



Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists Newsletter April 2024

Dear Fellow Humanists

Welcome to the April edition of the Coventry & Warwickshire Newsletter. Despite the inclement weather we do need to believe that the weather will become more spring-like as May approaches. The opportunities to be outside is limited. Hopefully soon we will be able to enjoy picnics and walks in the open air with comfort. With the approach of summer, the Humanist calendar becomes busy with the Humanist Convention in Cardiff, World Humanist Day and as well as our own programme. Please note that we will have an in-person meeting on Thursday 16th May with an online session with Clare Elcombe-Webber the Head of Humanist Care. This will be ac new venture and approach for us, I hope that you will support us.

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Meetings:

Thursday 25th **April:** We had a well-attended and a very interesting meeting. The main item was the continuation of the discussion from the March meeting on the background to the current conflict in Gaza. The main discussion was on the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the period leading up to the arrival of the Zionists following the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. Many Jewish people had fled to Israel due to the rise of Nazism in the 1930's. This debate was again well led by John Goodfellow and also prompted an interesting discussion with those who attended.

Thursday 16th May: As mentioned above we have a new development with an in-person meeting and logging into an online discussion with Clare Elcombe-Webber the Head of Humanist Care. There will be the opportunity to ask Clare questions. We are also hoping to provide a link-up for those who are unable to attend in person.

Future Events: We are hoping to arrange A **Tour of Stratford-upon-Avon led by none other than William Shakespeare.** The tour will include a visit to some of his favourite haunts and those of significant interest. A date has not yet been confirmed, but it is likely to be a weekday in June. After tour we will meet for a meal in a restaurant in Stratford. Humanists are encouraged to invite their friends and family. We will publish the details once they have been confirmed.

Richard Dawkins at Warwick Arts Centre on Wednesday 23rd October at 7.00 pm – Full details below. I know that many Humanists will not want to miss this event. My advice is to book as soon as possible. Within a week of the event being put on the WAC website, half the seats have already been snapped up.

An Evening with Richard Dawkins and Friends – Wednesday 23rd October at 7.00 pm in Butterworth Hall, Warwick arts Centre:

Don't miss the opportunity to be part of this enlightening experience and hear first-hand about Dawkins' upcoming book promoted on tour: The Genetic Book of the Dead delves into the transformative potential of DNA in our understanding of evolution.

VIP: £128 (includes premium seating, limited edition signed copy of Richard's latest book, 'The Genetic Book of the Dead', meet & greet with Richard, with an opportunity for a photo. £48 / £38 / £33 / £28

You can also purchase a copy of Richard's latest book 'The Genetic Book of the Dead' during checkout.



Some speakers use very strong language and express controversial opinions. Please come prepared

Settle in for an unforgettable evening with Richard Dawkins, the world-renowned evolutionary biologist, author, and public intellectual, as he embarks on a highly anticipated tour across the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, and European Union, starting September 2024. Renowned for his unapologetic advocacy of science and reason, Dawkins is celebrated for ground-breaking work such as *Unweaving The Rainbow, The Selfish Gene* and *The God Delusion*, captivating millions with his passion for scientific inquiry.

Dawkins aims to connect with audiences in unscripted conversations touching on topics from science to religion, life on earth and beyond. With his trademark honesty and wit, Dawkins promises an evening filled with wisdom and insight.

World Humanist Day - 21st June:

World Humanist Day is a Humanist holiday celebrated annually around the world on the June solstice, which usually falls on June 21. According to Humanists International, the day is a way of spreading awareness of Humanism as a philosophical life stance and means to effect change in the world. It is also seen as a time for Humanists to gather socially and promote the positive values of Humanism. The holiday developed during the 1980s as several chapters of the American Humanist Association (AHA) began to celebrate it. At the time, the date on which it was celebrated varied from chapter to chapter, with selections such as the founding date of the IHEU, or other significant dates. From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, the AHA and IHEU passed resolutions declaring World Humanist Day to be on the northern summer solstice.

The manner in which World Humanist Day is celebrated varies considerably among local Humanist groups, reflecting the individuality and non-dogmatism of Humanism as a whole. Whilst the event might be a simple gathering, such as a dinner or picnic, with ample time for both socialising and reflection, the method of celebration is down to the individual Humanists. Some groups actually develop intricate social rituals, music, and proceedings which highlight the metaphoric symbolism of the solstice and the light (knowledge) which brings us out of darkness (ignorance).

