

# 'LIFE' IN OUR GALAXY

C R Lockwood



Imagine aliens disputing when the 'right to life' starts!

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**CHAPTER 1: Planet Aruna**

**CHAPTER 2: Planet Bernissa**

**CHAPTER 3: Planet Cropusma**

**CHAPTER 4: Numbers**

**CHAPTER 5: Viability**

**CHAPTER 6: The Galactic Parliament**

**CHAPTER 7: A Universe-al Law?**

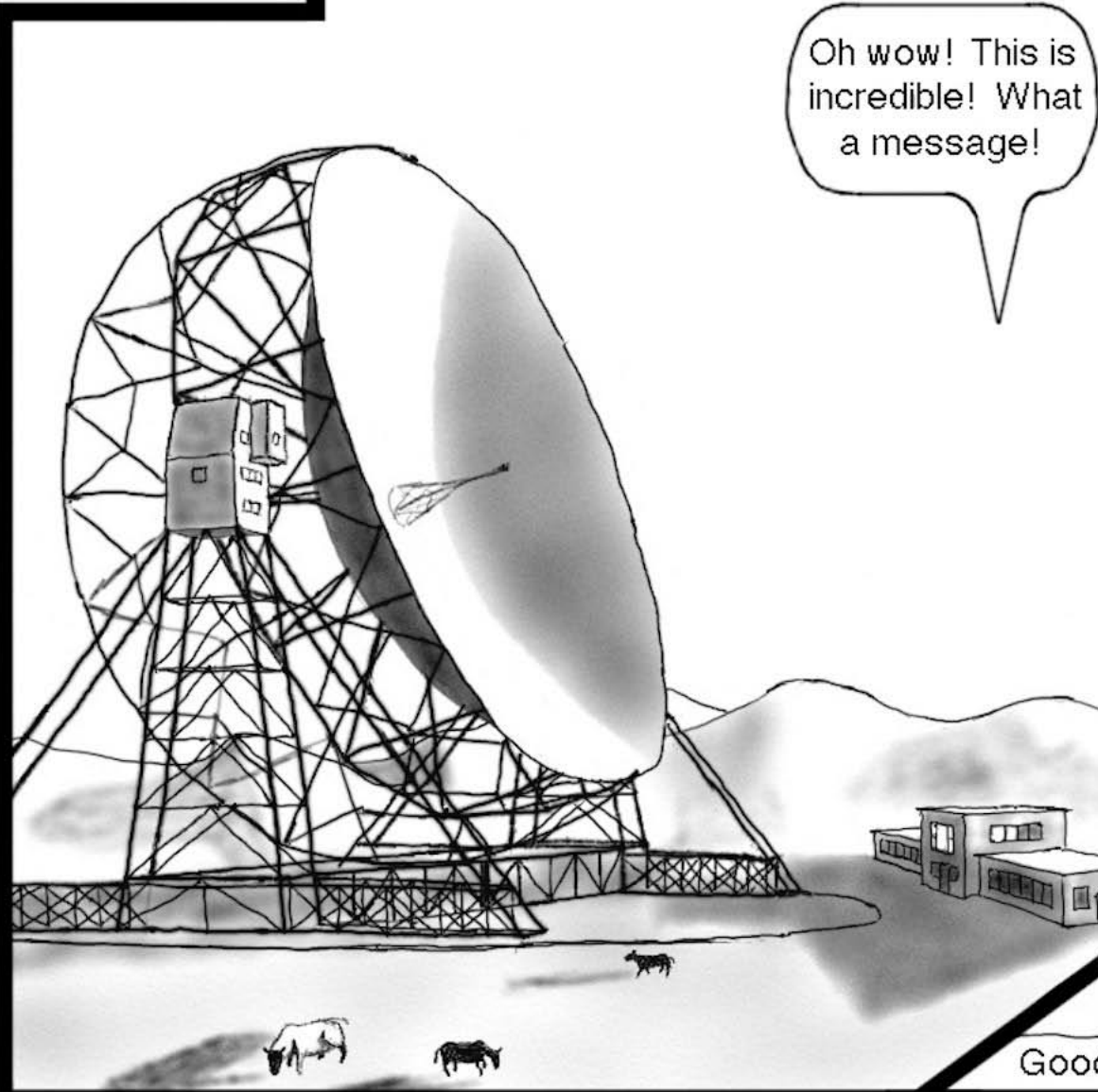
**CHAPTER 8: Having Control of Our Own Bodies**

**APPENDIX: Notes, References and Acknowledgements**

# LIFE IN OUR GALAXY

by C R Lockwood

## CHAPTER ONE



Oh wow! This is incredible! What a message!

Next day. The Vatican:

We must lose no time taking the Catholic message to these aliens.



**INTELLIGENT LIFE FOUND ON DISTANT PLANET**

Your holiness, Monseigneur McGarrity has been one of our most successful missionaries ...

... and he's already told me how willing he is to go there.

Good ... can he fly one of our spacecraft?

One interstellar journey later ...

Another earthling arrives!

That's already the sixth to come here ... was it sensible to make contact with them?

Oh yes!

The Pope has sent me here to spread the Catholic message...

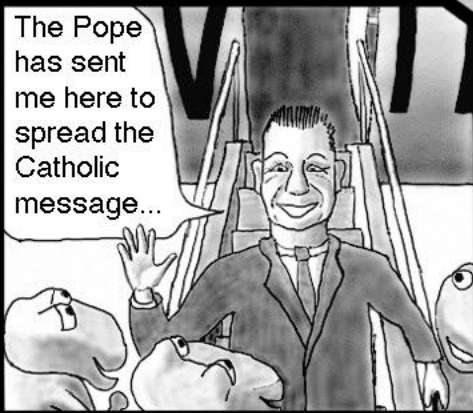
... I'm so looking forward to telling you about Christ, about redemption, and how He can alter your lives ...

... as well as the Catholic teachings on abortion, on ...



We made contact because we hoped they'd bring us lots of new and unusual ideas.

You want to welcome this one and hear his ideas don't you?





One thing at once! Can we start with "abortion"?

Certainly ... Our views are founded on the belief that life begins at conception.



From that moment, everyone is an individual, whose life is as precious as can be.

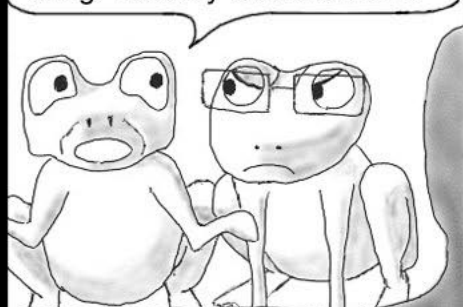
Hmm! Well you wanted to hear some odd ideas...

He's not that odd. Remember their biology is different - I don't think he means they apply to us...



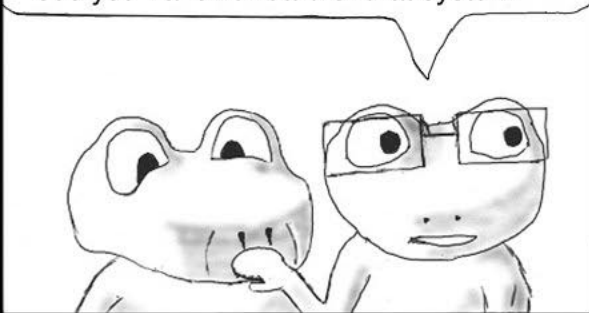
Excuse me! The Catholic teachings are universal truths - they apply to everyone. That's what the word "Catholic" means.

And the universal truth is: Life begins when you can talk. Kids who can't talk aren't worth anything. Nobody cares for them.



You are quite wrong!

You need to know that the way we have children is different. With us, the mother lays thousands of eggs at once, and the father fertilizes them straight after. I can see you haven't heard of that system.



Yes I have! It sounds just like the way frogs on Earth reproduce!



So you know all about it?

Ah, I remember when I was a little boy, I collected a load of frog spawn from a local pond, put it in an old fish tank at home, and let them grow.



At one point I'd hundreds of tadpoles swimming around in there!

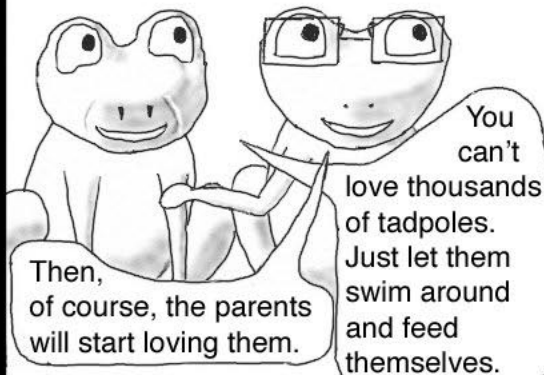


Nearly all of them died though.



It's the same for us...

One couple will produce thousands of tadpoles at once, but only a few survive long enough to start talking.



You can't love thousands of tadpoles. Just let them swim around and feed themselves.

Then, of course, the parents will start loving them.

You don't love them? But don't you at least admit that your tadpoles have rights?



No-one does.

Almost no-one.

"Almost" no-one?

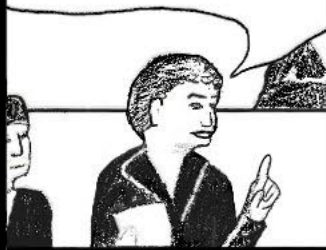


If that interests you, you should see Prof Uroaw when you get a chance. She's done a lot of research into "love of tadpoles".

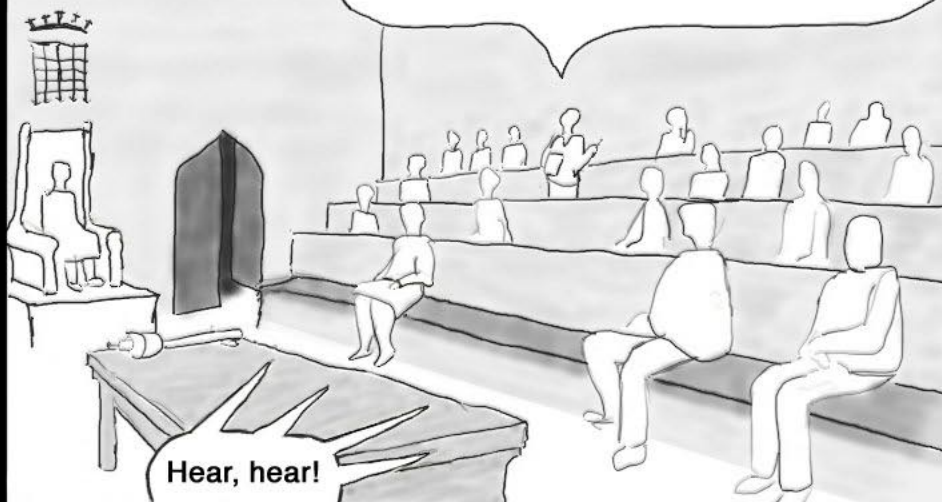
Meanwhile, on Earth ...



For many years, we have set a time limit for abortions, which is equal to the time when a fetus becomes capable of independent survival, outside the womb.



But, despite all the advances in medical technology in recent years, there has been no change in the time when independent survival becomes possible. I know, I have spent a great deal of time looking at the evidence on this. So there should be no change in the time limit for abortion!



Parliament has made no change to the abortion laws ...

We won that battle! What next?

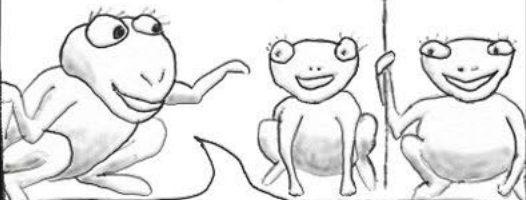


Think what that Catholic missionary is telling the aliens!

One interstellar journey later...



Feminists of the galaxy unite!



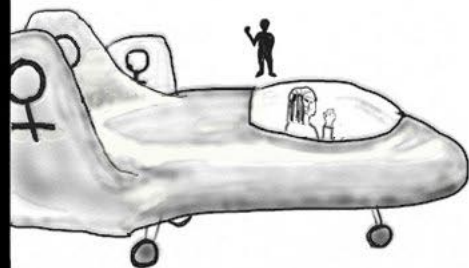
Sisters, this is gonna be the first time our planet is visited by a feminist from planet Earth! I'm so excited!

You're right Karla!  
We've gotta fight him to make sure we win the battle to control our own bodies!



I'll go out there!

Bye, Karla!



Hi Karla!

Hi Sisters!



We're so glad to see you here!  
That Catholic Monseigneur guy keeps getting on the TV!

Trying to spread his strange message about life beginning at conception!

What an awful time mothers would have if that were true!



I've got the answer!



There! That flyer was great at getting our message across on Earth! We'll print thousands of 'em!



But, Karla ... this flyer says life begins at birth, not at conception!



Of course!

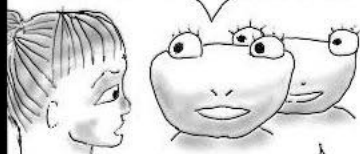
Hasn't anyone told you about our biology? We do fertilization externally.



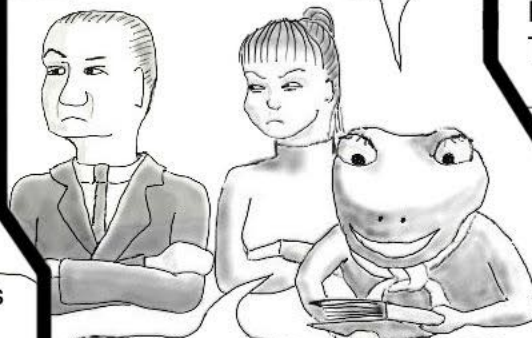
The way we reproduce, birth occurs *before* conception, not after.

What this flyer says is even more restrictive than the nonsense that Catholic guy was talking!

Oh dear Karla. I think you need to learn more about our biology before you start campaigning.



So... Hello, I'm Professor Uroaw.



Sorry I couldn't see you before, I was away at a conference.

So you guys actually love your tadpoles before they can talk? Before they can walk, even? That's normal where you come from?



Yes it is

We call them "babies"...

Someone at the University's offered to teach Earthlings about that sort of thing ... maybe you should join in.

This is so exciting! It'll make such a difference to my research programme!

I've made several studies of "Mothers who love their tadpoles", but it hasn't been easy. They are very, very rare on this planet.

... if their child is sick, they make every effort to nurse them back to health ...



Your society must lose a great deal because of that. Why, back on Earth, the love parents have for their little children is one of the noblest things there is. Yet it is quite normal.



... and a parent will even risk their own life rather than see their child perish!



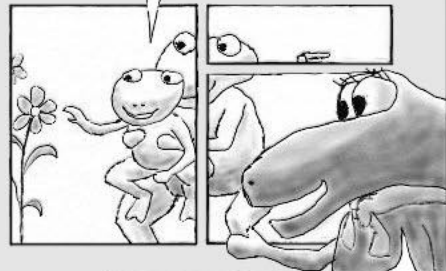
Yet you don't have any of that here?



Parents do all they can to help their children ...

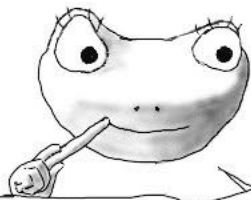


Issa flower!



Oh, we have it all - but only if the child can talk.

So mothers who love their tadpoles, err babies, are normal on your planet. Then I guess you don't lock them up in mental hospitals?



No...

What! Is that what happens here?

Yeah...

Oh my goodness. Back on Earth we used to have some governments who, when criticised, would label their critics "insane" so they could lock them up.



What exactly is this law that says mothers can't love their tadpoles?

And that's what you do to mothers who love their babies? Just because they're not normal? That's outrageous!



Yes! It's appalling! A woman should be free to choose how much love she shows her children!



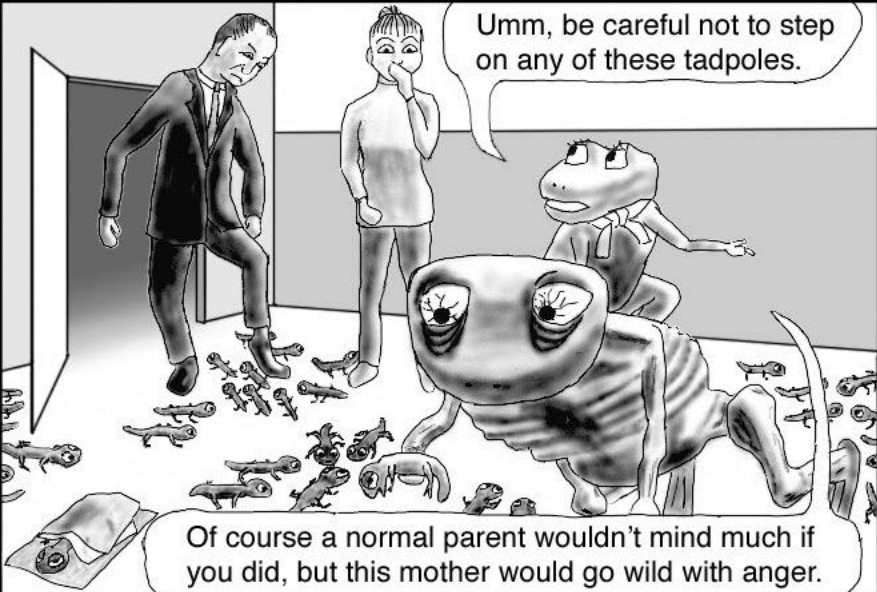
Err ... in that case, I'd better take you to meet one of these "mothers who love their tadpoles". I'm due to visit her this afternoon.

She's at home, not in hospital. A case well worth studying.



That afternoon ...

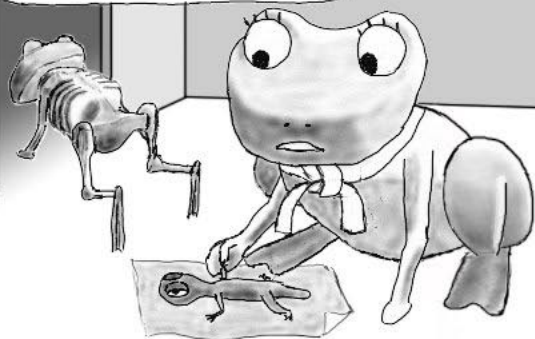
Social Services have had this case under observation for some time. The mother's litter of tadpoles are just old enough to have started walking ...



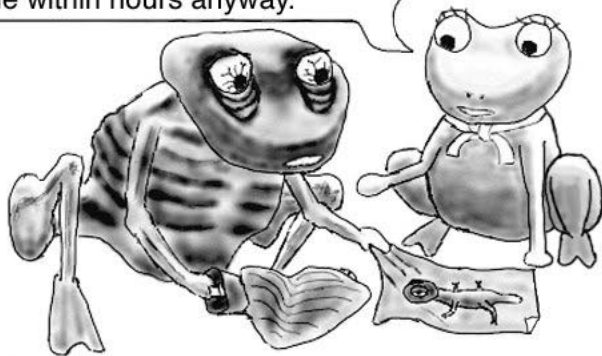
Umm, be careful not to step on any of these tadpoles.

Of course a normal parent wouldn't mind much if you did, but this mother would go wild with anger.

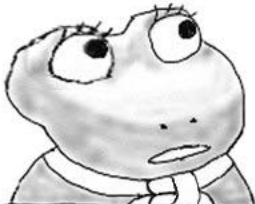
Hey, this one is very weak.  
If nothing is done, he'll be dead in a few hours.



And if we do everything we can for him, he'll probably die within hours anyway.








This is just an ordinary litter of tadpoles. Umpteen die every day. Normal parents wouldn't bother, but this mother tries to save every one.



This brings back bad memories...



So she never gets any rest! There are always some on the verge of death. The mother knows that if she gets a good night's sleep, by the time she wakes, some of these will have died. And she loves every one. She won't let herself go to sleep if there's any chance she can save one!



We believe this mother has had no sleep at all for 43 days!

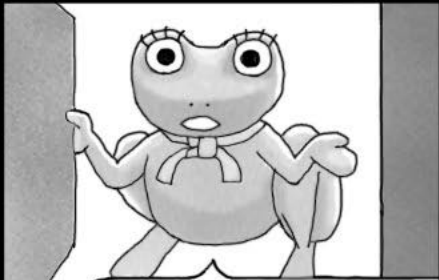
Of course she's starting to suffer hallucinations.

Are you okay now?

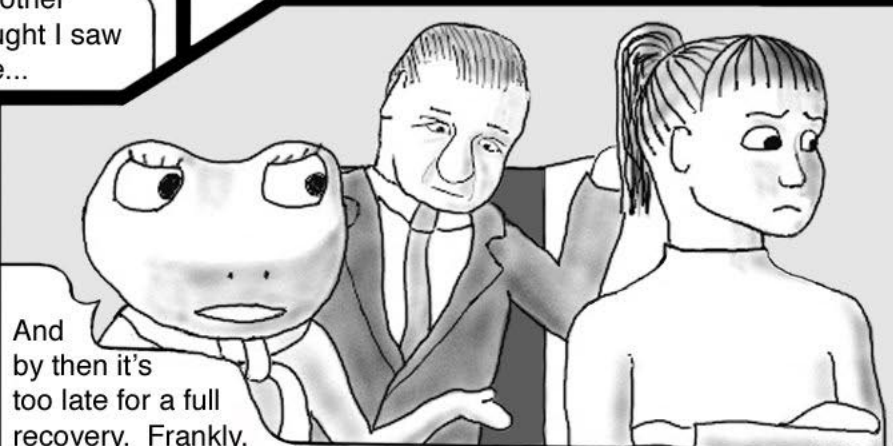


Oh, I had another hallucination yesterday. I thought I saw a giant snake coming to eat me...

I expect that, in a few days time, her hallucinations will become so bad she'll meet the legal definition of "insane". Then, we can at last put her in hospital and give treatment.



You see, there *is* no law that stops mothers loving their tadpoles. We have to wait until they're so insane that they come under the ordinary insanity laws.

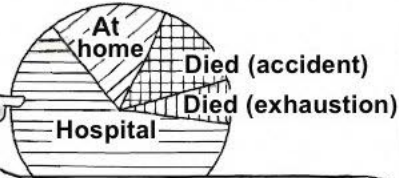


And by then it's too late for a full recovery. Frankly, I think we should be allowed to intervene earlier. But whenever I try to get the law changed, someone starts campaigning about "the freedom of mothers", and the government ends up doing nothing ...

Back at the university...

Here's some results from my studies of "mothers who love their tadpoles".

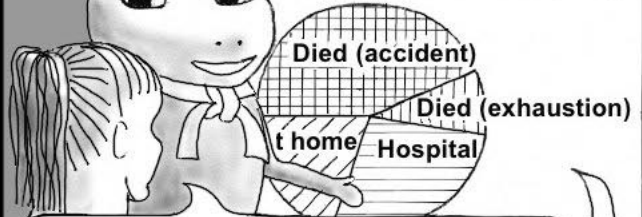
### Outcome for mothers



Here's the state of the mother when her tadpoles started talking. Only one mother in five was still at home. Most were in hospital (mainly because of hallucinations), and a few had died of exhaustion or accidents.

Aha, I like to test my students using this chart! The previous chart was for towns, this one's for rural areas. Notice the difference?

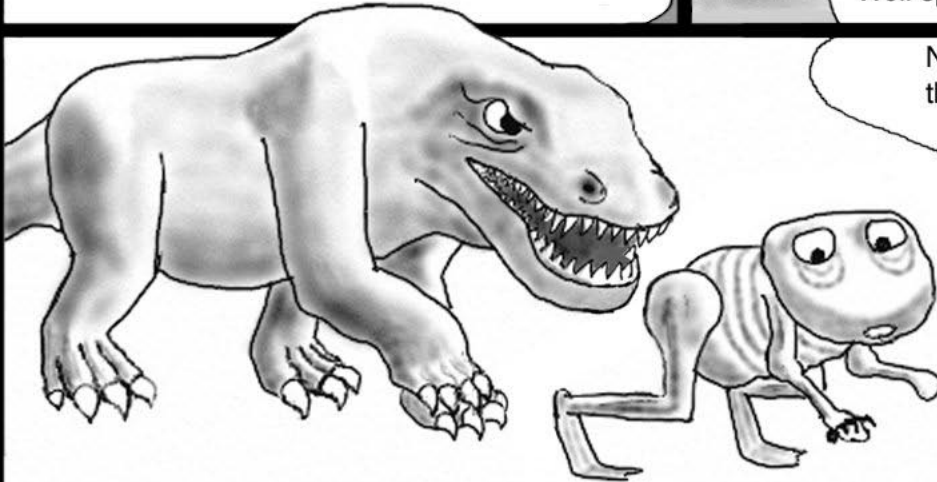
### Outcome for mothers (rural)



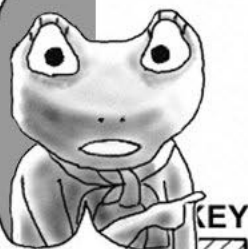
Hey, there's a lot more fatal accidents!

Well spotted! Can you think why?

No? Well, wild animals roam the rural, undeveloped parts of this planet. When one's about to eat a tadpole, a normal mother ignores it - but a mother who loves it will risk her life to save it! As her litter contains thousands of tadpoles, she has to risk her life every day...



As the mothers were too exhausted (or dead) to take care of their children, the children do badly in later life ... can't get jobs ... look at all the teenage spawnings!



### Long-term outcome for tadpo



Unemployment



Teenage spawnings

KEY

Children of mothers who love

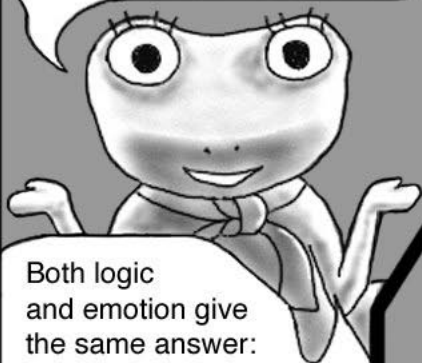
Children of normal mothers

So are you saying all this is a logical reason to *not* love your little tadpoles?



Oh yes. But it's not just logic. Our emotions work like that, too...

... when we see our tadpoles talk, we have this instinctive feeling of love. Not before.



Both logic and emotion give the same answer: Don't love your tadpoles until they talk.

Alright, parents can't do it all, but why doesn't society help save some of these little lives? They're past the stage of conception, and have the potential to grow into intelligent, social people. So your government should give these tadpoles the right to life, and save as many as possible.




What! Give tadpoles a legal "right to life"!?

Most tadpoles die without their parents even noticing! Are you serious?





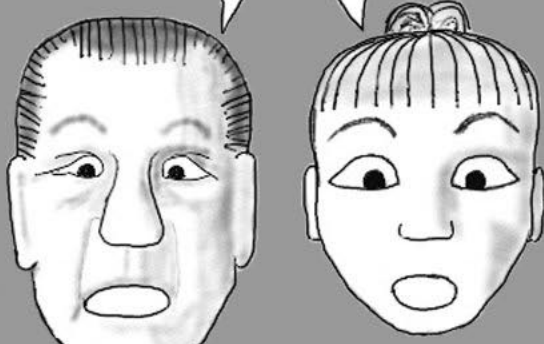
Yes, I am serious.




But why is talking the critical stage?

Then I'll give you a serious answer: At any one time, the number of tadpoles on this planet far exceeds the number of adults. Even if the rest of society helped the parents, the number of tadpoles needing care would far exceed the help available.


A controversial question! I think it's because few tadpoles reach that stage, so it's practical to love them as individuals. But not everyone here would agree ... and on Planet Bernissa they don't even agree that talking's the critical stage.



On Planet Bernissa? YOU MEAN THERE'S ANOTHER INHABITED PLANET?!



This is news of the greatest importance. The Catholic Church must extend its mission there immediately!



Er, yes ... what, hasn't anyone told you that!!?

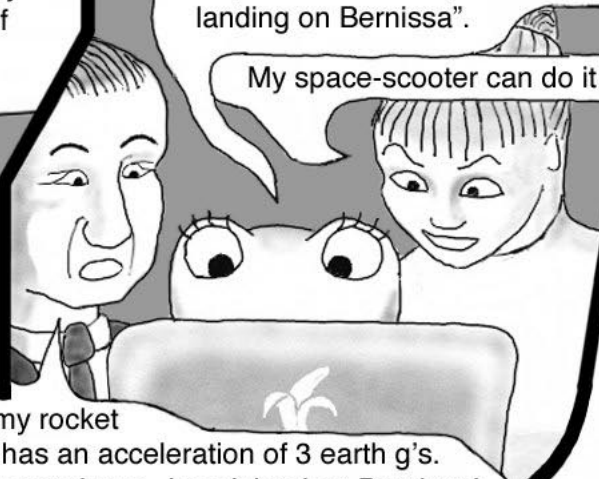
I'll contact missionary control to arrange a flight-plan.

Well, be careful, it's not easy to go there. I've got a list of requirements on this computer somewhere ...



Ah, here we are: "Spacecraft requirements for landing on Bernissa".

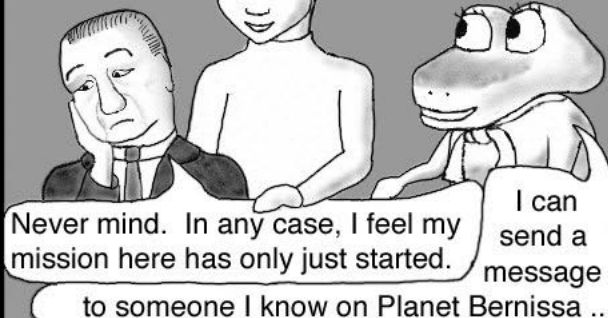
My space-scooter can do it!



But my rocket only has an acceleration of 3 earth g's. Heavens above. I can't land on Bernissa!

I'll have to say goodbye then. Sorry I can't offer you a lift!

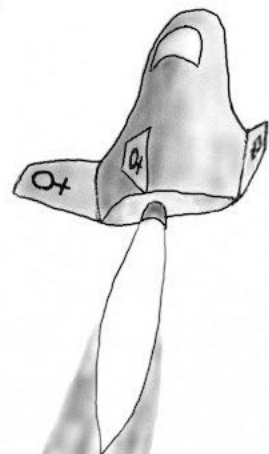
Thank goodness it's a one-seater!



