

LJ Book

Your Most Personal Book.

CERANDOR

Contents

1	2005	9
1.1	February	9
1.1.1	In the Beginning (2005-02-20 16:58)	9
1.1.2	An unusual happenstance... (2005-02-21 20:21)	9
1.1.3	(2005-02-22 21:01)	10
1.1.4	Not what I intended (2005-02-23 22:43)	10
1.1.5	Somebody else's idea (2005-02-24 23:32)	11
1.1.6	Other people's minds (2005-02-26 17:38)	11
1.1.7	The joys of writing... (2005-02-27 12:27)	12
1.2	March	12
1.2.1	Personal Issues (2005-03-01 19:54)	12
1.2.2	iPod Fatigue (2005-03-02 19:19)	13
1.2.3	Motivation (2005-03-04 19:20)	13
1.2.4	A Lazy Day (Not Hazy) (2005-03-08 22:40)	14
1.2.5	For the Love of Facts (2005-03-13 22:34)	14
1.2.6	Great Out-of-Context Quotes of Our Time (2005-03-18 19:16)	14
1.2.7	Meh at the Movies (2005-03-21 18:24)	15
1.2.8	Hubris, thy name is Ciaran... (2005-03-21 23:30)	15
1.2.9	In Praise of Flawed Heroes (2005-03-23 00:00)	16
1.2.10	What's in a name? (2005-03-23 23:37)	16
1.2.11	All generalizations are rubbish (2005-03-24 20:58)	17
1.2.12	A good walk spoiled (2005-03-26 20:24)	17
1.2.13	Mythology in your back garden (2005-03-27 21:13)	18
1.2.14	Great Out-of-Context Quotes of Our Time (2005-03-28 22:26)	18
1.2.15	Great Out-of-Context Quotes of Our Time (2005-03-29 20:53)	18
1.2.16	Oh god, no... (2005-03-29 21:55)	18
1.3	April	19
1.3.1	The Route to my Ears (2005-04-01 00:51)	19
1.3.2	Great Out-of-Context Quotes of Our Time (2005-04-01 00:55)	19
1.3.3	A Short Rant Against Pointlessness... (2005-04-03 20:12)	20

1.3.4	Great Out-of-Context Quotes of Our Time (2005-04-04 18:02)	20
1.3.5	A few thoughts (2005-04-06 18:51)	20
1.3.6	Idea Spasm (2005-04-11 22:34)	21
1.3.7	Updragging (2005-04-15 19:23)	22
1.3.8	The Threadbare Universe (2005-04-17 20:34)	22
1.3.9	The Inevitable (2005-04-18 20:51)	30
1.3.10	To be on TV (2005-04-19 23:53)	31
1.3.11	Paris, France (2005-04-22 01:07)	31
1.3.12	Fechez la Vache (2005-04-22 21:18)	32
1.3.13	Paris in the Almost-Summer (2005-04-24 03:10)	32
1.3.14	Paris Without Pictures (2005-04-25 00:40)	32
1.3.15	Return of the Foreigner (2005-04-25 23:50)	33
1.3.16	A Brief Note About Football (2005-04-26 22:47)	33
1.3.17	Historicism (2005-04-28 20:56)	34
1.4	May	35
1.4.1	Nonaltruistically (2005-05-04 23:03)	35
1.4.2	A Little Slice of Paradise (2005-05-08 20:00)	35
1.4.3	One more thing... (2005-05-08 22:42)	36
1.4.4	BA Meeting (2005-05-09 20:11)	36
1.4.5	Just this moment (2005-05-10 21:18)	37
1.4.6	New Comics (2005-05-12 15:19)	37
1.4.7	Great Out-of-Context Quotes of Our Time (2005-05-15 00:23)	38
1.4.8	Stayin' Up (2005-05-15 17:33)	38
1.4.9	From the Outside (2005-05-18 22:42)	39
1.4.10	A Dark and Lonely Walk (2005-05-22 01:58)	41
1.4.11	The Small Habit of Losing Touch (2005-05-23 00:00)	42
1.4.12	A Little Bedtime Story (2005-05-23 20:15)	43
1.4.13	No Favourites (2005-05-27 10:49)	45
1.4.14	All of us on the Earth... (2005-05-28 20:52)	46
1.4.15	And now on the mic... (2005-05-29 09:58)	46
1.5	June	47
1.5.1	Time to Write, Not Read (2005-06-01 00:13)	47
1.5.2	The Perils of Advertising (An Extreme Example of Pedantry) (2005-06-03 23:11)	48
1.5.3	In a Classical of Its Own (2005-06-06 22:35)	48
1.5.4	Derelict Station (2005-06-07 23:28)	49
1.5.5	A Computing Life (2005-06-15 23:30)	51
1.5.6	Urban Wasteland (2005-06-17 00:46)	53

1.5.7	Seeking Swelter (2005-06-19 13:38)	54
1.5.8	Home Thoughts (2005-06-20 21:58)	54
1.5.9	Tough Week (2005-06-27 18:06)	54
1.5.10	U2 at Croke (2005-06-28 21:52)	55
1.5.11	Changing the World (2005-06-30 21:58)	57
1.6	July	59
1.6.1	Reading Update (2005-07-03 22:05)	59
1.6.2	Religion vs. Science (2005-07-04 17:32)	59
1.6.3	Cancer Myths (2005-07-06 18:59)	63
1.6.4	A Hole in my Mind (2005-07-06 18:59)	64
1.6.5	War of the Worlds (2005-07-07 21:56)	64
1.6.6	Inevitable Consequences (2005-07-11 07:59)	65
1.6.7	Two Ways to Write (2005-07-12 23:13)	66
1.6.8	Desolation Jones 2 (2005-07-14 23:49)	67
1.6.9	New Strategy (2005-07-19 23:03)	67
1.6.10	Music to my Ears (2005-07-22 19:36)	68
1.6.11	Monday Evening Review (2005-07-25 21:41)	69
1.6.12	Making History (2005-07-27 20:27)	70
1.6.13	The Dregs of the Night (2005-07-30 00:18)	70
1.7	August	71
1.7.1	Lessons Learned (2005-08-02 00:26)	71
1.7.2	Apologies of Sorts (2005-08-02 19:11)	71
1.7.3	Weekly Report (2005-08-05 23:40)	71
1.7.4	Waiting for Stellar Revelation (2005-08-07 20:34)	72
1.7.5	New Thoughts (2005-08-09 22:22)	72
1.7.6	Collaborative Works (2005-08-11 22:43)	72
1.7.7	Confessions of a Fan (2005-08-14 23:11)	74
1.7.8	Absence makes the hair grow blonder... (2005-08-16 23:10)	75
1.7.9	Update (2005-08-21 19:25)	76
1.7.10	New Week (2005-08-22 23:13)	76
1.7.11	The Power of Marketing (2005-08-24 00:43)	76
1.7.12	New Images in my Brain (2005-08-24 23:52)	77
1.7.13	Smells Like New Beginnings (2005-08-28 20:37)	77
1.7.14	Critchett (2005-08-29 21:07)	77
1.7.15	The Fiction Shelf (2005-08-30 23:23)	78
1.8	September	78
1.8.1	Weekly Report (2005-09-05 00:11)	78
1.8.2	Earnestly, honestly... (2005-09-06 00:26)	78

1.8.3	Crazy Week (2005-09-10 11:33)	79
1.8.4	Intelligent Mousetraps (2005-09-12 21:09)	79
1.8.5	Games that blew me away... (2005-09-12 21:14)	80
1.8.6	Weekend Report (2005-09-17 14:24)	83
1.8.7	T-5=25 (2005-09-18 15:52)	84
1.8.8	Apologies and Non-sequiturs (2005-09-18 22:56)	84
1.8.9	T-4=26 (2005-09-19 20:59)	85
1.8.10	T-3=27 (2005-09-20 19:58)	85
1.8.11	T-2=28 (2005-09-21 20:30)	85
1.8.12	T-1=29 (2005-09-22 20:36)	86
1.8.13	T=30 (2005-09-23 18:54)	86
1.8.14	A commentary (2005-09-24 04:15)	86
1.8.15	Revelation (2005-09-24 19:33)	87
1.8.16	Bill Bailey (2005-09-25 23:54)	87
1.8.17	The Addict (2005-09-27 19:29)	87
1.8.18	Breaking the Back (2005-09-28 23:14)	91
1.8.19	New Beginnings (2005-09-30 22:59)	91
1.9	October	91
1.9.1	Plague Ridden (2005-10-02 22:11)	91
1.9.2	Redemption (2005-10-05 00:18)	92
1.9.3	Round Up (2005-10-07 19:11)	92
1.9.4	The Irishmen who went up a mountain... (2005-10-10 00:19)	93
1.9.5	Notes in the Margins (2005-10-13 00:04)	94
1.9.6	Persian Fire (2005-10-14 21:12)	95
1.9.7	Done (2005-10-16 11:58)	95
1.9.8	Another Book (2005-10-16 22:32)	96
1.9.9	Associations (2005-10-20 22:31)	97
1.9.10	A Week Off (2005-10-23 22:14)	98
1.9.11	Return of the Lazyman (2005-10-30 17:04)	99
1.9.12	Deflation (2005-10-30 17:55)	99
1.9.13	Amassing Grace (2005-10-31 21:28)	99
1.10	November	100
1.10.1	Compliant (2005-11-03 21:54)	100
1.10.2	End of Week Report (2005-11-06 21:11)	100
1.10.3	Monday Blues (2005-11-07 23:43)	100
1.10.4	Adversity, adversely... (2005-11-08 23:53)	100
1.10.5	Pub quizzes will be the death of me... (2005-11-10 21:25)	101
1.10.6	Poker Too (2005-11-12 01:46)	101

1.10.7	Poker Three (2005-11-13 21:46)	102
1.10.8	Recovered (2005-11-16 23:14)	102
1.10.9	Weekend Report (2005-11-18 22:56)	103
1.10.10	Anansi Boys (2005-11-20 23:33)	103
1.10.11	What we leave out (2005-11-22 22:23)	103
1.10.12	The Intermind (2005-11-24 00:36)	103
1.10.13	Feet of Clay (2005-11-25 00:19)	104
1.10.14	I have my camera back! (2005-11-25 20:07)	105
1.10.15	Rome (2005-11-28 00:12)	105
1.10.16	A chapter a day... (2005-11-28 23:54)	106
1.11	December	106
1.11.1	Deathly Distractions (2005-12-01 00:39)	106
1.11.2	Explanations and Correlations (2005-12-05 00:21)	107
1.11.3	An Entrance! (2005-12-06 22:45)	108
1.11.4	Chainsaw of Natural Selection (2005-12-07 19:25)	108
1.11.5	Late Notice (2005-12-09 01:15)	109
1.11.6	Blog on the Edge of Midnight (2005-12-11 23:59)	109
1.11.7	Self-Serving Legislative Changes (2005-12-12 13:47)	110
1.11.8	A Change can be Arresting (2005-12-13 12:55)	111
1.11.9	Time to Speak (2005-12-16 23:00)	111
1.11.10	The End of a Week (2005-12-18 23:04)	111
1.11.11	The Lewisian Jihad (2005-12-20 00:04)	115
1.11.12	Self-Promotion (2005-12-20 15:51)	115
1.11.13	Christmas Fleeting (2005-12-25 20:56)	116
1.11.14	Moving Out (2005-12-28 00:37)	117
1.11.15	Last Post... (2005-12-28 21:56)	117

Chapter 1

2005

1.1 February

1.1.1 In the Beginning (2005-02-20 16:58)

This is actually my second attempt at keeping a journal/blog online. Despite the generosity of my more technologically-aware cousin, the first attempt died a death when my online access dwindled at entirely the wrong time (ie. after one entry).

So, let's hope this one lasts a little longer, eh?

As this is meant to be an introduction, I'll keep it short. The idea behind this effort is not to offer detailed commentary on any particular topic, but rather to cover anything that strikes my interest at the time. As such, it'll probably only be of real interest to people who know me, and even then only intermittently. Good thing I'm not setting my sights too high, isn't it?

So, I'll be back later, and the amorphous shape of this will perhaps solidify some. Anyone who wanders into this by accident is more than welcome. I hope there'll be something interesting for you sooner or later.

lostperdita (2005-02-20 22:29:50)

welcome to the community. it'll do you good!

1.1.2 An unusual happenstance... (2005-02-21 20:21)

I was planning to kick this off with some musings on motivation, something that's been on my mind this last while, but I've decided to be less ambitious (and less pretentious) and talk about what happened this morning. You see, this morning, it snowed.

I know this isn't exactly a major occurrence, but it's unusual enough for Dublin. For about three hours, the view out of my window (obscured slightly by my boss and her potted plants) was dominated by swirling snow, the only weather condition that can accurately be described as hypnotic. Yet, despite the three hours of snow, there was not one flake that hit the ground but that it melted immediately. There's a good half-dozen metaphors in there. Pick the one you like best.

It's probably a sign that I'm an old fogey that I can complain that we don't get snows like

we used to. I remember waking up in January 1987 (I may be vaguely out on the date) to a snowdrift outside my window. Granted, I lived in a bungalow, but it was still something. We had snow last Christmas day too, but hardly anyone would raise an eyebrow if a year went by in Dublin without snow. So I'll enjoy it while I've got it. Apparently, the Arctic winds will be blowing for a while yet.

1.1.3 (2005-02-22 21:01)

This is something of a work in progress: In browser tab no. 1, we have a regularly updated report on the Premiership match between West Brom and Southampton. In browser tab no.2, we have me writing this entry.

For those who don't know, I support West Brom. This is part of my habit of supporting underdogs (it may be the root of it) and this year in particular, it's been a pain in the ass. Losing matches we should have drawn, losing ones we deserved to win. All with the best team we've had in years and a manager who seems to have pulled them together well. Frustrating isn't the word. All of which has left us in the position of being bottom of the table, five points adrift of safety.

However... We have a game in hand over Norwich and Crystal Palace, two and three places ahead of us, and Southampton, directly above us, are only two points ahead. If we win, we jump two places and are within touching distance of avoiding relegation. Everything changes. If we lose, well, I get to beat my head off the table for a while.

It's 0-0 as I write, 60mins gone. Half an hour to do the necessary. Come on boys, cheer me up!

(2005-02-23 10:37:44) Relegation

Relegation isn't that big a deal. In fact, it's a doddle. Come on down here, Ciaran and enjoy the Championship party. It is much more fun than the boring, Upper-East-Side WASP parties with the Sky Sponsorship you have in the Premiership. Soulless. You know you want to.

cerandor (2005-02-23 23:04:33) Re: Relegation

Nah. I think I'd rather stick around the Premiership for a while. The money's good, the women are cute and you get a better class of vehicle in your car parks. Besides which, they'll let anyone into the Championship these days...

1.1.4 Not what I intended (2005-02-23 22:43)

Snow again this morning. If I hadn't worn my heavy boots, the odds were I would have slid most of the way to work on a solid layer of slush and snow.

More importantly, West Brom only drew last night. Could have been worse, but it's still not good enough. Looks like I'll have to get used to relegation to Division One again. Except, hold on, it's not Division One anymore, it's "The Championship." Which is bollocks, of course. We already have the Premiership, and now the teams that aren't good enough get to compete in "The Championship"? Please. Do you think that the teams languishing in the old Divisions Three and Four feel better that their competitions are now called League One and League Two? Don't think so. Still, it's not all bad. West Brom were down in the old Division Three (League One) once. The year we got promoted was the year they instituted the Premiership. We jumped up two divisions in one promotion: Division Three to Division One. Impressive,

huh?

No, I didn't think so either.

Anyway, apologies. I didn't mean to write about football and the weather all the time, so I'll stop now.

Until the next time, anyhow...

1.1.5 Somebody else's idea (2005-02-24 23:32)

As an antidote to actually deciding what to do with this journal, I'm going to steal an idea from [1]lostperdita. (Admittedly, she got it from someone else, but why haggle?)