Today! World Humanist Day is a holiday in many Humanist organizations; many of them recognize it and plan events and activities around the holiday. Humanists International lists several different ways that national and local Humanist groups celebrate World Humanist Day. For example, the Dutch Humanistisch Verbond broadcast short films about World Humanist Day on Dutch TV in 2012. In 2013, the first National Humanist Day will be organized in The Netherlands. The Humanist Association of Ireland held poetry readings in the park to celebrate the day. The Humanists of Florida Association has recommended groups hold *Introduction to Humanism* classes on World Humanist Day.

We are hoping that the walk around Stratford-upon-Avon walk with William Shakespeare will be the Coventry & Warwickshire contribution towards World Humanist Day.

The Michaela School Ban on Muslim Prayer:



Michaela Community School, Wembley

The high court decision to uphold a prayer ban at one of the highest performing state schools in England has been welcomed by many people including the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and other government ministers. It was also welcomed in some degree by some atheists and some Humanists. It was described by Kemi Badenoch MP as a "victory against activists trying to subvert our public institutions". The case against Michaela community school in Brent, northwest London, which is famous for its strict discipline code, was brought by a Muslim pupil, known only as

TTT in court proceedings, who claimed the ban was discriminatory and breached her right to religious freedom. In a written judgment handed down last week, Mr Justice Linden dismissed the pupil's arguments against the prayer ban on all key grounds.

Katherine Birbalsingh, the school Headteacher welcomed the court's decision as a victory for all schools. She said: "A school should be free to do what is right for the pupils it serves. Schools should not be forced by one child and her mother to change its approach simply because they have decided they don't like something." I am sure that many Humanists would support this statement. However, it is worth looking deeper at the background of this extraordinary issue.

The judgment followed a two-day hearing in January at the high court in London, which heard the prayer ban was introduced in March last year by the school's founder and former government social mobility tsar, Katharine Birbalsingh, after the school found itself the target of death and bomb threats over its approach to religious observance. Birbalsingh, who is often called "Britain's strictest headteacher", defended the policy,



Katherine Birbalsingh

arguing it was vital in order to "maintain a successful learning environment where children of all races and religion can thrive".

However, it was also noted by the girls who organised the prayer session that they now feel discriminated and discounted and not part of the school's community? Whilst achnowledging this aspect, a senior Muslim leader who accused her of sensationalising the case, while the Runnymede Trust, an independent race equality thinktank, warned the ruling set a dangerous precedent.

Humanists UK have called for the Government to develop national guidance for England on the question of religious practices in schools following today's High Court ruling which ruled in favour of the so-called 'prayer ban' at Michaela Community School, Brent.

Michaela Community School was taken to the High Court in January by a Muslim pupil following allegations that a ban on all prayers and worship had been imposed in the school. The pupil argued that the ban was a 'breach of her right to freedom to manifest her religious beliefs', however this was rejected on the grounds that the pupil had...

'chosen the School knowing of its strict regime; on the evidence she was able to move to a suitable school which would allow her to pray at lunchtime; and, in any event, she was able to perform Qada prayers in order to mitigate the fact that she was not able to pray at the allotted time.

The judge further ruled that:

'The disadvantage to Muslim pupils at the school caused by the PRP (prayer ritual policy) was outweighed by the aims which it seeks to promote in the interests of the school community as a whole, including Muslim pupils.

There are no existing laws to explicitly govern religious practices in schools in England apart from that (uniquely in the world) Christian worship in state schools should take place every day. This latter requirement has been condemned by the UN as in breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The National Governance Association also called for the requirement to be abolished since 2018, as have most teaching unions. In a debate in the House of Lords in January, peers called for the abolition of collective worship in schools.

Humanists UK has long campaigned against the legal requirement, arguing that the law is inconsistent with modern society and calling for collective worship to be replaced by inclusive assemblies. In 2019 we supported Lee and Lizanne Harris to successfully challenge mandatory collective worship at their child's school on human rights grounds.