Never mind. In any case, I feel my mission here has only just started.

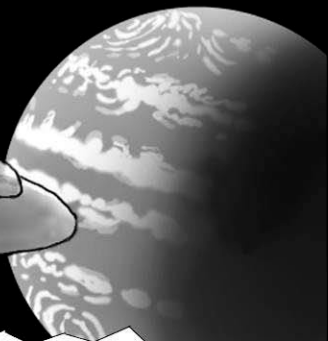
I can send a message

to someone I know on Planet Bernissa ...



END OF CHAPTER ONE.

Calling Spaceport 1 Bernissa, permission to land please.



Please upload your spacecraft data

Okay ... hey, you're from Earth - we've not had a visitor from Earth before! Shall I tell the newspapers?

I'm a campaigner! Of course I want publicity! I put so much energy into getting headlines...



Upload successful  
Permission given  
Flight data:  
g = 23.7 m/s/s



Upload successful  
Permission given  
Flight data:  
g = 23.7 m/s/s

even more restrictive than ...

**NO** thank you!

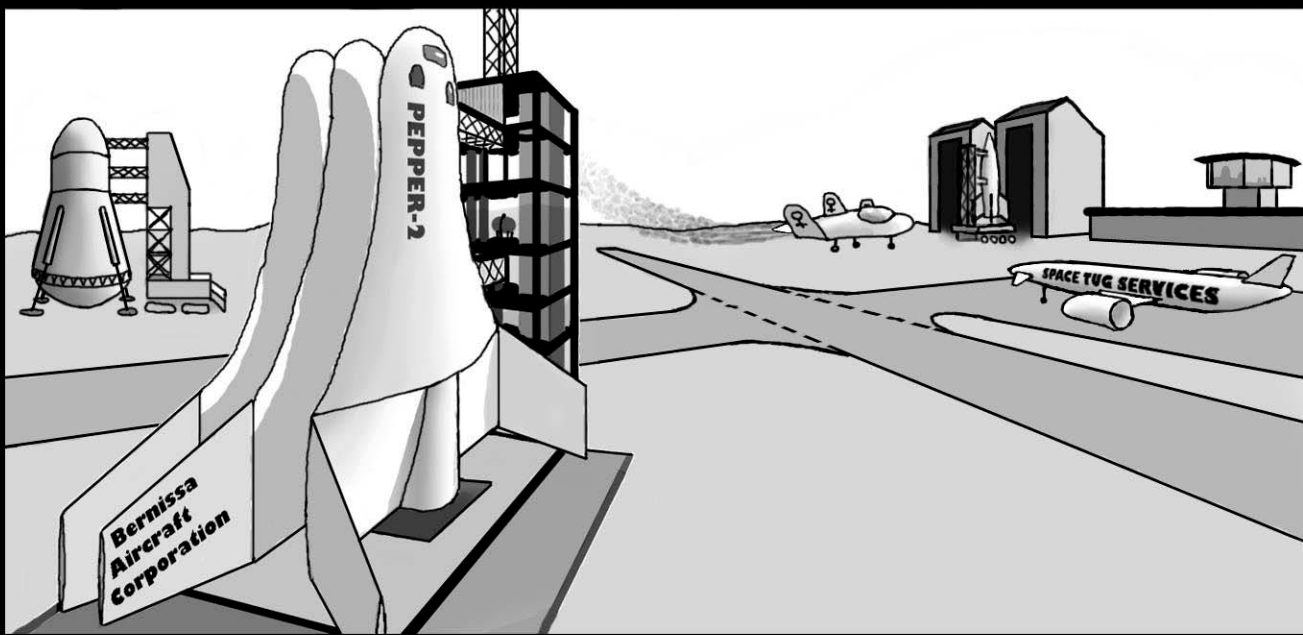


I came here to campaign, yet I'm avoiding publicity. The girls back home will be horrified! But if I campaign without knowing how Bernissians have children, I'll never convince them...

Commit to re-entry?

So is there any reason for me to be out here? When so much needs protesting against on Earth?

Yes, there is a reason ... I'll return to Earth with a new message to add to the abortion debate, one that'll make every-one sit up ... and I'll get **sooooo** much publicity if I'm first to return from Bernissa!

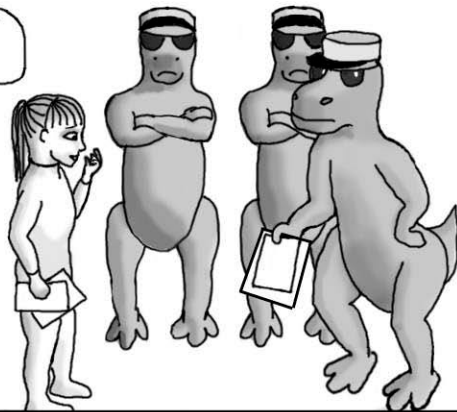




Urghh! The gravity on this planet.



My visa?  
Err...



It's alright officer, I'll sign

for her to have a visa.

Do you know who she is?

Yes, my friend Prof  
Uroaw told me.

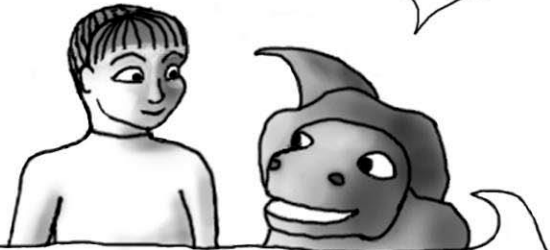
And that you're responsible  
for any trouble she causes?

Yes, yes ... she  
won't ... will you?



Er, no. Damn!

Sorry you had a welcome like that. Our immigration laws are a mess ... people worry about trouble-makers from other planets.



Today, for instance, some fanatics from Planet Aruna arrived at the spaceport hotel. They'd fiddled the system, got a visa...

And there's some locals who've come to meet them...

HOTEL



Ha! A protest!

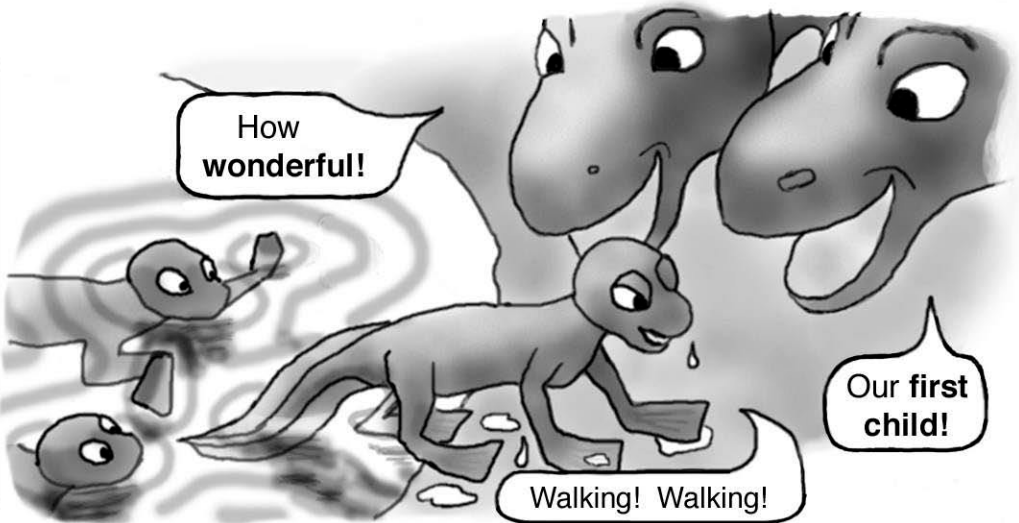
You've been told how they have children on Aruna?

Yeah. Each couple produces thousands of tadpoles, which they don't love or regard as persons, until they can talk.



Well, it's similar here, but with two differences. One is that, with us, fertilisation is internal, then the mother lays thousands of fertilised eggs soon after.


The other difference is that on Aruna, their tadpoles *walk* before they can *talk*, whereas ours *talk* before they can *walk*. We don't regard a tadpole as a person until it can walk. When we parents see them walking, we instinctively feel love for them.




How wonderful!

Walking! Walking!

Our first child!



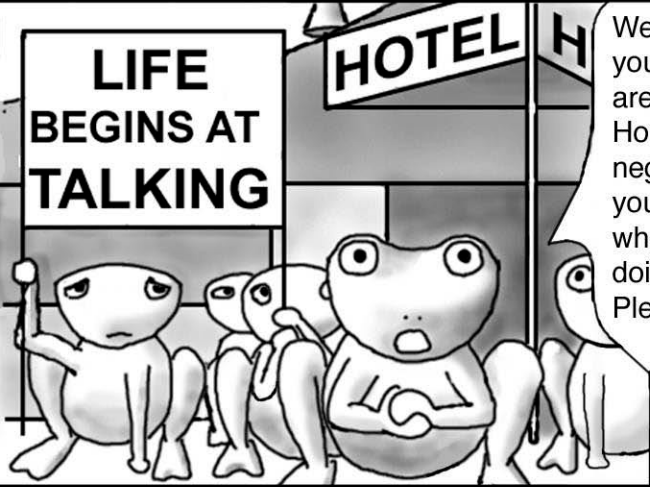
Ah! Those Arunians!  
Let's stay and watch.



You'll find it quite tiring to sit up in this gravity after a while. Try lying down.



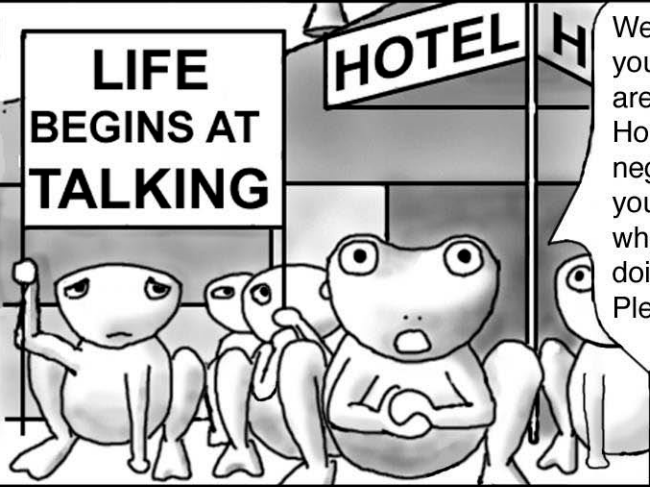
**LIFE BEGINS AT TALKING**



We came to tell you talking babies are so precious. How can you neglect them, as you do? **THINK** what you're doing. Please!



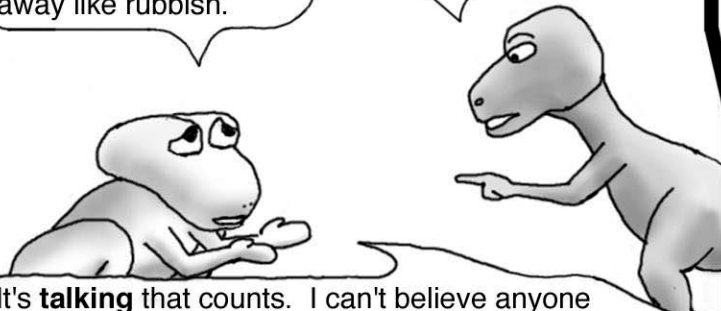
**LIFE BEGINS AT WALKING**



Parents have a right to control their own lives - they mustn't be slaves to their talking tadpoles. Can't you see that?

Talking babies are irreplaceable lives! Not something to be thrown away like rubbish.

But that's exactly what you do to **walking** babies ... we all know walkers must be cherished!



It's **talking** that counts. I can't believe anyone supports the callous treatment talkers get on this planet!

You really think parents can abandon a **walking** baby? They can choose to *Kill a Life*? **That's** what shouldn't be allowed!



That's a vicious attack on parents' rights!

Walking's what really matters. Your arguments

suck!

Wow, who'd have thought you could get more pathetic.



I like seeing my enemies make fools of themselves. Thanks so much!

It's talking that matters! That's the truth! **Period!**  
**END OF STORY!**

You can't prove that!

Yes I can, **dumbass!**

**HOW?**

**LIKE THIS!**





WHACK!

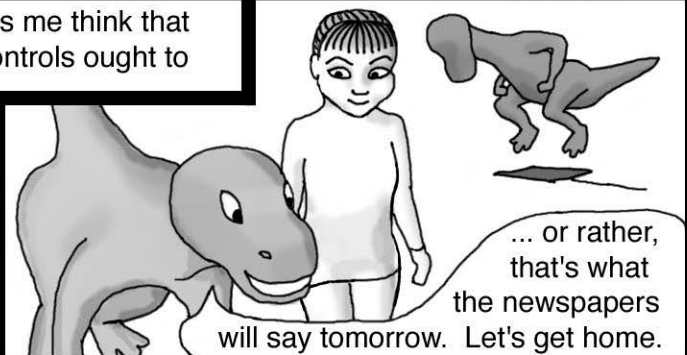
BAM!

SPLODGE!

LIFE  
INS AT  
KING



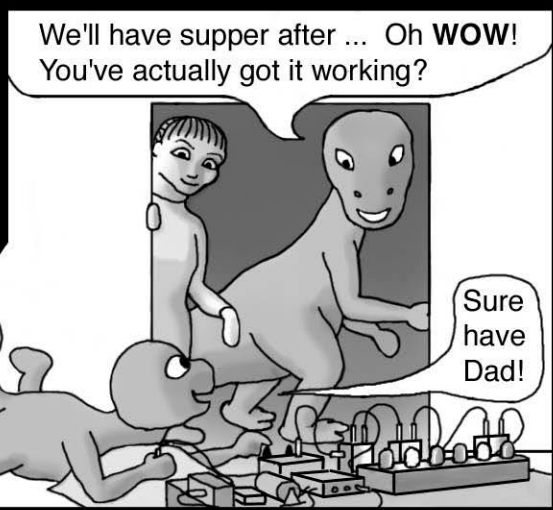
Okay, I've seen enough. Watching this makes me think that maybe immigration controls ought to be strengthened after all ...



... or rather, that's what the newspapers will say tomorrow. Let's get home.

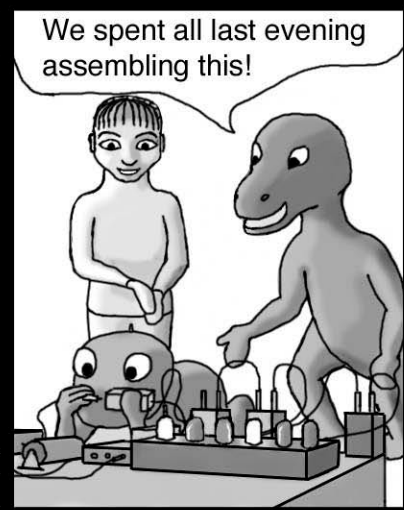


Come on in...

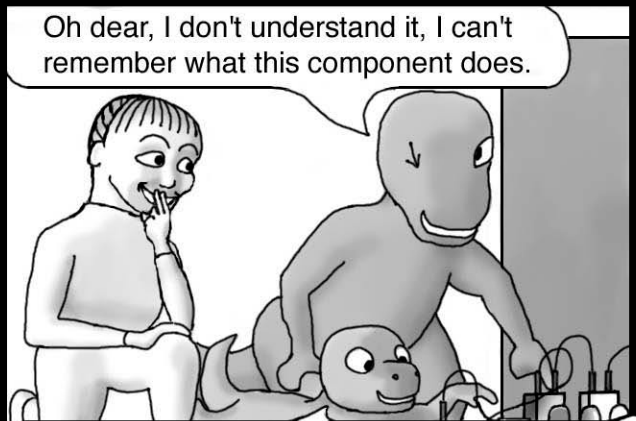


We'll have supper after ... Oh **WOW!**  
You've actually got it working?

Sure  
have  
Dad!



We spent all last evening  
assembling this!



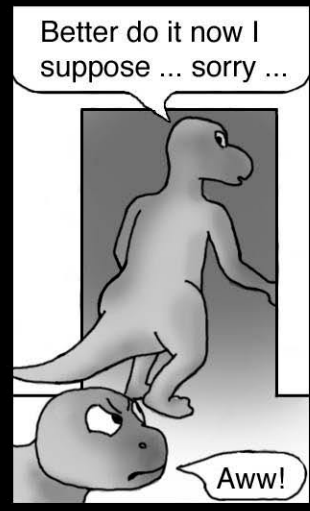
Oh dear, I don't understand it, I can't  
remember what this component does.

Oh Dad! I know! Listen! When the voltage here goes  
up, it cuts off the electricity here, and you see this wire ...



Have you given our  
tadpoles their vitamins?

Er, no ...



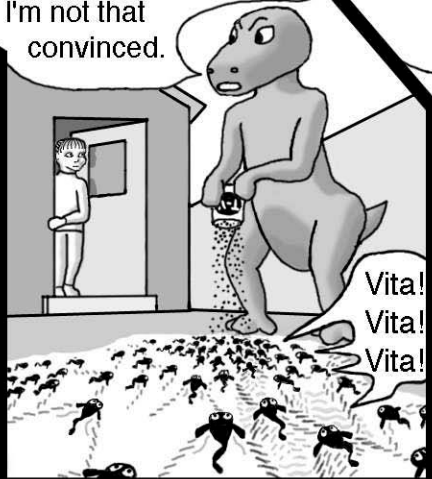
Better do it now I  
suppose ... sorry ...

Aww!

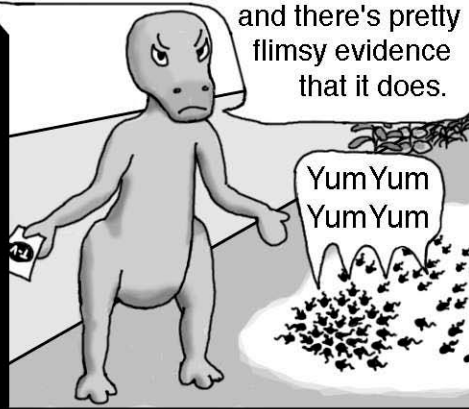
My wife and I produced a litter of tadpoles recently. We're giving this to them ... my wife thought we should try it.



It's supposed to lead to healthier children ... though I'm not that convinced.

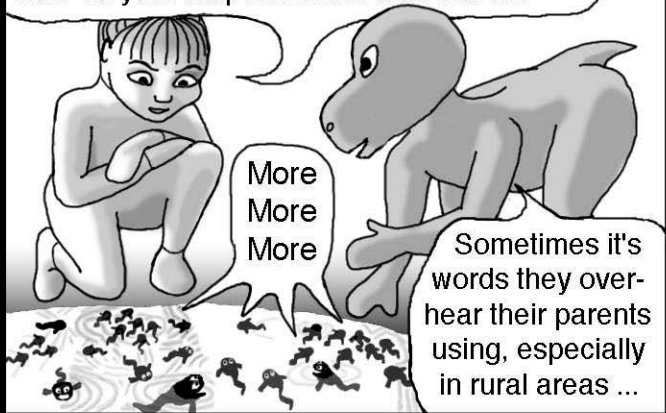


Certainly it makes the tadpoles healthier. But that's not what we want. We want healthier **children**, and if it doesn't produce that it's a waste of time ...



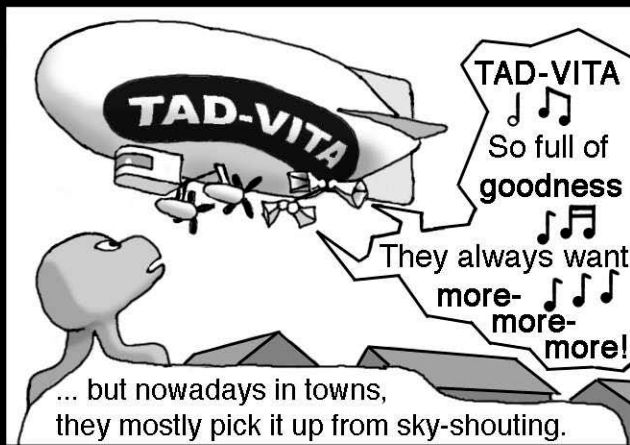
and there's pretty flimsy evidence that it does.

How do your tadpoles learn their words?



More More More

Sometimes it's words they overhear their parents using, especially in rural areas ...



TAD-VITA

So full of goodness

They always want more-more-more!

... but nowadays in towns, they mostly pick it up from sky-shouting.

Stupid nuisance.

That's appalling! They get your tadpoles to pester you to buy stuff?



Vita! Vita! Vita!

Mmm? No, the sky-shouting is aimed at adults. I thought the people on Planet Aruna told you about reproduction by tadpoles?

Well it's pretty similar here. Dozens of my tadpoles die every day. That's normal and I don't fret about it. And if I don't care about them dying, I'm not going to worry about what they're saying, am I?

Well ...

Yeah, they did!

More!  
More!  
More!

The tadpoles can say anything and we parents just don't give a damn. Their "pester power" is zero.

**SLAM!**

It's not the same as ...

**DAD!** Look at this kit I've just seen shown on the computer! Will you buy one?

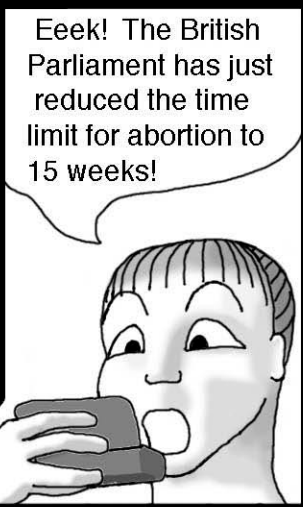
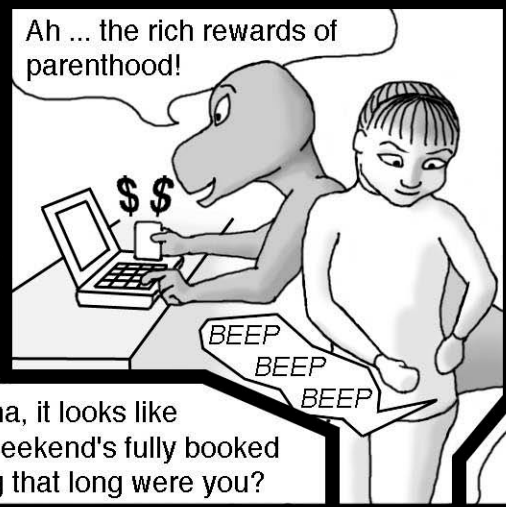
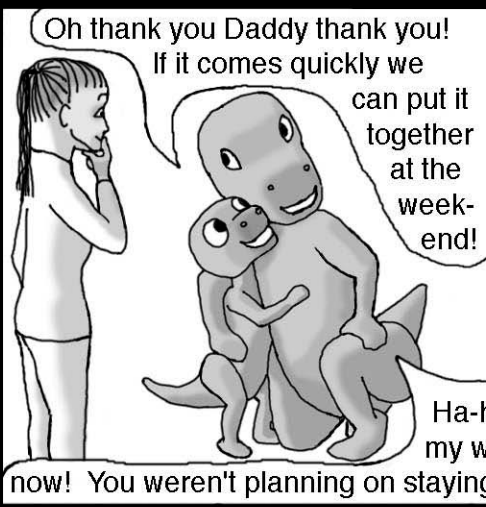
It's got a trippelister in it!

Um, well ...

**Pleeeeeease!**

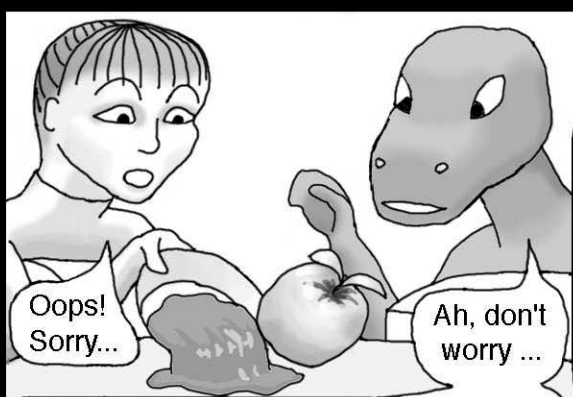
Oh wow! You've really wanted one of those for ages, haven't you? We'd better get it!





Ha-ha, it looks like  
my weekend's fully booked  
now! You weren't planning on staying that long were you?





Visitors from other planets often do that, till they adapt to the gravity.

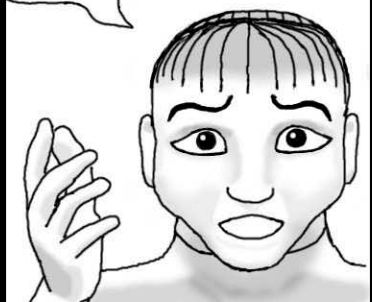
OMIGOSH!  
I'VE JUST  
REALISED!

*That's why your tadpoles can't walk! The gravity here is so strong, your tadpoles would never have the strength to walk, not until they reach an advanced stage of growth! By the time they're strong enough to walk, there are only one or two still alive, all the other tadpoles have died!*



But **that's** why you instinctively feel love for them, as soon as you see them walking! It's **the right time to start loving them!**

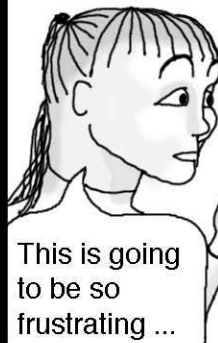
If the gravity here was as weak as it is on Planet Aruna, your tadpoles would start walking when they were much younger, when there were still hundreds alive in the litter! It'd be impossible for you to love them as individuals then! **It's only because the gravity here is so strong that you end up believing ... that you believe walking is what marks the start of a new life!**



I think what you say is true. But most people on this planet don't. Most people here believe there is a Fundamental Moral Principle that says "Walking marks the start of a new life", and they won't listen to any suggestion that it could ever have been different. It's one reason we get on so badly with Planet Aruna!



So *keep your voice down* if you say that! If anyone overheard you, there'll soon be fanatics on my doorstep, shouting "Walking is the start of life"!

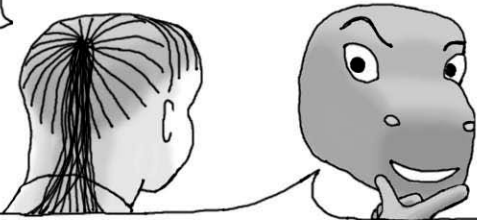


This is going to be so frustrating ...



I know Karla, I'm sorry. You're the sort that wants to shout out your beliefs! But not here I'm afraid.

Not much point in me staying then ... still, I'm glad I've learnt all about how aliens have children! Thanks for all your help!

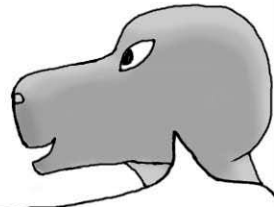


All about it? No, Karla, you won't understand it all unless you ... umm, let's see ... I think you should visit Planet Cropusma!

But there's things I ought to be doing back on Earth ... do I really need to see more swarms of tadpoles?



You won't see that on Cropusma! They only have to cope with one conception at a time ... that's what you humans do, isn't it? Mind you, they have external fertilization, that's a difference...



It certainly is, and boy, us Earth-women know just how big a difference it makes!

True. Okay, I'll go to Cropusma!

But you won't really know what the difference is till you see it!

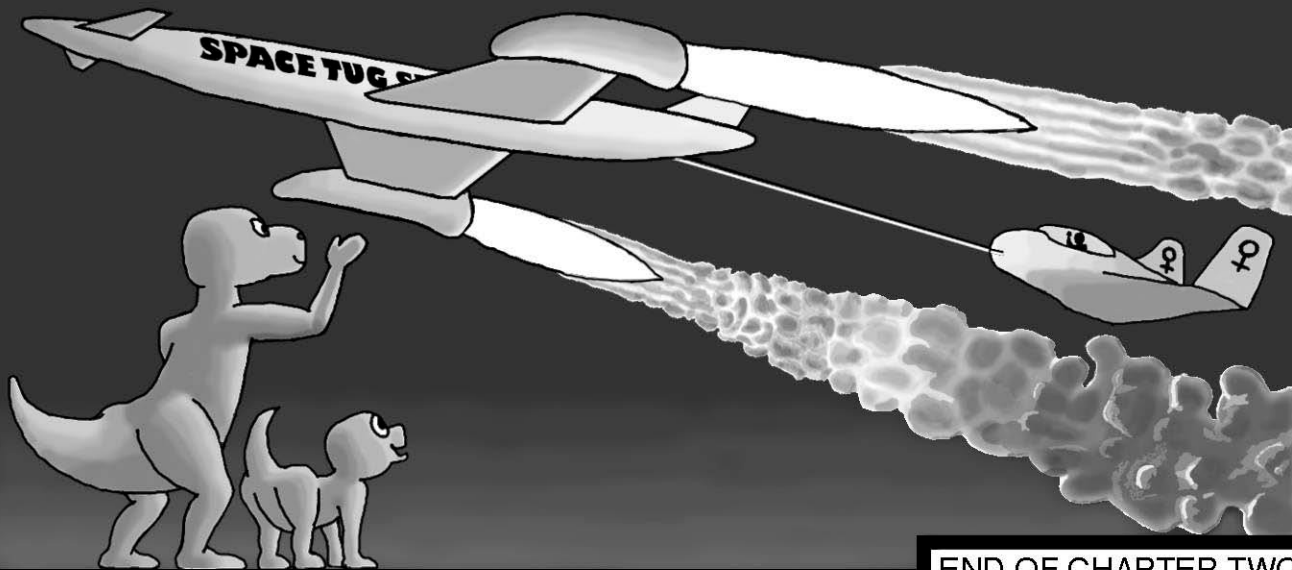
But I hope you'll stay a few days first! Then, we'll take you to the spaceport ...

... Junior loves to watch the rocket tugs!

