

The Loerie Awards: One long stick fight

 By [Lwandile Fikeni](#)

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For me, creativity has always been terrifying. The first time I came across something remotely creative was at my grand parents' home in the rural village of Nzungiseni in Mount Ayliff, Eastern Cape. I was four years old. My grandfather and I were watching his cattle graze on the slopes of Intaba Yentsizwa (the Mountain of men) when a group of men, wielding spears and knobkerries, marched past chanting a song.

They tied red cloth on their foreheads and arms and seemed to spoil for a fight. Frightened, I put down the binoculars we were using to watch the cattle and bolted for the door to lock it, so that the men would not cause harm to me and my grandfather. This made my grandfather laugh so hard he nearly fell off his chair. After he recovered he told me the story of the men. They were called 'iindlavini', The Rebels, warriors who occasionally marched and sang as a form of creative expression of their identity as well as their grievances.

Face your fears

The second time I experienced the terrifying effects of creativity was at my maternal grandfather's home in Esithebe, near Qunu, in the Eastern Cape. Out there in the fields, against the clear blue skies and the now famous rolling hills, we (the boys who herded sheep) would gather in circles for stick fights. It was oh so frightening, but you had to do it to gain credibility, especially for us, who were seen as city boys who had no skill in the ways of the village.

We would pluck the stems of mealie crops after the mealie cobs were harvested, and use these stems as sticks to fight. One sunny afternoon it was my turn. A first turn of many to come. I took my sticks and stood in the centre of the circle to face one of my friends who lived in the village. He was a skilled fighter and on that dreadful afternoon would prove the effects of creativity.

He danced around me in short, deft, steps as he picked parts of my body with his educated right hand. He whipped and hit and twisted and turned and blocked my attempts to get one shot in. He stomped and shouted and called his ancestors as he tore into me with thunderous swooshes, which left welts all over my body. Later, he would tell me that I would never learn to fight well when I was so defensive, that I needed to let go of my fears in order to permit the creativity needed to be a skilful fighter to find expression. I took his advice and with time grew to be better at stick fighting.

Brave work

With the Loeries Awards just around the corner, I think of my friend who told me to let go of my fears in order to be a good fighter. During the event we will be treated to the best advertising work South Africa has to offer (in the past year, at least). The work that often wins the big prizes - The Grand Prix or Loerie Gold - is often work that is brave, that pushes boundaries, that shows what brand communication can achieve when brave creatives, suits and planners stand up for their work and brave clients let go of their fears in order for their brand to fully articulate itself in the marketplace and to its audience.

I always look forward to this kind of work, more than the pretty work, which is often aesthetically pleasing, yet safe and uninspiring. For me, brave work is the signifying mark of the creative warrior. The Loeries Awards is the recognition of this warrior's spirit and his/her craft. Therefore, the Loeries become the place where the best skilled fighters from ad agencies and client-side gather under one roof to see who used his sticks best in the preceding year.

There will be a terrifying air of expectancy in the room before winners are announced. The losers will scoff at the judges while scratching the welts on their behinds and finding a drink or two at the bar. And the winners will stand tall in the glaring light of their glory like my friend did, all those years ago, under the clear blue skies of Esithebe, in the Eastern Cape.

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