Ten Things I've Done That You Probably Haven't: (Bear with me. This may take more than one post.)

1. I've written a novel. (Go for the easy one first, I suppose.)
2. I sprained my ankle for the first and only time three days before going on my first and only skiing trip. (I'll get into my sense of timing in a later post.)
3. I bought an iPod before they were cool. (Cheap shot, I know, but hey, I'm struggling here.)
4. I've stood at the top of Slieve Donard on a sunny day. (Excessively parochial, maybe, but if you haven't done it, you ought to.)
5. I've appeared on several TV quiz shows. (I even won one once. I have the tape, if you'd like to see it.)

Hmmm. Okay, that's it for now. God, my life must be even less exciting than I thought...

1. <http://www.livejournal.com/~lostperdita/>

1.1.6 Other people's minds (2005-02-26 17:38)

As a brief aside (and to avoid having to think about that list), I'd like to direct you to the blog of a friend of mine: <http://mickcooney.blogspot.com/>

He can introduce himself, of course, but as a general description, he's less cynical than I am and a good bit funnier. That's not a major boast, though. There are bars of soap funnier than I am. Moreover, he's one of the few people I know I'd admit to being smarter than me. (The importance of intellectual status in my life is something I'll probably yak about in future.

So, head over there from some slices of the life of a lecturer in Dublin with an occasionally idiosyncratic approach to his work. Then come back here. If you like.

As an aside, Mick has also been responsible for adding a couple of new words to the English language. Specifically:

Antideliberately: The closest I've come to a definition of this is that it's the verb form of doing something accidentally on purpose. All the same, drop it into a conversation and watch

the looks on people's faces.

Predonym: You know when you're using predictive texting on your mobile and you type 'if, only for it to come up as 'he'? They're predonyms of each other. This word deserves to be in the dictionary. So spread it around.

Girlf (and Girlfed): To be girlfed (one syllable, not 'girl-fed') is to have your time laid claim to by your girlfriend, usually when you're planning on spending an evening with your mates. A very useful word.

1.1.7 The joys of writing... (2005-02-27 12:27)

Recently, I've started writing again. Pretty much concurrently with starting this journal. This makes me happy. Yesterday, I re-encountered one of my favourite experiences while writing: the coincidence you didn't intend, though it looks like you did.

I tend to write either short stories or novels off a fairly broad plan, adding in details off the top of my head as I go. This results in a lot of flaky stuff that needs a lot of editing, but occasionally, disparate elements come together in wonderful ways. It's rather like realising that you've just written a map of your brain.

I'm probably not explaining this too well. The specific case yesterday was that in the piece I'm working on, the three main characters are orphaned siblings. (I'm trying to avoid making it cliched. We'll see how it goes.) Yesterday, I realised that three other characters in the story are also orphaned siblings, setting up all manner of resonances and implications for the story. And I didn't plan any of it. These kind of things are why I love writing and why I keep coming back to it. I'm just hoping they'll keep coming.

1.2 March

1.2.1 Personal Issues (2005-03-01 19:54)

This one has been bubbling in my head for a few days.

I'm currently fascinated by the reaction to the murder of Robert McCartney. I was born in Northern Ireland in 1975, five years after the 'Troubles' kicked off, and I grew up thinking it was odd if the evening news didn't have a new bombing or shooting to report. I watched a couple of ceasefires and near-misses come and go, and I wondered whether the Good Friday agreement would be able to have any effect on bone-deep sectarian attitudes.

Maybe all that was needed was time.

The murder of McCartney and subsequent arrogant and inept cover up by his IRA killers has revealed a lot about what's happened in Northern Ireland since the bombings stopped. While the loyalist paramilitaries have been shooting each other with gay abandon, the IRA seem have found their true calling: what is apparently now referred to as the IRAfia. Hardline nationalist communities, taught to think of the IRA as the only protection from sectarian violence, have watched these 'heroes of the struggle' reveal themselves as self-serving thugs.

The family of McCartney are from such a community, but they've had enough. The IRA are sheltering those who beat McCartney to death after slashing his friend in the throat with

a bottle (he survived). The family are demanding they give them up. Sinn Fein, caught between their constituency and the paramilitary force they've defended for so long, are currently swinging in the wind, being shot from all sides.

How this will pan out in the short term, I don't know. But maybe the first cracks are showing in the entrenched attitudes that have allowed fanatics (both disguised and otherwise) like Sinn Fein and the DUP to take control of the north.

1.2.2 iPod Fatigue (2005-03-02 19:19)

Yes, I know, that very title puts me in the ranks of the most decadent members of western civilization (a very good idea, as Gandhi once said). But it's true.

I've had my iPod for over three years. It's a clunky old thing compared to the sleek models that some are sporting now, and its 10G drive just doesn't cut it in some circles. Yet the only gadget I love better is my iBook. I recently replaced the battery (which was still working fine, albeit at about 50 percent efficiency) and it's now better than ever. But...

I'm not a big music buff. I have about 30-40 CDs, a fair chunk of which are U2. All of them are on my iPod, along with a few other bits and pieces I've picked up over the years. When I got the iPod, I hadn't had a walkman in years, and the shuffle function was like manna from heaven. For three years, I've listened to Radio iPod, which only plays my favourite music. But now, I've heard it all. Repeatedly. Only a few new albums get listened to regularly. I'm resisting the call of the iTunes music store (I have a slight dislike of pirated music, and a much stronger dislike of music industry practices), which seems to offer a solution. But I don't know how long I'll hold out.

1.2.3 Motivation (2005-03-04 19:20)

I have issues with motivation. I veer between laziness and industry with something approaching regularity. I managed to get an hour-plus of writing in this evening, motivated largely by the fact that I've only managed half an hour in the last two days. Lacking a proper spur, I find it difficult to get myself up and running at a project.

This leads to some funny statistics. The first time I tried to write a novel I was around 15-16. I messed around with it for a year or two, getting about four chapters in. However, I'd told a lot of people at school what I was trying to do, and external pressure slowly built up. The final straw came when my physics teacher asked me how the book was coming along. That evening, I sat down and wrote for an hour. And the next day, and the next. In three months, I wrote another 20 chapters and finished the book.

You'd think this would be a valuable lesson, but it hasn't really turned out that way. Every time I start a major project, I lose interest at some point and it tails off. A few years ago, I decided to focus on short stories. Guess what? I never finished half of those either. The glow of achievement is great, but it's difficult to see from the other side of the thicket of hard slog.

I have a new project now, started and abandoned last year and now picked up again. Regular work. We'll see how it goes.

1.2.4 A Lazy Day (Not Hazy) (2005-03-08 22:40)

I got home late, and I've had a few drinks, so I'm taking the evening off writing. I've been good. I deserve a break. Besides, I need to think about where the story's going.

So, in celebration of my current vaguely beer-sodden mentality, a list of famous personages I've been compared to at one time or another:

1. Marvin the Paranoid Android. (Rather obvious, but oddly flattering.)
2. Jeremy Brett. (My favourite Sherlock Holmes and the closest physical resemblance on this list.)
3. Steve Jobs. (Apparently, the jumper/glasses/stubble combo I'm currently sporting push me towards another personal hero.)
4. Colin Firth. (Despite the protestations of personages who will remain nameless, I don't see it myself.)
5. George Clooney. (But only, and I stress this, because I have black hair slowly turning grey.)

I suppose there are worse collections of comparisons out there...

1.2.5 For the Love of Facts (2005-03-13 22:34)

I have always had an almost unnatural love of facts. Everywhere, everywhen, I'll read and watch what's available and soak it in. As a child, I'd read every side of a packet of Cornflakes (even the ingredients) for want of something else to take in. Not all of it stuck, but a lot did. Strangely, it's the odd, trivial things that stay the best: the amusing facts that aren't really important. This habit/fetish has made me pretty good at quizzes.

I'm at home this weekend, a holiday of sorts, and I've been watching the BBC's Supervolcano. This little drama documentary ticked most of my boxes. Odd, historical, geological, scientific, epic, controversial. It's the topic du jour and it'll be forgotten a year from now, but right now it's fascinating. I'll drink it in, absorb as much of it as I can, and keep reading.

The only problem is, the more reading and absorbing I do, the less time I have for writing I afford myself. I've been very lax these last few days. Tomorrow, I'll have the house to myself. Time to get down to work again.

1.2.6 Great Out-of-Context Quotes of Our Time (2005-03-18 19:16)

No. 1 in an ongoing series:

"Oh my god! The old guy is kissing Jesus!"

(2005-03-18 21:55:48) Apologies

Sorry about that, been letting my standards slip recently. To be honest it was like smooching an ash tray. Regards, Jesus. P.S Didn't see at mass last Sunday, tut tut.

cerandor (2005-03-21 23:39:33) Re: Apologies

I thought we'd cleared up the whole mass thing? I don't go, and you don't say anything? I knew you'd welch on the deal once your dad started throwing his weight around...

(2005-03-22 23:12:19) A Divine Intervention

Yeah he's being a real bastard lately, Heal this, orphan in Mexico that, clean your cloud. I had to step though really, I have seen two possible futures for you: 1- You don't go to mass, spend Sunday morning writing, and before you know it your richer then astronauts and well respected in the writing community. However, you find it empty and not like you thought it'd be. The other writers are backstabbing and you get no film offers. So you turn to the bottle and die of liver failure middle aged. OR... 2-You drop the writing thing. Find God on the back of a beer mat in your jacket pocket. You become a priest and move to El Salvador. Your very happy because all the people are not very smart and happily lap up the drool you feed them in your sermons at mass. Then, alas you fall in love with a beautiful El Salvadorian prostitute whose soul you are trying to save. You quit the priesthood marry her and your happy untill you come to find her in bed with your good friend michael. You kill them both in a fit of rage. You realise what you've done all to late. You run away, turn to the bottle and die of liver failure slightly past middle age. Hey it's your choice. Now about that orphan in Mexico...

(2005-03-30 14:22:41)

Don't make me come down there. Iuz

1.2.7 Meh at the Movies (2005-03-21 18:24)

I suffered an unexpected disappointment in the cinema yesterday. No, they hadn't run out of popcorn. What happened was that I saw "House of Flying Daggers" and was distinctly unimpressed.

I'd seen and enjoyed "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" and "Hero" and was expecting more of the same. However, "Flying Daggers" is not in the same league as those progenitors. To be fair, the action sequences are beautiful, with wire work much more skilfully worked into the action than in "Tiger" or "Hero", with a bamboo forest sequence that outdoes "Tiger"'s admittedly more soulful effort.

However, "Flying Daggers" failed to engage me on pretty much any level. The story ranged from cliched to high melodrama (especially at the end), and the backstory simply tapered off and vanished. The structure didn't help: conversation, fight, conversation, fight, and so forth. Even though the film was only two hours long, it seemed much longer. It lacked either the humour of "Tiger" or the beautiful use of colour of "Hero" to leaven the dull patches.

Possibly I was expecting too much, and possibly what I saw as overly melodramatic rings truer for Asian audiences. But I came out of the cinema less entertained than I went in.

1.2.8 Hubris, thy name is Ciaran... (2005-03-21 23:30)

And while we're on the topic of movies, I've had a crazy thought running through my head for the last day or two: I want to rewrite the Star Wars movies. Not all of them, just "Phantom Menace" and "Clones," and not with any expectation of doing anything other than amusing myself, but still...

I'm convinced those movies could have been great. Should have been. Just a few changes here and there, a little character depth added (especially to Anakin), a more coherent and

imposing backstory (I could make midichlorians sound good, honest).

It's an idea that's driven me to distraction, and it'll eventually go away, but it's fun to play with the possibilities in my mind. I have a folder full of ideas that lasted a day or two and then faded away. It's only the really durable ones that stick with you.

1.2.9 In Praise of Flawed Heroes (2005-03-23 00:00)

About the time that "The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers" came out, an argument kicked off between me and several of my friends. Specifically, I claimed to prefer the version of Faramir presented in the movies to the whiter-than-white character of the books. A little self-doubt and torment did wonders for a character who'd never really appealed to me all that much. But then again, I've always enjoyed characters who veer away from the straight and narrow path.

I could argue that I like to see characters struggling with their own failings because I tend to be overly aware of mine, but I have my literary reasons too. Flawed protagonists are simply more enjoyable to observe, because although their success may be foreordained, you don't know what they're going to lose, or who they're going to hurt, along the way. I'll give way to no one in my love of The Lord of Rings as a work of creation, but my favourite characters are Saruman, the fallen wizard, and Boromir, fatally tempted by the ring. My favourite scenes mostly involve the former, especially the moment when his pride gets in the way of his best chance of redemption.

Shakespeare wasn't the originator of the flawed hero, but he employed the model better than anyone before and almost anyone since. His comedies are driven by the foibles and blindness of his characters, and his tragic heroes - Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, etc. - more often than not are responsible for their own falls. When people say that Shakespeare brought humans to life on the stage, they mean that he represented their failings as clearly as their glories, bringing both into sharper relief.

1.2.10 What's in a name? (2005-03-23 23:37)

One of the main pains of writing fantasy is names. Specifically, creating them. We're not all Tolkien and can't create our own languages to provide root words for our philologically correct creations. (No, I have no idea whether 'philologically' is the correct spelling. Hush.) Nonetheless, if your names (and this goes for place names as well as personal names) don't hang together and look both credible and as if they sprang from the same or related languages, readers will pick up on it very quickly and the whole thing will look like a mess.

There are a couple of ways through this. Tolkien did it the hard way. George R.R. Martin took the aesthetically pleasing short cut of just altering the spelling of everyday names (Edward > Eddard). He also mixes and matches techniques, helping to differentiate between cultures, which is a tip worth remembering.

For the story I'm currently writing, I'm using compound names, stitching two familiar words together to give me a suitably evocative name. For example, one fairly important character is called 'Summerborn'. It's been interesting figuring out the rules for this method. For a start, such names work best when one or both parts are single-syllable. Anything more is too complex. Not that it's a particularly easy method. Weeding out bad names from the ones that pop into my head can be pretty laborious. Hopefully it'll be worth it in the end.

1.2.11 All generalizations are rubbish (2005-03-24 20:58)

Gratuitous compliments to the first person to point out the flaw in that statement...

Nonetheless, it's mostly true. Any time I see someone in the media employ a sweeping generalization (and it's usually negative), I lose a little of the small amount of faith I have left in humanity. Generalizations are the common currency of modern life because there's just too much information being thrown at us for us to be able to get anything more than a vague grip on large issues. Politicians in particular love generalizations. Why actually deal with facts when you can tar your opponents (or anyone else who's handy) with the biggest brush available?

You can't avoid using them. There's a few in the paragraph above, I know. So the question is, do I learn to stop worrying and love the generalization or take up arms against a sea of them and doom myself to old age as a grumbling curmudgeon?

lostperdita (2005-03-25 08:57:21)

i tend to think of generalizations as tools for propelling discussion or analysis forward while acknowledging that it's the very nature of generalizations to have exceptions that may or may not be immediately relevant to the topic at hand. sometimes it's worth lumping like items into a handy package for the sake of transporting/transmitting, but it cannot be forgotten that the handy package contains distinct components that need to be considered in their own right. but, as any trip to the store would teach you, some people are just better packers than others, and if you wrap it in shiny paper, it's really easy to forget to care about what the package actually contains. mmmshinymmm.

cerandor (2005-03-26 20:37:48)

Point taken. Generalizations are actually necessary, from the point of view that we'll all actually get bogged down in the details otherwise. The problem I have is that too few people are aware of the exceptions: they just absorb the generalizations from the media, which is happy to spew them out in order to sell pages. In shiny packages of course...

lostperdita (2005-03-27 07:45:06)

then it's people you should hate, not generalizations. of course, this won't help you from becoming a hopeless curmudgeon, but i suppose there are worst fates.

aeredhal (2005-03-30 14:17:45)

Becoming?