Commenting on the High Court ruling Humanists UK Chief Executive Andrew Copson said:

'In the absence of national guidance on religious practices in schools and of a serious national discussion about existing laws, cases like this will continue to be brought. Schools shouldn't be left alone to deal with this. Today's High Court judgment requires serious thinking from the government about how to protect the child's freedom of religion or belief while also making sure our education system is fair and inclusive to all.

'We believe a first step should be to resolve the wider issue of mandatory collective worship in schools and replace it with an inclusive form of assembly that makes all pupils feel welcomed, while making reasonable accommodations for those who want to privately pray or worship where it doesn't infringe the rights and freedoms of others. Without such holistic attention, resentment will continue to build within our school system.'

SACRE Agreed Syllabus Launch 22nd April:

After many months of discussion and negotiation the Coventry and Warwickshire SACRE launched its Agreed Syllabus at the Coventry Council House. Members of SCARE either attended in person or online through Microsoft Teams. The main purpose of the launch was to clarify the syllabus which is mainly for schools and teachers with a responsibility for religious education. The whole process was to ensure that all religions and non-religions were included in the syllabus. This is where Jane Sault and I as Humanist SACRE representatives were involved to make sure that the Humanist perspective is included in all of the school's religious education syllabus.

Poetry Corner:

This month I have passed over the choice of poem to John Goodfellow. To conclude last Thursday's input by John om the Gaza crisis, he read out the following poem — 'The Right Word' by Imtiaz Dharker. Which appeared appropriate for the discussion.

Imitaz Dharker: She is highly regarded as a poet and an artist. She was born in Pakistan in 1954. Imitaz no0w describes herself as a 'Scottish Muslim Calvinist who married a Welshman'. She was offered the post of Poet Laureate following the end of Carol Anne Duffy's tenure, but decided that she would prefer to keep writing poems rather than spend her time in the public eye. In 2006, she published her fourth book of poems 'The Terrorist at my Table', which includes 'The Right Word', one of her most important poems which explores the challenges we all face when dealing with the emotive words often used in the public discussion of controversial political and social issues.

'The Right Word' – Imitaz Dharker

Outside the door, lurking in the shadows is a terrorist.

Is that the wrong description? Outside that door, taking shelter in the shadows, is a freedom fighter

I haven't got this right, Outside, waiting in the shadows, is a hostile militant.

Are words no ore than waving wavering flags? Outside your door, watchful in the shadows is a guerrilla warrior.

God help me,
Outside, defying every shadow,
stands a martyr.
I saw his face.

No words can help me now, Just outside the door lost in the shadows, is a child who looks like mine.

One word for you,
Outside my door,
his hand too steady,
his eyes too hard
is a boy who looks like your son too.

I open the door. Come in, I say, Come in and eat with us.

The Child steps in and carefully, at my door, takes off his shoes.

Sing it Loud – Saturday 25th May at Warwick Arts Centre:



Debbie Hill has asked me to attach this flyer for an upcoming event where she is appearing in a concert at the Butterworth Hall, Warwick Arts Centre on Saturday 25th May

'Sing it Loud' is a massed choir. Although she is a newcomer to Sing it Loud, Debbie is looking forward to singing with others accompanied by an orchestra.

As well as celebrating Sing It Louds 10th birthday, the event will raise money and awareness for The Friendship Project for Children, a registered Warwickshire wide charity who match children who are in need, for a variety of reasons, with volunteers for friendship and activities.

So, if you enjoy a good sing-song, get along to join Debbie at Warwick Arts Centre

Songs will include

Adiemus (Jenkins)

Africanna (Toto)

Easter Hymn (Mascagni)

Humming Chorus (Puccini)

Let the River Run (Simon)

O Fortuna (Orff)

Somewhere (Bernstein)

Total Praise (Smallwood)

Film Preview:

Challengers: It follows a professional tennis champion who plots a comeback with the help of his wife, a former tennis prodigy who retired after an injury, as he goes up against another player, who also happens to be his former best friend and wife's former lover. Starring Mike Faist Zendaya and Josh O'Connor

Civil War: A journey across a dystopian future America, following a team of military-embedded journalists as they race against time to reach DC before rebel factions descend upon the White House. Starring Wagner Moura, Kirsten Dunst and Cailee Spaeny

The Teacher's Lounge: A teacher in a German school decides to get involved when one of her students is suspected of theft. Caught between her ideals and the school system, the consequences of her actions threaten to break her. Starring Leonie Benesch and Sarah Baurett

Io Capitano: Longing for a brighter future, two Senegalese teenagers embark on a journey from West Africa to Italy. However, between their dreams and reality lies a labyrinth of checkpoints, the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean. Touching, powerful and raw – not to be missed.