\$\$

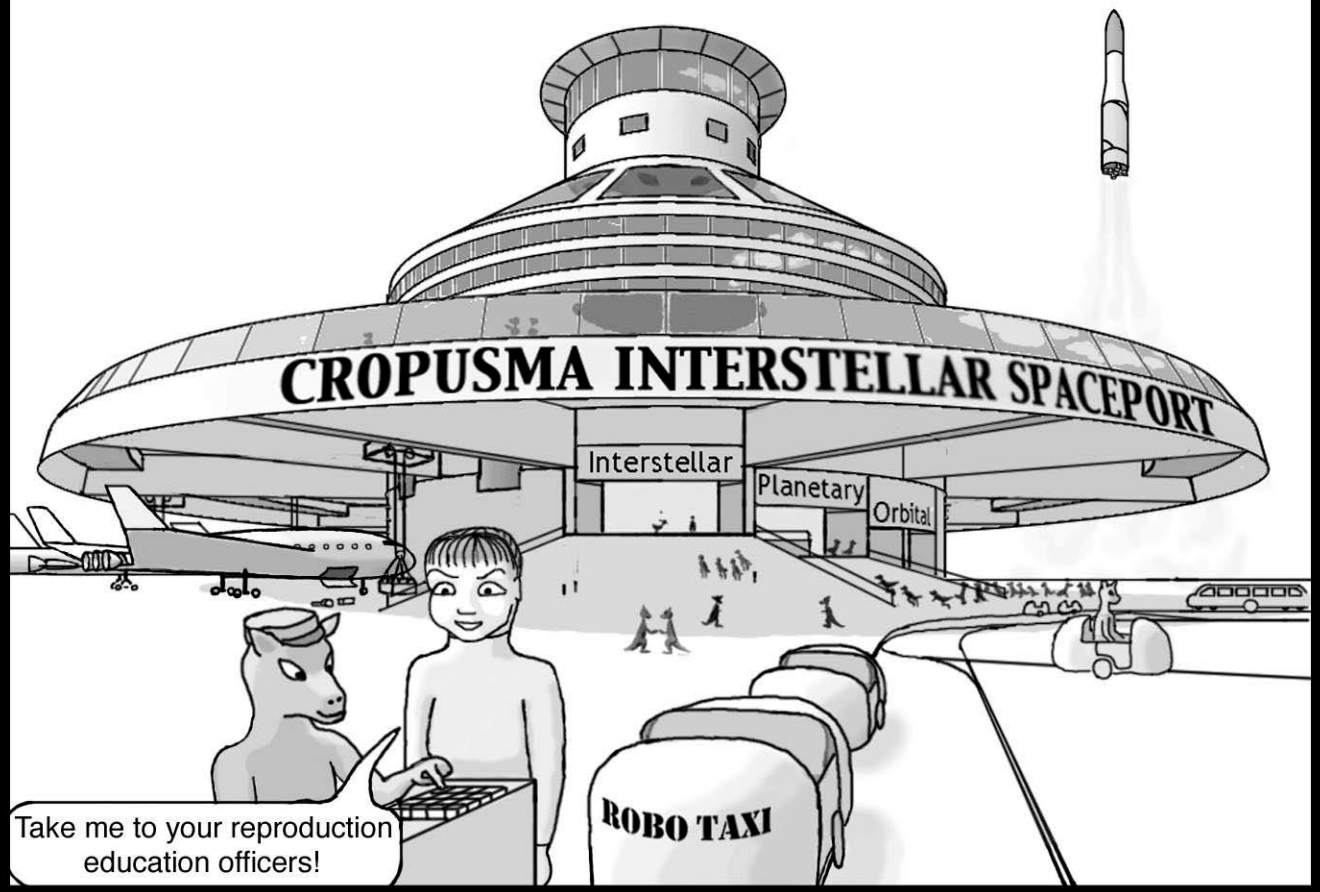
**TUG  
FEE**

They're damned expensive! And my space-scooter needs help to get into orbit here! Curse this gravity!



END OF CHAPTER TWO.





**CROPUSMA INTERSTELLAR SPACEPORT**

Interstellar

Planetary

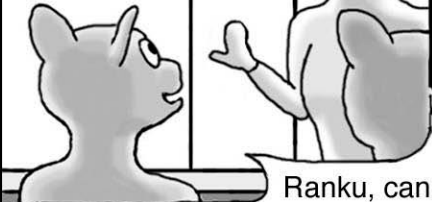
Orbital

**ROBO TAXI**

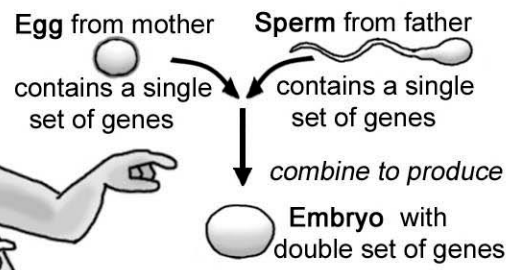
Take me to your reproduction education officers!

How can we help? I need to know how you guys have children ... start from the basics!

REPRODUCTION  
EDUCATION  
CENTRE



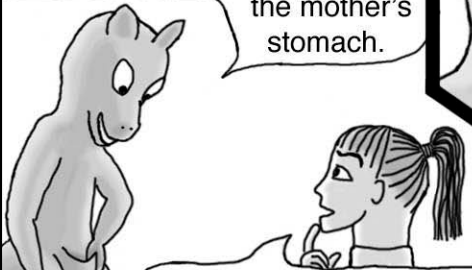
Okay Karla, we start with this!



That's just the same as it is for us humans!  
But ... I've heard there is a difference ... your egg is outside the mother's body when it's fertilised?

Ranku, can you give this client the beginner's course?

Yep! Then the embryo on its own develops into a little baby, after which it lives in a pouch on the mother's stomach.



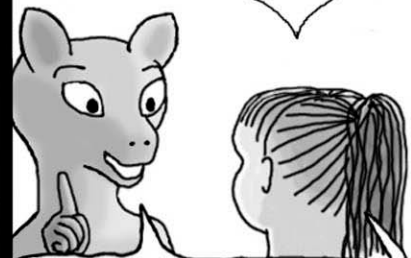
But, then, the egg must contain all the nutrition it needs to grow into a baby ... your eggs must be really big!

Yes they are.



Typical!  
The woman contributes a huge egg to the embryo, and all the man contributes is one teeny little sperm.

No, a sperm is almost as big as an egg.

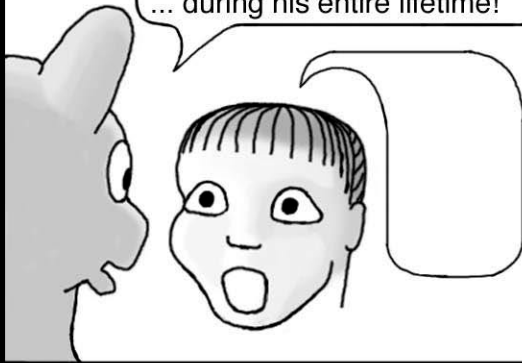


No, a man of our species only produces five or six sperms...

But how..?  
... oh ... I guess your men don't produce lots of sperms.

Wow!

... during his entire lifetime!



Eggs are just as rare -

Wow! You can't afford to waste any then ... how do you make sure they're not wasted?



The parents take a lot of care to make sure the egg and sperm meet. Watch this!

A sperm can usually find the egg without help ... but not always ... so the parents help.

That's the way! Attaboy!



Coochy coo!

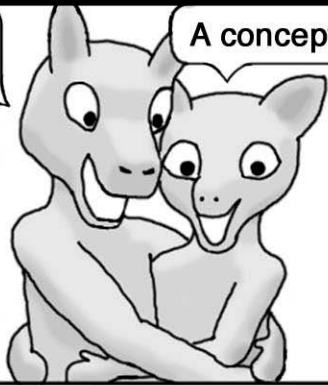
Go on! Swim swim swim!

You're all ready, aren't you!



YES! We've done it!

A conception!



Wait, don't tell me, I can figure out what emotions you must feel, if you're to be really successful at having children ...



... oh, wow

... your fathers must *want to care for each sperm* ... and mothers for each egg!

Of course they do! Who wouldn't love such precious little lives?



I can think of several species who wouldn't ...

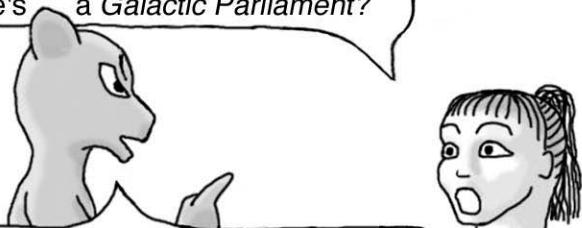


Yeah, there's a lot of corrupt species who won't admit

that sperm and eggs must be protected ... they said dreadful things when the issue was debated in the Galactic Parliament!

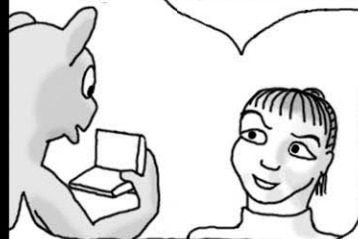


There's a Galactic Parliament?



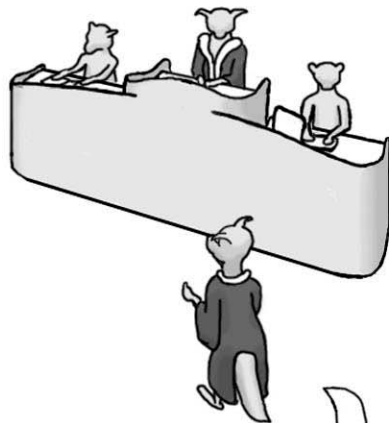
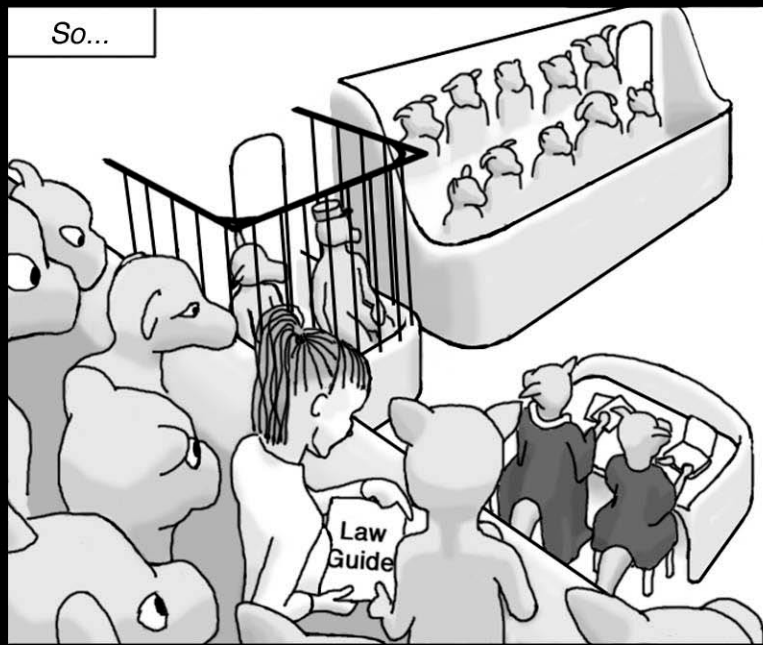
Yes, and a lot of delegates wanted to ban us from jailing sperm-killers. Appalling! We fought it, of course, and nothing was decided, thank goodness...

You prosecute people for killing a sperm? That I must see ...



Well, there is a trial starting in a few days. Perhaps I can take you along ... yes, I'm free then.

So...

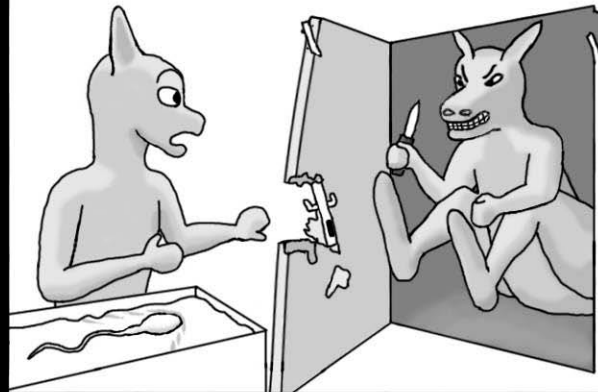


I will now make the opening statement for the prosecution.

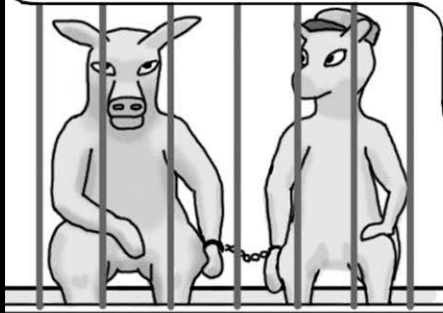
This dreadful crime took place in the home of Karlturrrpa and Katiku. They were hoping to conceive their first baby. They had just produced an egg and a sperm...

... the sperm had had several hours rest, looked well, and Katiku thought it was in perfect condition to be introduced to the egg.

But at that moment the defendant, Mulyakana ~ an ex-boyfriend of Karlturrrpa ~ burst into the house wielding a knife, then attacked the sperm. Katiku fought most bravely to defend his sperm, which, however, was stabbed - fatally.



We say the jealousy of an ex-lover was the motivation for this awful crime!

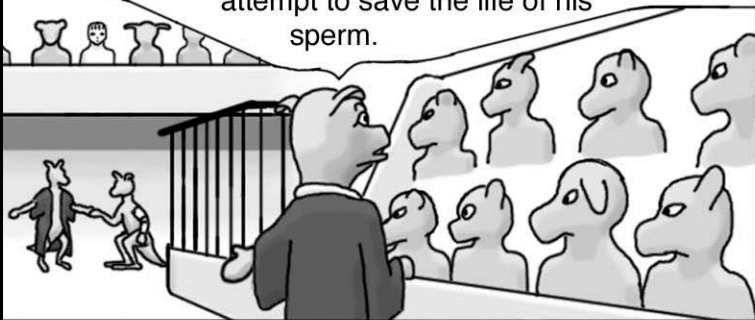


the motivation for this awful crime!

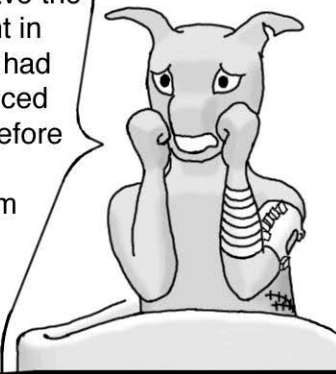
Naturally, with no sperm to fertilise it, the egg died a few days later. It was a victim of this terrible attack, quite as much as the sperm and the parents were.



Now we hear Victim Impact Statements. First, from the father Katiku, who, you will notice, has still not recovered from the wounds he received during his courageous attempt to save the life of his sperm.



I'm so worried about whether I'll have the children I want in the future ... I had already produced two sperms before this one, but neither of them resulted in a conception, because ... umm ... err ...



The court does not require you to describe the personal details relating to your earlier sperms.



Thank you ... well, my doctor's told me I should be able to produce two or three more sperms during the rest of my life, so *if I'm lucky* I may have all the children I want ... but I'm really worried! If anything more goes wrong, then I'll *never* be able to have the large family I've always hoped for!



Now Karlturrrpa, the mother - not physically wounded, but her emotional scars are just as deep!



We so wanted this baby! How I long to cuddle her! Her room was ready, we'd put decorations up in it just a few days before the killing. They're still there, we've disturbed nothing. And I keep on, in my mind, watching my precious egg wither and die, all those months ago...



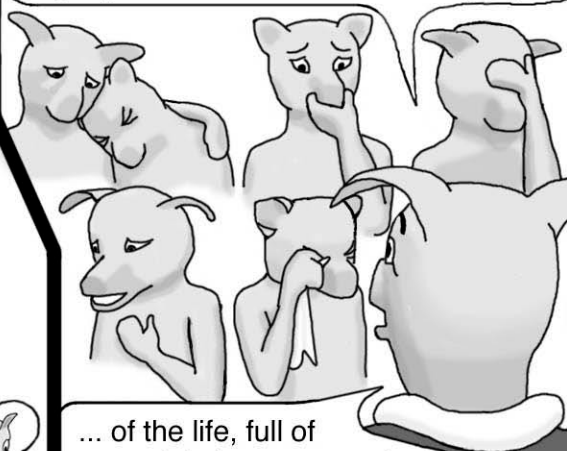
The sperm's body was examined by pathologists. I shall quote from their report: "Genetic analysis did not find any evidence of future ill health in this sperm ..."

"... we also found several genes which give musical ability, so this sperm would have produced a person of exceptional musical potential, almost irrespective of which egg it was mated with."

Court  
Officials  
← Only

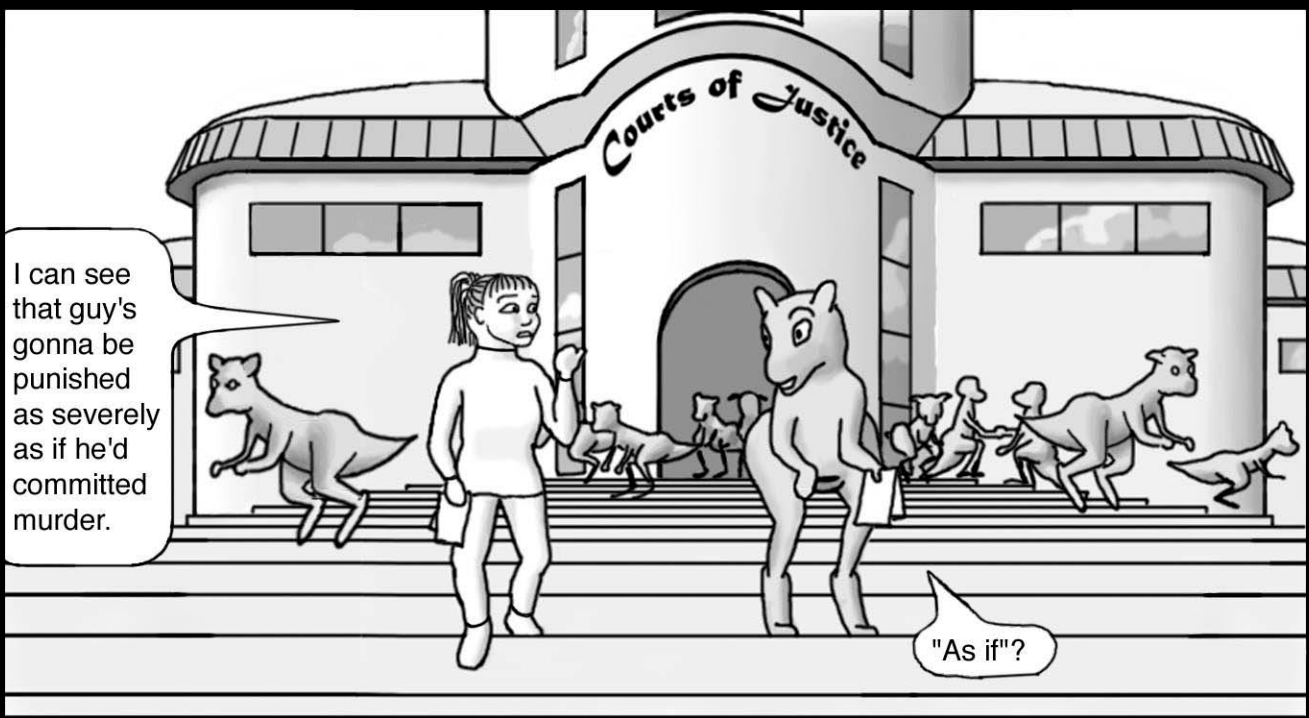


Members of the jury, you can now begin to glimpse the full extent of this tragedy ...



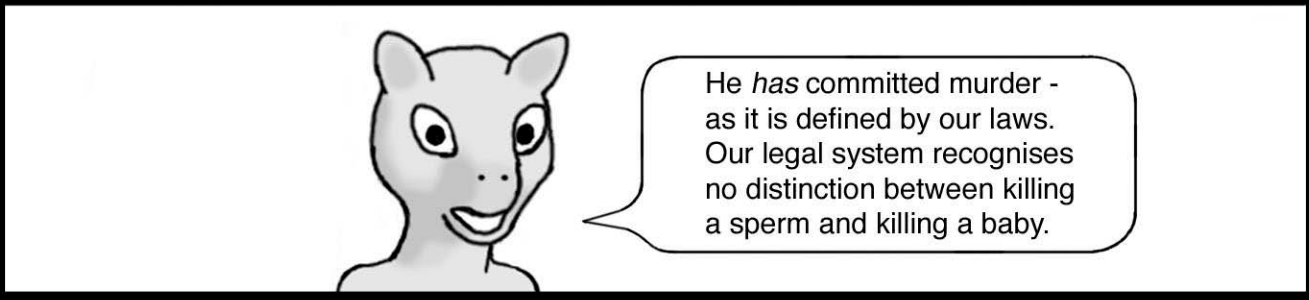
... of the life, full of potential, that was cut short by this terrible crime.

That concludes the opening statement for the prosecution.



I can see that guy's gonna be punished as severely as if he'd committed murder.

"As if"?



He *has* committed murder - as it is defined by our laws. Our legal system recognises no distinction between killing a sperm and killing a baby.



Oh no! The British Parliament is going to vote on a *total ban on abortion!*



I've gotta get back to Earth *immediately*, so I can campaign against this!

But ... what is "abortion" ... and why do they want to ban it?



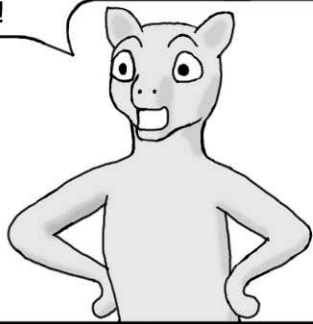
The message doesn't say why ... I bet it's the Catholics! They've spent years claiming that the right to life begins at conception!

**What!** So they don't recognise that a sperm has a right to life?



The Catholics must be another of those lax species that won't admit the true value of life in its earliest stages ... it's appalling, all the species too lazy to care for their young .... Arunians, Bernissians, Catholics ... and of course all of them are oh-so-proud of how devotedly they protect their young once they talk, or walk, or've been conceived, or whatever ...

... as if that makes up for neglecting them at the youngest, most vulnerable stage! Outrageous! You go back and fight 'em!



I must fight this! But how? My space-scooter won't get me back to Earth by the date of the vote!

I'll try that!

Maybe it'd be quicker if you caught a fast rocketliner?



You've been such a help ... thank you! So I'll be frank with you before I say good-bye ... I'm gonna fight for the right to life to start long after conception ...



Earthlings think of sperm the same way as Arunians and Bernissians think of their tadpoles ... expendable items, produced in quantities far in excess of what's actually needed!

How can I help?

**TRAVEL AGENT**



I've gotta get to Earth, quickly!



Ah, Planet Earth. It was contacted only very recently, and is a fascinating destination

for the more adventurous tourist. A few charter flights to Earth are now being arranged.



I've gotta get there before this date, when the British Parliament votes on abortion!



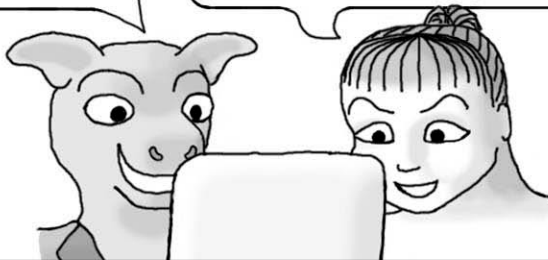
You will find it charming to watch the quaint ceremonies of government, on a planet so primitive that it doesn't even have a planetary parliament. Let me check for flights...

Good! An express rocketliner will be flying from Planet Aruna to Planet Earth, arriving one day before that date.

And my space-scooter can get me to Aruna in time to catch it! Book me a ticket!

Window seat or aisle seat?

Whatever's cheapest!

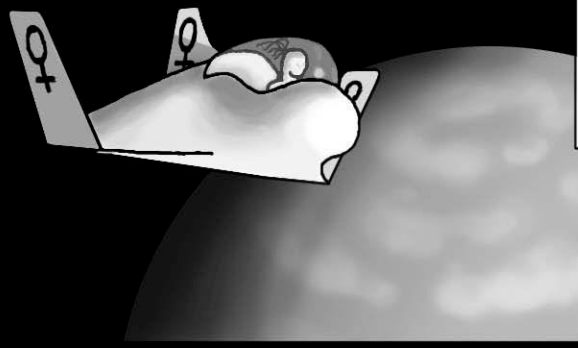


END OF CHAPTER THREE.

Space: This female's frontier.

These are the voyages of Ms Karla Earthling. Her feminist mission: ...

To explore strange new laws...



To seek out new definitions of "life" in new, umm, civilisations...

To boldly think what no human has thought before!

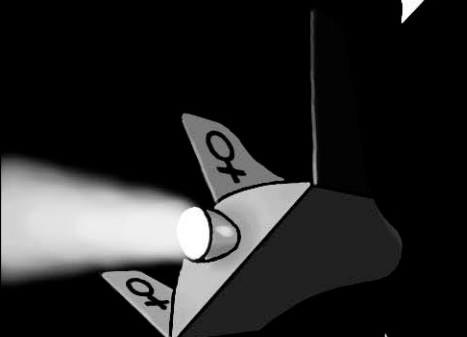


Mayday, Mayday! This is the "Arunian Starseeker", part of our rocket's exploded, we need help! Urgently!

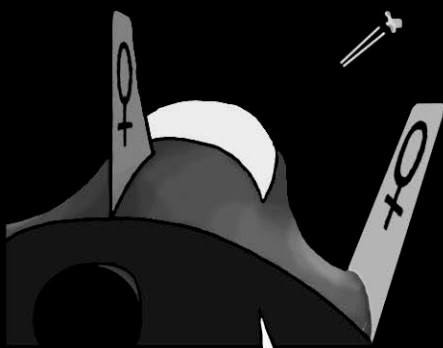
Cropusma was fascinating ... but not what I'd expected ... what if they'd produced lots of sperms? I'd like to see a species whose *only* difference from us is having children without pregnancy.



Hello "Arunian Starseeker", I'm on my way, should be there in an hour!



Half an hour later...



<Beep> Radar warning: Small unident <Beep> Radar warning: small...

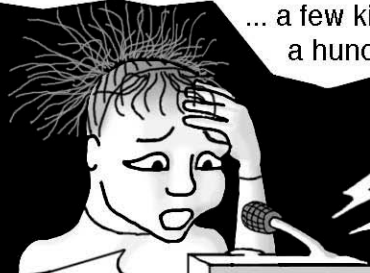


Hello "Arunian Starseeker", my radar's noticing lots of debris, it must have been a big explosion. Is anyone injured?

Please hurry! We're losing air fast!

<Beep> Radar warning: Small unidentified object moving in our direction. Miss distance will be 638m.

Yeah, a dozen with serious injuries ... a few killed ... about a hundred uninjured.



OH MY GOD! My little space-scooter can't rescue anything like that many! You've gotta get other help too!

We've tried. No-one else is near!



<Beeeeep> Major warning: Collision avoidance system is overloaded by number of objects. Cannot guarantee safety. Recommend you turn away.



The wreck of the "Arunian Starseeker"



I'm here guys, can you throw a line over?

Yeah, we're just choosing straws to see who goes first.

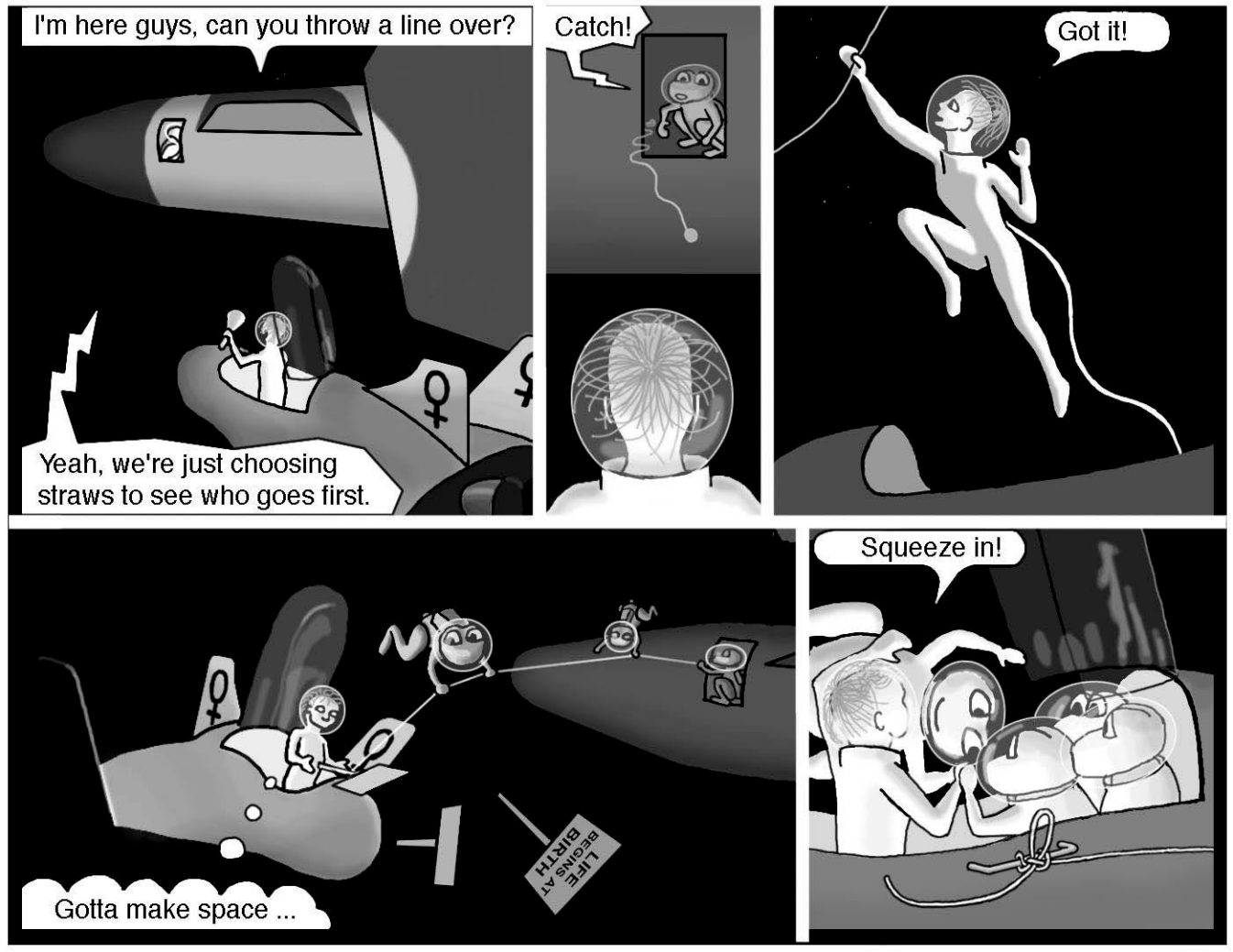
Catch!