1.2.12 A good walk spoiled (2005-03-26 20:24)

I'm home for Easter currently, stuck in the middle of nowhere, watching golf. This is hardly a chore though: it's a very comfortable, picturesque middle of nowhere, and I enjoy watching golf. As with more than a few of my opinions, that last statement might mark me out as being a little odd. With the exception of my dad, I don't know anyone else who enjoys watching golf on TV.

I can't see why. If I had to pick a sport to excel at, it'd be golf. (I used to play occasionally and poorly.) It fits TV too: if one pairing is quiet, switch to another. There's always something going on somewhere on the course. Okay, so the competitors are not the most exciting souls in the world. Even Tiger Woods, for all Nike's efforts and a marriage to a tall, Swedish blonde model ("So, exactly why did you marry the millionaire Tiger Woods, Miss Nordegren?") is on

the wrong side of dull. But that works for me. I'll keep an eye on local favourites and lovable underdogs while reading or playing a game. It's background entertainment, like Grand Prix racing.

Of course, I used to watch snooker too, but that's so dull these days...

1.2.13 Mythology in your back garden (2005-03-27 21:13)

I've been a fan of myth since I could read. With the help of my local library, I devoured Egyptian, Greek and Norse myths and legends just as fast as I could. Irish myths tend to suffer from twee bowdlerizations, but versions like Thomas Kinsella's *Tain Bo Cualigne* (The Cattle Raid of Cooley), there's as close a depiction as could be imagined of an essentially alien mindset separated from us by language and over 2,000 years.

Anyhow, the story of the Tain centres around two bulls, one brown and one white, from the provinces of Ulster and Connacht respectively. Why is this on my mind? Well, for the last few months, the field that surrounds my family home has had two inhabitants: one brown bull and one white. Supposedly, they don't get on too well. I've been told that they once spent three hours standing head-to-head in the field, but they haven't tried to kill one another yet.

So, mythological resonances outside my bedroom window. These kind of things amuse me. And, as things have been kind of quiet this weekend, any amusement is good.

1.2.14 Great Out-of-Context Quotes of Our Time (2005-03-28 22:26)

No. 2 in an Ongoing Series:

"It's her fault. She's filled your thing with other minds."

More of a malapropism really, courtesy of my friend, uh, George.

(2005-04-01 11:25:20) From George

Listen, you know what I meant, and I still do! She really has filled your _ _ _ _ with other _ _ _ _ s.

1.2.15 Great Out-of-Context Quotes of Our Time (2005-03-29 20:53)

No. 3 in an ongoing series.

"In fairness, I'm unlikely to make much ground either, but as the entire Western Front of the First World War proved, that's never stopped anyone."

It's been a good week for quotes. This one comes courtesy of, uh, Rocky.

1.2.16 Oh god, no... (2005-03-29 21:55)

Right, I am now officially depressed. Thanks to [1]Aeredhal, I foolishly took the [2]Real Gamers Use Dice Test. And got 93 percent. This worries me. For a start, I'm not an old gamer. I've only been playing for what, 15 years?

...

God, I'm depressed. I have two ways out of this. Either I assume that I got such a high mark from inspired guessing and put it down to my demonstrated skill at remembering useless facts. Or (and this is the preferred option) someone I know has a go and gets a higher score than me.

I'm waiting...

1. <http://www.livejournal.com/users/aeredhal/>
2. <http://www.okcupid.com/tests/take?testid=13826541550696699943>

(2005-03-30 08:57:36) 1% more sad than thou
94 % - so nyah! SconeBringer

aeredhal (2005-03-30 11:34:51)

Be glad I'm not posting all the various how geek pure are you tests, or worse how bab 5 pure are you? Now who is our mystery 94 % gamer?

(2005-04-01 11:44:00) The Obvious Geek

Well I got 87 %, you long, sad, game-playing loser. For my demographic, I hit the 93 % percentile which is not particularly surprising. Like I said, I'm the obvious geek who makes it very obvious about how I am. You are more of a stealth-geek. But a stealth geek who got scored 7 % higher than the crop-haired, loquacious computer nerd with a house full of computer games and O'Reilly publications.

1.3 April

1.3.1 The Route to my Ears (2005-04-01 00:51)

Apropos of nothing much, the 5 albums that I've been listening to most over the last few months:

1. "How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb," U2
2. "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King," Howard Shore
3. "Halo Soundtrack" Martin O'Donnell +
4. "Dial-a-Song," They Might Be Giants
5. "Fire," Electric Six

1.3.2 Great Out-of-Context Quotes of Our Time (2005-04-01 00:55)

No. 4 in an ongoing series.

"I'm not a crack whore!"

"You said it, not me!"

The names have been removed to protect the (probably/possibly) innocent.

(2005-04-01 11:33:44) From George

I'm not quite sure where the George comes from, but I'll take it. And I stand by my statement as well. She did say. I didn't.

1.3.3 A Short Rant Against Pointlessness... (2005-04-03 20:12)

Let me just say, before I hang myself (metaphorically), that I am against censorship. If you have a problem with what's on TV, use the off switch. If you don't like a film or play, walk out. If you don't like a song's lyrics, don't listen. Unless laws were broken in making said media products, they have a right to be out there.

That said, on with the rant.

Why the hell is George Lucas, who's been keeping as many secrets as he can with regard to the last Star Wars movie, releasing the novelization a month and a half before the film? What if Hitchcock had released the novelization of Psycho before the film? Aggh. The target audience is the fans who can't wait that long, and I know I'm one of them. Every time I go to the shop, I'll see that on the shelves and suffer the urge to crack it open and spoil the movie for myself.

So, I'm not really complaining about George Lucas. Just my own weakness. Damnation...

aeredhal (2005-04-03 19:29:51)

Because he's lost his mind. Does no one else remember the N-Sync incident from the last movie?

1.3.4 Great Out-of-Context Quotes of Our Time (2005-04-04 18:02)

No. 5 in an ongoing series

"I'll probably be dead by the time I'm 50. I can live with that."

Courtesy of Johnny.

1.3.5 A few thoughts (2005-04-06 18:51)

Haven't exactly been diligent in keeping up, so here's a few things running through my mind:

1. I have a new toy (I have lots of toys: iPod, iBook, digital camera, at least until it conked out again). Specifically, I now have a 1gig USB flash drive. I've wanted one of these for a while, and it's going to make some things a lot easier, specifically writing. As long as I keep my text files in RTF format, I ought to be able to work on them anywhere, specifically at work. (It also ties into my longstanding belief that computers will become commodities and what'll be important are the personal data stores we'll all carry around with us. But more of that some other time...)

2. Writing has been a bit flaky lately. "The Novel" is progressing slowly. Leaving lots of stuff undefined helps in some ways, but not in others. On the bright side, thanks to the USB key, I've almost finished a short story about the end of the universe, which I started yesterday.

When it's done, I'll post it here.

3. A friend of mine recently dropped over from Australia, where she's now living. It was great to see her again, albeit briefly, but that (and some other factors) are reinforcing the fact that I'm not doing enough with my life. There are specific areas I have in mind, but again, it's not worth speculating right now.

Something more in-depth next time, I think.

1.3.6 Idea Spasm (2005-04-11 22:34)

The cliched question to ask an author (no, I'm not claiming to be one - yet) is where they get their ideas from. For my part, I tend to find them in large clumps, whenever and wherever it would be most inconvenient: usually when I'm trying to write something else. This has resulted in a plentiful collection of text files and A4 sheets filled with one-sentence distillations of something that popped into my head a while back. This is my mushroom method: keep said distracting ideas hidden away in the dark and one day they'll sprout. Or, I'll just never think of them again, which serves much the same purpose.

Anyhow, I've been distracted from writing "Das Book" (writing it makes me feel claustrophobic, but if I come up for air, I'll probably be sunk) by one such idea. Trying to distract myself at work, I read over an idea-dump text file and came across the following passage:

The Threadbare Universe: Billions of years in the future, the universe is literally coming apart at the seams. In the vast gulfs between galaxies, time and space have frayed and snapped, and the ragged remains of reality are rapidly collapsing in on themselves. These remnants have become increasingly hostile to any form of sentient existence, but the Last Library lingers yet, its custodians desperately searching for a way to preserve their archives in the face of universal annihilation.

It was nothing more than a shadow of a concept, but when I read it again it got its hooks in and wouldn't let go. The only way to escape was to write it. So I did. Now, it's a little long to put in a LiveJournal entry, but I'd be interested in seeing what people think of it. Most, I suspect, are not going to like it. But all criticism is good, and I'm a poor enough editor of my own work to recognise a need for help. So if you want to take a look, drop me a line. All I ask is an opinion, or even better, criticism.

(2005-04-12 11:16:09) The Story

I certainly want to read it and have been asking to read your stuff for some time. I would post it here anyway, what harm if it is very long?

cerandor (2005-04-15 18:23:42) Re: The Story

I'm relatively happy to post it here. I've noticed that you can have links off entries in a journal to longer files, but I haven't been able to figure out how to do this (LiveJournal's help files are extremely extensive). I suppose I'm just paying for not learning HTML years ago. If you can point out how to do this, I'll post the story. One more thing: if it's not too personal, who is this? I've been wracking my brains. Two suspects have LiveJournal accounts and wouldn't be anonymous, one other I asked and another contacted me separately. So who is the mystery man/woman?

aeredhal (2005-04-16 12:59:31) Re: The Story

Harm in it being long, without an lj cut, is that it will break peoples' friends pages. Formatting of text varies with page style so big pictures or huge amounts of text can make some of the default

styles do strange things.

aeredhal (2005-04-16 10:29:57)

ok the thing you want to do is called an LJ cut, you can find it in the LiveJournal FAQ in your user area. Basically it works like a html tag put the phrase `?lj-cut?` in side less-than/greater than signs, without the question marks. Place this at the beginning of the text/image you want to cut. then at the end of the text/image you want to cut put `?/lj-cut?`, again within less than/greater than signs and without the question marks. The default text that appears with this link is something like "Read more", but you can change that by replacing the first tag with `?lj-cut text="Blah blah blah"?` I d explain this better but I don t know how to type the phrases out properly with out them activating (and therefore hiding the tags) Hope that helps Nifty (not your anony mouse)

(2005-04-16 10:40:41)

But I could be by just clicking options *Squeak

1.3.7 Updragging (2005-04-15 19:23)

Over the years, I've learned that the best way to get myself into a good mood is to accomplish something. Whether it's something small, such as cleaning the dishes, or large, such as writing a short story, actually getting something done gives me a mental boost like almost nothing else. Which is why it's so frustrating when I fall into one of my lulls, when I just don't have the enthusiasm to do anything. I've been in one of those for a week or two now, in which I've done almost no writing on the novel and spent several days on a short story. But I think I'm over it now. Got home, did cleaning, wrote some emails, spent an hour on the novel and now I feel refreshed and ready for the evening. Weekend ahead and a trip to Paris in a week. As I get older, my downswings shorten and my upswings lengthen. I'm almost entirely sure that's not the way it's supposed to happen.

1.3.8 The Threadbare Universe (2005-04-17 20:34)

Thanks to [LJ User: Aeredhal] for explaing LJ-cuts to me. Ergo, for those who want it, here's The Threadbare Universe in its current form.

The Threadbare Universe

The relay suit left great echoing footsteps hanging in the air behind it as it carried the immortal form of Third Custodian Gavinil to the outer ring. Within the suit, he was fending off sleep, ignoring the crumbling architecture around him as he reviewed the status of the Library on five viewscreens. Even if the relay suit were to fail or put a foot wrong - a thing entirely unheard of - Gavinil would be safe within his support pod. He had not left it since time out of mind and would not do so until after the universe had failed.

The problem was that the time for that was rapidly approaching.

When the suit reached the outer ring, it reversed its facing and backed into a recess in the outer wall. Its anti-entropic shielding fell just as another shield sprang up, and mechanisms whirred swiftly and smoothly from the wall, extracting Gavinil's pod from the suit and attaching it to the ascent cage above.

As the cage began its parabolic climb to High Watch, Gavinil remained fixated on the viewscreens. There was no real need for him to physically visit High Watch and Seventh Custodian Micaster, but he felt that there should be at least one of the custodians who still walked the corridors of the Last Library, regardless of the energy expense. However, if there

was one thing about the trip that he disliked, it was the view. When he reached High Watch, he would have little choice but to apprehend it. Until then, he would stick to his work.

High Watch was suspended vertically above the Knowledge Well, the heart of the Last Library, by four great curving pylons that ascended from the outer wall and met in the center. It could only be reached by the ascent cages that ran along those struts, just as Low Watch, which hung directly below the Knowledge Well in the same manner, could only be reached using the descent platforms that ran along the lower four pylons.

Micaster dwelt permanently upon High Watch, and thus had become somewhat isolated from the other custodians. He was, for want of a better term, eccentric, and Gavinil had long felt that it was wisest to visit him occasionally and ensure that he was performing his tedious task to the best of his ability. There was no intrusion of sympathy into this thought: if Micaster descended into insanity, it would matter little to Gavinil unless it interfered with his work.

The ascent cage swung to a halt above a small platform that extruded from High Watch's lower regions. Gavinil did not look up as another set of arms emerged from above and lifted him from the cage and into another relay suit. However, as the suit powered up and began the slow ascent to High Watch's viewing gallery, he did lift his gaze from the screens and look around, as he had done many times before.

High Watch's architecture was distinct from that of the Library proper or from that of Low Watch. The Library itself was monolithic and purposeful, shorn of all decorations but glimmering with the light of countless storage elements that reflected off every cracked and polished surface. Low Watch was shaped like a basket, every element straining upwards, as if to grasp hold of the pylons it hung from and stave off the inevitable day when it would tumble into the whirling vortex below.

In contrast, High Watch seemed almost to be striving to escape the Last Library's grasp and ascend to the void above. Every column, arch and spire was true to the vertical, and every embellishment or ornamentation (of which there were many) seemed to show a human or animal figure that aspired to take flight and leave this sinking ship behind. However, it was in no better shape than the rest of the Library, and there were few corners or details that did not show some sign of wear or damage.

There was something almost religious about the place, Gavinil observed. It was unsurprising that Micaster lingered here and indulged his whims without the oversight of the other dozen custodians. Twelfth Custodian Jorusk, who dwelt upon Low Watch, was a more sober individual, if somewhat given to paranoia and suicidal impulses. On more than one occasion, his support pod's preservation protocols had prevented him from achieving cessation.

No, Micaster's problem was something else, Gavinil thought as the suit and he ascended the stairs, passing by a thousand and one leering gargoyles and smiling saints. Whereas Jorusk had been overwhelmed by the enormity of the task facing the custodians, Micaster seemed to be uncaring of the need to preserve the Library's archives. He was more interested in his own flights of fancy, and thus it fell to Gavinil to visit him occasionally and keep him in check.

The ascent had been going on for some time, and Gavinil began to fear that he knew where Micaster was among the lofty warrens of High Watch. A brief glance at one of his viewscreens confirmed it: the Seventh Custodian was upon Voidfall, a platform atop High Watch's tallest tower, as far as could be from the Knowledge Well. The journey would take some time yet. Gavinil decided not to waste it. He shut down the viewscreens, opaqued the support pod's shell and surrendered to sleep.

What woke him was not light, for no light could penetrate the support pod's shell in its opaque state. Rather, it was a gnawing sensation on his brain, informing him that something was subtly wrong in the nature of reality. Gavinil recognised it quickly enough, and in recognising it, he knew he had arrived. Alert once more, he reactivated the pod's information function and allowed himself to see the void.

As he remembered, the gnawing sensation lessened when his eyes were allowed to join the party of the senses that the void engendered. For some reason, the brain could fool itself into

thinking all was well when the senses were in accord that all was not. However, if one sense were denied information, such an imbalance worsened any feeling of unease. Gavinil had searched the Last Library without uncovering a reasonable explanation for this phenomenon. However, this was not surprising, as there was little in the Library that had been set down after the void had become a matter of concern.