The Fall Guy: A comedy adventure starring Ryan Gosling and Emily Blunt. A battle-scarred film stuntman leaps into action when the big studio star disappears. The sinister plot is more dangerous than any of his previous stunts.

Love Lies Bleeding: A reclusive female gym manager falls for an ambitious female bodybuilder who is heading to Las Vegas to pursue her dream. Their love soon leads to violence as they are pulled into the web of a criminal family. Starring Kristen Stewart and Katy M O'Brien. Fun and adventure! Kidnapped: (Not the Robert Louis Stevenson novel). An historical Italian drama based on a true story. A young Jewish boy is taken from his family by the Papal States and raised as a Catholic Mapantsula: A re-release of this 1988 South African crime drama made during the apartheid era. A low-rent hustler and petty criminal must choose between his selfish goals and becoming part of the anti-apartheid movement. Starring Thomas Mogotlane. Mainly at the Arts Centres

That They May Face the Rising Sun: A nice profound and gentle film. A couple leave London to live and work in a small community in Ireland. Starring Barry Ward and Anna Bederke.

Hoard: A 7-year old girl and her mother live in their own loving world built on sorting through bins and collecting shiny rubbish. One night their world falls apart and the film joins a grown-up girl decades later living with her foster mother. Starring Saura Lightfoot and Ceara Coveney. Intriguing **The First Omen:** Harrowing and sinister. A woman starts to question her own faith when she uncovers a terrifying conspiracy to bring about the birth of an evil incarnate in Rome. Starring Nell Tiger, Sonia Braga and a cameo from Bill Nighy Still on the Circuit:

Back to Black: Biographical drama film based on the life of British singer-songwriter Amy Winehouse, played by Marisa Abela. Directed by Sam Taylor-Johnson and written by Matt Greenhalgh, the film also stars Jack O'Connell, Eddie Marsan, and Lesley Manville. The film delves into the life and career of Winehouse, beginning with her early days in the early 2000s as a North London jazz musician and culminating in her rise to fame. Brilliant – not to be missed!!

Mothers Instincts: A taut, stylish and unnerving psychological thriller. In 1960s America, suburban housewives and best friends Alice (Jessica Chastain) and Céline (Anne Hathaway) seem to have it all. But when a tragic accident shatters the harmony of their lives, guilt, suspicion and paranoia begin to unravel their sisterly bond and a gripping battle of wills develops, revealing the darker side of friendship and maternal love.

TV Preview: It will be difficult week for those who do not like snooker – The World Championship will be on throughout the BBC network until Monday 6th May Monday 29th April:

21.00 – BBC1: Blue Lights – Another episode of the thrilling police series set in Belfast **23.05 – Channel 5: - The Commuter** - Action thriller starring Liam Neeson and Vera Farmiga. A former police officer and insurance investigator is asked by a shady *femme fatale* to seek out a particular passenger on his train to work. The financial reward on offer is tempting.

Wednesday 1st May:

