaking his corn cob at them. At just the right time, he roars, “I AAAAM!”

Unknown to him, I stealthily enter as “The Plunger” and rush towards him with my plunger at the ready. Just as he says “I AAAAM!” I plunge him. He jumps in surprise, and I chase him off the stage, preceded by James and Danine, who are fleeing for their lives.

This costume, and the presentation was not so much an attempt at exact recreation as it was an homage, nearly a half century later, to Shaw!, his character, those who witnessed

the performance, and especially to the costumes that were damaged by Shaw!’s notorious costume that lead to the “no peanut butter” rule for future masquerades. And this time around, we did it by sticking to the rules.

Sources

Gory Stories Quarterly Issue No. 2 1/2

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Kathe Gust enjoys creating clothing for many historical periods, and for various sci-fi and fantasy genres. Visit her [website](#) to read articles and see photos for some of her costuming projects.



Kathe Gust as “The Plunger,” Philip Gust as “The Turd,” Danine Cozzens and James Langdell as “The Victims.” in the Worldcon 76 masquerade entry, “Sticking to the Rules.” Photo: [Olav Rokne](#).