"Third Custodian Gavinil, in the flesh no less," came a voice that carried through his pod's protective fluid. "It is an honour for me, a habit for you and an undoubted waste of energy."

Without being prompted to, the relay suit carrying Gavinil's pod turned to face the speaker. Gavinil was treated to the sight of the rear of a relay suit, its two short metal legs supporting a bulky ovoid body festooned with manipulator arms. Only the very tip of the amber support pod was visible, but Gavinil knew that Micaster was within, just as he knew that Micaster had not needed to look at him to know who and where his visitor was.

"I've come to observe your work," Gavinil replied. "And for a report on your progress."

"As expected," replied Micaster. "Make yourself comfortable on a throne. I'll be with you shortly."

Gavinil directed the suit to turn away from the cluster of instruments and screens where Micaster stood, facing it towards the centre of Voidfall, where a raised circular dais stood, around which were arranged thirteen pedestals. These were the "thrones" of which Micaster spoke: receptacles for the support pods that offered full recording and connection to the Library. The suit began to tromp over to the dais and without even thinking about it, Gavinil again turned his attention to the void above.

It was a strange thing, this absence that remained when all else was removed. There were no words to describe it, nor had there been or ever would be. It did not so much tug at the mind as create the impression that the viewer was already being drawn towards it; thus it was unwise to stare at it too closely or too long.

Had the suit been a little taller, Gavinil would have been able to see over the edge of voidfall and apprehend the horizon, the dividing line on which the last Library was hung. Below, of course, was the vortex, the great maw of this particular ragged remnant of time and space, which was slowly dissipating. The Last Library, which had been devised when it was first confirmed that reality would fray and snap in the spaces between the galaxies, belonged to neither the void nor the vortex, but one or the other was sure to consume it, and it was this that held the custodians' full attention.

The relay suit approached the dais and stood behind one of the pedestals, employing its two heavy lower manipulators to extract Gavinil's pod and place it upon the pedestal before retreating a safe distance from whence it could be summoned when needed. The pedestal was not chosen at random, for Gavinil had been placed upon it before. There were thirteen pedestals, one each for the thirteen custodians. Once there had been more, but they had dwindled.

Immediately he was connected, Gavinil could feel the senses available to him multiply and the wealth of knowledge at his disposal bloom. The sensation, which was not unlike floating upon a sea of knowledge, was one of the most euphoric available in the Last Library and one of the few good reasons for travelling to High Watch. Of course, there were pedestals in the Knowledge Well as well, but the other ten custodians remained there all but permanently, somewhat reducing Gavinil's desire to join them. With a guilty flush, he realised that he simply did not enjoy their company.

"If anything had changed, I should have informed you." Micaster's voice broke into Gavinil's guilty reverie. "So why are you here?"

"To check on your progress," Gavinil began somewhat testily, and then stopped as he saw Micaster's relay suit depositing its burden upon the Seventh Custodian's pedestal. There was something odd about Micaster's support pod. "What is-" Gavinil began and then switched his attention to his pod's viewscreens, using its sensors to gain a closer view of Micaster. There it was. There was no doubt. "What is that thing in your pod with you?"

"What? Oh, this. It's a beard. My species used to be able to grow them. I was curious, so I

used the Library and the pod's systems to modify my selfcode."

"You mean it's attached to you? How revolting."

"Oh, it's not so bad. It provides some unusual sensations. Doesn't seem to have a purpose though. I can see why we lost the knack."

Inside Gavinil's pod, one of the viewscreens began to display the Library's stored data on beards. "Is it dangerous?" Gavinil asked, ignoring the screen for the moment. "It seems to take up more space in the pod than you do."

"Only if I'm careless," Micaster replied, his face appearing as the centre of a sea of white filaments in the amber pod. "It grows faster than I thought."

Gavinil's mind went back to Jorusk's attempts at cessation. Micaster had shown no such leanings previously, but this beard endeavour certainly had a chance of sidestepping the pod's safety protocols. He would have to take steps. "Be careful that you are not displaced by your growths."

Micaster's face split into a grin. "Oh, I don't intend to share my pod much longer. But perhaps we can attend to business? Such as why the esteemed Third Custodian is attending me here in person rather than conversing by viewscreen link?"

"Caution dictates that none of the custodians remain isolated on a permanent basis. And as you have chosen to absent yourself from the Knowledge Well, I must come to you."

"But why you?" Micaster pressed. "Why not one of your juniors? Your position allows you to remain in the Knowledge Well permanently, should you want to."

Gavinil was not about to reveal his newly realised distaste for his comrades to this reprobate. Thankfully, there was another reason. "I believe that one of use should maintain motion through the Library. Were we to confine ourselves to the Knowledge Well and High and Low Watch, much of the structure would go unobserved."

"And observation gains you what, exactly?"

"Observation is an element of maintenance."

"So you trust your ocular organs over than the Library's systems? Intriguing."

"In addition to, rather than in preference to." Gavinil realised that he had gotten sidetracked again. "I did not come here to discuss my reasons for coming here. What is there to report?"

Inside his pod, Micaster moved slightly, stirring the white filaments floating in the pod fluid. "What is there ever to report? The void remains as it always has: unmeasurable and thus unaltering."

"And what of the vortex?"

"The vortex is not my purview," replied Micaster with some suspicion. "Surely you should speak to Jorusk."

"Your instruments are as good as his, and you have access to all of his data through the Library. I spoke with Jorusk when he last visited the Knowledge Well. Now I wish to hear your opinion."

Micaster actually sighed audibly. "Very well. The vortex - our own little fragment of time, space and gravity - continues to dwindle. It has shrunk by three orders of magnitude since you last visited me, and time within continues to loop in ever decreasing cycles."

Gavinil looked around. From the raised pedestal on which he stood, he could see over the edge of Voidfall. The horizon was just visible, along with a sliver of the blackness of the vortex. "It does not appear to have changed."

"Of course not," Micaster confirmed. "We are anchored to it, after all. Nor will it appear to alter until it reaches cessation. By which point, of course, it will be too late."

By which he meant that the Last Library would be cut adrift in the void, lacking a reality to anchor itself to and doomed to eventual entropic dispersal. "There are no perturbations in the void?" Perturbations that might indicate the birth of a new reality to which the Library could attach itself and sustain its precious cargo of knowledge.

"As I said, no." This time, Micaster seemed to want to say more, so Gavinil paused to allow him to speak. "Nor do I believe there will be."

The statement shocked Gavinil to the core. A new reality was the Library's only hope for the

survival of its archives, and Micaster and High Watch were tasked to study the void for signs of new realities. Although the custodians knew that their time was limited, they had no way of telling how long the vortex would remain before it dwindled to nothing, removing the Library's source of power. "Explain," he said, more harshly than he'd intended.

Micaster's head twitched again, his expression unreadable to Gavinil. "Very well. Consider the void as an infinite ocean. Infinite, for the purposes of this example, because it cannot be measured. A reality, or universe, as we understand it, is caused by perturbations in the void that result in a sealed environment. That environment expands, by its own measure, not the void's, until its internal forces are insufficient to maintain its coherency, at which point it tears itself to shreds. We, of course, are anchored to one such shred of our long-dissipated reality."

"Retaining the sum total of all the knowledge gathered during that reality's span," Gavinil added. "This much I know. What of the void?"

"Well, to return to my first metaphor, if the void is an infinite ocean and a reality a bubble within it, why can we not perceive other realities?"

"Because the void does not provide a medium across which we can view them."

"Limited thinking," snapped Micaster. "The void does not provide a medium across which information can flow. Whether there are a finite number of realities, infinitely far apart, or an infinite number of realities packed tighter than can be imagined, it does not matter: we cannot penetrate the void."

"And we have seen no perturbations in the void because..."

"Because although we perceive the void as a plane because we view it from the Library, we exist in fact as a point in the void, infinitely small. Unless we cause a perturbation, we shall see none."

It took some moments for Gavinil to take all of it in. The Last Library had been created to safeguard the knowledge of the universe when it began to fall apart, and the custodians had been chosen to safeguard it to the end of reality and beyond. Micaster was taking away the greatest hope that they had of continuance.

Clinging to a thread, he recalled other possibilities. "Jorusk told me, when last we spoke, that there was a chance that when the reality onto which we cling finally reaches cessation, that it will give birth to a new reality.

"Jorusk does not truly believe that," Micaster responded harshly. "Nor do I. It is a hope he clings to because he needs hope. Our anchor is not collapsing. It is dissipating into the void, fraying away its substance. When it is gone, there will be nothing. No ember from which it might spark anew."

In his stunned state, Gavinil was only vaguely aware that the interview had not gone as he had planned. Micaster had effectively rendered the Library's purpose null and, well, void. If the Library could not find another reality, it was as doomed as the one whose memory it was seeking to preserve.

"This cannot be true," he moaned.

"It is true," replied Micaster, who had been watching his companion closely during the previous exchange. "When we lose our anchor, we will find no other; and finding no other, we are doomed to fail in our task."

"This is a dismal prognosis. Why have you not reported it before now?"

"Hmm, yes. I can just see myself going to First Custodian Stepahkin and telling him that he's wasting his time. What would he do? No, don't tell me, I already know: he'd ignore me, think that I'm even more of an idiot than he already does and tell me to return to my work. No, my friend, the question you ought to be asking yourself is why I'm telling you this now."

That stopped Gavinil's misery short. His gaze snapped up from the viewscreens that were dolefully confirming Micaster's forecast to Micaster's face, which floated in its white cloud, watching him intently. "Why?"

"Yes, why. If you think on it, I have already provided you with the answer."

Now shaken from his despair, Gavinil was flitting swiftly from deep scepticism to fragile hope.

As the Seventh Custodian waited patiently, he searched through the record of their conversation to that point, dipping into the information most newly deposited into the Library's. Then he found what he sought. Unsure, he examined it again and paused to consider it. Then he looked up at Micaster.

"You said that we would find no perturbation if we do not create one."

"Exactly." Something that Gavinil recognised as a smile crept across Micaster's features.

"You can do this?"

"Yes." But there was a flicker of doubt behind the smile, Gavinil was certain of it.

"You are not sure, are you?"

Micaster pursed his lips. "In such a matter, there is no way to be sure. But if we continue as we have, we will fade away to a slow and pointless death. If we act, we have a chance. Perhaps our only chance."

"How would you go about it?" Gavinil asked. Micaster's wild theories were supported by all the evidence he could uncover, but he had the disturbing feeling that he had stepped in on the last act of a long-in-planning scheme.

"Through information," replied Micaster. "All the information that we have gathered here in the Library. The void swallows up matter and energy, but it is information that underlies the building blocks of any reality. If we transmit every iota of information in the Knowledge Well into the void, as many times and as powerfully as we can, I believe a perturbation will result."

"It sounds ridiculous," Gavinil scoffed, for it did.

"Nonetheless," Micaster continued, seemingly not in the least offended. "The Last Library is ideally suited to accomplish it. My own instruments are designed to probe the void, and they not only draw information in, they are also capable of sending it out. My calculations suggest that we can transmit the entire contents of the Knowledge Well 3.9 million times every second. I believe that will be enough."

A glance at his viewscreens confirmed this for Gavinil. "So why have you not attempted this before?"

Over on the far side of Voidfall, Micaster's relay suit suddenly started moving from its berth and headed towards the dais. "We need three things to make this work. We need a means of transmission, which I can provide. We also need to sever the Last Library's anchor with our reality fragment, which Jorusk has agreed to accomplish."

"Sever the anchor!" Gavinil exclaimed, just before a secondary thought intruded: "Jorusk is your confederate in this?"

"Yes to both," Micaster responded, infuriatingly calm. "So long as we remain achored to the vortex, all we perceive of the void is that singular point where we touch it. Even if we could engender a perturbation in the void at that point, which I do not believe is possible, all we would accomplish is to sandwich ourselves between the vortex and a new reality, most likely resulting in our destruction. We need to be alone in the void if this is to work. Jorusk agrees with my prognosis and is prepared to do his part."

Gavinil felt quite ill at the scope of what was being proposed. "This still doesn't explain why you haven't already tried this." A suicidal custodian and an eccentric were proposing to gamble with their mission and their existence?

"That's because I haven't told you about the last thing we need," Micaster replied as his relay suit lifted his pod up from the pedestal and nestled it within its guts. "We need you, Third Custodian. Or more specifically, we need your access. I am Seventh Custodian, Jorusk is Twelfth. The entirety of the Knowledge Well and the systems of the Last Library are only open to the First through Third Custodians. We need that information and we need that access to do what we must."

Gavinil did not respond immediately. With one hand, Micaster had promised the doom of the Library. With the other, he offered a chance, however slight, to redeem it. It was a terrible temptation.

"I need time to think about this," he moaned, caught in an agony of indecision. At an unspoken command, the relay suit that had brought him to Voidfall clanked into life and began to

step towards him.

"Time is what we don't have," Micaster insisted. His relay suit was stomping around the dais towards Gavinil, who could now see his face quite clearly.

"Why not?"

"Because the amount of energy we can draw from the frayed edges of the vortex has become insufficient for our needs. Our reserves are declining. You know this to be true."

Gavinil did indeed know it. It was one of the reasons why he had chosen to visit Micaster at this time, to seek for a sign of hope. Could the Last Library be at so dire a pass already?

"What of the other custodians?" he asked weakly, all but admitting that Micaster had proved his point.

"They stay in the Knowledge Well," Micaster told him as Gavinil was raised from his pedestal by the relay suit. "You know them better than I, of course, but they are so preoccupied with maintaining the archives that I doubt they will even notice what we are doing until it is too late."

Supported again by a relay suit, Gavinil began, oddly, to feel cold. Again, there was a distance between him and the Library's archives and he understood why the other custodians preferred to avoid being separated. He wondered what perverse impulse was in him that drove him to avoid following their example. "You may be right," he admitted. "I do not know that they ever notice anything that does not occur within the archives."

Micaster was close to him now, and Gavinil was aware not only of his face but the rest of his body, suspended in the amber fluid, protected by the support pod and given motion by the relay suit. He seemed to be waiting for something.

Gavinil knew what it was. "What do I have to do?"

The preparations, he discovered, had already been made. In Low Watch, Jorusk was waiting for the word, and when Micaster made contact, he began to institute the decoupling procedure. Micaster had already done most of the work necessary to employ his instruments as a powerful transmission device. The remaining work was mostly down to Gavinil, connecting the archives of the Knowledge Well and the control systems of the Last Library to Voidfall's instruments.

He had half expected that the First or Second Custodians would have noticed what he was doing and interrupt, demanding an explanation or summarily overriding his commands. But nothing of the sort happened. Without fuss, Voidfall became the heart of the Last Library.

As he worked, Micaster expounded on the theory underlying their efforts. "Information," he said, "is a perturbation in the nature of reality, warping the energy or matter employed as its medium. This is hard to notice, except on large scales, because any material reality is by its nature a troubled and unsteady state. But the void is different. The void is stable, still and lacking in perturbation - at least in so far as we perceive it.

"Now, the void can dispose of energy and matter by swallowing it up. But this process can be delayed by perturbing the matter or energy in question with information. At first, I thought that this was the answer: sooner or later, such perturbations would spread to the void and give birth to a new reality. Sadly, I came to realise that this is not the case. In an infinite void, perturbations that give birth to realities can only occur in one of two cases: First, spontaneously, which is inevitable in an infinite system, and second, when the perturbation provided by the engulfed matter or energy is equal to the task of describing a new reality.

"Obviously, as I explained to you, we will never witness a spontaneous perturbation. However, the Last Library offers an opportunity to initiate a perturbation of the latter kind. We have effectively encoded a universe-worth of information here. So we can use it to create a new reality."

Gavinil hardly heard the last of Micaster's speech. To his mind, the Seventh Custodian was descending into babble, and there was truly only one question that concerned Gavinil. When at last he had finished his work, he turned to his companion and asked it.

"What if you're wrong?"

