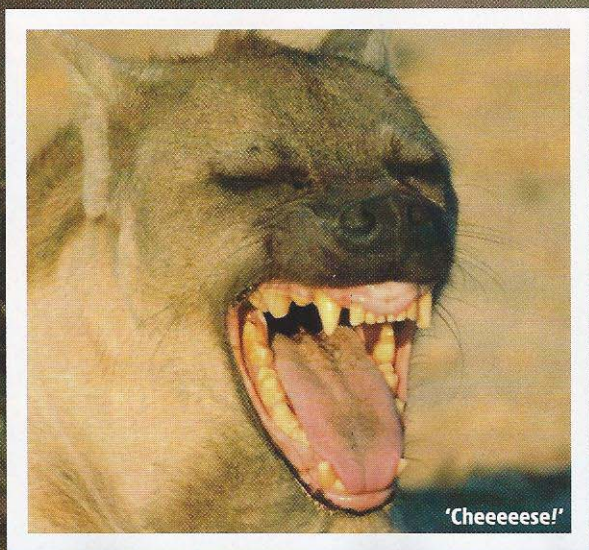


JAWS OF DEATH

It's an efficient, vicious killing machine, but is only in it for the laughs. **Crispin Andrews** watches the spotted hyena brutalise its next breakfast



'Cheeeese!'



'You're standing in the wrong position again. From the top – you put your left leg in.'

Have you heard the one about the Flipside reader who got his face chewed off?



Eating machines

JAWS

Large jaw muscles give the hyena bone-crushing bite-force. One of the muscles attaches directly to the top of the hyena's head, and there's a special vaulting to protect the skull. Hyenas can out-crunch brown bears and have 40% more bite force than a leopard.

TEETH

A hyena can crunch through bone using its strong upper and lower third premolars. Protected behind these gnashers are large carnassial teeth which can access parts of a carcass that other predators can't reach: bone marrow and calcium. Healthy!

SENSES

Even when down-wind, a hyena can recognise prey from a distance, with its acute sense of smell and hearing, not to mention great night vision.

BODY

As a big, strong animal, a hyena can take down prey much larger

than itself, such as a wildebeest or zebra, by gnashing at its flanks. It's sturdy enough to withstand a kick or a tumble too.

LEGS

Powerful forequarters with back legs shorter than the front make for efficient running. More Kelly Holmes than Usain Bolt, it runs its prey down over long distances. Wildebeest and zebra are faster but tire more quickly.

STOMACH

Heavy-duty with powerful acids, the stomach can digest hide, bone, teeth, hooves and horns, all within 24 hours. Hyenas even get nutrition out of mummified corpses. Burrrp!

BRAIN

Disney's *Lion King* hyena was Shenzi (Swahili for 'stupid') but hyenas are highly intelligent and can outperform chimpanzees in cooperative problem-solving tests. It's just getting them to stop savaging the examiner that's the problem.

Uh... little smudge on your face there...