Got it!

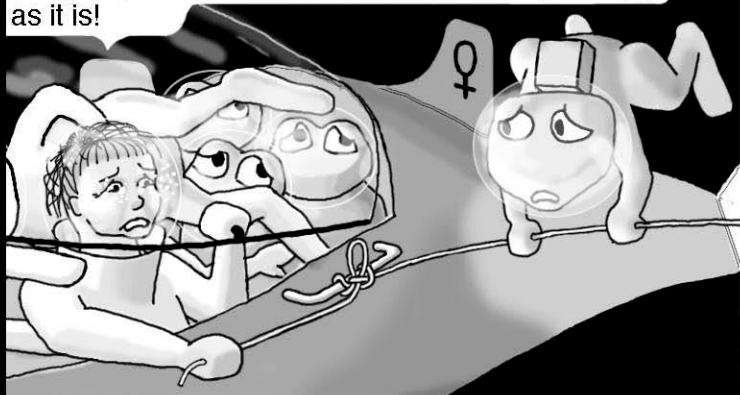
Squeeze in!

Gotta make space ...

LIFE  
BEGINS AT  
BIRTH



Sorry guys, no more! I can barely shut my canopy as it is!



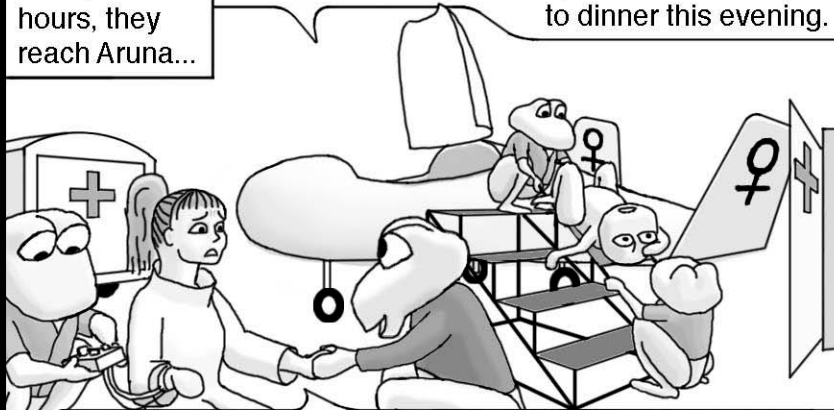
Bye ... I ... I hope someone else gets here in time!



You know that won't happen.

After forty cramped hours, they reach Aruna...

We're so grateful, Karla, for rescuing the only survivors! The spaceline president invites you to dinner this evening.



Oh! Oh, make sure I get a hotel room ... I'm desperate for some rest ... 'n' my connecting flight leaves early tomorrow ...

An honour! You have such courage - going on when your computer said it was unsafe!

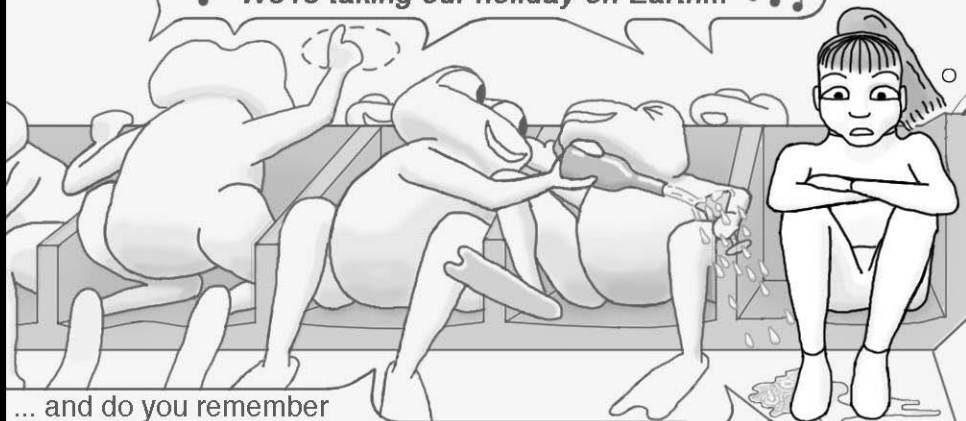


Oh, it didn't need much courage ... computer is approved by the British Health & Safety Executive...

Next morning ...



♪ We're taking our holiday on Earth... ♪

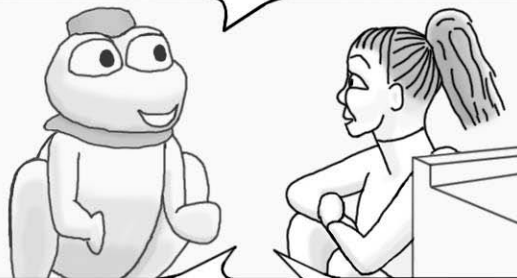


... and do you remember the time you got so drunk you fell into my tadpole pond? You came out covered in squashed tadpoles!

Ha! Ha! Ha! That was so gross!

No wonder this seat's cheap. It doesn't align with the in-flight gravity, and the view out the window gets boring!

Why, you're the one who rescued the survivors of the "Starseeker"! Can I do anything for you?



An upgrade to "Star Class" would be nice ...

Of course. Follow me!

Oh! Fancy meeting you here! What a coincidence!



Coincidence, my foot! You're hurrying back to Earth for the same reason I am, aren't you?

All because of you Catholics trying to take women's rights away!



Ah, you've got the details then?

Details? No ... inter-stellar texting is so slow!

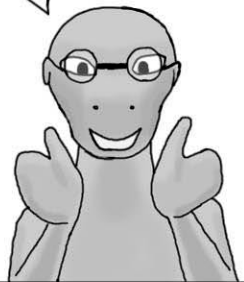
And expensive!

Would you mind going to the buffet, so Karla can use your seat? You can imagine how much I'd like to talk to a fellow Earthling...



Very well ...

But first I must tell her, too, about the campaign I will start on Earth ... I want Earthlings to accept that life begins at walking!



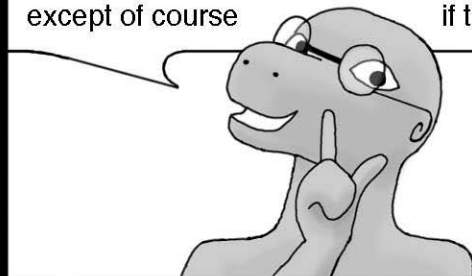


That's going to be difficult...

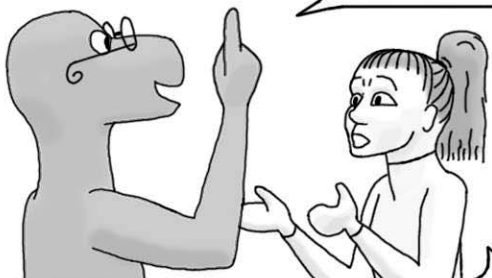


Yes yes I know, Earthlings love their babies too much to tolerate their being killed ...

But I've got the answer. Human babies are the property of their parents, so anyone who destroys one commits a crime against the parents, and society can punish them as severely as if they'd committed murder ... it's just that you mustn't *call* it murder, except of course if the child can walk.



With that alteration, your laws can recognise the Fundamental Principle that life begins at walking, whilst still being acceptable to ordinary Earthlings.

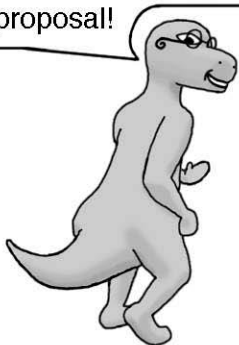


But ... if children are the property of their parents, then it would be no crime for a father to kill his own child ... Earthlings will never accept that!

You don't know the history of your own species! My research found that, in early Roman law, a father had the right to kill his child ... *vitae necisque potestas* ...



... so I think I can persuade Earthlings to accept my proposal!



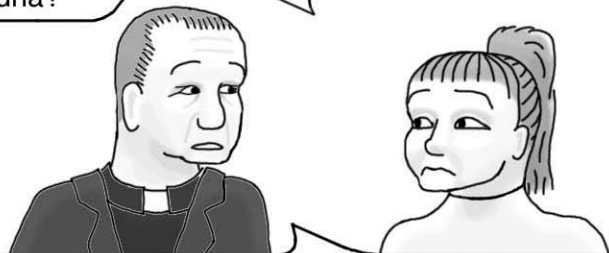
Boy is he wasting his time!



And mine ... I just could not stop him talking ... I would have used any excuse to get rid of him!



So ... umm ... did you enjoy your stay on Planet Aruna?



Not particularly. It's no fun, going into a lecture hall, knowing that everyone in your audience will disagree with you ... but, duty calls! Alas, they're still saying they shouldn't care for their tadpoles, because there's too many of them.

Sounds a good reason to me! Why won't you accept it?



Well now, this goes back to when I was a young priest. I felt I ought to help the poorest people in the world, so I joined a missionary organisation, who sent me to a village in Africa...

The first year went well ... I taught them about the gospel, and they were very friendly to me ... they were wonderful, kind people!



But in the second year came a terrible famine. The head of the village did all he could to help, but he was utterly overwhelmed.

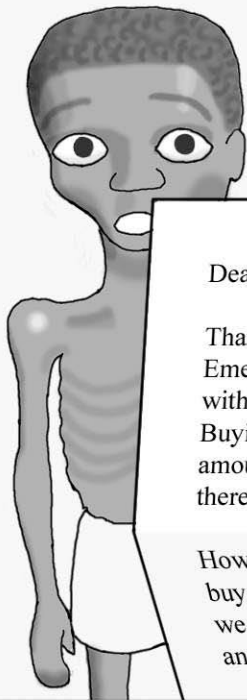


My congregation was dying around me!



Well, I knew the organisation that sent me had an emergency fund. So I wrote to their administrators, asking them to spend that fund on food for my village.

I'll tell you what their reply was; I can still remember every word of it...



Faiths of the World

Dear Father McGarrity,

Thank you for your recent letter requesting food aid. Our Emergency Fund Committee have considered your letter, along with similar requests from other missionaries in your area. Buying all the food requested would require many times the amount of money in our Emergency Fund. With great regret, therefore, we have decided to decline ALL such requests.

However, an ad-hoc collection amongst our staff enabled us to buy a kilo bag of flour for each village, which we enclose; and we will, as you requested, pay you half your normal stipend, and use the other half to send food to your village.



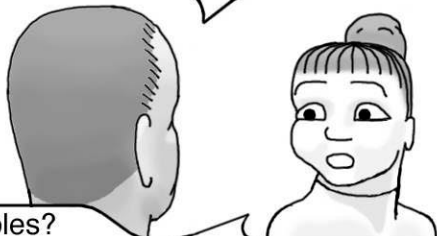
I'd met those administrators before I went out there. They weren't evil people. If they'd had enough money to save everyone's life, they would have done so, I'm sure they would!

But they knew that most people were going to die anyway ... which *they* thought was a good reason to do ... nothing! Practically nothing!



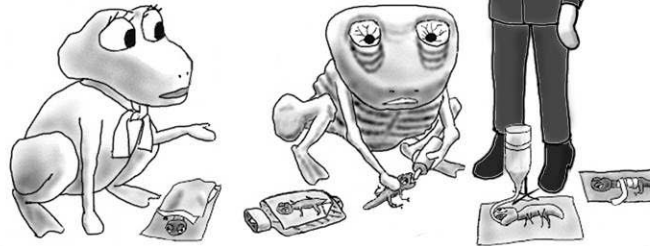
Of course I took the opposite view. Even if most people will die, it's still our *duty* to save *all we can!*

So, why abandon the tadpoles? Surely you're not saying the "right to life" disappears just because too many people need help?



Tadpoles?  
Frankly, yes, I *am* saying that ... if "right to life" is your way of saying we're *obliged* to care for them.

That "mother who loved every tadpole" brought it all back ... the mother, overwhelmed by all the care needed ... the Professor, making excuses to do nothing ... it felt too much like my African mission!



Really, Karla? Then why'd you save people from the "Starseeker"? Everyone in the wreck knew his or her chances were small, as small as the chance that a tadpole will survive ... so according to your own principles, they no longer had a "right to life" ...



Umm ...

You ... you ...



... so you didn't have to save them!  
And yet, you felt you just had to help.  
Why?



Yep. Why...?

I ... guess  
it's 'cause it  
was a one-off ...



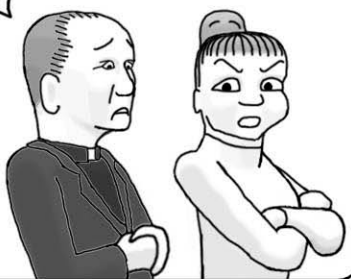
- so, yeah,  
I did it!



But it wasn't  
nice, and if

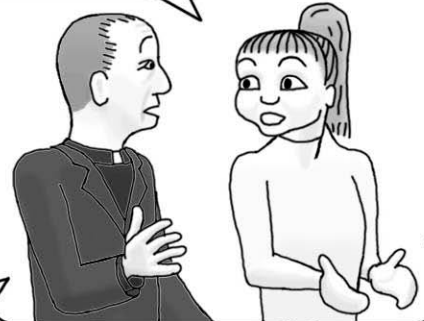
that happened every week of my  
life, *I wouldn't do it!* Crowded in so  
tight, and my space-suit so stiff I  
couldn't get out of it for 40 hours!!  
Spend my life doing that? *No!*  
No, I didn't *have* to save them!

So, you're unprincipled - even when  
you do the right thing, it's not because  
a moral rule says it's your duty!



You and your rules! You can only see  
the extremes! Either someone has to  
be rescued however big the sacrifice -  
or they shouldn't be rescued at all!

What about  
expecting people to  
help, but only if they  
don't give up too much?



That's *far*  
too vague. In a real case, how on  
earth can you judge what's right?

Depends  
on the  
conscience of the  
person on the spot.

Yes, it is vague!  
You can't make it  
into a simple,  
exact rule! Aren't  
I scary!

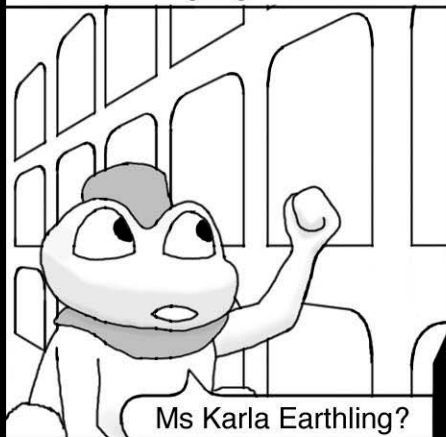


'Moral duty' shouldn't be set just  
by what someone feels like ... a  
worthwhile rule must sometimes  
tell people to do something  
they don't want!



I've brought you back a coffee each ... now  
let me tell you more about my scheme for  
bringing Bernissian moral rules to Earth...

After travelling a great distance...



Ms Karla Earthling?

You asked  
to be woken  
early.



Yes, thank  
you, I want  
to be first in  
the queue  
to get off.

We should be landing on Earth in 2  
hours. Centrifugal gravity will cease just before we begin landing  
manoeuvres, 75 minutes from now.

END OF CHAPTER FOUR.





**Janis!** How nice of you to come and meet me! But ... shouldn't you really be out protesting?

Ah, I need to bring you up-to-date, before *you* go campaigning about the abortion vote!

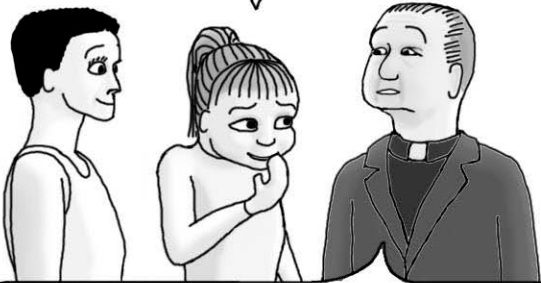


Yeah! We've gotta stop the Catholics imposing their beliefs on the rest of us!



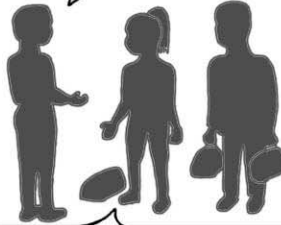
Why'd you say that? The Catholics had nothing to do with it!

Oh, it was just my guess ... Oops, sorry ... I shouldn't have assumed you Catholics would be guilty!



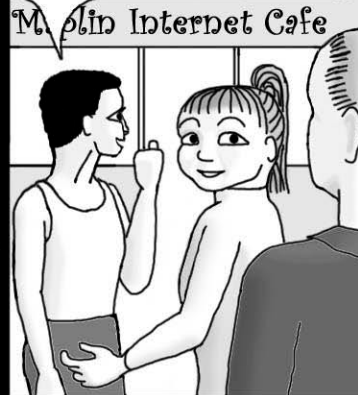
That's a shame ... I would be very proud if we were "guilty", as you put it ...

The Arunians caused this vote!

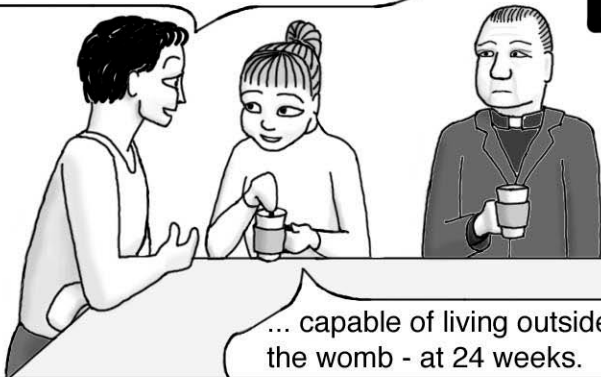


But they think life begins at talking ... how on earth did they set off a vote against abortion?

Let's get in that cafe, I'll tell you the story...

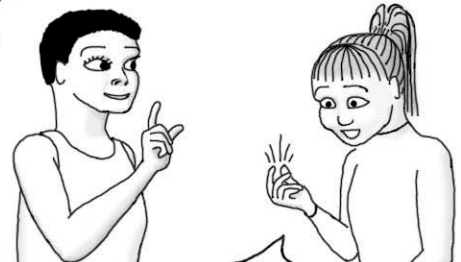


So ... remember, for decades, Parliament has set the time limit for abortion as when the fetus becomes "viable"...



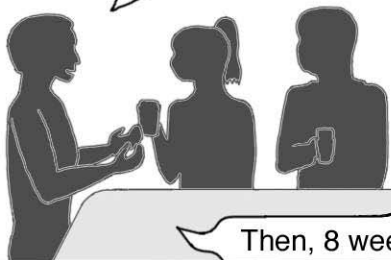
... capable of living outside the womb - at 24 weeks.

Not any more! After the Arunians made contact, their scientists gave ours lots of ideas ... so our medical scientists found how to keep alive babies born prematurely ... after just 15 weeks pregnancy!



So *that's* why Parliament reduced the abortion time limit to 15 weeks! Of course!

But it was one of those breakthroughs that set off even more discoveries ... they were soon keeping alive fetuses that were just 12 weeks old!



Then, 8 weeks!

So, Parliament scheduled the vote tomorrow, to reduce the time limit to 8 weeks ... but then, a group of scientists announced they'd kept a freshly conceived embryo alive in a hospital lab, and grown it beyond the 8 week stage!



So, Members of Parliament who think the time limit should be when the fetus is viable, as so many believe, must now set the abortion time limit at zero weeks ... effectively, a complete ban on abortion! Wonderful!



That's right.



Except ... that as soon as that became clear, most of the MPs who had *said* they believed in viability, suddenly changed their minds, and suggested other ways to set the time limit!

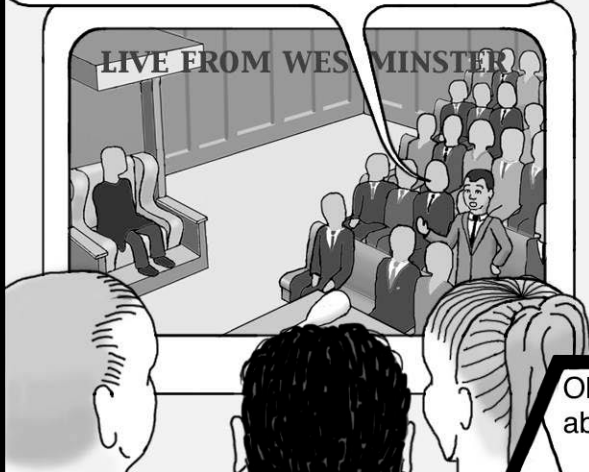
And how do they justify *that*?



With all sorts of reasons. Let's watch a live webcast of the debate in Parliament ...



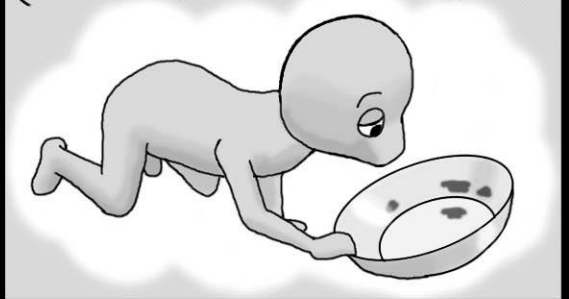
British law requires parents to care for their child until it can care for itself. But on the Planet Zugran, it's the other way round ...



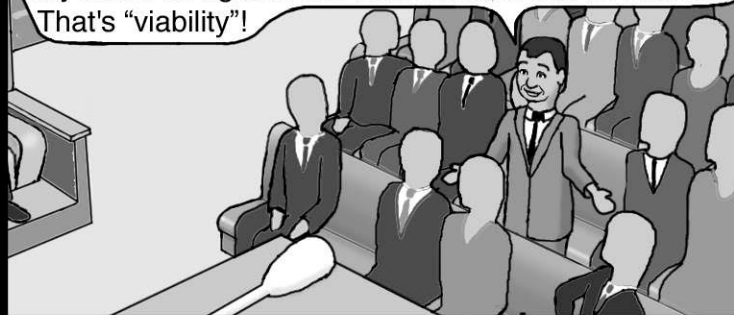
... once a Zugran child's old enough to earn a living, Zugran law makes its parents pay for everything the child needs, so the child doesn't have to *actually* earn anything ...



... but while a child's too young to support itself, the child has no rights, so it's parents have no duty to care for it! Crazy, eh?



Okay, I made that story up, Zugran doesn't exist. But our abortion law is like Zugran law - when a fetus is so big it **DOESN'T** need it's mother's womb to survive, we give it the right to use that womb, by banning its abortion. When a young fetus **NEEDS** the womb to survive, we say it has no right to use that womb, it can be aborted! That's "viability"!



Huh! I have supported the principle of viability in the past, and the reason was, that I just don't want to change the time limit ... and I no longer support the principle of viability ... for exactly the same reason. I am simply being consistent!



Hear, hear!

All that moral weakness! We need a strong final campaign, to succeed in banning abortion tomorrow! Well, that's what I came back to help with.



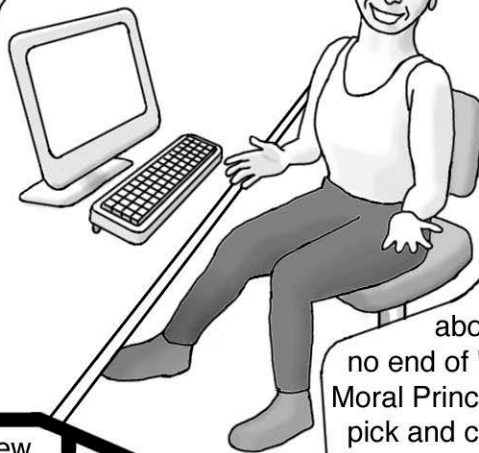
You should give up! I don't think they're gonna ban abortion - most MPs have made their position quite clear!



You mean they've made their *voting intentions* quite clear. It sounds as if their *moral positions* are utterly confused!



Absolutely! MPs who used to support viability are now saying that life doesn't start until there's a heart-beat ... or brain formation ... or movement ... or feeling pain ... I've lost count of the number of reasons Parliament should vote "no" tomorrow!



For an MP wanting to support a compromise time limit on abortion, there's no end of "Fundamental Moral Principles" they can pick and choose from!

And how on earth are they going to choose a new time limit, then? Will there be anything they agree on?

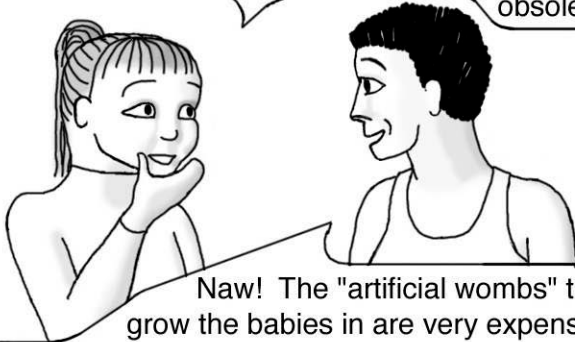


Of course not! They'll just leave it as it is, 15 weeks.



If so, the time limit will be based on a moral principle they've just rejected, combined with a medical technology that's already out-of-date...

Sounds good about the vote, Janis, but how'll this affect the position of women? Are our wombs ... obsolete?



Naw! The "artificial wombs" they grow the babies in are very expensive, need round-the-clock attention, and only a handful of experts know how to make them work.

So, really, men still need our wombs to keep the human race going!



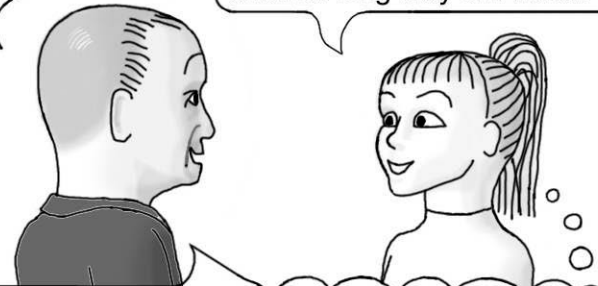
I'm glad. That's how God intended it should be.

I'm not giving up. I'm going to campaign.



Well I can't honestly wish you good luck! But I hope you've got something nice to do afterwards?

Yes, I shall attend a multi-faith conference about aliens and the start of the "Right to Life" ... then discuss it at the Vatican!



I shall be ... um ... going back to Aruna.

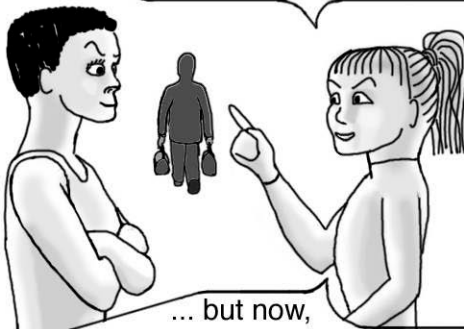
You haven't actually answered my question...

Enjoy your conferences!



I will! It'll be a nice change, addressing people that share my beliefs, for once!

I hadn't expected you two to be so friendly! I had to work out where he's going ... *after* Aruna ... and I'll tell you where later ...



... but now, it's time to start campaigning!

... yes, I'm the *first* human ever to visit Planet Bernissa and Planet Cropusma ... and I want an interview this evening!



I need a printer.



Oh ... you again.

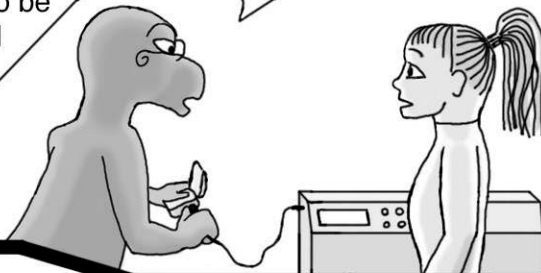
I just made an terrible discovery. The immigration officer said you regard people as adults from their 18th birthday...

Why 18? Why not 19?

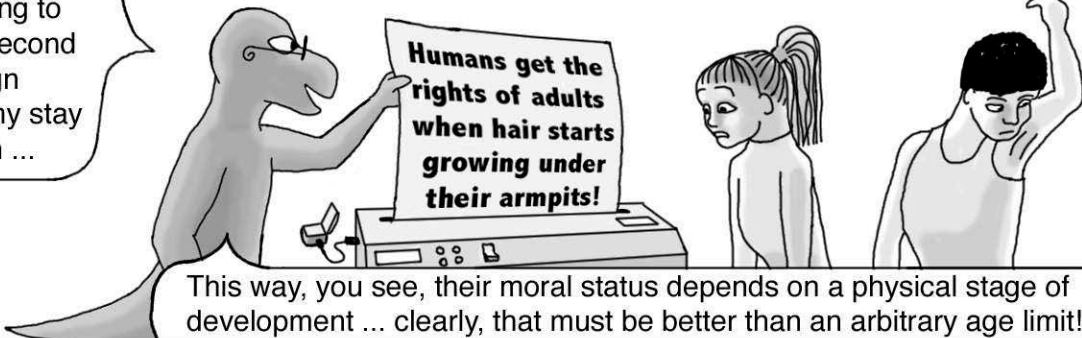
Yeah...

Err ...

It's appalling! The "rights of an adult" are far too important to be determined that way.



I am going to start a second campaign during my stay on Earth ...



This way, you see, their moral status depends on a physical stage of development ... clearly, that must be better than an arbitrary age limit!

Go campaigning in the afternoon...