A quarter of the way around Voidfall, Micaster's relay suit turned away from the displays he had been studying and began to move towards Gavinil. "If I'm wrong, then it makes no difference. The Last Library is doomed either way. The only difference is time, and time only makes a difference in here. But I believe I'm right, and you had best hope that I'm not as mad as you think I am."

Gavinil did not respond. There was a hollow feeling inside him. He had never considered the void as an abyss before, but now he did. They were standing on the edge of their little universe and about to jump off.

"Have you finished?" asked Micaster as he reached Gavinil's console. There was an odd edge to his voice. Gavinil could not tell whether he was attempting sympathy or merely excited by the prospect of what they were about to do.

"I have finished," Gavinil confirmed. He did not turn to face Micaster. He did not want to see the expression on that floating face.

"I can give Jorusk the word then?"

"You can."

Micaster said nothing, but Gavinil sensed the flow of information passing from High Watch to Low Watch. There was a long pause during which neither he nor Micaster spoke. Then, without fanfare or aftershock, the vortex was gone, the horizon was gone and the Last Library was alone with the void.

Once again, Gavinil waited for a response from the Knowledge Well. Once again, none came.

"They haven't even noticed," he stated mournfully.

"Of course they haven't," Micaster agreed, almost cheerfully. "First Custodian Stepahkin and the others are concerned only with the Knowledge Well and the information it contains. They have forgotten that information requires a medium, that the Knowledge Well requires the Last Library. But you, Jorusk and I remember. They have turned in upon themselves, like the vortex, tending their store of information as if it had a worth intrinsic to itself. But information itself is only meaningful through context or use. Without us, they mean nothing."

Gavinil heard but did not respond. Instead, he stared at the console before him. "Energy reserves are declining rapidly," he observed.

"Then we have no time to waste," Micaster stated. "The process can be begun from this console. Do you wish to do it, or shall I? You do outrank me, after all."

Fatalism had grabbed hold of Gavinil. He could feel himself plunging through the abyss. All his doubts had resurfaced and he saw his doom approaching in the Last Library's draining energy reserves. Saying nothing, he moved the relay suit away from the console, the display of the reserves switching from there to a viewscreen within his pod.

Micaster stepped forward and engaged with a console. Through his own viewscreens, Gavinil followed the steps in the procedure of preparing High Watch's sensor array for broadcast. It had been long-prepared for and took little time. Between the space of two breaths, it was ready.

Micaster paused for a moment, and Gavinil saw him look upwards, toward the void. "Fiat Lux," he murmured and initiated.

Gavinil's pod just had time to perform a translation of that strange phrase and display the results on a viewscreen when it happened. There was no light, no pulse, no outward growth. One moment, there was only the void and the Last Library, with its power cells tumbling towards empty, and the next, the indescribable nothingness above them was replaced by a vast canvas of black.

Micaster stared upwards in awe, unable to respond. Gavinil looked from the blackness, to him, and finally to his own viewscreens. They confirmed what he was looking at. The gambit had succeeded. The Last Library hung once again on a horizon, but this time between the void and a newborn reality.

It seemed almost banal, now that it had happened.

Gavinil looked at Micaster again, still stuck in that pose of adoration. "Why did you say that?" he asked.

Micaster started, shocked by the intrusion of a foreign element into the symbiosis between himself and his creation. He looked at Gavinil uncomprehendingly for a moment. "I . . . I don't know. I thought it was appropriate, I suppose. I was wrong, obviously. No light, just darkness." Where he was and what he was saying suddenly caught up with him. "It worked! All of it worked! So easily too! Who would have thought it?"

He turned to the console again, excited and animated now. "The sensors are realigning." There was a pause as he watched the information being drawn in by those same sensors, during which Gavinil tapped into the information and watched it on his own viewscreens. "It's perfect! A new reality. We're saved." Micaster's voice was hushed, little more than breathing. Gavinil's attention was elsewhere. The Last Library, as was its habit, was drawing in all the information that the sensors were recording. However, that information was causing the Library's systems to complain: complaints angrily flashed upon Gavinil's viewscreens. It appeared that the Library had expected entirely new data from this new reality but was being provided with something else and was complaining about the wastage of its valuable storage space.

Gavinil thought about this. The reason for the problem came to him quite quickly. He felt some relief that some fragment of his earlier fatalism still lingered with him, otherwise this latest surprise might have caused him to laugh out loud.

"We may be saved," he murmured, "but there is nothing new about this reality of yours."

Micaster's relay suit turned so that Gavinil could see the puzzled look on his face. He immediately understood that the Seventh Custodian had only considered the process of engendering the new reality, not about what it might lead to. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"The information you used to create this new reality was the Last Library's entire collection. All the information ever gathered within our own reality, packed as tight as can be within the Knowledge Well. Didn't you guess that the nature of that information might have an effect on the reality you created?"

Micaster looked at him, uncomprehending.

"You have not created a new universe, Micaster. You have only recreated the old."

Bewildered complaints (but only insightful ones) to the usual location.

laerfan (2005-04-21 12:26:44) Story

I enjoyed the story. It was certainly original and kept my attention nicely. Well done. If you're interested, try one of mine on livejournal.com/laerfan

1.3.9 The Inevitable (2005-04-18 20:51)

This evening, for the first time since losing my umbrella a few months back, I got heavily rained on while walking home from work. It was just as little fun as I remembered. Yet I'm not overly fussed about getting another umbrella. When I had an umbrella, I'd check the weather forecast every morning and see whether or not I needed to take the bulky thing with me. Since it got blown repeatedly inside out (by the wind) and deposited in a bin (by me), I haven't bothered. The odd thing is, despite Ireland's reputation as the rainy arse-end of Europe, fortune seems to have favoured me. Today was a nasty deluge, but it was short, and if I'd bothered to duck into a shop I'd have missed it entirely. So I'll live without an umbrella and take my chances.

(2005-04-19 10:51:13) Hell yeah!

Damn straight. I absolutely HATE umbrellas. They are always far more hassle than just getting wet. They always invert and get battered by the wind. Not really worth it, I feel. I usually just wear a hat

and it does most of the "keep dry" job anyway.

1.3.10 To be on TV (2005-04-19 23:53)

I've been on TV a few times now, always on quiz shows. Twice on BBC2 with my Dad on a show called "Today's the Day," once on RTE1's "Dodge the Question" and twice on Channel 4's "15-to-1." I've had varying degrees of success, though less so than my Dad, who I got the quiz bug from and who's been on quite a few more shows than me. Still, though I don't reckon my general knowledge is as strong as it once was, I'm feeling the urge to put myself forward for something again. Maybe it'll pass, or maybe I'll put some real effort into it.

The lucrative shows, such as "Who Wants to be a Millionaire," are nearly impossible to get on, and the prestigious ones, such as "Mastermind" (which my Dad was one once, and whose video of his appearance I can never fully apologise for taping over) are a bit intimidating. Plus, I've long since missed the opportunity to enter "University Challenge" and Irish quizzes have too many questions about Ireland, which somebody like me, raised on BBC News, finds hard to answer. So, time to hunt down entry forms and the like. There are opportunities out there. I just have to find them.

1.3.11 Paris, France (2005-04-22 01:07)

Many of you may be unaware that this weekend I am in Paris, France, city of a thousand something or others. Not alone either. Des and Paul are accompanying me on this particular jaunt. I've only ever been in Paris for a very short period of time before, so I'm looking forward to this five-day excursion. Apologies if I meander, but here's a description:

Starting with a two-hour delay, during which we caught up with our sleep on the plane, was not an ideal beginning, and Charles De Gaulle Airport turned out to be something of a warren of concrete, so the first day wasn't really moving at full steam ahead. All the same, once we were in Paris and made it to the apartment where we were staying, something of the spirit of this melting pot of cities had entered into us, and we prepared to make the most of our stay.

French patisseries are a major reason for visiting the country, and our first excursion took us past one, proving that everyone else gets it wrong. If it's not French, it's not as good as it should be. We took ourselves to the Bastille and had a beer and met with Mark, an old friend and a native, who subsequently took us to a restaurant (whose name I have shamefully forgotten) where my opinions of French cuisine were confirmed. Specifically, although the Italians have the best recipes, no one prepares food like the French. I've had two meals in Paris, and both would count in the top ten of meals I've had anywhere.

Even learning that we'd been gulled by a conman in Le Gard du Nord earlier wasn't enough to entirely spoil the mood of the day. Back to the Bastille area we went for more beer and some surprisingly pleasant tequila, and not much else. Travel and a lack of sleep have sapped our energies. Tomorrow begins an exploration of Paris at large. I'll see if I can't add to this then.

(2005-04-22 14:47:34) The One They Left Behind

"Gulled by a conman in Le Gard du Nord?" What on earth happened? Glad to hear you are having a good time, I had heard on the grapevine that youse had got delayed. Probably just as well considering all the no sleep you got on Thursday. Dunno if youse got my texts, just wondering if you d pick up

some poker chips like the ones I already have, if you spot any. No worries if you don't. Talk to you all soon.

cerandor (2005-04-22 20:21:55) Re: The One They Left Behind

The conman in question homed in on us when we were having trouble with the ticket machines in Le Gare du Nord. We were actually being relatively suspicious, but a combination of flaws in the ticket system and some apparent sleight of hand on his part got past us. Annoying, but not a holiday breaker. Paris is an expensive city though, in more ways than one.

1.3.12 Fechez la Vache (2005-04-22 21:18)

This evening, I believe I've eaten more cow than can possibly be healthy for one person. In a place called Cote Canal, near the Canal St Martin, on which our apartment is, Des and I decided to try a two person dish: Cote de Boeuf. It arrived on a platter half the size of our table. Effectively, it was a meal of meat, with a side order of meat. Admittedly, there were some potatoes hidden under the meat, but they were very small potatoes...

Also satisfying was a six-hour journey through the Louvre. Not my favourite museum (though it is in the top five, along with the National Museums of London and New York and the Vatican Museum), it was let down by an understandable preponderance of French artists as compared to their Italian and Dutch counterparts, but items like the Code of Hammurabi and the Winged Victory of Samothrace lifted it high. Plus, there was this painting called "La Joconde." Seemed quite a nice piece...

1.3.13 Paris in the Almost-Summer (2005-04-24 03:10)

As with my holiday to the States last year, this one seems to have been particularly well timed. The weather so far has been excellent, with the first stirrings of summer dragging the reluctant crowds out, but not in such numbers as to make Paris a painful city to dwell in.

Yesterday was Louvre Day, today was shopping day. Not that I did any shopping, being too cash-shy right now to risk messing up the rest of the holiday when I still have three days to go. A long tramp along the Rue de Rivoli, then through the Champs Elysees and around the Arc de Triomphe, passing by the higher-class shopping districts before making a bee-line for Le Defense and the frankly mad Grande Arch. Which, as an uncomfortably open lift proved, is far too bloody high. Not that heights overly bother me, but being suspended over them in a carriage that's creaking and groaning at the slightest provocation is not my idea of a happy time. Descending proved much the happier experience than ascending, though.

The evening brought food in Montmartre and a return to the various bars in the Rue de Oberkampf, where the night was played out to the strains of whatever music happened to be assaulting our ears at the time. After a certain amount of alcohol, it's not that it sounds all the same, but you do lose the desire to differentiate...

1.3.14 Paris Without Pictures (2005-04-25 00:40)

My digital camera, which has provided me with 20 or so photos on the first two days of this trip, has now given up the ghost. Don't want to bore anyone with the detail, but I've sent it off to be repaired twice now, and I've pretty much lost hope at this stage.

However, the day itself was good, despite a return of my sense of timing, which saw me try to visit the catacombs a week before they are opened to the public once more (having been closed in November 2004). We caught some heavy rain though, as well as visiting the relatively underwhelming Musee de l'Armee and the somewhat more imposing tomb of Napoleon. On our last full day in Paris, it seemed appropriate to continue the relaxed theme of this trip, so we retired to the apartment and from thence to the closest bar available for some Leffe Rosso. Going for a kebab thereafter may not have been the wisest of moves, but at least we don't have to drag ourselves too far before we collapse.

1.3.15 Return of the Foreigner (2005-04-25 23:50)

The last day in Paris was mostly dominated by tidying, cleaning and strolling round the Bastille/Republique area, where we had lunch, and then heading out to CDG airport nice and early. One final beer, a swift flight and even swifter landing, and everyone's back home once more. A five day weekend is over. Or it would be, if I hadn't taken tomorrow off work too...

I'm still a little undecided about Paris. I enjoyed the weekend, but I don't feel the same burning desire to return there as I did about Rome. Missing out on the Catacombs probably didn't help, but I felt that Paris was a bit fixated on a particular era for my tastes. Whereas Rome is a cultural and historical kleptomaniac of a city, you have to dig a bit to discover a part of Paris not covered in Napoleon's fingerprints. And despite my general enjoyment of all things historical, the Napoleonic era isn't in my top ten.

Perhaps I'm being unfair. A longer holiday and one a little more cultural and less historical might change my mind. Certainly, it's a beautiful city, with an abundance of small shops and restaurants to explore, and the inhabitants are far friendlier than they're generally given credit for. I'll be back, I don't doubt, but I'm not in too much of a hurry.

(2005-04-26 11:16:05) Rub It In

Oh that'd be right. I was in Paris, but I'm not sure it was great. You disgust me. Respect for the no texts. I had a bit of a think, and I would totally have done that to myself, had I gone with you.

1.3.16 A Brief Note About Football (2005-04-26 22:47)

I know I promised to keep football and the weather out of this journal, but as I've failed in the latter, keeping to the former seems somewhat less than vital. West Brom played tonight, their fourth-last match of the season, a game they had in hand over their relegation rivals. With matches against Arsenal and Man Utd (2nd and 3rd in the table) coming up, a win was pretty close to vital. However, despite taking the lead in the first half, they let it slip in the second and held on for a draw, which puts them equal on points with two other teams and two ahead of another (three of which will go down). With a hard series of games ahead, the odds are against survival in the Premiership.

But I didn't want to talk too much about that. When West Brom took the lead, I was pleased, but not over the moon. When they fell to a draw, I was disappointed, but not surprised. Their survival is not going to be a major element of my life, yet it affects me more than many things that I'd judge more important. This seems to be an ongoing trend in my life. I can deal quite well with large problems, but smaller troubles depress and distress me. It's something of an anti-survival trait, as I can't see any particular reason why my mind should arrange things this way.

All the same, I cling to small hopes. Three games, nine potential points, one thin sliver of light. It's far from over yet.

1.3.17 Historicism (2005-04-28 20:56)

As long as I've had a Mac, I've been writing. Ok, that's not entirely true. My first Mac project (way back in the 1980s some time) was a Hypercard stack that was an interactive atlas of a fantasy world. Then again, since that world was the basis for my first book, I have actually been writing all that time. But it took my Dad looking at the results of my creative noodlings and saying "Why don't you write a book about it?" to kick me into doing so. (Thanks Dad. Years of frustration lay ahead...)

Anyhow, the folder containing my writings (the computer-based one; I have other, real-life, folders with many years of scribblings captured within) has slowly expanded. It currently lurks on my iBook, as well as on several backup devices, taking up just over 4MB of space. Not much, maybe, but as most of that is text, or near-text, files, it amounts to a fair amount of writing, if not as much as nearly 15 years of writing should have produced. But then again, my writing has always come in fits and starts.

For those who are interested, here's a list of some of my favourite items from the folder. If you want, I might release a few to anyone interested in reading them.

Drawing the Power:

Seems a silly title now, but it was my first novel, written when I was 17, and the basis for a lot of my later stuff. Meant to be the first part of a trilogy, but I never wrote more than a few chapters of the rest.

Glittereyes:

My stab at a grand Sci-Fi, space opera story. Also meant to be a novel, but never written. Exists more in notes and in my head than anywhere else.

Windshadow & Crumbledust:

My current project. (Also referred to as Das Book.) Struggling to keep up my earlier pace on it. I really like the central idea, but I'm finding it a little lacking in action.