- **21.00 BBC1:** Race Across the World The actual race bores me but they do go to some exciting places. Last week it was Vietnam and Cambodia this week it is Thailand and Myanmar.
- **21.00 Channel 4: Professor T** Another episode of the psychological mystery and police drama starring Ben Miller
- **21.00 BBC3: Lara Croft: Tomb Raider** Action Adventure based on a computer game starring Angelina Jolie and Daniel Craig. The actual 'tomb' is real and is in Cambodia
- **22.00 BBC4:** The Invisible Woman Biographical drama based on the book by Claire Tomalin, starring Felicity Jones. Author Charles Dickens at the height of his popularity and has become the toast of literary society. But the great writer's private life is far from idyllic. Having grown apart from his wife Catherine, Dickens embarks on a relationship with an 18-year-old actress
- **23.40 BBC1:** Cape Fear Thriller starring Robert De Niro, Nick Nolte and Jessica Lange. After 14 years behind bars, a brutal rapist is free to exact revenge on the lawyer who could have kept him out of jail. The devious ex-convict begins a reign of terror that threatens the lawyer's family. **Thursday 2**nd **May:**
- **21.00 Channel 4: Taskmaster** Still one of my favourite comedies, Greg Davis and Alex Horne set a number of silly tasks for the comedians to solve
- **22.00 BBC4: The History Boys** Another airing of the excellent film of the play by Alan Bennett. Starring Richard Griffiths and very young James Corden and Russell Tovey etc. **Friday 3rd May:**
- 20.00 BBC1: Granite Harbour A new series of the crime thriller set in Aberdeen
- **21.00 BBC1: Have I Got News for You** This week Martin Clunes is in the chair and journalist Lyse Ducet and comedian Chloe Petts join Ian Hislop and Paul Merton in the popular satire show
- **21.15 BBC3: The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert** A great comedy about a group of drag artistes travelling across Australia starring Terence Stamp and Hugo Weaving
- **21.30 BBC1:** Avoidance The final episode of the comedy series starring Romesh Ranganathan.
- **23.05 Channel 4: Step Brothers** Comedy starring Will Ferrell and John C Reilly. When their respective parents get married, step brothers Brennan and Dale are forced to share a room. The problem is that these guys are in their 40s and should have flown the nest long ago.
- **23.55 BBC2**: **Kursk**: **The Last Mission** Disaster drama based on a true story, starring Matthias Schoenaerts, Léa Seydoux and Colin Firth. A torpedo aboard the Russian *Kursk* prematurely explodes during a training exercise, sending the vessel to the bottom of the sea.
- **00.10 BBC1:** Man Up Romantic comedy starring Lake Bell and Simon Pegg. A woman is fed up with her friends' attempts at matchmaking. But when she's mistaken for a blind date by a divorcee, she decides to go with the flow. It proves to be a memorably chaotic evening.
- **01.25 Channel 4: Trading Places** Comedy starring Eddie Murphy, Dan Aykroyd and Jamie Lee Curtis. Two millionaires create an experiment in human nature by framing their niece's fiancé a pompous stockbroker, for theft and drug pushing, and replacing him with a black conman. **Saturday 4**th **May:**
- **23.10 Channel 4: The Last of the Mohicans** Period adventure inspired by James Fenimore Cooper's classic novel, starring Daniel Day-Lewis and Madeleine Stowe.
- **23.50 BBC1:** Highlander Action fantasy starring Christopher Lambert and featuring Sean Connery. An antiques dealer living in modern New York is, in fact, a 16th-century Scottish warrior, one of a group known as "immortals", who can only be killed when decapitated by another of their kind.
- **00.00 BBC2:** We Need to Talk About Kevin Drama based on the bestselling novel by Lionel Shriver, starring Tilda Swinton, John C Reilly and Ezra Miller. A former travel writer gives up her career for her husband and two children, but her home is not a happy one. She is driven to the edge of sanity by her son, Kevin, who appears to have sociopathic tendencies that eventually bring the family and their surrounding community to snapping point. Excellent film **Sunday 5th May:**
- **21.00 BBC1: The Responder** A return of the earthy police drama starring Martin Freeman

21.00 – ITV1: Red Eye – The 2nd episode of the drama following an aeroplane crash

21.00 – Channel 4: The Piano – A welcome return of the popular search for piano talent with Claudia Winkleman, pianist Lang Lang and musician Mika. This series is at Cardiff Central Station

22.00 – BBC4: Sunset Across the Bay – A welcome return of the 1975 play by Alan Bennet about a retiring couple settling in Morecambe

23.20 – Channel 4: Senna – An excellent award winning documentary charting the career of Brazilian driver Ayrton Senna, who was killed in an accident during the San Marino Grand Prix on 1 May 1994. Senna's arrival on the Formula One stage in 1984 marked the beginning of a ten-year battle for supremacy in the motor-racing game.

Monday 6th May:

21.00 - BBC1: Blue Lights - Another episode of the thrilling police series set in Belfast

22.00 – **BBC2**: **Rush** - Motor-racing drama based on a true story, starring Chris Hemsworth and Daniel Brühl. The 1976 Formula One season is dominated by the intense rivalry between two brilliant drivers: the maverick James Hunt and the methodical Niki Lauda.