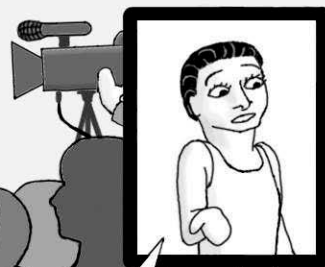
"Viability" is important because we've always used it. The time limit for abortion has always been linked to the potential viability of the fetus outside the womb.

That was the case when we legalised abortion in 1967, when we revised that law in 1990, and it's the case now. And it's been the case in the USA since *they* legalised abortion in 1973.



But that just raises the question: WHY did Parliament make viability part of the law, all those years ago?

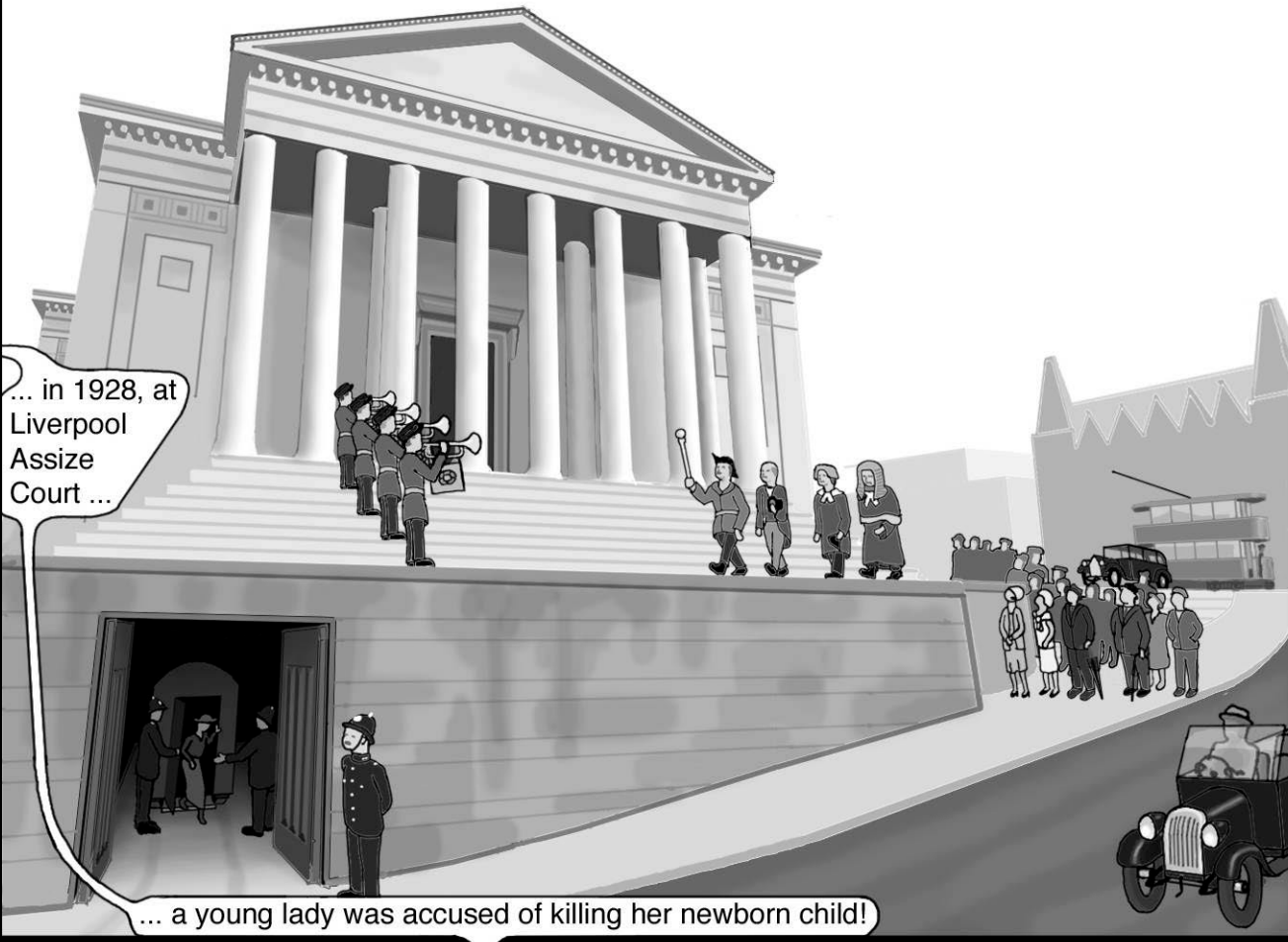
The answer is: there wasn't any reason! - at least not one that was ever published. The guys who wrote this law didn't bother to say WHY they did it! Not one sentence! It's a disgrace!



Mind you, to be fair, they didn't realise how important it would become, because they never intended their law to set a time limit for abortion. Their purpose was quite different ...



... in 1928, at  
Liverpool  
Assize  
Court ...




... a young lady was accused of killing her newborn child!



Mr Justice Talbot told the jury:

The law upon the matter is unsatisfactory ... It is a felony to procure abortion, and it is murder to take the life of a child when it is fully born ...

... but to take the life of a child *while it is being born* and before it is fully born is ***no offence whatever!***



Two days later, Lord Darling introduced a Bill in Parliament, to fix that amazing loophole in the law ...

... his Bill said nothing about "viability". It simply made it an offence to kill a child whilst it was being born.

But a committee of Lords altered the Bill, making it an offence "to destroy the life of a child capable of being born alive" ... which they said would occur by the 28th week of pregnancy. That clause remained law even after abortion became legal in 1967, so it *then* became the time limit for abortion!

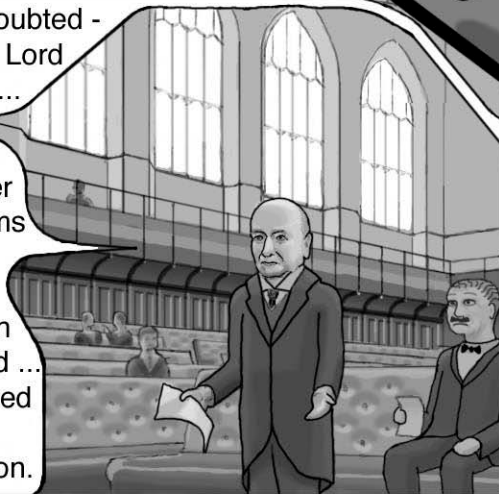
But why'd the Lords alter it? Because a 'during-birth' offence would be hard to prosecute in a real case -

hard to prove that birth had in fact started. So they re-defined the offence to cover later parts of pregnancy too. But that still doesn't explain why they chose "28 weeks/viability" - even if all this was needed -




- which some doubted - the legal expert, Lord Atkin, told them...

the provision as to 28 weeks after conception seems to be quite unnecessary, because such an act as that would ... always be covered by the law as to procuring abortion.



That is the **only** mention of "viability" during the debates. No-one replied to it - they were too busy debating babies killed during birth.





Only the draftsman's private notes record why he picked "28 weeks/viability", rather than say 15 weeks, or 35 ...

... and that was, to re-use the limit in the Births and Deaths Registration Act - which said a stillbirth should only be officially registered if it occurred after 28 weeks pregnancy!

And *that's* why British babies now get the "right to life" at viability!!!

... Go campaigning in the evening ...

An amazing trip, Karla!

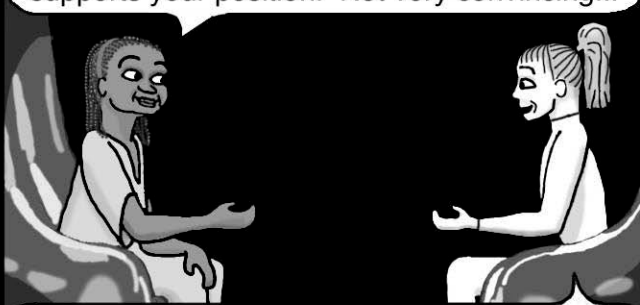
And, you'll notice, none of the three species I met believes life begins at conception. None believes that the right to life starts with "viability".

But, also, none of them believes "life begins at birth", which you have campaigned for...



Excuse me! The Cropusmans believe a sperm has the right to life as soon as it's born.

But that's only one species out of three which supports your position. Not very convincing...



They all pick a different stage in growth. We've gotta stop saying there must be a particular stage that's the magic moment when life begins!

None of the three species puts an impossible burden on mothers. Let's focus on that!



Their next evening is an evening of suspense, until ...

Parliament has made no change to the abortion laws ...

Yippee! We won that battle! What next?

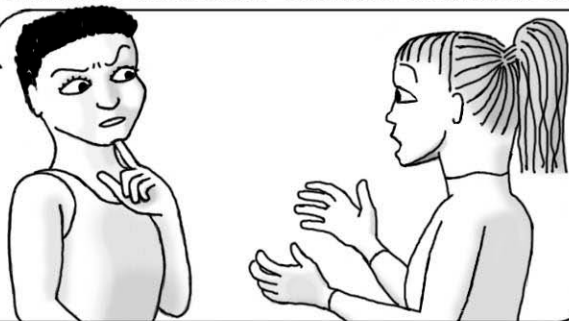


The Galactic Parliament! They're going to debate a law that will declare when the "Right to Life" starts!

Monseigneur McGarrity's gonna be there, I bet you he is! *He'll* tell them that human life begins at conception ... and who'll be there to put a different view?



There's a Galactic Parliament? But their laws don't affect us ... do they?

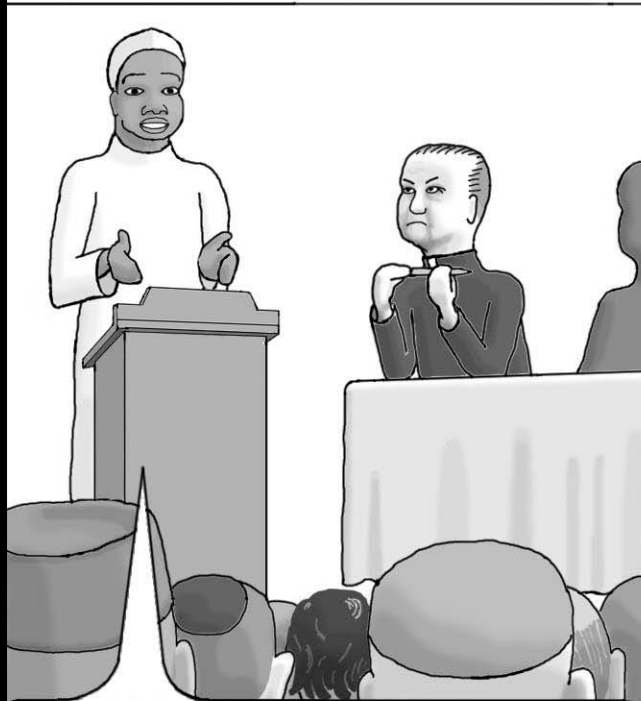


Think ahead, Janis! Years from now, Earth may join the Galactic Parliament ... and adopt the Galactic laws! We've gotta make sure those laws let Earth-women control their own bodies!

I'm gonna make sure they hear what we need!



Monseigneur McGarrity finds the conference is more controversial than he expected...



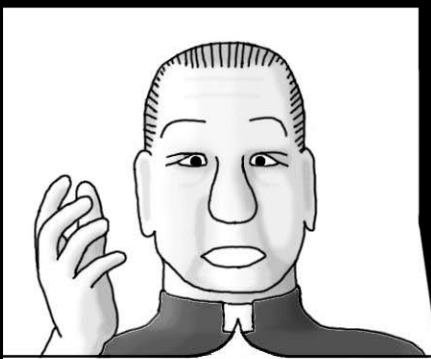
When God created the Arunians, He gave them an ability to love children, which only starts when the child can talk. God must have had a good reason for making them that way. Surely, this is a sign that God Himself believes that Arunian tadpoles do not have the "Right to Life"!

Some days later, in the Vatican...



Thank you for coming. The Pope and I have discussed your visit to the Galactic Parliament. You must tell them firmly that, **FOR HUMANS**, life begins at conception. You must make **NO** public statements that the same is true, or is not true, for any other species.





But that is a very serious restriction! When people ask *why* life begins at conception, I often say it's when the embryo acquires a *complete set* of genetic material, and so becomes a fully determined individual. But that is also true for the Arunians!

If we say Arunian life may *not* begin at conception, that implies life does *not* have to begin when you gain all your genetic material.  
So how, then, would we argue our case?



There are other arguments that human life begins then - more theological...



Indeed yes, but we'd have deprived ourselves of an idea that's been very effective at convincing people of our beliefs!

Personally, Monseigneur, I agree with all you've just said. But we must wait till Pope Pius issues a definitive statement on the aliens. Until then, no-one should publicly commit the Catholic Church to views that some believers do not support.



Remember, you are our Official Representative to the Galactic Parliament!



END OF CHAPTER FIVE.

The journey took months; but Karla stuck to her mission.



Nearly there ... how do I land ... where's that printout?

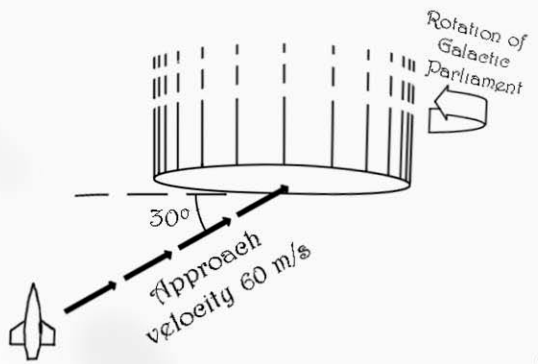
### History of the Galactic Parliament Building

There was huge controversy about where to build the Galactic Parliament. Everyone wanted it on their own planet.

The only solution was to locate the Parliament far from any habitable planet, despite the cost. So the Parliament is a space station, orbiting around its star, once every 49,300,000 seconds. Shaped as a gigantic tube, 400m in diameter, it rotates to provide centrifugal gravity.

Over the years, it has expanded to provide many hotels, meeting rooms, hangars, and landing ports; a notable feature is the Coffee Bar, designed by the galaxy-famous architect Polypaster.

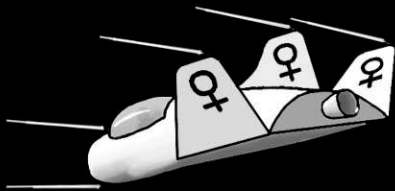
### Landing Approach Path



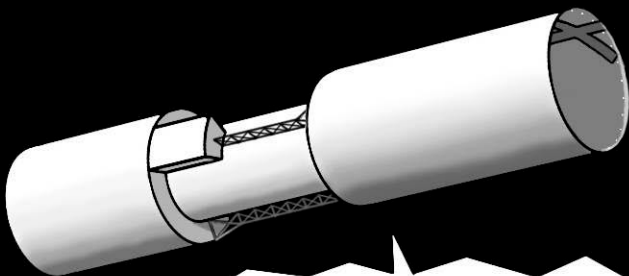
570 Earth days

Approach velocity 60 m/s

DO NOT point the nose of your spacecraft straight ahead; point it 60° left of your direction of travel

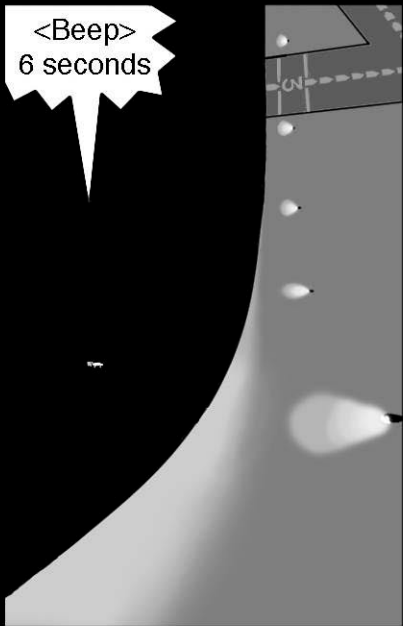


Calling Galactic  
Parliament Space Traffic Control,  
confirm permission to land, please.



Land on Runway 3, in 175 seconds.

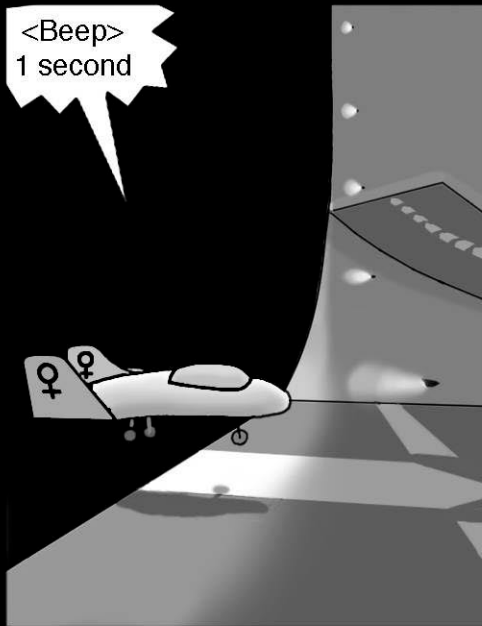
<Beep>  
6 seconds

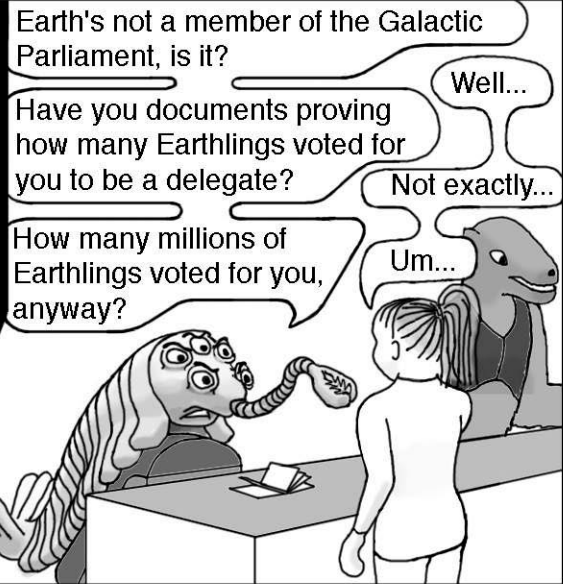
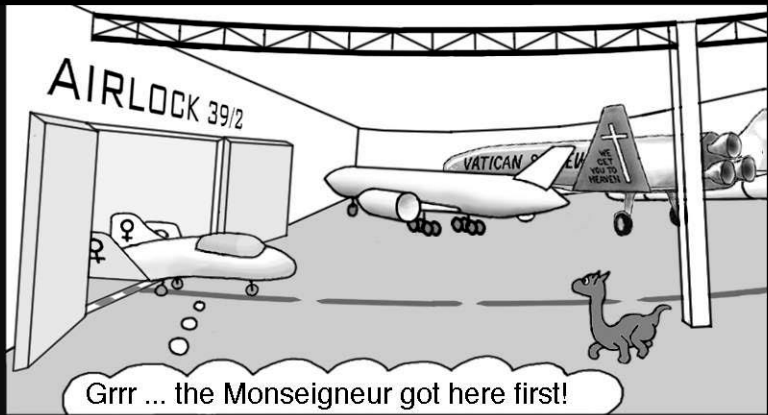
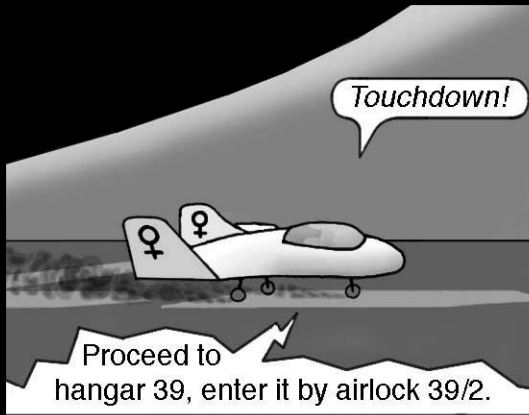


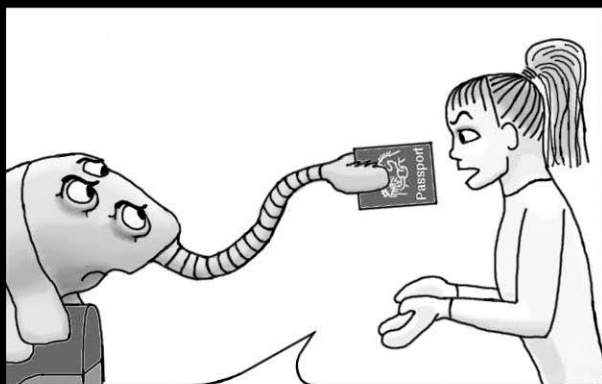
<Beep>  
3 seconds



<Beep>  
1 second







Look, my planet's only just made contact with the Galactic community, we need to start getting involved without all this formality!

We usually do this when a new planet is contacted. Anyone who speaks in the Galactic Parliament, however briefly, causes a lot of talk on their home planet ... it encourages the planet to think about becoming a proper member of the Galactic Parliament.



I deal with that ... follow me.

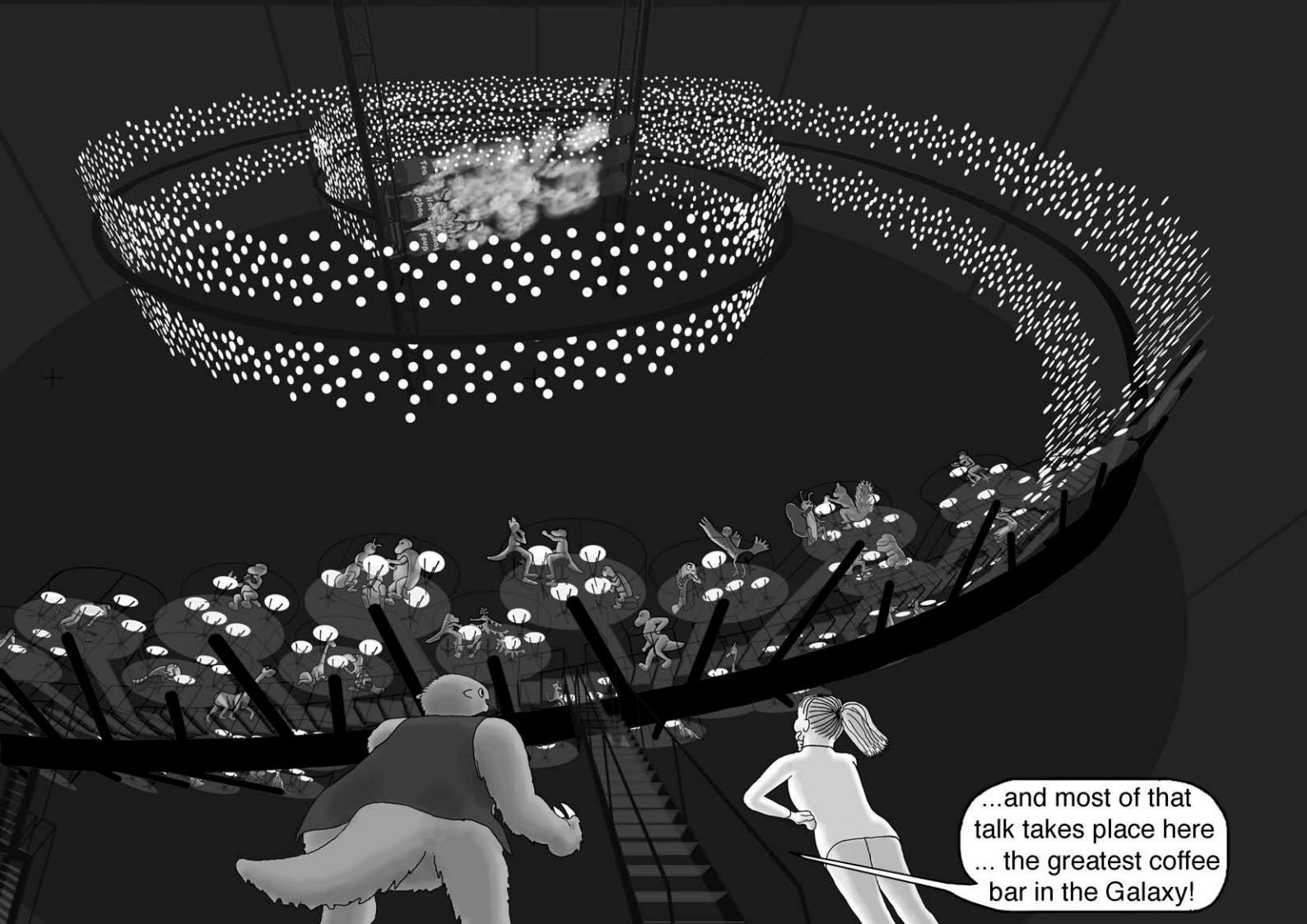
I can't make you a proper delegate, but I'll make you an observer; you won't have a vote, and your speaking rights will be tightly time-rationed.



That's great! But I gotta chat to delegates too.

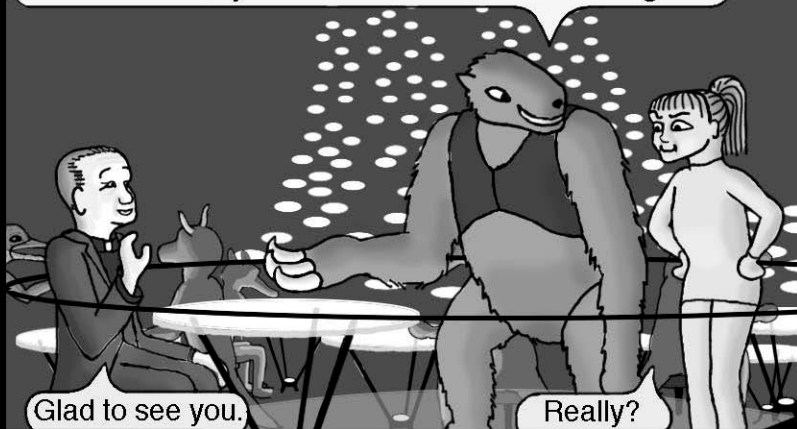


Indeed, face-to-face talk is important as well...



...and most of that talk takes place here ... the greatest coffee bar in the Galaxy!

We've already reserved one table for Earthlings.



Glad to see you.

Really?

Yes, really .... well, a bit. Most of the species I've talked to don't get pregnant, they reproduce by external fertilization ... I'm fed up being asked "what it feels like to be pregnant". Perhaps you'd like to tell them ...



No, I need to link up with other species who *do* get pregnant ... *especially* if they're in a minority.

You don't have to stick to this table. Mill about and meet people!




Mill about!

Would you like one of my cakes?




How sweet of you! Yes I would!





Mmm! It's delicious!  
Who made them?

Mummy said I was naughty  
when she found how much  
chocolate  
I'd put in.



Shall I give a cake to that man  
there?

Mummy did - and I helped!

Don't worry!

You do that!

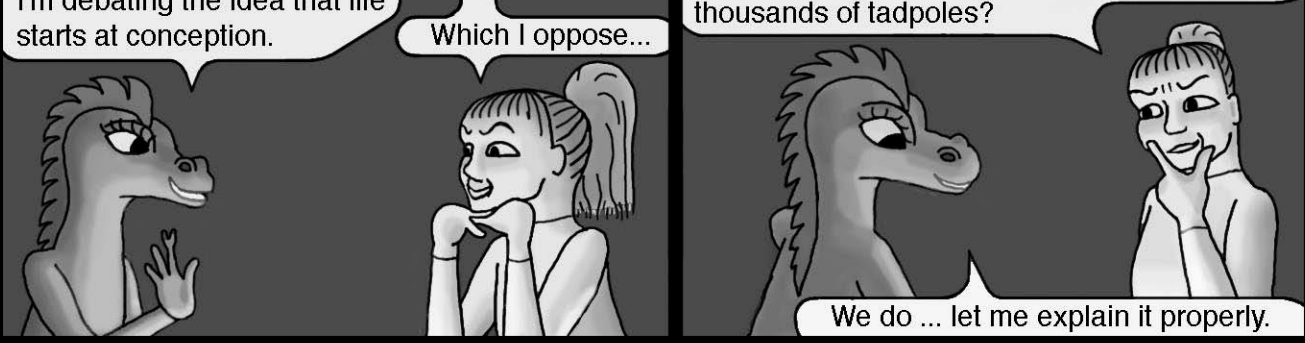
I'm from Planet Gragrowdula. My  
son's a great help  
when campaigning!

You're exploiting  
children? Tsk, tsk.

I'm debating the idea that life  
starts at conception.

Which I oppose...

But I'd better check what you mean ... do you  
conceive outside the body, and produce  
thousands of tadpoles?



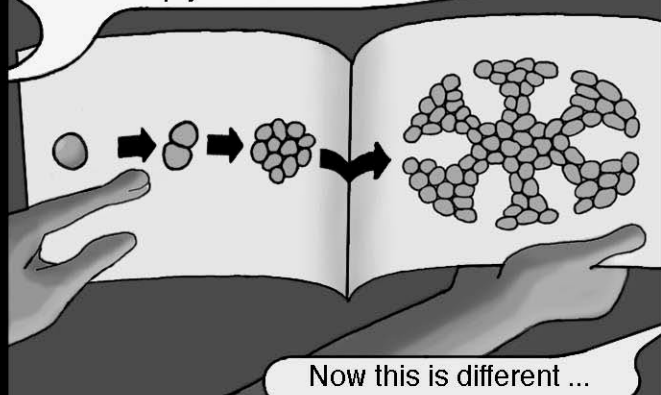
We do ... let me explain it properly.

See here. A mother's egg starts as a single cell. It contains a single set of genes ... not the double set of genes you have in ordinary cells.



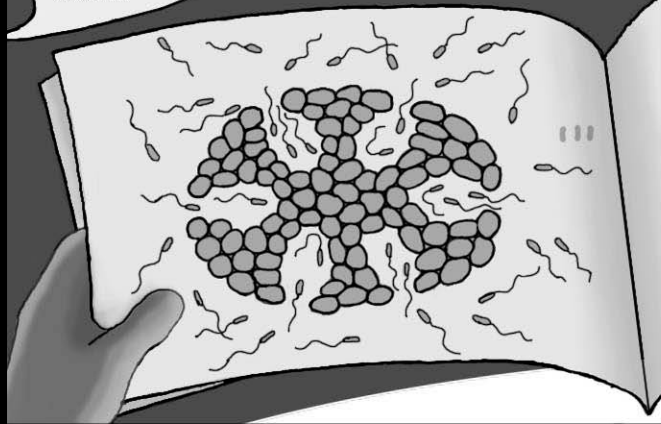
That's just like us Earthlings.