Courier Duty:

A short story competition entry, in a cyberpunk tone. Didn't enjoy any success, but it's one of my few efforts at coming up with a story to order, and I kind of like it.

Jeremiah Baby:

A dark little thing, neither fantasy nor history. Just an odd idea predicated on the title (a method I often use) that was written up in a day.

Middlement:

Probably my favourite short story, which makes it all the more painful that I never finished it. Despite missing its last quarter, it's already 13,000 words, and the central idea I really like.

The Walker in the Woods:

A rather simple allegory, written (or at least completed) during a holiday in France a few years ago. Not exactly deep, but probably the most complete thing I've done.

The Wrong Hero:

A short story that's actually more of a first chapter to a novel I never meant to write. Fantasy-set, it ends rather flatly, which is something of an ongoing problem with my writing.

Most of these are largely unedited and unreviewed, so they're probably pretty rough. I've trimmed and tucked them from time to time, but I've never taken out the shears.

(2005-04-29 09:57:22) Give me them all
Because I want to read them.

(2005-05-04 13:16:50) Post More Articles...
You lazy sod.

1.4 May

1.4.1 Nonaltruistically (2005-05-04 23:03)

Largely as a result of my tendency to retreat to my room and brood, I've developed a few odd beliefs over the years. This is one: I don't believe in altruism.

Which is not to say that I don't believe in doing good deeds. I've suffered too much Catholicism to escape that one (though I rationalize it in my own way). I just don't believe that it's possible to act in a benevolent manner without any expectation of reward. If you're religious, you're racking up the heaven/nirvana/enlightenment points. If you're acting publicly, you're gaining respect and regard from your fellow man. If you're acting privately, you're soothing whatever it might be that afflicts your own conscience.

Terribly cynical, I know, but even if someone were to perform a benevolent act privately, affecting themselves detrimentally without the recipient being aware of their efforts, the third clause would still apply. A good deed is a good deed. Altruism just happens to be an unobtainable ideal.

As is objectivity, but that's another conversation...

(2005-05-09 12:04:39) Shockingly Enough
... I completely agree.

1.4.2 A Little Slice of Paradise (2005-05-08 20:00)

What you grow up with can seem mundane to you, so it's not surprising that it sometimes takes other people to remind me that where I come from is something special. I may have lived in Dublin for over ten years, but Northern Ireland is still home, and my little slice of it lies at the eastern end of Dundrum Bay in Co. Down.

A description: I'm standing in the middle of our front lawn, looking south. Ahead of me, the slope of the ridge leads down to a road, on the other side of which is a wall that drops six feet to a stone-and-sand beach. It's a clear day, so the sea is blue, waves breaking distantly beyond a shallow sandy beach, interrupted here and there by rock pools.

To my left, about two miles distant in a straight line, the bay curves in, so that I can just see the bumblebee-striped lighthouse of St. John's Point. To my right, the bay stretches away, in alternating sandy and stony stretches, past my granny's house and Tyrella Beach, past Dundrum itself until it gets to Newcastle, lying exactly where - as the song has it - "the Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea." I've been to the top of Slieve Donard once and got to see the sweep of Dundrum Bay from that viewpoint, but I like my version too.

Behind me is home. A dazzlingly white bungalow and garage, a tarmac driveway and gardens and lawns that have been carefully tended and moulded ever since we first moved here, almost exactly 20 years ago. Beyond that, the other side of the ridge slopes more gently away, down to fields that have been farmed for who knows how long. And so it goes, on to the north, northwest and northeast, until higher hills block out the view, framing the small segment of the world that I know better than any other. I may not live here any more, but I never felt that I belonged anywhere else.

(2005-05-09 15:08:41) Incredible As It May Seem
... I agree again.

(2005-05-09 15:10:47) Absolutely
Where you live is pretty damn incredible. That night I wandered out into the porch to the waves and the rain and the pitch darkness seeing nothing but the lighthouse light flashing in regular periods is burned into my memory forever.

cerandor (2005-05-09 19:58:42) Re: Absolutely
One of the best things about going home is arriving late in the evening during winter on a clear night. There's nothing like getting out of the car, looking up and seeing the stars spread out across the sky, so clear that you can make out the sweep of the Milky Way and disentangle the constellations from the dusting of stellar material all around them. Awe inspiring.

1.4.3 One more thing... (2005-05-08 22:42)

Another thing I love about home (and Ireland more generally) are the placenames. Near home we have Bonycastle Road and Blackstaff Road, and many more besides. As a reader, writer and player of fantasy, this tends to amuse me no end. Brian Friel's play "Translations" provides a pretty concise explanation of how we ended up with a lot of these names.

1.4.4 BA Meeting (2005-05-09 20:11)

Hi, my name's Ciaran, and I have a problem...

It started when I was in primary school. I tried one, just to see what it was like, and it was so good, I had another. And then another. Soon enough, they were taking up all my free time (and I had a lot of free time). Worse, my parents not only condoned my habit, they encouraged it! By the time I was a teenager, I was hitting the hard stuff. Not even all the normal distractions a teenager is prone to could tear me away from what was now less of a habit and more of a compulsion. I even chose my university on the basis that it would allow me to indulge even more deeply. And so I did, my four university years spent blissfully, among others who shared my predilection. We all had our poisons of choice, and if I indulged more deeply than most, no one criticised.

It all came to an end when university ended and working life began. Suddenly I had the

money to support my habit but not the spare time to indulge in it. So slowly, painfully, I began to cut back. From one every few days to one a week, then two or three a month. Eventually, a month might go by when I didn't reach out for another.

But recently, I've been backsliding. I've had seven in as many weeks. Other things I ought to be doing have been falling by the wayside. I'm worrying that things might be getting out of control.

I bought five books today. I need help...

1.4.5 Just this moment (2005-05-10 21:18)

Tuesday evening, I'm alone in my room, a pineapple-flavoured cocktail in front of me and the computer running. People are roleplaying downstairs, so the rest of us are exiled upstairs. The weather has been pretty fantastic, the first genuine summer day this year, but it's been a slow day overall, and I'm currently oscillating between a book (the second of the five I bought yesterday) and a game (Half-Life 2). I'm inclined to do something else, but whether it's watch one of my DVDs (gathering dust on a corner shelf) or just trawl the net I haven't quite determined.

This blog seems to have evolved into something of a dumping ground for whatever happens to be on my mind at the time, which isn't exactly what I intended it to be. I know the audience is small enough, but I'd like to keep it interesting anyhow. I may start throwing in book and film reviews, given that they're my primary forms of entertainment these days. Plus, next Sunday or Monday will almost certainly see some kind of mention of West Brom's final match of the season. We've kept alive our hopes of staying up thus far, but now we need something of a minor miracle. I'm not crossing my fingers, but I may put some money on it...

aeredhal (2005-05-10 22:27:52)

It could be worse, you could be filling your blog with memes. Whats Albion's last fixture and what do you need from it?

cerandor (2005-05-11 06:30:10)

We're at home to Portsmouth. We have to win and hope Norwich, Southampton and Crystal Palace do no better than draw. Unlikely but straightforward.

aeredhal (2005-05-11 08:54:44)

And what are their fixtures like? Southampton have Man U don't they?

(2005-05-11 15:03:09) Seriously, It's Fine

I think your blog is pretty damn interesting. It being a dumping ground for things that are on your mind is a good place to start. As you know, I also tend to use it to vent or to talk about things I find interesting. Worshipper at the Shrine of Avarice

1.4.6 New Comics (2005-05-12 15:19)

I'm not really in the market for a new comic book at the moment. I've been whittling down my list for years, so that I now only buy a couple of ongoing series, only one of which doesn't have an end in sight. I still pick up the odd mini-series or graphic novel, but it'd take a lot to make me pick up a new ongoing.

What it might take are lines like: "But now, Mr. Jones, my needs are simple, and my penis is somewhere in Bombay."

Desolation Jones is a new ongoing series from [1]Warren Ellis, probably my favourite writer of comics. Hitler porn, extreme death and hallucinations. I may just have to stick with this one.

(I should point out that while linking to Warrenellis.com itself will not cause undue disturbance to the soul, some of the links leading from there may shred your brain, just a little.)

1. <http://www.warrenellis.com/>

1.4.7 Great Out-of-Context Quotes of Our Time (2005-05-15 00:23)

No. 6 in an ongoing series

"What, like some kind of fatal Jenga?"

1.4.8 Stayin' Up (2005-05-15 17:33)

About three years ago, give or take a week, I stood in the stands of the Hawthorns stadium in Birmingham as West Brom, my team, were promoted to the Premiership, ending a period of 16 years outside the top-flight. It was a rollercoaster day, for although we won our match convincingly, we had to keep an eye on other results too. I was kept informed by text messages from friends and had an absolute ball, enjoying the experience first-hand.

The next year, we were relegated, but we bounced back again and were promoted the following season. This year has been hard and came down, today, to four matches. We had to win ours and hope that none of our three rivals could muster a win. I couldn't be at the stadium for this match, but it's probably just as well. I might have had a heart attack.

The positions for the four sides trying to avoid relegation shuffled throughout the two hours that the matches covered. Norwich, in the best position at the start of the day, stumbled and fell early on, eventually going down 6-0 at Fulham. Southampton, just behind them, started well, taking the lead at home to Man Utd, but that was as good as it got for them, and they ended the day losing 1-2. We had maybe the easiest match, at home to Portsmouth, but on a day like this, nerves will affect anyone, and despite some good play, we couldn't string together passes like we needed to.

Our breakthrough goal came from an inspired substitution. Geoff Horsfield's first touch was a volley that squirmed under the keeper and into the net. So, for a moment, we were in the safety zone. But only for a little while. Because Crystal Palace, the last of our rivals, had fought back from a goal down at Charlton and, as if just to spoil my mood, took the lead shortly after we did. Back down we went. We added another goal through a beautiful move with 15mins to go, making our win pretty much safe, but all the attention was elsewhere. Rumours of equalizers spread cruelly, but with ten minutes to go, the crowd erupted. Charlton had equalized against Palace. I may have done some jumping too, but I'd never admit it.

Ten minutes of nerve-shredding tension remained, but just after the final whistle blew in our match came word that we had done the job. Palace hadn't been able to get another goal. We were staying up.

I wish I'd been there. I don't know if I'd have survived it, but it would have been worth it.

1.4.9 From the Outside (2005-05-18 22:42)

This is something a little different. It's not a short story, rather a stream of consciousness ramble that somehow develops into an idea for a story or two. It tends to head off onto odd paths and contradict itself, but as it's close to the unexpurgated contents of my brain as I've ever got on the glowing screen, I make no apologies.

Everything begins with a name. In the beginning was the word, after all. And, God being inevitably the ultimate solipsist, the primal word had to be his (or her, or its) name. That's if you're religious, of course. But names themselves are a form of religion. They stand as labels, connecting our own mess of preconceptions and drifting thoughts to a consensual reality. Unless, of course, one is a solipsist, in which case names are just waypoints: markers of things we feel we ought to remember.

This isn't really going anywhere, which isn't really surprising. As of this moment of writing, this little diatribe has no title. No name. This may seem to contradict my initial point, but as yet nothing has begun. This is nothing more than a record of a few thoughts, circling round a point which they are trying to reach. A story requires a character, human or not, and characters require names. If unnamed, characters become "the hero," "the protagonist" or "the villain," among any one of many premade categories. As yet, we do not have a story, just the desire for one.

As this may suggest, what has come before is just a search for a story, or more precisely, for the name of a story, from which we can begin. Like groping in a dark tunnel for the exit, there may be a lot of wrong turnings, but when that exit is found, the tunnel is left behind. Like birth too, I imagine, though that's a little more complex a subject.

In any case, we want a story. Most people do, because stories make sense of things. They teach, instruct and illuminate. Not merely in simple or moral ways, but in the broader sense of making the reader, viewer or listener consider what is told. But this brings us to an impasse. Considering the nature of stories as teaching aids (too precise and restricting a term, but anyway...) makes devising the story a mechanical chore, not an organic expression of something already known but unconsidered. And chores are not a delight to undertake, by their very nature, though their results are frequently delightful. Let us turn away from this track.

Readers also help in creating a story, not merely by imagining it (if they read it or hear it, rather than watch it) but by applying to characters and events attributes not explicitly mentioned, all in aid of allowing them to identify more with the story. For example, it's been a day since I finished the last sentence, and I've had to read over this piece again. My state of mind while reading is not the same as that I had when writing, so what I get out is not what I put in. Two days now, and I'm wondering what the point is. I haven't gotten any closer to nailing down an idea. Let's review what we've covered.

1. Names begin things.
2. Stories require characters that fit certain categories.
3. Devising a story is somewhat like childbirth.
4. Stories teach, but should not be devised with this in mind.

5. Readers and writers derive different things from stories, and time also changes this.

These may not be true, or even if they are, agreed with, but they distill things down and give us something more manageable to work with. Considering each point can add to a story.

1. If a name is a beginning, so then is a naming. And if a naming is to feature as the starting point for a story, then it has to be in some way unusual. The name itself should be relevant to the story, whether it implies a truth or a falsehood. The name may be stolen, or it may be prophesied. The main character may have lost their name, perhaps losing the trappings of their life thereby. Or they may have been denied something rightly theirs because their name has been taken from them.

2. The main character, being nameless, has no category in which to fit. Nameless, they may also be outcast (which is one of the most important categories). Being outcast means that the thrust of the story may involve their attempt (successful or not) to restore their status. This may also mean that they take a position more often inhabited by the villain with regard to the other characters. The emotions they feel with regard to the place or group they are outcast from are unlikely to be entirely positive.

3. A rather direct analogy is that the character is cast out into the darkness, nameless and abandoned, and must create themselves, in character and story, if they are to restore the natural order and be born into the life that should have been theirs. This process is unlikely to prove easy and may involve blood and a great deal of anguish on the part of everyone else.

4. As a surrogate for the reader, who enters the story with as little idea as the main character of what it will involve, the main character is the one who will learn, both about themselves and the world which they do not fit into as they once thought they did. The main character inevitably learns that they are not the person they once thought they were, both in circumstances and character, and coming to terms with this is the crux of the story.

5. The main character may not learn the lessons on their journey that a reader might wish them to learn. Moreover, by the time that the story is complete, they may find that their earlier conclusions and the motivations derived from them were not only flawed but actively harmful. Whether they try to make reparations for their mistakes or continue on the path they have set out on will depend very much on the character they have built up over the course of the story.

These story ideas, though they may seem somewhat precise, can provide widely differing stories if treated in different ways. For example, choosing a different genre allows a story to be approached in a different manner.

Fiction: After agreeing to donate a kidney for a transplant to save his father's life, a man is shocked to learn that he is genetically incompatible with both of his parents. As this comes as a surprise not only to him but also to his 'parents,' he embarks on a search to find his actual parents and the person who can save his 'father's' life. Along the way, he digs up many secrets long hidden and better left buried and causes grief for those whose lives he questions. When his 'father' dies before his quest is finished, he is forced to question its importance and the reasons why he continues it, such as the importance of family, fate and where one came from. (Oedipal, after a fashion, which may not be a bad angle to pursue.)

Fantasy: The son of a lord, prophesied to be a leader unparalleled in history, is ex-

changed at birth for the son of another man, who wishes his own blood to gain the plaudits of fate. The original child is then abandoned (a la Romulus and Remus) and declared dead. Fostered by a woodsman, he grows to become a warrior in a far off land. When that land comes under threat from the conquering king who has usurped the warrior's birthright, he is given the task of finding some means of saving his land. In doing so, he discovers the wrong done to him long ago and his task becomes one of vengeance. As he pursues this destiny, he causes pain and horror for many and learns of what could have been. When he finally succeeds in reclaiming his birthright, it is apparent that this outcome is perhaps the poorest for many, including himself.