22.15 – ITV1: The Magnificent Seven – A 2016 remake of the original classic Western. Starring Denzel Washington and Chris Pratt. Judge for yourself if it is as good as the 1960 original?

Review – Entangled Pasts 1768-Now at the Royal Academy:

I had the pleasure of seeing this exhibition at the Royal Academy earlier this month. An exceptionally good exhibition. 'Entangled Pasts' explored the connections between art associated with the RA and Britain's colonial histories. The first President, Joshua Reynolds called the RA an 'ornament to Britain's empire.' The RA was keen to express how the legacies of colonial histories continue to form part of the fabric of everyday life, physically and emotionally across social, economic, cultural and political fields both national and global.

The exhibits included many paintings and artefacts by black artistes and depictions of aspects of slavery and colonisation. There was an interesting short fil documentary of the American abolitionist Fredrick Douglas and his time in England and Scotland. Douglas was a freed slave who spoke to many audiences in Britain on the reality of slavery in the United States.

It was apparent from the exhibition that the RA recognises that like other British institutions had definite links to the slave trade and colonialism. Particularly as some of its founders and contributing artists were involved with slavery and the exploitation of nations that were colonised. The works on display at this exhibition represent only a tiny fraction of the institution's colonial links and unfolding legacies of British colonialism around the world. Yet in the visual and conceptual resonances between them. The RA hope that there exists a space for contemplation, inquiry, acknowledgement, reflection, imagination and ongoing conversations.

Unfortunately, 'Entangled Pasts' finished its exhibition run last week. It is an exhibition that should be seen by a much wider audience. The RA must be congratulated on being open and honest with its own part in Britain's slave trade and colonial exploitation.

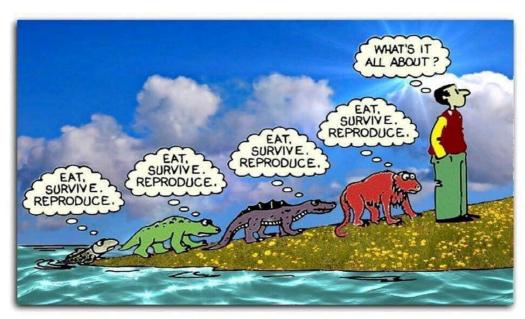
A Few Cartoons to Enjoy:











A Few Funnies to Finish With:

My friend asked me " How much do you usually spend on a bottle of wine?" I replied "About 20 minutes "

A lorry carrying Vics vapour rub has overturned on the M25, but there's not expected to be any congestion.

I've started a business building yachts in my attic, sails are going through the roof.

I popped into McDonald's and ate a kid's meal – Wow!! Did his dad get angry?

I tried a bit of nude painting yesterday, it went really well, and now everyone says my front door looks lovely.

I asked my wife what she thought of my singing, she said I should sing Tenor. "Really" I replied "Yes" she said "ten or twelve miles away"

My daughter was doing her homework and she asked me what I knew about 'Galileo'? I told her 'He was a poor boy from a poor family'

I saw a man going up a hill with a trolley full of four-leaf clovers, rabbit's feet and horseshoes, I thought he's pushing his luck

Can circumcision be carried out at any age, or is there a cut-off date?

They told the inventor of alphabetti spaghetti it who never work, but he made them eat their words.

Of course, I can't afford a voice activated car, it goes without saying.

CREATING A PASSWORD!!

(I am sure you have all been here before!!)

Please enter your new password

"cabbage"

Sorry, the password must have more than 8 characters

"boiled cabbage"

Sorry, the password must contain one numerical character

"1 boiled cabbage"

Sorry, the password cannot have any blank spaces

"50stupidboiledcabbages"

Sorry, the password must contain at least one upper-case character

"50STUPIDboiledcabbages"

Sorry, the password cannot use more than one upper-case letter consecutively

"50StupidBoiledCabbagesShovedUpYourBackside,IfYouDon'tGiveMeAccessImmediately"

Sorry, the password cannot use punctuation

"NowlAmGetting Really Angry 50 Boiled Cabbages Shoved Up Your Backside If You Dont Give Me Access Immediately"

Sorry, that password is already in use