The egg-cell divides and divides, to become a ball of unfertilized cells ... with a number of these empty sacs.

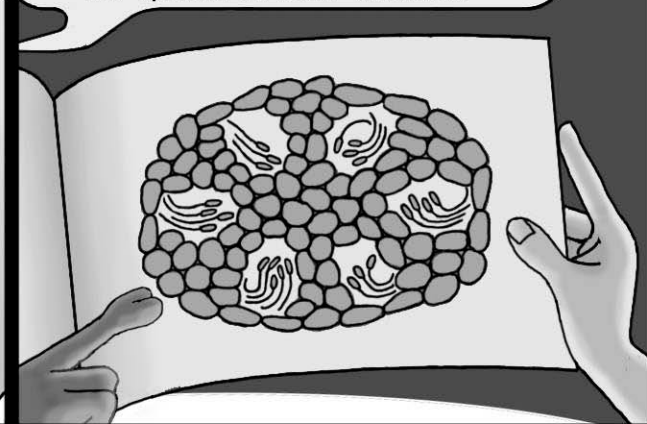


Now this is different ...

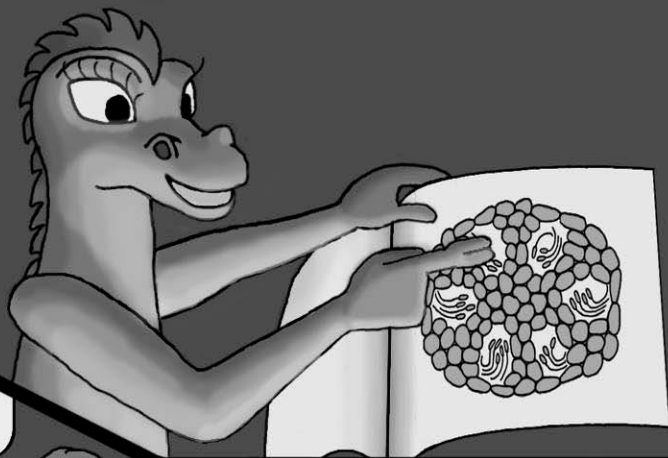
During fertilization, a lot of sperms swim into each sac ...



... then the sacs close off, and the sperms become dormant.



Now each sac is the starting point for one organ. For instance, that sac is what the liver starts from. At the right time, one of those egg-cells becomes receptive to sperm, the sperm become active, and one combines with that egg-cell ... which then grows, divides, and eventually becomes the liver!



So one conception produces the liver, another conception produces the heart, another one produces the brain ...

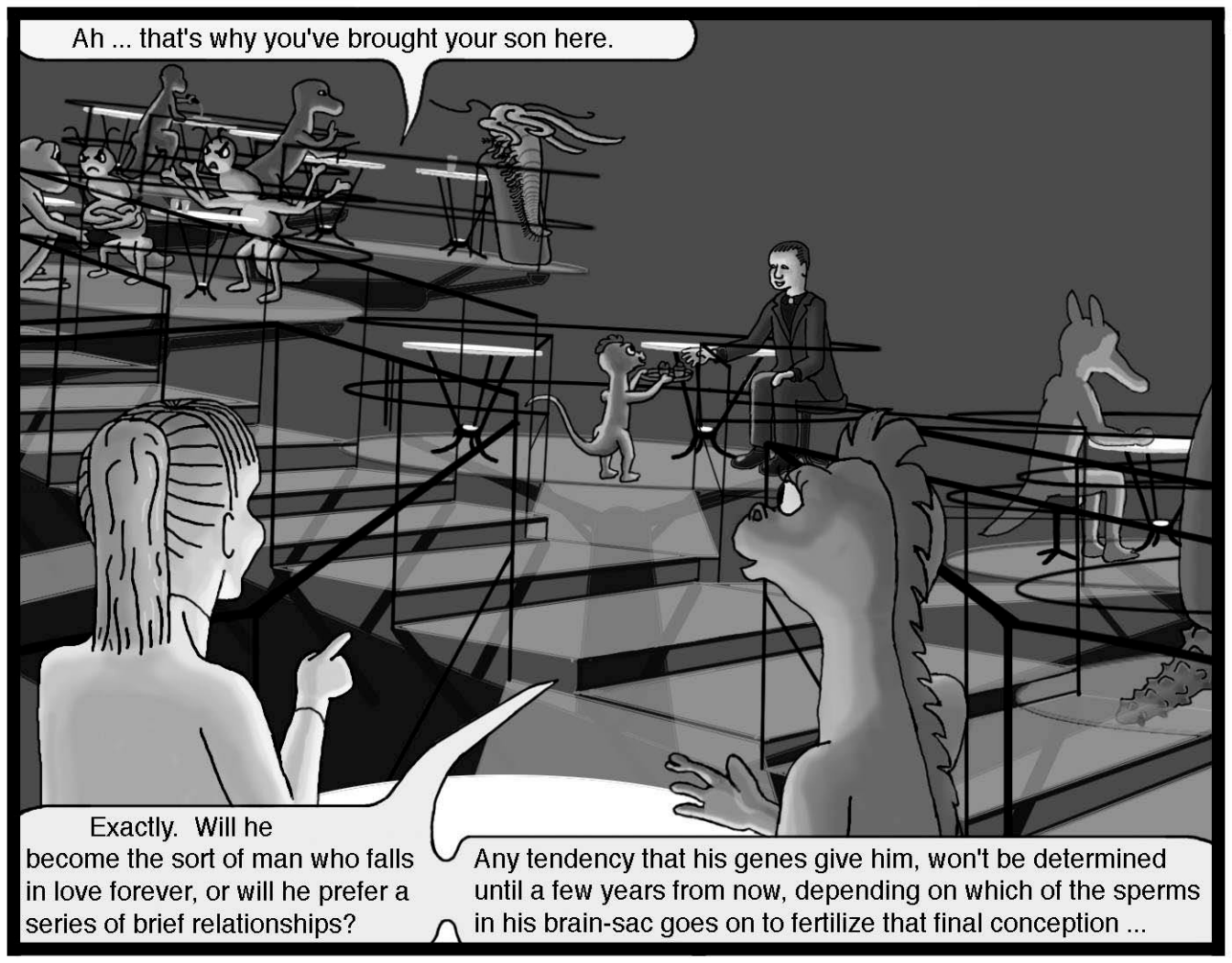


Not quite - *five* conceptions produce the brain ... it's a complicated organ, made of a number of parts.

When does this all finish?



Our organs don't start growing till they're needed. The final conception produces the part of the brain that deals with falling in love and becoming a parent ... and that doesn't occur until the start of puberty.



Ah ... that's why you've brought your son here.

Exactly. Will he become the sort of man who falls in love forever, or will he prefer a series of brief relationships?

Any tendency that his genes give him, won't be determined until a few years from now, depending on which of the sperms in his brain-sac goes on to fertilize that final conception ...

So if the right to life starts when someone is fully determined genetically, then your son doesn't have the right to life yet ... but no-one here will really want to say that!



You'd be surprised how tough-minded some people are ...

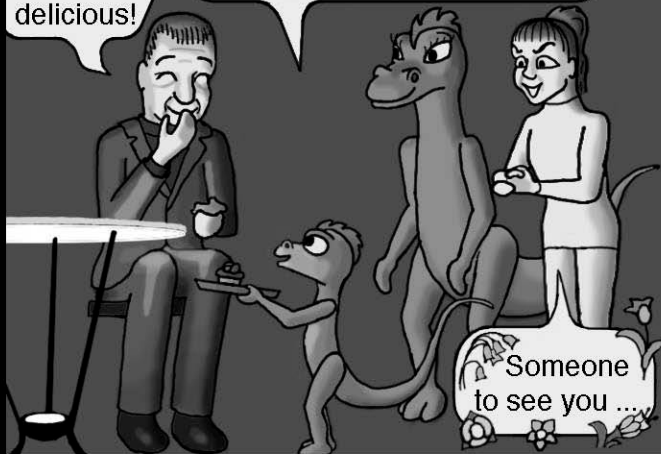
Anyway, I've got to move on ... I want to take my message to as many delegates as possible.



You do!

Mmm! It's delicious!

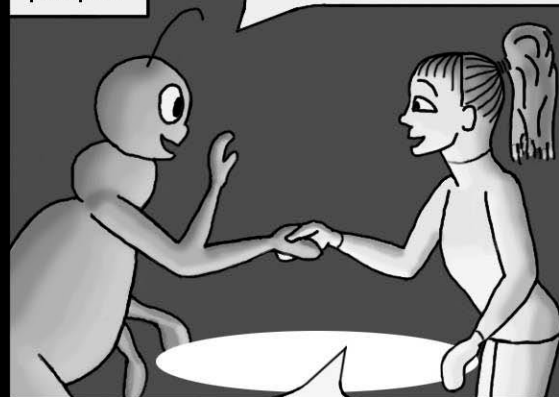
Would you like another?



Someone to see you ...

Meet people!

Yep, we're a species that gets pregnant.



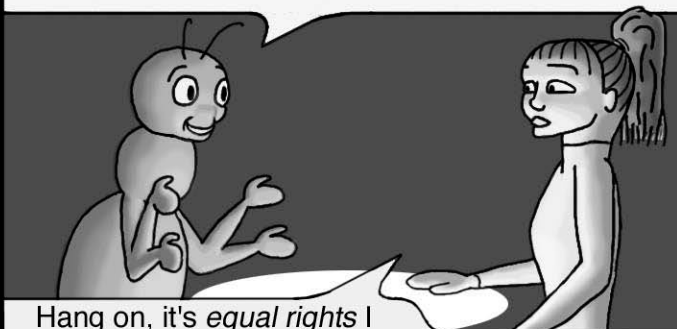
And can you use abortion to end your pregnancies?

That's quite rare.



Men restricting women's freedom to have an abortion, I suppose!

Don't worry sister, we're not oppressed by men! Our law-makers are all women.

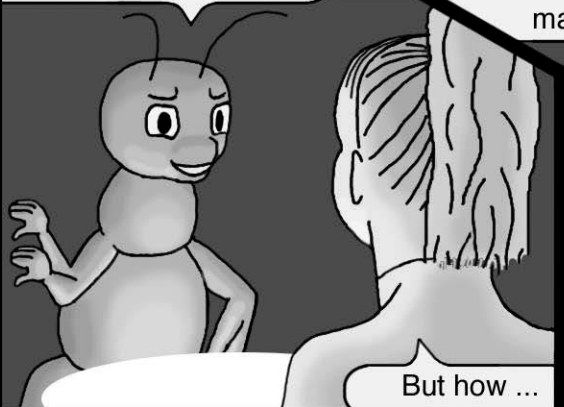


Hang on, it's *equal rights* I believe in. Not depriving men of their natural rights!

Oh our men don't have many natural rights ... it's not natural for them to be born.

Each pregnancy produces several children. Our males mate with their sisters while still in the womb ... so that's their job done! The females are born pregnant, and the males die before they're born!

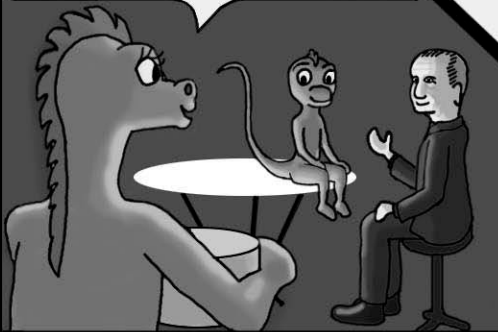
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But how ...

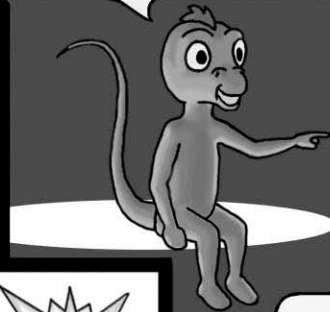


Good, you're still there ... I've found that other tin of cakes.



Mummy! Mummy! This man's from planet Thirs!

He must be! The way he talks about conception!



Err, I don't think so ...



No no, now run along and hand out these cakes!

Sorry about that ... "Planet Thirs"?



hee  
hee  
hee

Oh it's just a myth we tell our small children - so they can understand how to behave.

Then it's a story I should know.

Okay ...

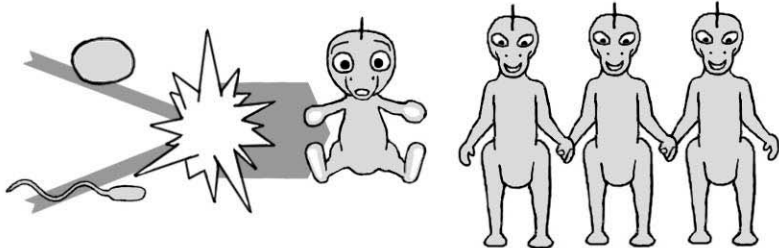


... "When the great creator Thirf made his first people, he made them so they had children instantly.

When a sperm and an egg fused,

POW! They instantly turned into a small child.

So everyone happily agreed when the "Start of Life" was.





But after about ten generations, Thirf altered how children were made.

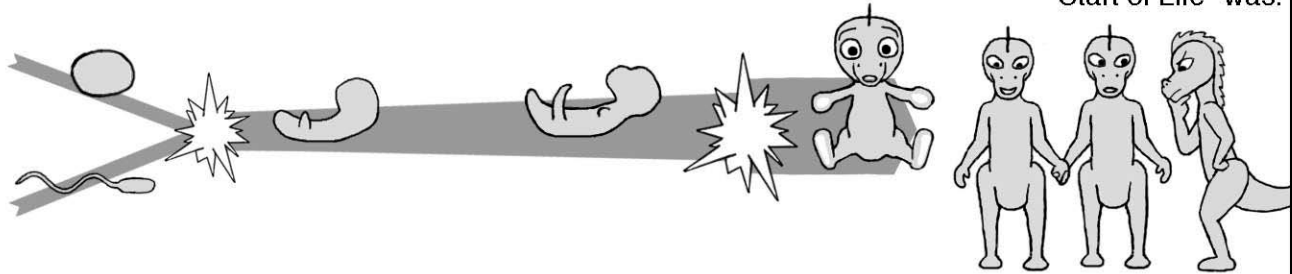
When a sperm and egg fused,

*POW!* They instantly turned into an embryo ...

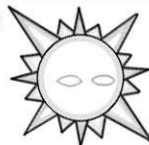
... which then developed gradually for some time ...

... until *POW!* It instantly turned into a small child.

So it wasn't so obvious when the "Start of Life" was.

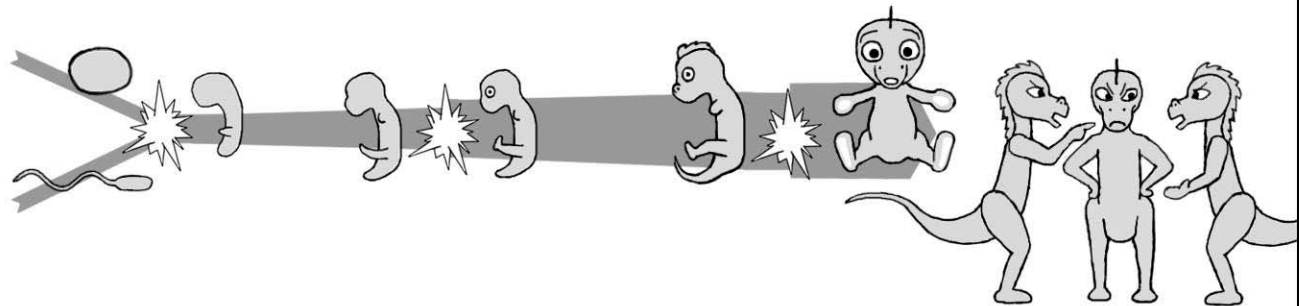


Another ten generations later, Thirf altered it again.

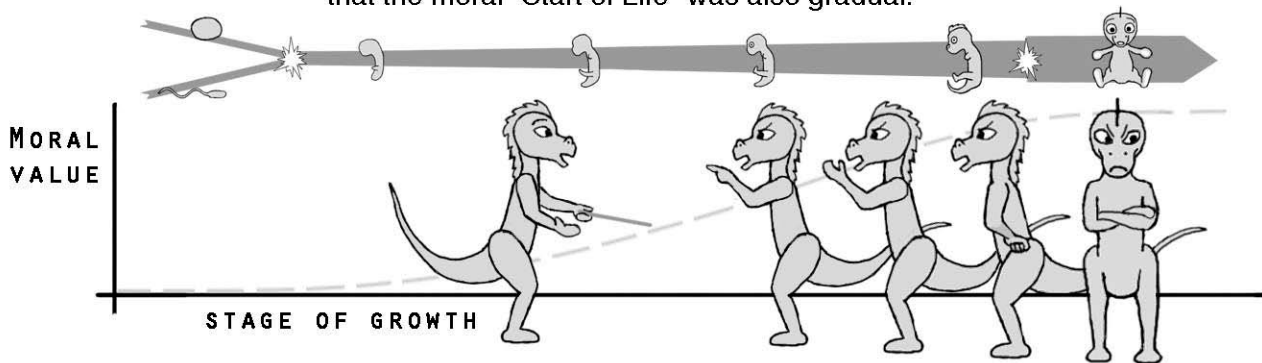


Now it took three sudden changes, and two periods of gradual change, to produce a child.

So there were even more disputes about when the "Start of Life" was.



Thirf kept altering it. The periods of gradual development contained so many important changes ... development of eyes, of brain, and so on ... that a few people suggested that the moral "Start of Life" was also gradual.

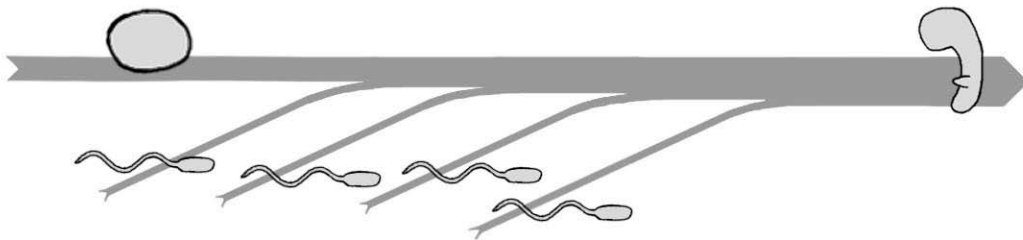


But that was rejected with fury. If moral value changes gradually, then there must be a time when the fetus is worth, say, half as much as an adult ... No, no!

They believed all individuals are absolutely equal in their moral value ... so they had to believe that the "Start of Life" must be sudden.

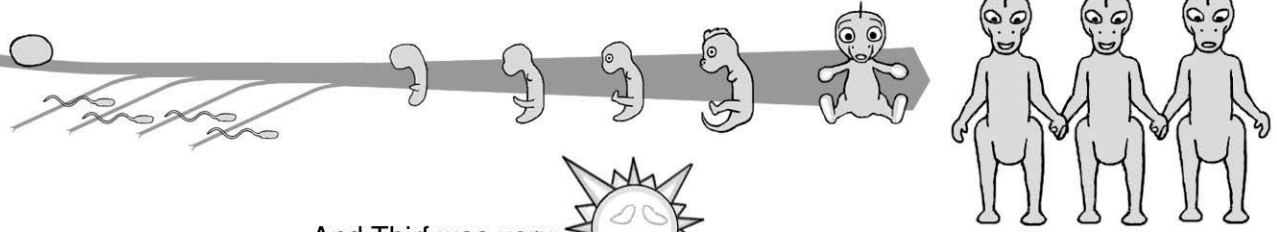
Thirf said, "Let's make conception gradual!"

Until now, every sperm contained a complete set of genes. But now, each sperm carried just one gene ... so thousands of sperms would fuse with one egg, until it contained an (almost) complete set of genes from the father ... each conception took hours.



Eventually, the creation of a new child was a completely gradual process, with no sudden changes.

And there were no more bitter disputes about when the "Start of Life" was, because people agreed it was gradual.

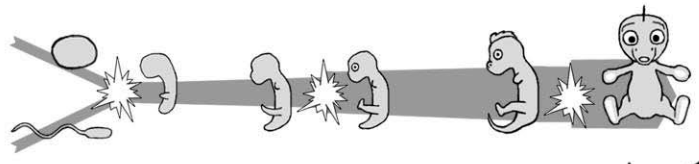


And Thirf was very disappointed.

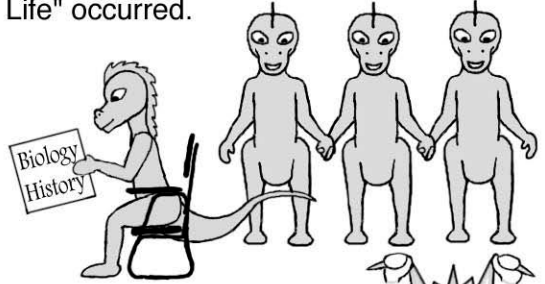
You see, what Thirf enjoys, more than anything else, is to watch people bickering.

So Thirf made more alterations, adding a few sudden changes here and there amongst the gradual change. Thirf made conception a sudden event, and made it happen inside the mother - so there would be a birth that would be another sudden event.

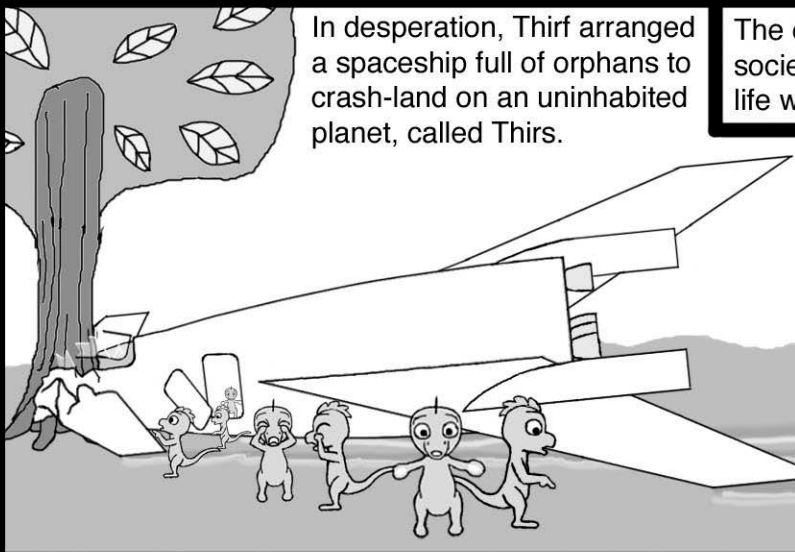
But they didn't. The history books described how, once, the start of life was completely gradual; and so long as people remembered that, there were no bitter disputes about when the "Start of Life" occurred.



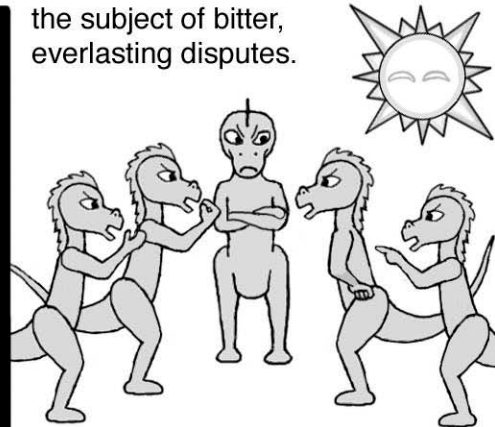
Then Thirf waited for the disputes to restart.



In desperation, Thirf arranged a spaceship full of orphans to crash-land on an uninhabited planet, called Thirs.



The orphans grew up, and formed a new society with no memory of when the start of life was gradual; and the "Start of Life" was the subject of bitter, everlasting disputes.



... So Thirf lived happily ever after - because the Thirsians didn't."



... so unsuitable for small children! On Earth, we make children behave by telling them about Santa. Listen ...

The abortion laws on my planet discriminate against women ... I want everyone to sign this petition for change!



Sure - always glad to help womens' struggles!

Oh it *has* been a struggle ... I thought I'd never live to see this law changed.



Deep-rooted discrimination, eh?



Yeah. Our law bans the abortion of male fetuses that are more than 40 days old ... but for female fetuses, the limit is 80 days!

So what have feminists done?



Not much ... 'cause of a split in the movement. Some wanted to raise the male limit to 80 days, but some said there was more public support for reducing the female limit to 40 days.

But the latest President of our planet wants to see a uniform 40-day limit - it's a once-in-a-generation chance to get this law fixed! We're all uniting to support the President! So, **sign my petition! Strike a blow** for women's equality!



Does your species get pregnant, like us?

Yep. And do you have abortions on your planet?



Alas, we have a great many ... millions every year.

We have abortions, but not nearly as many as that.



I suppose that's something.

There's little need. A fetus doesn't grow unless the mother wants it to ... we can suspend a pregnancy for years, with the fetus alive but not growing.



Hmm!

That, I think, is fine, so long as it's born eventually.

But some women die of old age, still pregnant after many years, their fetuses dying with them.



Personally, I find that quite unacceptable!

But you can't actually say they're *killing* their fetuses. They're not doing anything to them.



It's like a human mother who abandons her newborn child ... now you could argue that, strictly, she's not actually killing him, just letting him die ... but that shows that the "right to life" is more than a ban on killing. For babies, it means the right to be given care by the parents.

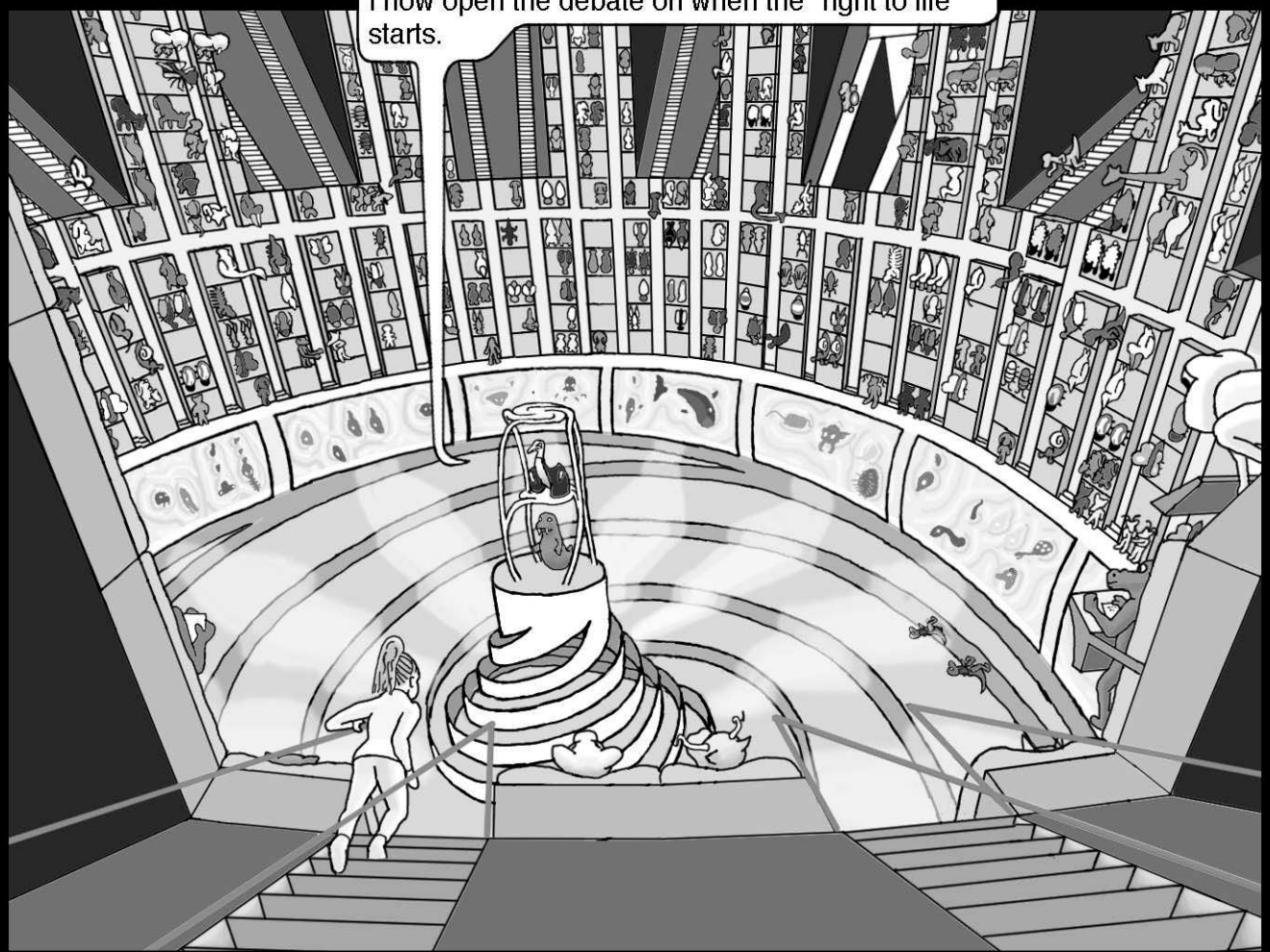
After two days of sharing opinions ...



The debate on the "Right to Life" will be starting shortly; take your seats in the Debating Hall ...

END OF CHAPTER SIX.

I now open the debate on when the "right to life" starts.





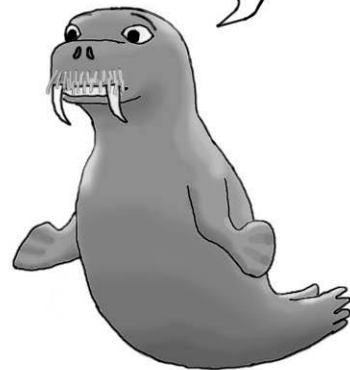
Last year, we debated a law that said it should start at *walking*, proposed by the Bernissian delegates ...