Science Fiction: A child adopted as a baby is one of a group of children not born but created by scientists operating outside strict genetic-control legislation, seeking to create humans of greater intelligence and physical capabilities than the norm. Observed in secret throughout his youth, he begins to suspect things are not quite normal when still young and covertly begins to investigate himself, his abilities and his origins. Slightly paranoid (if not unjustifiably) as a result of the genetic tampering, he eventually learns of his creation and his 'siblings.' Understanding that his creators are willing to kill to preserve the secrecy of their experiment, he begins to contact the other children and to establish a network between them. They are as gifted as he, if similarly afflicted with psychological and physical flaws, and soon learn to work in concert to attain what they want. When the scientists learn of this, they start to wage a covert action against the youths, one that eventually becomes overt, played out in the media, as the children set out to establish their place in the world, at the expense of any who would hinder them.

These stories suggest a title (a name!) at last: "From the Other Side." So I get to save this file after three days of mental mumblings.

As for deciding which of these ideas to pursue (if any), each seems interesting, in various ways.

1. Relatively straightforward, perhaps told as a travelogue, a diary from the protagonist's point of view. Or perhaps as a retrospective, using a narrator who holds a grudge against the protagonist or evinces a dislike of him, the reasons for which are revealed through the course of the story.
2. Not necessarily fitting as a Talamid story, though there are plenty of ways in which it could be made to do so. Any of the major areas of Talamid have periods in their history (save the Southern Wastes, perhaps) where this could be slotted in, perhaps the earlier the better, in order to provide more background.
3. Perhaps could be used as an Empyrean story, perhaps from the perspective of an investigator following up on the story. It certainly fits into that setting's focus on information and the power that accrues from its possession.

1.4.10 A Dark and Lonely Walk (2005-05-22 01:58)

I'd just spent the evening with the guys in Glasnevin, watching "Super-Size Me." Even though it was 1am, I'd spent the evening drinking Coke, Sprite and Fanta, so I was certainly motivated enough to walk the half-hour trek home.

As I left, my iPod was playing Johnny Cash's rendition of "Personal Jesus," which segued, oddly enough, into U2's "The Wanderer," with vocals by J. Cash, as I passed by Glasnevin cemetery. I've made this walk often enough, sometimes alone and sometimes in company. At

this hour, the city is pretty empty, save for a few spots, and my thoughts tumbled back and forth. As they settled, I realised I was actually composing a journal entry for the journey.

Things got interesting as I neared Phibsborough. Just over the canal bridge, an overweight man sat on a wall, his back to me and his arm around a teddy bear nearly as big as he was. There were no women around, and from the look he gave me as he passed, he wasn't too happy about his situation. I resisted the urge to look back. A little further on, the music shifted to Fatboy Slim's "Right Here, Right Now," one of my favourite songs, which made me think of a city of wires and flesh, dirty and desperate. Further still, two people were taking pictures of each other with their cameraphones. The women was wearing a feather headdress. Neither gave me so much as a glance. Beyond them, four men surrounded a flatbed truck, strapping down two supermarket chiller cabinets, obviously from the Tesco the truck was parked outside.

The human density increased as I neared the Phibsborough crossroads, then dropped off swiftly. In the Sunshine Chinese fast food shop, I glimpsed a young women, bent at the waist, her hands on her knees, swivelling from side to side. No, I don't know why. As I neared McGowan's, Beck's "Hollywood Freak" came on, just in time to soundtrack the smokers lingering outside the door in the dry night air.

The music turned, smoothly enough, to They Might Be Giants' "S-E-X-X-Y" as I turned down Dominick St. As I crossed over to Lower Dominick St., a drunk weaved back and forth across my path, pausing just long enough to let me through. As I opened the door, I saw him walking down the middle of the street. Thankfully, no one drives down Dominick St. at this time of night.

(2005-05-25 11:23:41) Excellent

Those night-time walks with no company but your thoughts are amazing.

(2005-06-02 13:58:06)

I've always thought one of the best times of day in a city is between 4 and 6 am. The streets are still and empty. There's a very special hush. In winter you have the sodium halflight. In summer, the glimmerings of the coming dawn.

1.4.11 The Small Habit of Losing Touch (2005-05-23 00:00)

One of my least favourite personal habits is that of losing touch with my friends. It's something I've done repeatedly, most noticeably when I left school to attend college in Dublin. Pretty much everyone I knew back in Downpatrick now falls into the category of a former acquaintance. You'd think that the arrival of email and instant messaging would make it easier to avoid this, but no. I still have the feeling that people I knew and cared about are slipping away from me; mental divisions growing to match the geographical.

Part of it, I believe, is that fact that I have next to no facility for small talk. Absent some pressing need to get in touch, I'll just let lines of communication grow dusty and unused, until the mental pressure (usually my old friend guilt) builds up and I send off a missive of stunning banality. Or, if someone else initiates contact, I generally struggle to hold up my end of the conversation with semi-interesting anecdotes of the life of a Dublin-based editor. (I often cheat, and talk about interesting things that have happened to other people.

So, if there's anyone out there whom I've neglected, I apologise. It's not deliberate. If ever

a university (local, of course) offers a course on advanced small talk and inconsequential banter, I'll be the first to sign up. And, as Shakespeare wrote: "So, good night unto you all. Give me your hands, if we be friends, and Robin shall restore amends."

1.4.12 A Little Bedtime Story (2005-05-23 20:15)

Had the idea for this story this morning at work, wrote it in between doing what I was supposed to be doing, finished it after lunch and polished it in my last hour at work and when I went home. It's short and something of an atmosphere piece (not my real forte) rather than a standard twist-ending short story. I like it nonetheless.

The Axeman

The axeman sat on the stump, sharpening his axe with a whetstone. He drew the polished stone along the blade's edge in long, gentle sweeps, striking sparks off the steel that fizzled in the chill winter air. The season being what it was, the branches of the trees that rose around the clearing were bare, none more so than those of the tallest tree, a gnarled and blackened thing. The axeman sat in its shade, while elsewhere the morning sun slid across the snow that lay in a fresh covering across the clearing.

At length, he ceased his polishing and examined the axehead. He nodded in satisfaction at the smooth, keen edge, having no need to test it with his thumb. He knew his business well enough to know when a blade was ready for its work. Instead, he laid the axe across his lap and reached into his pack, which lay on the ground beside him, and drew out some dried meat, bread and cheese. The day was cold, after all, and it might be that he would be waiting for some time yet.

After a while, the sound of footsteps crunching in the snow announced an arrival, and minutes later, the stranger arrived in the clearing, dressed finely under his warm cloak and leading a pack horse. He was evidently surprised by the axeman's presence, for he stopped dead when he saw him.

"Good day to you," the stranger said at last, maintaining a careful distance between the two of them. The axeman was a large man, even sitting down, and his thick black beard gave him no friendly appearance.

"And to you," said the axeman agreeably, still sitting, still chewing on a strip of dried meat.

"It's a cold day to be sitting out here alone."

"It is that." Despite the wool and leather that wrapped his heavy frame, the axeman couldn't help but agree with that one.

"So what brings you out here then?"

"I was waiting for yourself."

"For me?" the stranger asked, taking a step backward and almost bumping into his pack horse.

"Aye. You're the first person to come this way since midwinter."

There was a pause as the stranger took this strange statement in. "The solstice was two days ago," he said at last. "I was in Ashvale for the feast."

"So it was."

"Have you been waiting here for two days?" The tone of the stranger's voice suggested that although he didn't believe it, the fact that the axeman was here at all was strange enough.

"I have."

"Why?"

The axeman shrugged, the first real movement of any kind that he'd made since the stranger arrived. "Tradition."

"Whose?"

"The village's."

"I don't know of any villages round here."

"It lies about a mile yonder," said the axeman, indicating a direction away from the trail that the stranger had arrived by. "We get few enough of your kind in the village." For by his dress and the bags on his pack horse, the stranger was a travelling merchant.

The stranger nodded, seemingly a little more at ease. "So what's the nature of this tradition then?"

"It's simple enough," the axeman answered as he stood up from the stump. He took the axe in his right hand and held its long haft like a walking stick. "The first traveller to pass by after midwinter must give a gift to the Mother."

"The Mother?"

"Aye," said the axeman as he moved to the side of the gnarled black tree that had lately sheltered him. Bending beside its trunk, he swept away the snow from its roots, revealing a deep cleft in the earth. "This is the Mother, and this is where her gifts are left."

Intrigued, the stranger came a little closer, peering at the cleft. "And what manner of gift does the Mother prefer?"

"What do you have?"

"I have all manner of things in my packs. But this is a strange circumstance, and I have never known its like. Is there a purpose to this tradition, or is it something that you blindly follow?"

"The Mother sends us good harvests and good fortune for the year ahead," rumbled the axeman, speaking as if reciting a well-remembered verse. "And all that she asks is a gift to comfort her in the darkest part of the year."

"I see," said the stranger, not entirely able to keep the laughter in his eyes away from his voice. He glanced up at the axeman, as if struck by a new thought. "What would you have done if I had not happened by?"

"I would have waited."

"Yes, but for how long?"

"As long as it took."

"That seems somewhat dangerous at this time of year."

The axeman shrugged again. "I am well prepared. Sometimes the weather is bad and those who wait are caught by the cold. Those are bad years. But most years, someone comes along."

The stranger nodded thoughtfully, his laughter restrained by the axeman's seriousness. He was standing by the tree now, looking down into the dark cleft. "So what should I give, then?"

"I cannot tell you. But you may look in the cleft and see the gifts that others have given if you wish."

The stranger thought about it for a moment, and then bent down for a closer inspection. "It is too dark," he muttered.

The axeman stooped down beside him. "Look closer," he advised.

The stranger got down upon his hands and knees, bringing his head closer to the cleft. Within, he thought he could spy strange shapes, but they were too shadowed as yet to make out details.

"I think I see something," he said as he stretched forward, his head within the lips of the cleft. His eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and a pile of rounded objects slowly resolved before him.

He was on the verge of realising that they were skulls when the axe fell.

While he waited for the blood to stop flowing, the axeman cleaned his blade with handfuls of snow, which he then tossed into the cleft. It was important not to take anything that was the Mother's from this place. At length he dragged the body away to the far side of the clearing. There he stripped it of its fine clothes, leaving it naked on the ground. The stranger's head was the Mother's gift, his blood would water her roots and his body would feed her children. The axeman took the nervous pack horse in hand and led it from the clearing. The horse, the clothes and the goods: those were the Mother's rewards for faithful service.

It would be a good year.

(2005-05-24 12:33:53)

Nice... I like it!

laerfan (2005-05-31 10:38:56)

Hello there cerandor. I've just read "The Axeman" and I must admit, I really enjoyed it. I had a pretty good feeling that the poor soul who put his head down was going to get it cleaved off, but that's not the point. The execution (no pun intended) was excellent. It led wonderfully to the climax, and despite its short nature, this little story is more effective than nearly all of the ones I've read on live journal, some of which were five times the length. Well done.

cerandor (2005-05-31 18:21:08)

Thanks for the kind words. From what I've read on your journal, my work ethic is way below yours, but I do try. I liked your story "Thursday," though I'd want to read it over again before commenting.

laerfan (2005-06-01 10:46:47)

Thanks very much. Don't be afraid to comment on my journal, even if it's bad, every little helps! I read "The Threadbare Universe" too and liked that. It was a very fresh concept to me. You mentioned some time back in your journal that you were working on a novel. Best of luck with that, I know it can be a daunting thing to work on, but it's worth it in the end.

1.4.13 No Favourites (2005-05-27 10:49)

A friend recently asked me to name my favourite poet. Shouldn't be difficult, given that I have an English degree, right? Well, I have a problem with picking favourites. With a few exceptions (Apple computers, West Brom) I don't really like picking favourites. It's never made much sense to me to elevate one particular item in a category.

Part of this is a natural desire to avoid being definitive on a topic. I also dislike being asked to rate unquantifiable things. Like rating how attractive a woman is on a scale of one to ten. One to ten whats? [1]Millihelens? So, I don't spend a lot of time worrying about who my favourite band is, for example. I listen to a lot of U2, but if I were to put together an album of my favourite songs, they'd maybe get one or two on there.

In the end, I went for Byron in answer to the question I was posed. I tend to favour poets on the basis of memorable quotes rather than anything else. I might have picked Yeats, but the poetic line that sticks in my head best is from Byron's Don Juan: "What men call gallantry and gods adultery, is much more common where the climate's sultry."

1. <http://computing-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/millihelen>

(2005-05-31 16:52:31) Millihelens

What a kick-ass unit of measurement! Were it not that I have effectively eschewed the path of Science, I would dedicate my life to getting it recognised as an SI unit. Brilliant word. And you are such a wussy when it comes to scoring women! Is it that the denary scale doesn't fit well with you for some reason? You do have all your fingers and toes though, right? How about using the binary system (Would/Would Not)? Is that better? I reckon you are just being cagey, cos you are afraid of giving a girl a high score in the fear that Mother Time will wreak a terrible toll, giving us mucho ammunition in later life. "Hey Ciaran, remember that ugger you gave an eight? I saw her yesterday scaring babies on Grafton Street!"

cerandor (2005-05-31 18:17:29) Re: Millihelens

Meh. I'd use binary if it wasn't for the lack of nuance. And the denary scale is open to all sorts of misinterpretation and always will be, unless you can convince me that you can answer the question "Why?" with a number between one and ten. (One and a hundred is no problem. 42.)

(2005-06-01 09:30:34) Wood from the trees

"How about using the binary system (Would/Would Not)?" Or alternatively: Wood/Wood, Not... :D

1.4.14 All of us on the Earth... (2005-05-28 20:52)

I'm currently reading an excellent book, "The Earth: An Intimate History," by Richard Fortey. Reading this is part of what I've recently come to the conclusion is something of a self-improvement effort, which I'll probably write about soon. Fortey constantly makes the reader aware of the Earth, the processes that created and shaped it and how geology affects our everyday lives.

Through a roundabout route, this got me to thinking on how I've never been able to engage fully with environmental causes, which I otherwise sympathise with. As with religion, I tend to pick at causes for their underlying rationales before I accept them into my meagre brainspace. A lot of environmental movements seem to take what I'd describe as a walking-on-eggshells approach, whereby humanity should strive to have as little effect as possible on the environment. This, of course, is in reaction to and opposing the general historical trend of only noticing the environment after the damage has been done.

Both viewpoints are extremes, and I've never liked extremes. It seems better to me to accept that as an extremely widespread, versatile species, we ought to engage with our environment, wholly and knowledgeably. Not in the biblical sense of the earth having been made for our benefit, but from the point of view that we will benefit a lot more from living on, working with and even exploiting the resources of the earth if we know what the outcomes of our actions will be. (Having said all that, I'm sure there are groups out there that espouse such viewpoints. I don't claim to be a massively original thinker. I just haven't come across any of them.)

1.4.15 And now on the mic... (2005-05-29 09:58)

The dangers of sleep-deprivation and mind-improving books. Should you really wish to endanger your psyche, you may find below the results of a half-hour of wandering thoughts between lights-out and unconsciousness: my one and only (and pray it stays that way) attempt at a stand up routine...

Do you know what the difference between humans and animals is? We've evolved the ability to think that we're cool. Your average human being can pause for a minute, look around him and go: "You know what? We're pretty cool! Look at all the stuff we've done: built the seven wonders of the world, devised the theory of relativity, invented pot noodles... we're pretty damn clever."

Now, no matter how justified it might have been, no animal in the course of the earth's history has ever done this. No T-Rex ever paused in its search for Triceratops meat and thought to itself, "I've just realised: I rock! Biggest, nastiest meat eater on the planet, that's me! Best in history even. Nobody does it better, baby you're the best..." You can just see it doing a little self-congratulatory dance in the primeval forest, can't you? Just before getting smacked upside the head by a meteorite, anyhow.

Similarly, no sabre-toothed tiger ever paused mid-stalk and went "Jesus Christ! Look at the size of those! I have one pretty damn fine set of gnashers. I bet I don't even need to bite one of those mammoths. I'll just walk over, show them these babies and they'll have heart failure on the spot. Oh hold on..."