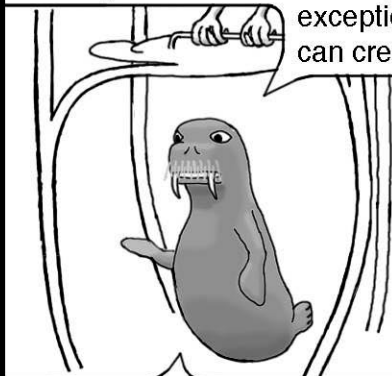
... that law was rejected by 93% of the votes. We now have a new proposal.



Delegates, we need a Galactic Law on this subject. Right now, there is a different law on every planet. There are an awful lot of ways to define "Life" in our Galaxy.



On most planets, the laws were made before the days of interstellar travel; they do not provide exceptions for other species who visit, which can create very awkward situations.



For instance, no-one taking a romantic holiday dares to visit Planet Cropusma.



I propose to remedy this by a law giving a general answer to the question "When does life start?" ...

**First heartbeat!**



**Birth!**

**Conception!**

**Becoming conscious!**

**Talking!  
Hatching!**

**Flying!  
Walking!**

**Ability to  
co-operate!**

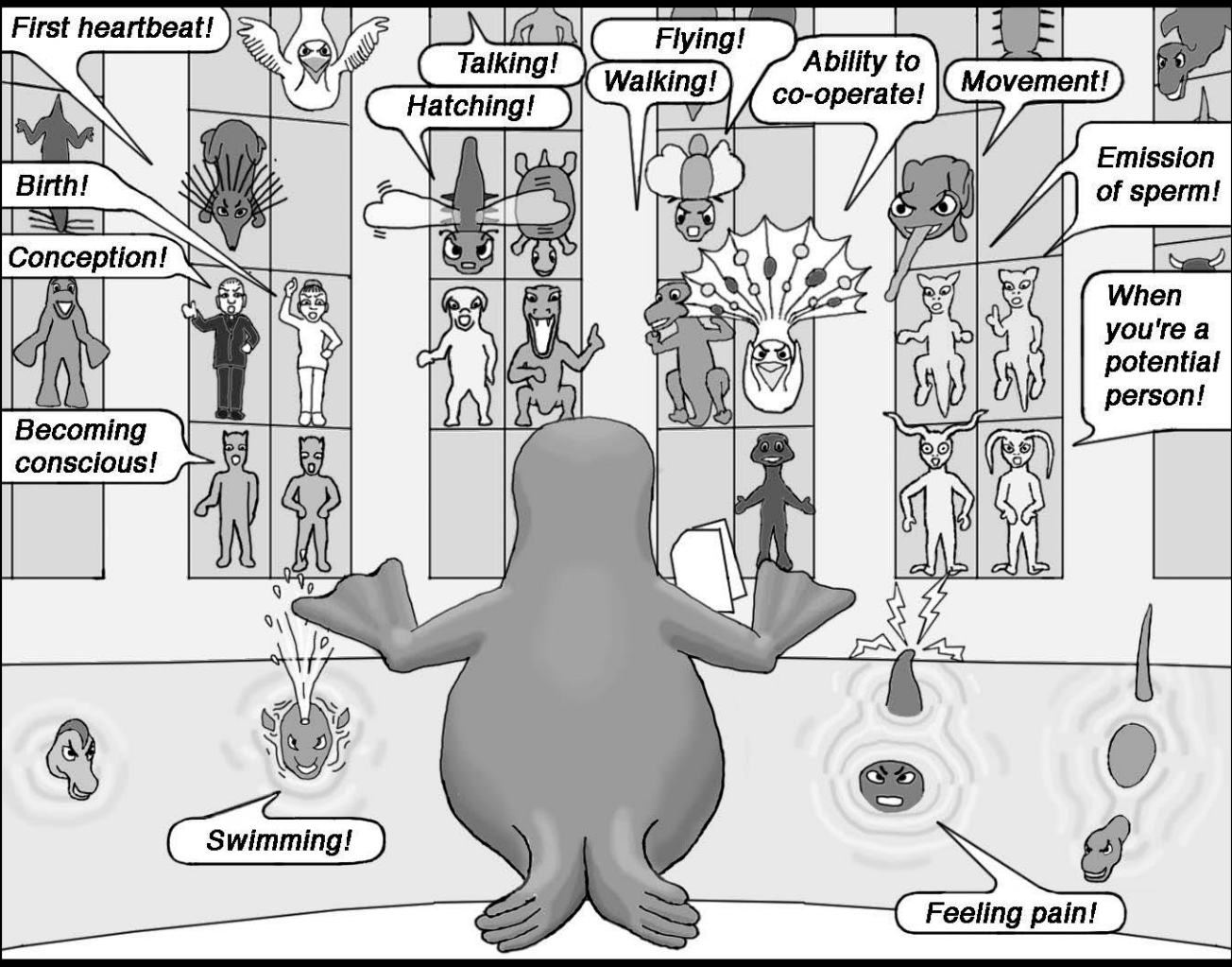
**Movement!**

**Emission  
of sperm!**

**When  
you're a  
potential  
person!**

**Swimming!**

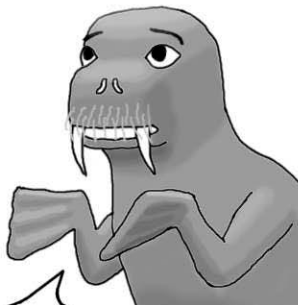
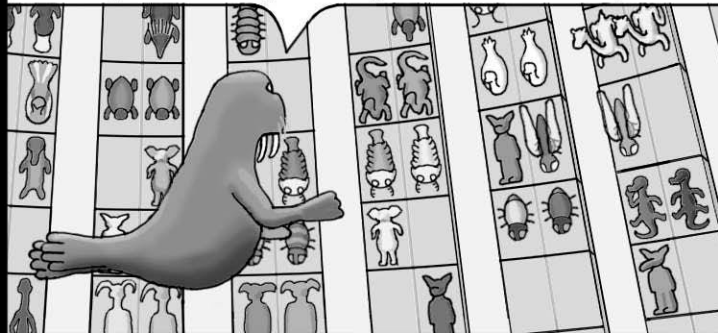
**Feeling pain!**



Thank you, delegates. I was just about to say that, if we try to pick a *particular stage* of growth, we shall *never* reach agreement. You have just demonstrated that more convincingly than any speech I could have made!

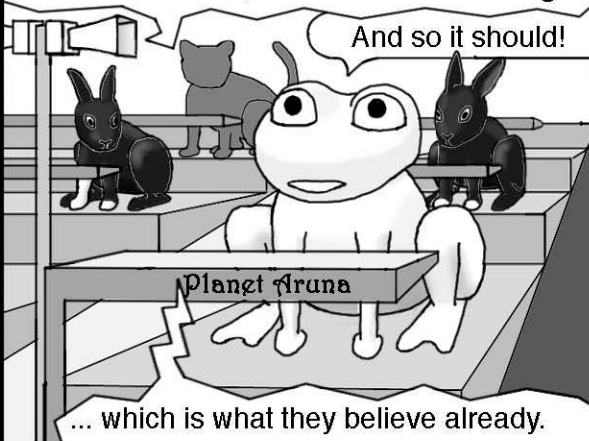


Instead of naming a particular stage of growth, I propose a numerical criterion. There should be no "right to life" at a stage of growth when the offspring vastly outnumber the parents. They gain the "right to life" at the stage when they no longer outnumber the parents.



Clearly, with this law, the "right to life" will start at a different stage for each species ...

For the Arunians, life will start with talking ...



... which is what they believe already.

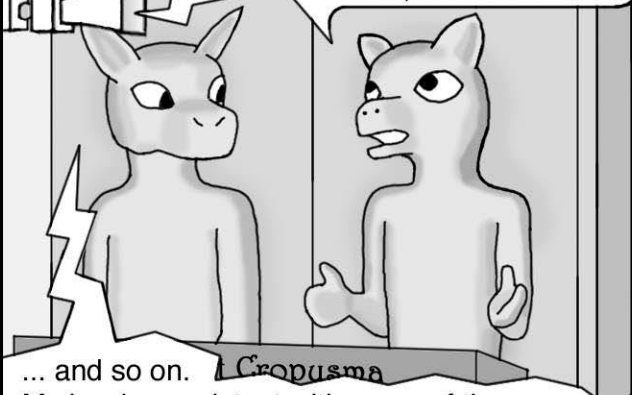
For the Bernissians, it will start with walking ...



... which is what *they* believe already.

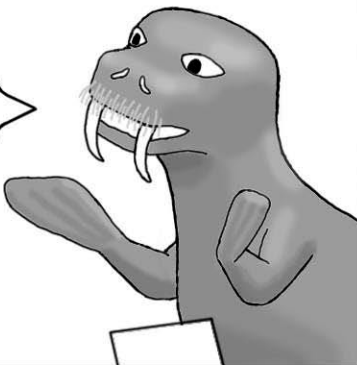
Cropusman eggs and sperm can have the right to life ...

At last, some sense ...

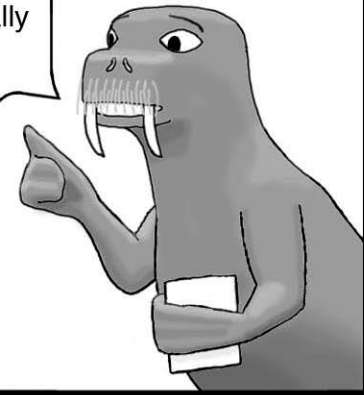


... and so on. My law is consistent with many of the existing beliefs about the "right to life".

Setting the "right to life" any earlier would place impossible demands on the parents, even if the parents loved them ... and usually they don't!

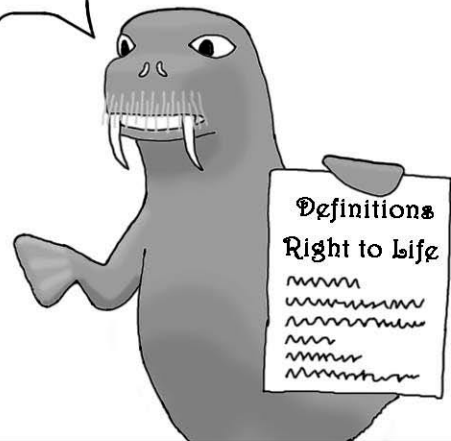


And there is a reason for this. Nature usually ensures that parents start loving their offspring as soon as it's practical - usually when the number of tadpoles gets small enough for parents to treat them as individuals.

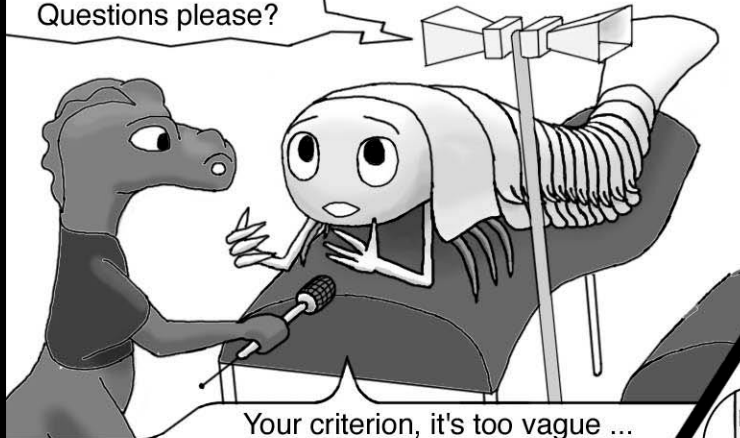


Perhaps it'd be different if the "right to life" merely

meant the right to not be killed. But my law will say the "right to life" means the right to receive care from your parents, and we mustn't demand more from them than is practical.



Questions please?



Your criterion, it's too vague ... surely you need to give an exact number of offspring for when the "right to life" starts?

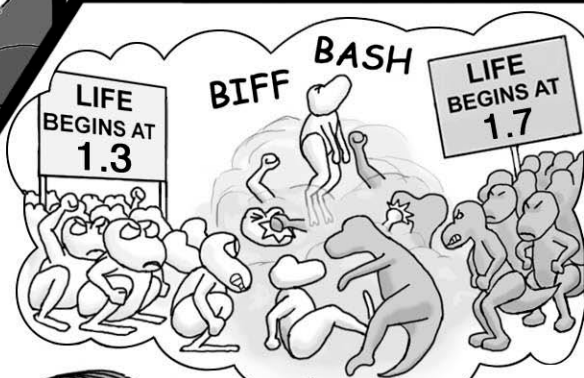
I shall not do that, for two reasons. First, I've given you a reason for this law, and it doesn't suggest any exact number.



And second,



it'd cause disagreement. For instance, in an Arunian litter, an average of 1.3 tadpoles survive long enough to get the "right to life", as they see it, whereas for Bernissian tadpoles, the number is slightly different, 1.7 ...



... It's impossible to pick an exact number that everyone will agree with. I want to give the lawmakers on each planet some flexibility in making their local laws.

So a little vagueness is an advantage. It makes my proposed law consistent with the existing laws on most planets ... those laws can now be regarded as local approximations to the fundamental principle I've just put forward ... so long as they alter how they deal with visitors from other planets.

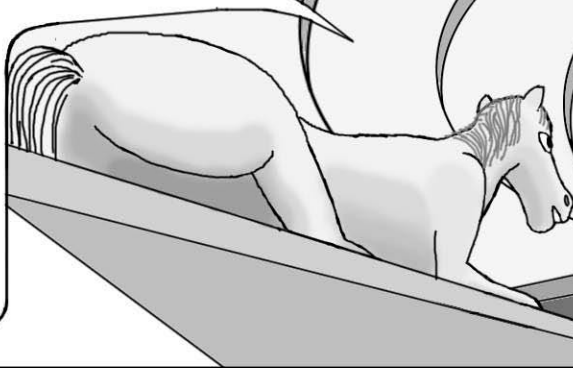


So what will this mean for humans?

Another question?

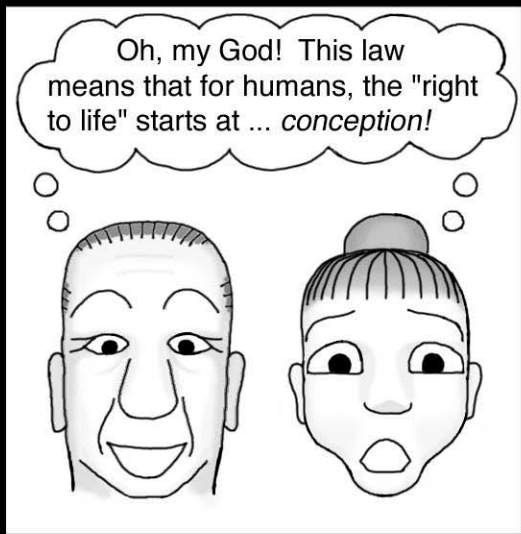


All you've done is summarise when parents start to feel affection for their offspring, and claim that is a moral law. Huh! I want a purely rational law, which is not based on natural desires at all.

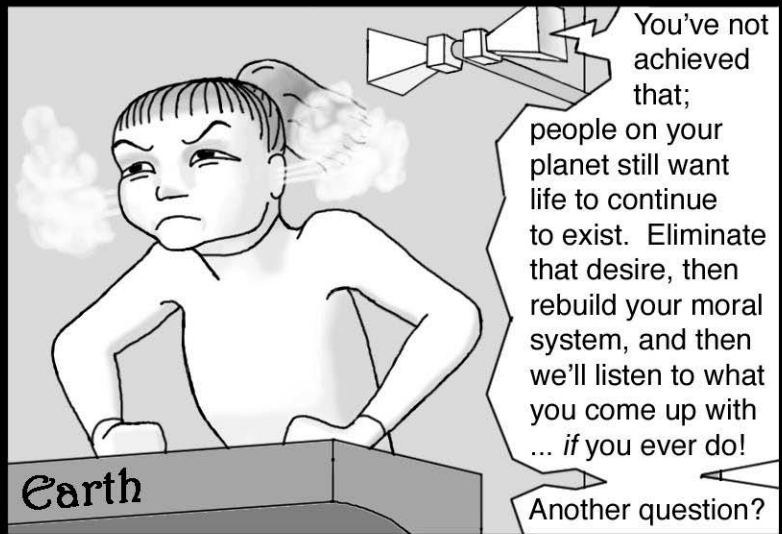




It is something we have already achieved on my own planet. We have no fondness for our colts or foals; the care we take in educating them proceeds entirely from the dictates of *Reason*.



Oh, my God! This law means that for humans, the "right to life" starts at ... *conception!*

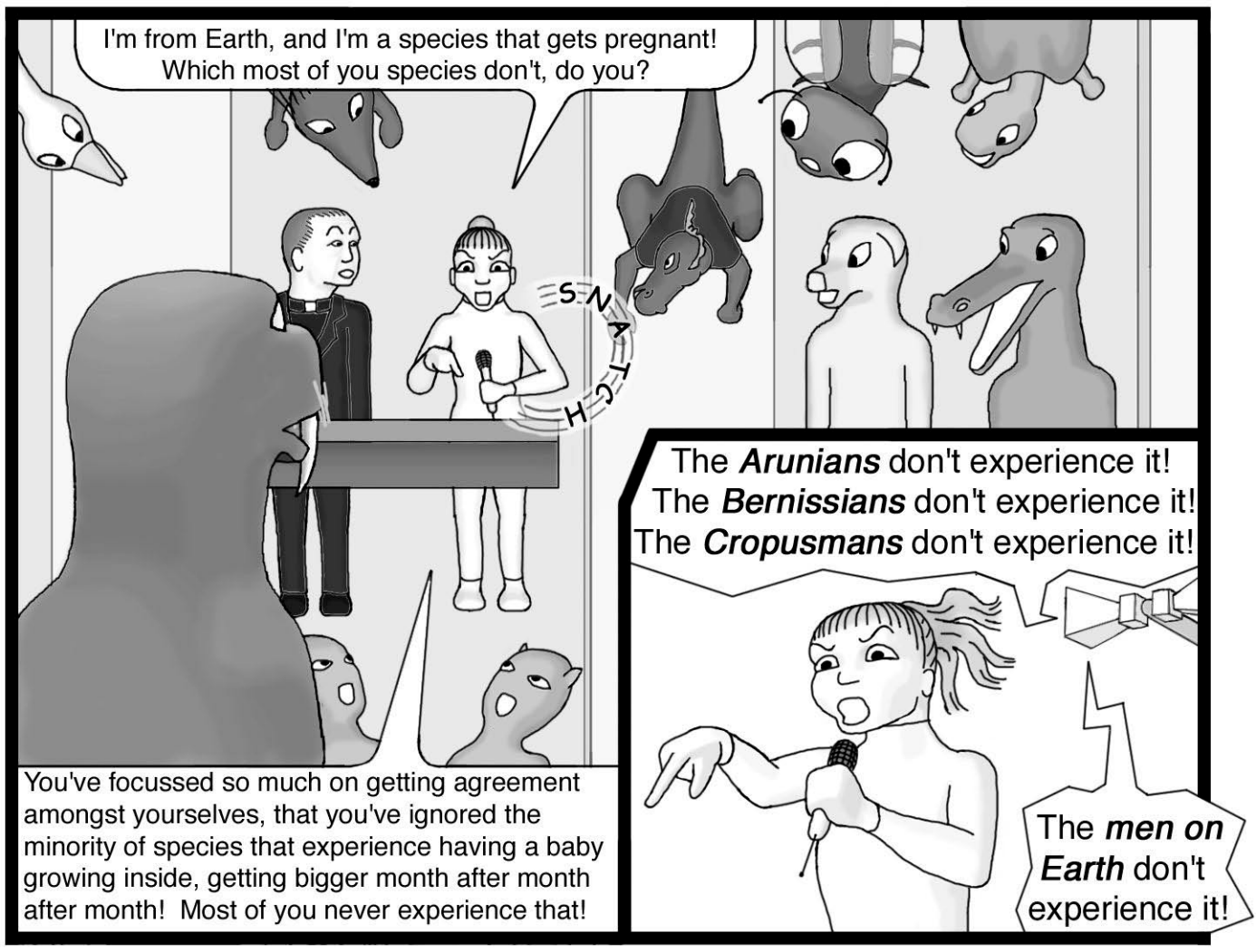


You've not achieved that; people on your planet still want life to continue to exist. Eliminate that desire, then rebuild your moral system, and then we'll listen to what you come up with ... *if you ever do!*

Earth

Another question?





I'm from Earth, and I'm a species that gets pregnant!  
Which most of you species don't, do you?

S  
N  
A  
T  
C  
H

You've focussed so much on getting agreement amongst yourselves, that you've ignored the minority of species that experience having a baby growing inside, getting bigger month after month after month! Most of you never experience that!

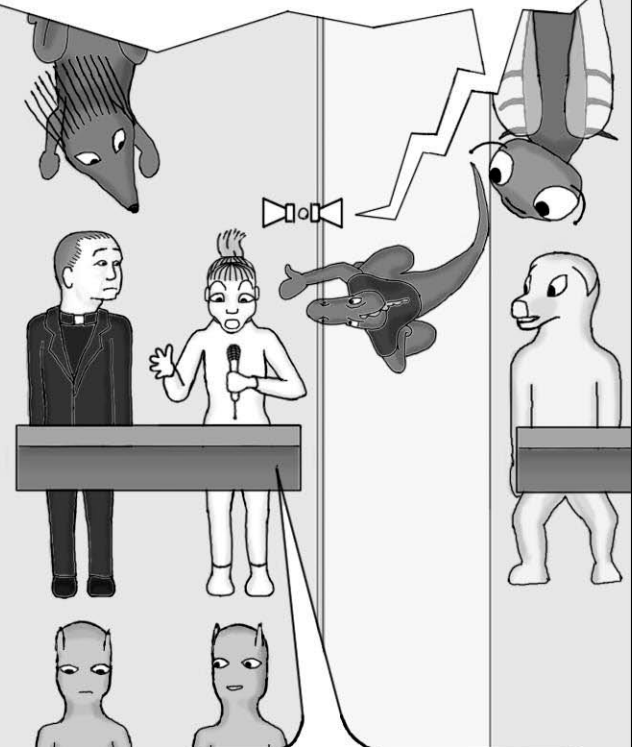
The **Arunians** don't experience it!  
The **Bernissians** don't experience it!  
The **Cropusmans** don't experience it!

The **men on Earth** don't experience it!



But we Earth-women do ... how dare you ignore our problems! Oh, yeah, this law may be fine for species that aren't forced to cope with pregnancy ...

... but you haven't said a single word to justify forcing women to carry babies <PING> YOUR TIME IS UP DELEGATE.



⚡ ⚔️ 🦴 🦷 ⚔️ ✨ 📌 🦴 !

Later... I suppose you like this new law.



Hmm.

It gives the right conclusion, of course ...

Take the Ten Commandments, for instance: none of the rules contain any numbers, except for keeping the 7th day holy. Simple "do"s and "don't"s.

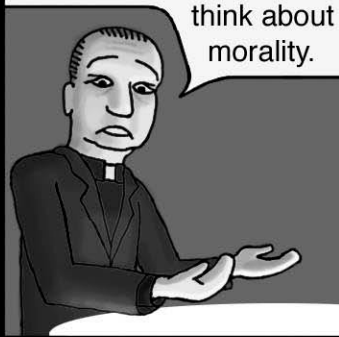


... but based on a principle I've rejected ever since my missionary days!

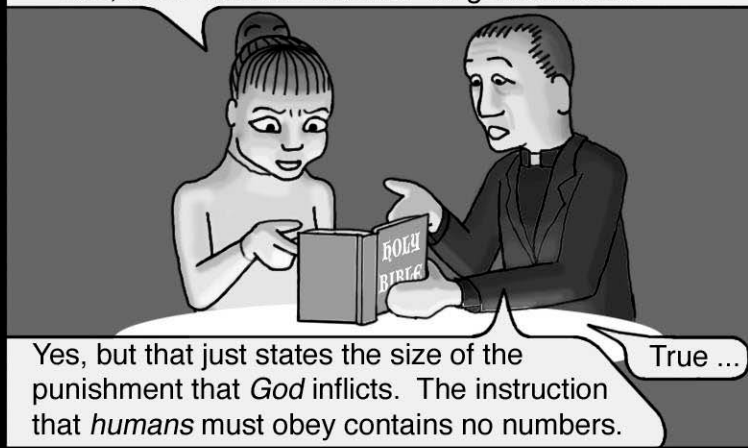


- As you know.

And it all depends on some vague numerical limit. That's not how we think about morality.



Wait, the Second Commandment contains numbers. It says God punishes the children of those who hate Him, even unto the 3rd and 4th generations...



Yes, but that just states the size of the punishment that *God* inflicts. The instruction that *humans* must obey contains no numbers.

True ...

Paa, so *what*, if “numerical” moral rules aren’t traditional? We’ve gotta go beyond traditional thinking, if

we’re to understand these alien beliefs ... or even our own!



We need **clear, simple** rules that ordinary people can understand and obey!



... like the administrators of your African mission ... who thought they had a **simple**

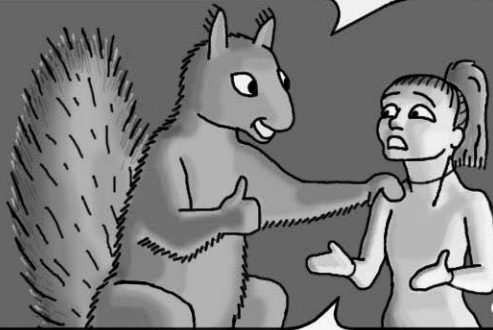
yes/no decision ... save everyone, or do nothing! Insisting on simple rules just dulls the imagination!



Tut! ... and yet it’d really help if I *could* accept this law, after all ... so I will put your points to the Vatican experts!



Great speech, Karla! Most of the species that get pregnant are going to vote against the proposal.



But that’s only a minority of species, it won’t be enough to win the vote ... we’re in danger of becoming an oppressed minority!

Ah, but species that don't get pregnant have recognised that danger ... some have told me they'll vote against the law because of that! And so will planets with overpopulation, I hear ... it all adds up!

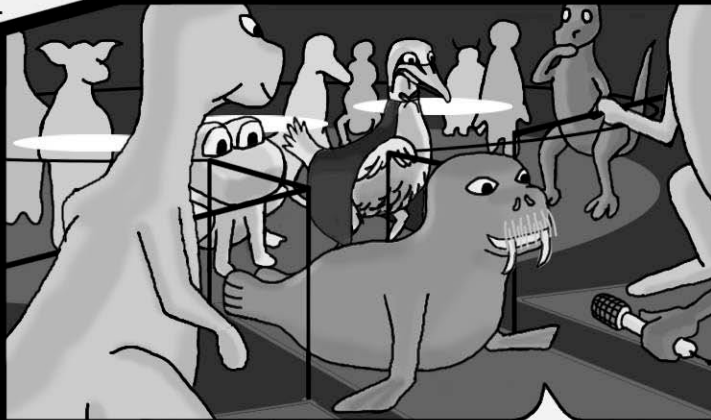


But, I hear, *some* species that get pregnant are in favour of this law ...

Later... Here is the result for the proposed "right to life" law: 43% voted in favour, 57% voted against.



Karla, compared with previous proposed laws on this subject, this one has done incredibly well.



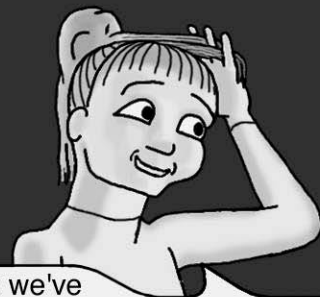
I'm grateful to have had so much support ... therefore, during next year's session of Parliament, I shall attempt again to pass this law ...

... once I have modified it so it gets more support.

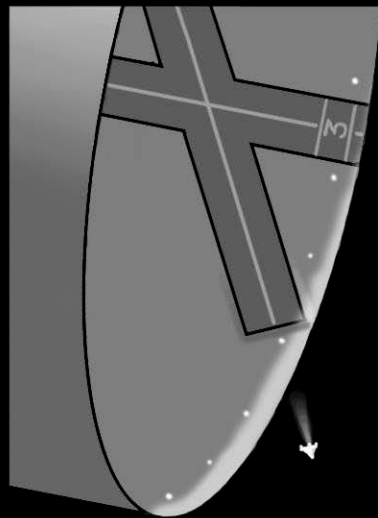


That's our chance! He'll want the votes of species who get pregnant ... so he'll take them into account now, won't he?

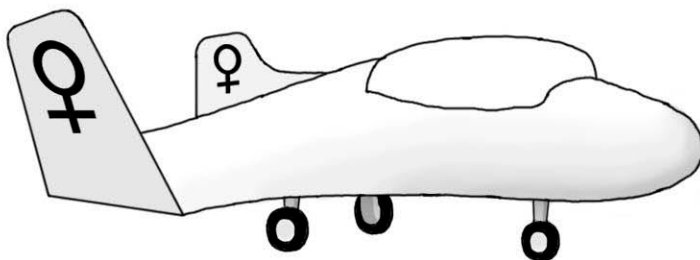
Let's hope so ...



But we've gotta gather support to fight for that, next year. So, in the meantime ... *I'll go home!*



END OF CHAPTER SEVEN.



Glad you can join us on WebNews Britain 877. Karla, the first Earth-woman to visit the Galactic Parliament, has just landed ...

How does it feel to be the second Earthling to return from the Galactic Parliament?

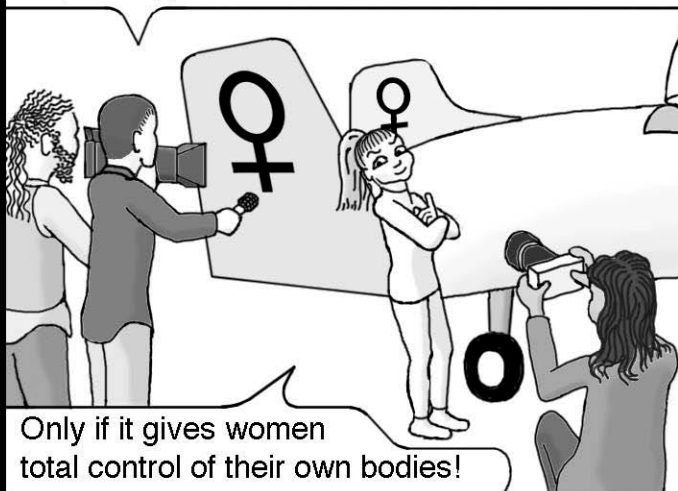
Very proud and very privileged to've had the chance to speak up for womankind!



Dammit ... the Monseigneur must have got back first!



Do you support the new British law on abortion?



Only if it gives women total control of their own bodies!

It lets women end their pregnancies at any time.



That's a wonderful law!

Wow! Sounds like lot's happened while I was away ... I really need to catch up!

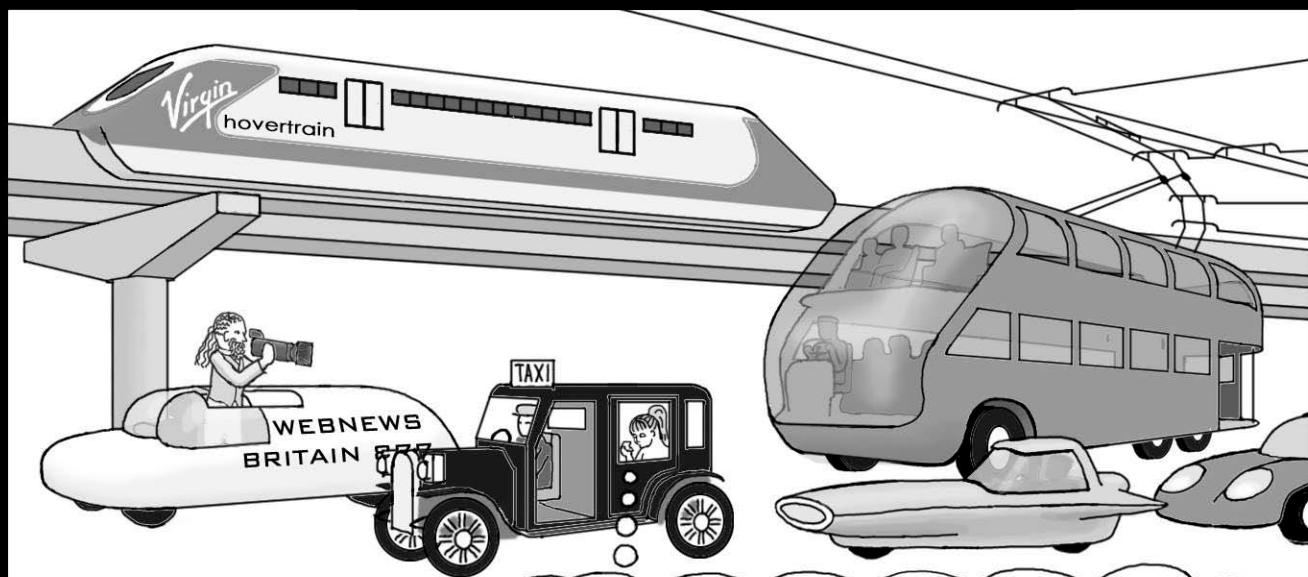
What do you think about the suffragette hunger strikers?



**TAXIS**

They fought hard for the rights women enjoy today, and it's great that modern journalists still remember them after all these years!

... and surprising ... feminists have obviously got the press to pay more attention to womens' rights!



Janis wasn't there to meet me this time, and her phone seems to be out of range ... I'll text one of our friends to find where she is!

Half an hour later ...



Hi Janis!



There was a cameraman following you!



Well, we want publicity, don't we?

I'm ... in hiding.



I had an unwanted pregnancy.

Sorry Karla ... it's great to see you, but ...



Janis!  
What's wrong?

Didn't you get an abortion?



Abortion's illegal. The new law says that killing a fetus or embryo is murder ... no matter how young it is!

But ... I heard that women were allowed to end their pregnancies ...



We can. Hospitals end those pregnancies by taking the fetus out of the mother ... and putting it into an artificial womb!

Not any more. It was ready to come out of the "womb" a week ago.

So what happened then?



It became *my* responsibility to look after it!



But I can't face up to it, Karla! I don't want to spend the next 18 years bringing up a baby I never wanted! That's why I'm in hiding!



Oh Janis!

And I led that cameraman straight to you! I am so, so sorry!

So *your* baby is now in a hospital somewhere ... in an artificial womb!



You might have been shown on a live webcast. We've got to get you to another hiding place, right away!



I suppose so ... if it's worth the bother ... *this* isn't really any better! I don't want to spend the next 18 years hiding from the authorities either. But I just can't face it!

What about the father? *He* should have as much responsibility as you!



Legally, he does ... but he's "disappeared" as well.

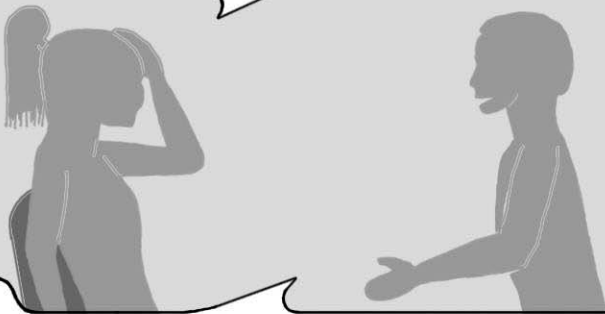
And when I went into hospital to have my embryo extracted, they took my photo, scanned my face, and so on ... that's the standard procedure ... so if both parents "disappear", it's a lot easier for the authorities to trace the mother than the father.



Besides, spending the next 18 years with *him* would be yet another way to ruin my life ... let's just say that part of me was quite glad when I heard he'd "disappeared" and I wasn't likely to see him again.



Why on Earth did the government do this?



Well, the technology behind the "artificial wombs" improved while you were away. Now they're cheap, automatic, and easy to set up.

The factories are churning out hundreds every day! There's no end of women in my position!



So, the government said, these new artificial wombs are the perfect answer which will end the abortion controversy ...

... we can give women total control of their bodies, allow them to end a pregnancy whenever they want, *and* save the life of every fetus ... **EVERYONE** will be happy!

Huh!

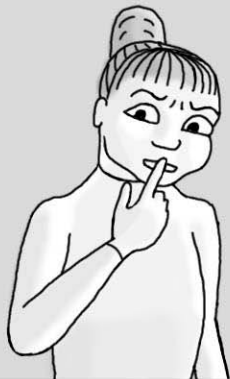


Only the Catholics will be happy ...



Nope. McGarrity's already been on TV, grumbling about how "unnatural" the new system is.

So "viability" isn't part of abortion law any more.



Yes it is - the law says a mother's right to control her body has priority over a fetus's life, therefore you *can* abort any fetus that's not viable.

But that only occurs when some medical condition prevents it living in an artificial womb. Just a few rare cases ...

I thought about having a back-street abortion...



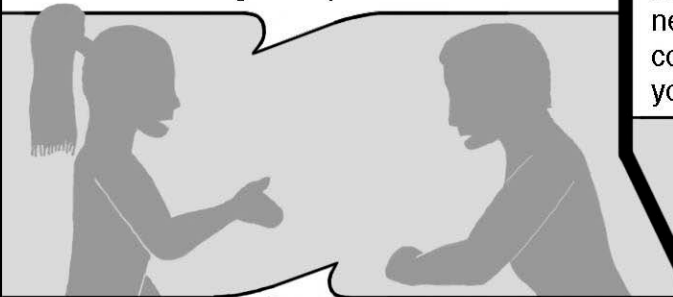
You'd probably have died!



They're not *that* risky ... they say the chance of dying is about 1 in 100 ... I'd have accepted that, it was the risk of being permanently damaged that put me off ...

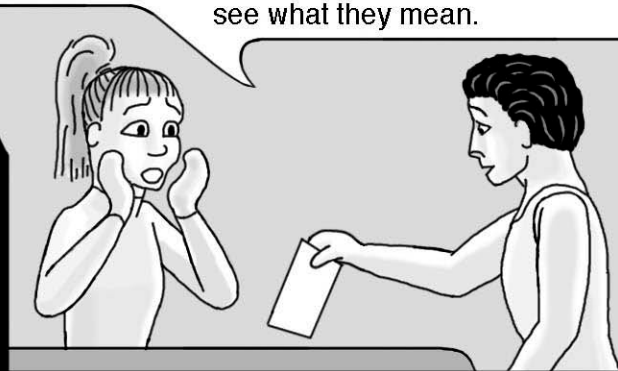


The feminist movement must be doing something to stop this!



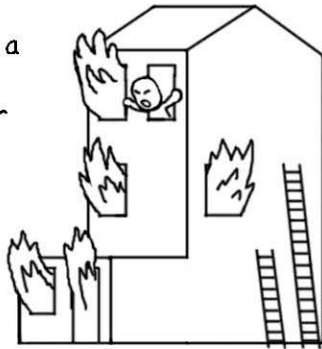
Yeah, of course ... the biggest protest is the hunger strikers. Women with unwanted pregnancies have stopped eating ... they hope that if they starve enough, their fetus will die, then abort without anyone having to do anything.

There's a huge legal battle going on to decide whether they're committing murder, or just child neglect. The hunger strikers say they're not committing murder, even under the new law, if you interpret it strictly ... read this leaflet and you'll see what they mean.



## SUPPORT THE HUNGER STRIKERS!

You see someone trapped in a burning building, who you could save if you risked your own life. You don't try, and the person dies. Have you committed murder? NO!!



You're asked to donate to help children starving in Africa.



You give them £1, though you have £30 in your pocket. You could have saved more lives if you'd given them *all* your money. Have you committed murder? NO!!



The Law has always recognised that letting someone die is not the same as killing them. Our pregnant hunger strikers are not *killing* their fetuses. They are doing nothing, and letting their fetuses die in the womb. That is not murder.

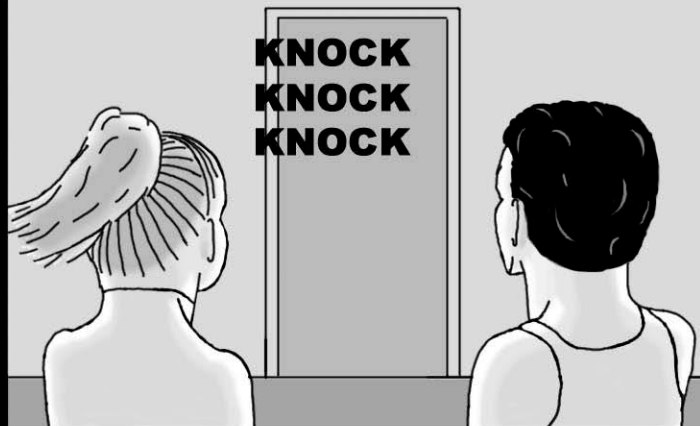
We want YOU to help us. Just give us a legally binding promise that YOU will take complete care of one of these fetuses until it becomes an adult ... and one of our hunger strikers will have her fetus transferred to the safety of an artificial womb! That fetus will be saved, because YOU did something to help it!

If you refuse the request we have just made, have you committed murder? NO!!

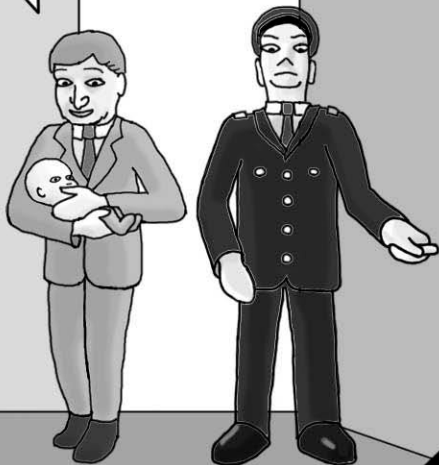
So, don't say our hunger strikers are committing murder, just because *they* won't lift a finger to save their fetuses either!



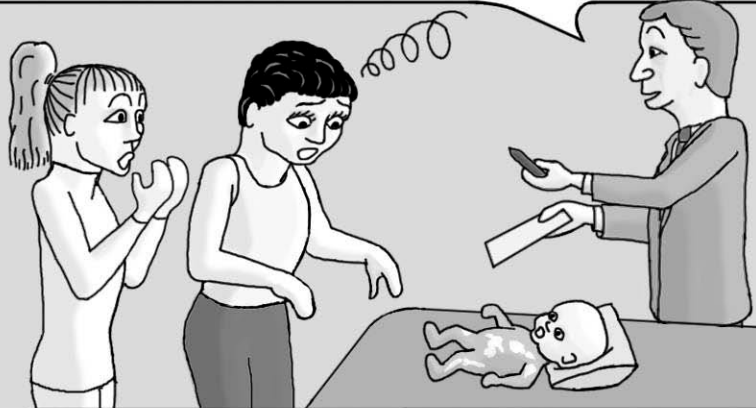
Yes, that's so like men!  
They won't pass laws  
that oblige anyone  
to keep someone  
else alive, except  
when the main  
burden falls  
on women ...



At last we've found you! Here's your baby ...

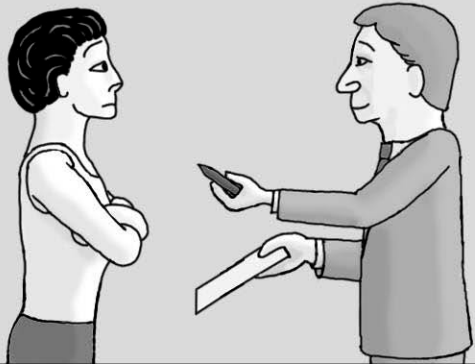


Just sign this form to say you accept responsibility for it ...

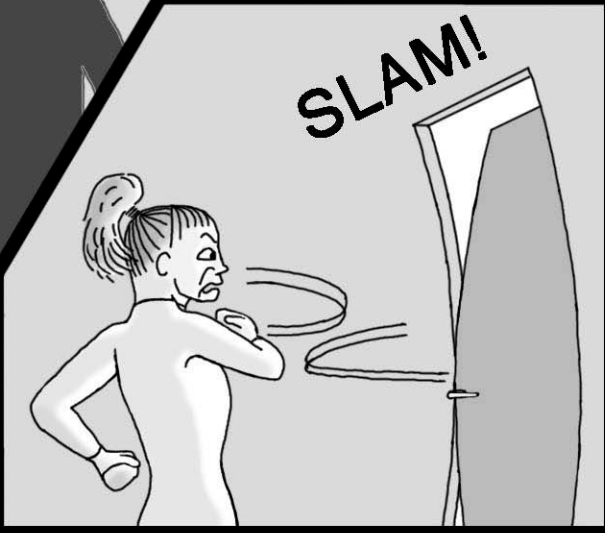


Reluctant to sign, eh? Never mind, this policeman can witness that we've handed you the baby, that'll do just as well in the eye of the law ...

Under the Child Protection Act, I am obliged to read you the following statement.



"This baby is now your responsibility. You are required to feed it, care for it, and keep it sheltered. If you fail to do so, YOU will be held legally responsible. If the child commits a crime, YOU will be held legally responsible. This responsibility lasts for 24 hours a day, until the child is 18 years old."



Oh Janis! And I was the one who gave away your hiding place!



I guess this would've happened anyway ... I was just putting off the evil moment ...



I've got the answer ... adoption! There are always more couples wanting to adopt than there are babies.

And any adopter will want to take you away as soon as they see you! All you have to do is lay back and look cute! And you can do that, can't you, little chap?



No ... there *were* more adopters than babies. Now abortion's been banned, it's the other way round! I'll try, but probably get no-where...



I told the Galactic Parliament they must treat us differently from species that reproduce without pregnancy ...



But now, we're a species that can reproduce without pregnancy.



What I told them wouldn't work for your case. Aw, heck! What on earth am I going to tell the Galactic Parliament next year?

This is worse than the suffragette hunger strikers, all those years ago. What advance have we made since then? We can fly around the Galaxy ...



... but we've still gotta fight for the rights we've always demanded. Okay, we now have total control of our *bodies*. That battle is at an end ...

**THE END  
OF  
THIS  
STORY**



... but we do not have control of our *lives*! That battle is only just beginning!

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

Although *Life in our Galaxy* is mostly fiction, all words relating to events in the past are true. My account of events in 1928 relies, in part, on unpublished evidence, and so the notes for them are particularly detailed.

### CHAPTER ONE

*"It sounds just like the way frogs on Earth reproduce!"* The number of eggs depends on the species; the toad *Bufo marinus* lays up to 30,000 eggs, whereas the frog *Dendrobates pumilio* lays 4-6 eggs at a time. "Frogs & Toads of the World", Chris Mattison, Blandford Press, 1992, chapter 8.

### CHAPTER FOUR

*"vitae necisque potestas"*. For more details about Roman family law, see, for example, Chapter 2 of "The Roman Family", Suzanne Dixon, 1992, The John Hopkins University Press.

### CHAPTER FIVE

*"effectively, a complete ban on abortion!"* Philosophers have long ago pointed out that medical advances may eventually make "viability" occur at conception, or near conception; e.g. J T Noonan and P Ramsey (both in "The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives", ed. J T Noonan, Harvard University Press, 1970, p52, p87); "Causing Death and Saving Lives", J Glover, Penguin Books, 1977; chapter 9.

*"The time limit for abortion has always been linked to the potential viability ... the case now."* This remark is based on a speech in Parliament by Dawn Primarolo (Minister for Health) during a recent debate on abortion (*Hansard*, House of Commons debates for 20 May 2008, 245).



## Chapter 5 (continued)

"we revised that law in 1990". The revision introduced a 24-week limit which largely replaced the previous 28-week limit. Sir David Steel told Parliament: "medical science has moved on a great deal since 1929 ... A wide section of expert opinion ... says that there is now a case for reducing the presumption of viability from 28 to 24 weeks." (*Hansard*, House of Commons debates for 24 April 1990, [206](#).) This implies that the purpose of the revision was maintaining the principle of viability, not abandoning it.

"And it has been the case in the USA since they legalised abortion in 1973." U.S. Supreme Court, *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

"Mr Justice Talbot told the jury". Report in *The Times*, "Infanticide and Child Murder", 13 June 1928; and in more detail in the Liverpool *Daily Courier*, "Faulty Murder Laws", 13 June 1928.

"The law upon the matter is unsatisfactory". G.J.Talbot, K.C. had been concerned about this for years; he wrote about it to the government on 16 Oct 1916 and 22 Sept 1923, asking them to address "One of the most scandalous defects in the criminal law." The letters are stored at The National Archives, Kew, England as part of record HO45/13291.

"his Bill said nothing about "viability"". The initial version of this Bill was published as "Infanticide Bill", The Lord Darling, ordered to be printed 14th June 1928. Lord Darling's statement of the purpose of the Bill is in *Hansard*, House of Lords debates for 21 June 1928, [616](#).

"a committee of Lords altered the Bill". See "Proceedings of the Select Committee on the Infanticide Bill [H.L.] now Child Destruction Bill [H.L.]". Ordered to be printed 16th July 1928. The clauses eventually became law as the Infant Life (Preservation) Act, 1929. The Act did not actually contain the word "viability"; however, a later generation decided to interpret the phrase "capable of being born alive" as being equivalent to viability, and so for brevity the cartoon refers to this phrase as "viability".

## Chapter 5 (continued)

*"so it then became the time limit for abortion!"* Section 5(1) of the 1967 Abortion Act (as originally enacted) declared that the 1929 Infant Life (Preservation) Act continued in force - thereby turning the latter into the time limit for abortion. When the 1967 Act was being passed, there seems to have been little discussion about whether it was justifiable to use the 1929 Act in this way. There were four long debates on the floor of the House of Commons (on 22 July 1966, 2 June 1967, 29 June 1967 & 13 July 1967); during these debates, which lasted a total of 35 hours, not even one sentence was uttered that attempted to explain why it was wise to use the 1929 Act as the time limit for abortion (except, perhaps, for the brief remark of Mr Angus Maude: "I ... cannot find it in me ... to regard the non-viable foetus in utero as a human personality." *Hansard*, House of Commons debates for 22 July 1966, 1118).

*"But why'd the Lords alter it?"* I have not found any publication giving the reasons for the alterations. However, information is given in some unpublished notes, particularly these three:

- A letter titled "Infanticide Bill", dated 27th June 1928, to Lord Darling, apparently from L.A.J. Granville Ram (Third Parliamentary Counsel). This letter is archived as pages 2623-2625 of the bound volume "Miscellaneous 1928-9 J.G.R", now kept in the archives at the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel (OPC). My thanks go to John Healy and Corinne Pither of the OPC for allowing me to examine this archive volume.
- A five page typewritten note "PRESERVATION OF INFANT LIFE BILL. Note on Lord Atkin's Amendments in Committee." by L.A.J. Granville Ram, now stored at The National Archives, Kew, England, within Folder 165493/18 (date-stamped 19 Nov 28), which is part of record HO45/13291.
- A two page note "PRESERVATION OF INFANT LIFE BILL. Short Notes." (no author, but a handwritten note immediately after suggests it was written by Ram), within Folder 165493/19 (date-stamped 2 Feb 29), also within record HO45/13291 at The National Archives, Kew, England.

## Chapter 5 (continued)

*"a 'during-birth' offence would be hard to prosecute".* The letter of 27 June 1928 explains:

I enclose some draft amendments to this Bill ... We do not see how the Bill can satisfactorily be limited to deal only with acts done "in the course of the delivery of a woman of a child" ... It would generally be virtually impossible to prove when a birth began ... We have, therefore, thought it best to make the Bill refer to the destruction of a child at any time after the expiration of 28 weeks from the conception thereof. This is the period mentioned in the Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1926 ... s. 12 of which defines "still-born" and "still-birth" as applying to any child which has issued forth from its mother after the twenty-eighth week of pregnancy ..... Further, I understand that this is the point commonly taken by doctors as marking the difference between miscarriage and premature birth.

The five-page note on Lord Atkin's amendments confirms this:

... Lord Darling's Bill intentionally abstains from limiting the punishable acts to acts done "in the course of delivery" so as to avoid putting upon the prosecution the onus of proving when "delivery" in fact began - an almost impossible task:

*"the provision as to 28 weeks after conception seems to be quite unnecessary".* See *Hansard*, House of Lords debates for 22 Nov 1928, 272.

*"the draftsman's private notes".* The letter of 27 June 1928 states the choice of time limit in the quotation given above. About a quarter of a page of it explains the choice of 28 weeks, whereas the letter does not mention any reason for adding the phrase "child capable of being born alive". It therefore seems likely that, when selecting the time limit, the draftsman thought that the main decision was the selection of 28 weeks, and that it was a secondary decision to qualify this with the phrase "capable of being born alive".

## Chapter 5 (continued)

The note "PRESERVATION OF INFANT LIFE BILL. Short Notes" also states that "a statutory precedent" for choosing the 28th week of pregnancy is "Section 12 of the Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1926." (The latter defines a still-birth as being born dead after 28 weeks of pregnancy. Consistency with this would therefore require a simple 28-week limit, so it is unclear why the phrase "child capable of being born alive" was also added to the Bill. Perhaps the latter change was not made for any deep reason; Ram's fellow-draftsmen occasionally called him "cacoethes mutandi!" (see "In On The Act: Memoirs of a Lawmaker", Sir Harold Kent, MacMillan London Ltd, 1979, pp27-29, 61, 73-78, 155.))

There is another reference to 28 weeks worth commenting upon. First, bear in mind that the existing anti-abortion law (The Offences Against the Person Act, 1861), made it an offence to procure a miscarriage; that the clause did not actually use the word "abortion" (except in marginal notes); and that the Act did not define what the word "miscarriage" meant. Next, notice that in the five page note described earlier, Ram quoted the definition of "Miscarriage" in the Oxford Dictionary, which defined it in terms of the foetus being expelled before the 28th week; however, he does not state whether this reference to 28 weeks had any influence on the 28 weeks clause he added to the Infanticide Bill. Ram did not quote the definition of "abortion", but it seems plausible that he looked it up at the same time as "miscarriage", and if so, he would have found that the medical definition of abortion refers only to a delivery so early that the child cannot live (see Oxford English Dictionary, 1933 edition). I speculate that Ram may have thought it ambiguous whether the 1861 Act banned abortions after 28 weeks (given the dictionary definition of "miscarriage"), and that he decided to eliminate this possible loophole by altering the new law to cover such cases. If so, then the 28-week limit was chosen because it was the start-time of the loophole left by the sloppy drafting of the 1861 Act. However, I have not found any positive evidence that this is the case, and I think it more likely that the main reason was the one he stated of following the 28-week limit in the Births and Deaths Registration Act.

## Chapter 5 (continued)

*"There are other arguments that human life begins then - more theological..."* The Catholic Church's arguments relating to abortion can be found in "Donum Vitae - Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation", Cardinal Ratzinger, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 22 Feb 1987.

## CHAPTER SIX

*"Each pregnancy produces several children"* This scene was inspired by the life-cycle of Acarophenax; see "Death Before Birth, or a Mite's Nunc Dimittis", in "The Panda's Thumb", S J Gould, W W Norton & Company, 1980.

*"a few people suggested that the moral "Start of Life" was also gradual."* For a real example of a philosopher suggesting that a human's right to life grows gradually in strength after conception, see "Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong", J L Mackie, Penguin Books, 1977, chapter 8.

*"thousands of sperms would fuse with one egg, until it contained an (almost) complete set of genes from the father ..."* Why "almost"? Because waiting for a complete set of genes might take forever. For this part of the myth, the details are as follows: each sperm would contain a small quantity of a special protein called Pretriggerin; after fusing with the egg, the molecules of Pretriggerin would eventually convert into another molecule called Triggerin, but taking many hours before all the molecules converted. Once the amount of Triggerin in the egg exceeded a certain amount, the egg would stop fusing with sperms. Then, for each gene where there was no version of that gene from the father, the mother's version of that gene would be copied; thus the egg would contain a double set of every possible gene. Then the egg would proceed to the next stage of development.

*"fetuses that are more than 40 days old"* This scene was inspired by a statement of Aristotle's that "distinct parts" are found in a 40-day old male embryo, or 90-day old female embryo (in his "History of Animals"). This influenced Catholic thought on

## Chapter 6 (continued)

the moral status of an embryo. St Thomas Aquinas believed an embryo received a soul some time after conception and that killing a embryo before this time, whilst a sin, was not the same sin as homicide. Under Pope Gregory XIII, the Vatican's Sacred Penitentiary did not treat the killing of an embryo under 40 days as homicide. See "An Almost Absolute Value in History", J T Noonan, in "The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives", edited by J T Noonan, Harvard University Press, 1970.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

*"We have no fondness for our colts or foals"*. Based on a line in "Gulliver's Travels", J Swift, Part IV, Chapter 8.

*"even unto the 3rd and 4th generations"* Exodus 20, v4-6.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

*"everyone will be happy!"* Others have suggested that artificial wombs could (eventually) provide a solution that both proponents and opponents of abortion would be happy with (especially in combination with adoption). Suggestions of this kind are listed in "The Ethics of Artificial Uteruses", S Coleman, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Aldershot, England, 2004. The earliest suggestion appears to be in "Foetal Adoption: A Technological Solution to the Problem of Abortion Ethics", R Freitas, *The Humanist*, May/June 1980. But earlier authors made the related point that, if it is possible to remove a fetus without killing it, then claims about a women's right to control her own body can at most justify removal of the fetus, rather than its destruction; "A Defence of Abortion", J J Thomson, *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1, No 1, 1971.

## Chapter 8 (continued)

"they say the chance of dying is about 1 in 100" The risks involved in an illegal abortion will depend on the circumstances, but 1 in 100 is as severe (and probably more severe) than the risks involved in a typical illegal abortion. Some examples of statistics that have been claimed:-

- *Britain before abortion was legalised:* During the Parliamentary debates that preceded that passing of the 1967 Abortion Act, the sponsor of it, Mr David Steel, stated that 30 women a year died of illegal abortions. He also stated that the number of illegal abortions was "probably" between 40,000 and 200,000 a year. So that implies 1 maternal death per 1300 abortions, or 1 maternal death per 7000 abortions. However, the main opponent of the Act, Mr St John-Stevas, quoted an estimate of 10,000 illegal abortions per year, which would imply 1 maternal death per 300 abortions.
- *Germany:* Writing in the 1930s, Rangy claimed one million abortions per year, and that 25,000 women per year died. That implies 1 maternal death per 40 abortions.
- *current worldwide situation:* The World Health Organisation claims that, in 2008, there were 21,800,000 unsafe abortions worldwide, resulting in 47,000 maternal deaths. That implies 1 maternal death per 450 abortions.

These data are taken from: *Hansard*, House of Commons debates for 22 July 1966, 1071, 1154; & for 13 July 1967, 1349. (More estimates of the numbers of illegal abortions are in the Report of the Committee of the Working of the Abortion Act, DHSS, 1974, Vol 1 paras 505-506, & Vol 2 paras 11-21.) "Abortion: Legal or Illegal?", A J Rangy, New York Vanguard, 1933; p105. "Unsafe Abortion: Global and Regional Estimates of the Incidence of Unsafe Abortion and Associated Mortality in 2008", Sixth Edition, WHO.

## Chapter 8 (continued)

"They won't pass laws that oblige anyone to keep someone else alive, except when the main burden falls on women ..." This is very similar to Judith Jarvis Thomson's claim that it was "a gross injustice" to have an anti-abortion law whilst there was no law compelling people to be "Good Samaritans". "A Defence of Abortion", J J Thomson, *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1, No 1, 1971.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the many people who have looked through various drafts of this book and given me suggestions or encouragement. In particular, the following have been especially helpful by giving comments in some detail: George Lockwood, Parisa Khaneghah, Yasna Hawksley, Grizelda Grizlingham, Laura Field, Richard Bruton, Sylvia Barnett. Ian Field gave very useful tips about the business of searching historical archives.

This edition of *Life in our Galaxy* was published 2013; Copyright Christopher R Lockwood.



On Earth, Karla campaigns vigorously for “abortion rights”; but when she tries to spread that message to aliens on other planets, it’s even more of a challenge, because the way aliens have children is so different from the way humans do ...

This science-fiction satire will be thought-provoking to anyone interested in the ethics of abortion. It does not adopt any of the usual positions on abortion, but is for readers who want to take a fresh look at the issue.

[www.LifeInOurGalaxy.com](http://www.LifeInOurGalaxy.com)