No, if we're going to look for evidence of self-satisfied smugness in the animal kingdom, there's only one real place to look: dolphins. Grinning bastards do nothing but swan around the sea, beating up sharks, doing the odd backflip and saving the odd drowning sailor, just to keep us sweet. And if they get tired of this exhausting lifestyle, they find a tourist spot and get us to feed them. Seaworld is their luxury retirement home. You have to hand it to the dolphins: sum total of effort, zero. Sum total contribution to the planet, zero. And yet we coo over them just because they toss us the odd bit of acrobatics. Ladies and gentlemen, we have been out-thought by pseudo-fish.

(2005-05-31 16:42:04) While Probably True...

... I can't but think that the T-Rex must have thought he was cool.

cerandor (2005-05-31 18:14:41) Re: While Probably True...

Well, if I was a T-Rex, I'd be doing self-congratulatory dances all the time. In between chewing down on paeleontologists who claimed I was nothing but a scavenger, of course.

1.5 June

1.5.1 Time to Write, Not Read (2005-06-01 00:13)

There comes a point when you have to say enough is enough. It came for me today in Waterstones. In front of me I had a book on Leonardo da Vinci, but among all the other 3-for-2 books, there was nothing else I really wanted. I suddenly realised I was on the verge of buying two books I didn't need just to read one I was interested in. Enough is enough. Reading has always been a compulsive act for me: I don't like stopping when I start and I don't like hopping between books. So far in the few months, I reckon I've downed about 15 books. I still have Brian Greene's "The Fabric of the Cosmos" to get through, and that won't be straightforward. Enough is enough.

The victim of this recent plunge back into heavy reading has been my writing. Sure, my one-hour-a-day period had faltered before I started on my Waterstones habit, but that habit pretty much drowned any hopes I had of restarting. Since then, I've been performing the computer equivalent of scribbling notes in the margin. In the last few days, though, and especially having gotten a short story out, I feel more like writing than reading. I mean to follow up on that.

I'll let you know how it goes.

laerfan (2005-06-02 10:18:54)
Good man!

1.5.2 The Perils of Advertising (An Extreme Example of Pedantry) (2005-06-03 23:11)

One of the more interesting ad campaigns of recent years has been Guinness's effort to add some kind of mythic/epic scope to the venerable Irish sport of hurling, in TV spots featuring players of giant stature carving chunks out of a typically Irish landscape in their effort to pursue their game. It's a nice campaign, but a bit one-note, so when I was confronted with a Guinness billboard showing a muscular man in archaic dress, holding a hurley and a sliotar, facing down a massive hound, it took a moment before I realised what I was seeing.

It is, of course, a recreation of a genuine piece of Irish myth, the confrontation between Setanta (who would later be known as Cuchulain) and the hound of Culain. In the myth, the boy Setanta is invited to Culain's feast but is forgotten, so when he arrives late, Culain's hound attacks him. The young man uses his hurley (which he's spent the day beating up the youth of Ulster with) and drives the sliotar down the poor beast's throat, killing it. In recompense, he takes its place as Culain's guard, thus gaining the name Cuchulain, the Hound of Culain.

So, Guinness have actually managed to tie their campaign into the one example of Irish myth where hurling is a major part. It's a brilliant, perfect choice. The problem? The aforementioned muscular male. For in the story, as in the rest of the Cuchulain myth, Setanta is described as a fairly scrawny, unimpressive physical figure. In an effort to bump up the masculinity of the ad, Guinness have managed to kill off the point.

1.5.3 In a Classical of Its Own (2005-06-06 22:35)

I recently got around to doing something that I've been promising I'd do for ages: buy myself some classical music. With the aid of Steve, whose knowledge in this area far outstrips mine, I picked myself up a selection of Deutsche Grammophon CDs: Holst's Planet Suite, Elgar's Enigma Variations, Grieg's Peer Gynt and all of Beethoven's Symphonies. So far, I've just been listening to choice cuts (In the Hall of the Mountain King, Ode to Joy, etc.) but when I get them onto my iPod, I expect my listening habits to alter for a while. At the moment, Mars is sounding like Star Wars' older, more sophisticated brother.

In other news, I've just heard that Apple is going to be switching to Intel processors over the next two years (there's a subject transition that'll make your head spin). As an Apple loyalist, I'm not sure what to make of this. There's nothing really bad about it, but Windows/Intel has been the enemy for so long. The news just seems odd. Irrational reactions...

Tomorrow I start a seven-week, relatively intensive course in French, a language I haven't studied for around 14 years. I'll probably report on it, assuming I survive the first lesson.

lostperdita (2005-06-07 17:27:00)

try and get a copy of rachmanov's piano concerto 2. it's brilliant (though i'd say that of most of his work).

cerandor (2005-06-15 22:25:02)

I'll add it to the list. It's a long list though...

1.5.4 Derelict Station (2005-06-07 23:28)

What a day. At work half an hour early, take only half an hour for lunch, do an hour and a half of overtime and then, after another half hour break, take a two hour French lesson for the first time in 15 years. Needless to say, the lesson went worse than I expected (which was unexpected).

Somehow, amid all of this, I managed to write a short story. It's a cyberpunk piece, based around a character created for an earlier short story of mine called "Courier Duty." I like the way this works better than the older piece though, so I may go back and edit it a little.

Derelict Station

Informally, the company refers to them as derelicts. The company, of course, has no mouth, any more than it has gratitude, but the individual workers who make up its cells have so little individuality that referring to them collectively is almost a compliment. Most workers are unaware that the derelicts exist, in any case, but those who do use the name. So do I.

I keep my 'ware in passive mode as I walk through Derelict Station. Not its real name, of course, but the psychological and physiological problems of derelicts mean that no one else wants to be around them for long. So they flock together, more out of a need for some company - any company - than any kind of fellow feeling.

Once upon a time, they were fitted with all the best 'ware, top of the line, bleeding-edge stuff. But that was a long time ago. The technology waterline kept on rising, and they ended up floating like everyone else. Then, stuck with custom parts and nonstandard 'ware they couldn't upgrade, they sunk, while the mainstream rose past them. The wisest and luckiest got out. The rest didn't notice until they started drowning. The unluckiest suffered the sort of glitches that plague bleeding-edge 'ware, making them useless for any walk of life but this.

There's an odd kind of smell in the air in Derelict Station. Not the stale, sour stink of ordinary down and outs, though that's there too. A sharp, acrid tang that catches me in the back of the throat. Even down here, they cling to hope. They'll scrape together what they can and pay for treatments that never have a chance of working. I catch electric glows through open doorways as I pass down corridors and alleys strewn with the debris of desperate lives.

Some of the debris is human and moans and mutters at me as I pass. Never any more than that, despite the fact most of them remain lethal beyond the limits of human capability. They know who I am; their own little angel of death. Nasty as they may be, I'm this year's new model, shiny, sleek and deadly under a rumpled coat. I really don't want to be here, but I keep on coming back because the company tells me to.

I keep my own 'ware in passive mode. It would insulate me from the smell and the tension in the air, as well as keep me safe, but I don't let it. Instead it chitters away in the back of my mind, keeping track of my objective, letting me know where he is, how I might get there and what he might do when he realises it's him I'm after. I keep the information it offers at the edges of my field of vision, even though there's nothing here that I want to see.

I find my target on the third floor of an abandoned house. My 'ware tells me he's

alone, no one else within fifty yards. Makes my job easier, though not by much. The stairs up to the third floor are littered with debris. Bottles, tins, used booster packs, battery implants with the stubs of their NT filaments still attached. I try not to think of how they might have been removed.

When I find him, he's curled up on a frame bed, huddled under an old army cloak, a filthy blanket standing in for a mattress and keeping the rusty springs from piercing his skin. He's not asleep though, and not unaware. Dark eyes stare out at me from a heavily lined and bearded face, and in the corner of my vision, my earware reports a rise in the target's heart rate. Not dangerous yet, but I stand in the door for a moment.

My 'ware tells me what I need to know, plus one fact: a name, Gunther Hagen. Everything else is classified, but I don't rely on my 'ware to tell me everything. I've heard stories about this guy. His codename was Grimmir, because he worked for the company back in the days when they allowed you to pick your codename. It's nearly four decades since he received his 'ware; four decades since he was a valuable asset. Now, some R & D rat has decided that he needs another subject for research into 'ware degredation. We're a rare breed, and our corpses don't show up for autopsy as often as the company would like. That's why I'm here. And he knows it.

As I step closer, my 'ware's chittering intensifies, as it picks up all sorts of readings off Hagen's body. I ignore most of it, but one in particular stands out. A constant, heightened level of brainwave activity. Easy enough to recognise: pain, caused by his degrading 'ware. The average useful life of a state-of-the-art operative is seven years these days. Back then it was probably less. He's had maybe 35 years to reflect on a contract he signed as a young man, the biggest losing gamble of his life.

He makes no move as I crouch beside the bed. I see why his eyes are so dark: the ceramics of his primitive eyeware are pitted and rough, and his eyelids are puffy, red and scarred. I can't see the rest of his body, but I know that old-style 'ware required massively invasive surgery. It's surprising that he's lived so long. It's not surprising that he's got no fight left in him.

I've been to Derelict Station before, always performing the same task. It's a response I've seen often enough. Most of my targets don't care that I'm here for their death. Some few fight, but not often, and not for long. I've even seen tears, heard "thank you" once. Hagen's silent, but he's not unusual.

My 'ware chirps at me, reminding me that I'm on a schedule. I raise my hand to his face and, after a shudder, squeeze the glandware in my wrist. Nanopackets splatter across his face and are absorbed as I watch. I stay a second longer than I should and then turn to go. Hagen's vital signs are fading already. Within half an hour, this building will have been sealed off by company troops, medical and research personnel preparing the body and environment for study. I'll never have been here.

I activate the switch in my head as I leave the building, letting my 'ware take the strain of allowing me to leave without being seen. It's not necessary, but I prefer it that way. As my tacware plots a course away from sightlines, I feel detached from the immediate moment. My mind is on that shudder, just before I ended Hagen's pain.

Just for that moment, as I tensed, I found myself looking at my face, not Hagen's. It's

happened a few times now, and I keep telling myself that it's psychological, not a glitch. That my 'ware is fine, even though it's been eight years since I was the newest model off the production line. I keep telling myself, but I can't keep believing.

The derelicts know. I may be their angel of death, but I'm also their little brother. And one day I'll come home to Derelict Station.

laerfan (2005-06-15 10:33:48)

Hello again cerandor. I've read this little story and I am delighted to say that it's as great as The Axeman. It's short and fairly simple, it's great to read and it is very powerful for its size. Great!

cerandor (2005-06-15 22:24:13)

Thanks. I'm getting to like the idea of using a blog for micro-stories: stuff that's not much more than an expanded idea. Which is not to say that I won't post anything longer. Just need to write it first.

laerfan (2005-06-16 10:20:34)

You seem to do those "micro-stories" pretty well. You should do more, definately.

(2005-06-20 14:08:52) Grim...

... but good. I think I prefer the Axeman a little more, but both are very good. I think your microstories are great.

1.5.5 A Computing Life (2005-06-15 23:30)

Been a while since the last post. Not too much has changed, except the sudden arrival in the house of a couple of online games: City of Heroes and Guild Wars. I can now see why these things can be such time drains. Anyway, they kicked my brain into contemplating how using computers has changed during my lifetime. This might be a bit dull, so don't feel obliged to click the link.

Having been using computers since around the age of eight (a guess, but probably pretty accurate), I've watched them move from days when 32KB was a lot of system memory to owning a PC with 1GB of RAM. For the most part, I've enjoyed taking part in this consumer tech race, mostly because I like cool toys (I am male, after all). However, despite the ever-growing power of computers, what's always impressed me more is their increasing ease of use.

My earliest computer memories are of using a BBC B computer with a tape drive to play games, write the odd program or just mess around with BASIC commands. Anyone who owned a tape drive (my friends had the much cooler Commodore 64s and Spectrums, an early example of my anti-mainstream nature) remembers the grinding squeal of the loading process, which - coupled with the knowledge that if something went wrong you'd have to repeat the 20 minute process - created an experience more tense and emotionally draining than any game. The games still stick in the memory though: Elite, Football Manager, Arcadians (the BBC's Galaxians clone).

The first big advance was ditching tape for disks. First large 5-inch floppies, then the smaller 3.5-inch disks (which were solid but were still called floppies for years. Minutes of waiting amid that screeching wail were now reduced to a few seconds of whirring and clicking. This kind of immediate access made a computer something that could be used on a whim, rather than as a planned afternoon or evening.

Next came an interface change in the form of an Apple Macintosh Plus. Any concerns about the step backward in graphics (black and white on a tiny screen) vanished with the appearance of the mouse. All of a sudden, the keyboard was used only for writing (and keyboard shortcuts, admittedly) rather than telling the computer what to do. Programs like MacPaint and MacDraw showed off this interface, but the Mac's crowning glory was a program called Hypercard. It allowed the user to create files, graphically and by coding, called stacks, which were a series of cards containing any kind of information the user wanted, linked by buttons coded by the user. I used it to create an interactive atlas of a fantasy world of my devising, and if Apple had kept the program up to date, I'd probably still be using it. As it was, they didn't know what to do with it and let it die off. A bit of a shame, as Hypercard stacks were effectively off-line Web sites long before the Web existed. (The ultimate example of a Hypercard stack is the game *Myst*, which was initially built on the technology.)

Before, I'd really gotten into Hypercard though, another advance had shown up in the form of a hard disk drive. The first one I used was the size of a telephone directory and weighed a bit more, yet it had only 20MB of storage. (For comparison, the USB drive currently on my keyring has 1GB - 50 times as much.) All the same, it killed off the detestable practice of disk swapping (though disks themselves would stick around for some years yet) and once again made the computer faster and more convenient to use. Even if the key rule regarding hard drives is that no matter how big one might be, you'll fill it up before you expect to...

After that, genuine advances were thin on the ground for a while. Things like CD-ROMs, inkjet printers and graphics cards were all just improvements on things that already existed, following the computer industry mantra of faster, cheaper, bigger (in capacity), smaller (in size). To be fair, graphics cards gave PCs the ability to compete as games machines, but in being used only to display and create graphics, their impact has been blunted. Now, though, their power is being applied to computer interfaces, so there may yet be a genuine advance to come out of them (as opposed to just fancy graphical bells and whistles).

The next real advance had been bubbling under for a while. The Internet and email had been tools for the technology-aware, but the arrival of the Web made the whole thing open to anyone who could handle a computer. I was relatively slow at getting myself an email address, only picking one up in third year at college, but once I did, I couldn't go back. In parallel with the arrival of mobile phones, email made communication with anyone, anywhere, anytime possible. It's a process that's still going on, and the Web itself continues to evolve as a source of information, in particular the fascinating wikis, such as Wikipedia.

This brings us to pretty much where we are now. Progress continues at varying paces, but the next major step has yet to hove into view. Or maybe it already has. My aforementioned USB drive is currently only used for storing files, but its capacity and speedy connection speed (plus the fact that it needs no battery) suggests to me something bigger. When the iPod first appeared, the idea of a pocket hard drive of 10GB or more got me thinking about how disposable computing power was becoming. The value of a computer to us is how we can display and manipulate our personal data with it. Sooner or later, we'll have pocket (or key ring) drives that are reliable, fast, cheap and large enough to carry all of our important data around with us, including the programs needed to access our data files. At that point, the computer becomes a terminal again: just somewhere to plug our data into. It's a reversal of the server system. The data is at the outermost part of the system and the computing power lies in the computers themselves. At the centre lies the ability to communicate, tying everything together. The computer might even vanish into a cupboard somewhere, leaving only the input (keyboard, mouse, microphone, etc.) and output (monitor, printer) devices immediately available to the user. Wireless technology makes that possible.

That's my idea anyhow. I can see obstacles, but nothing that can't be overcome. Anyone think different?

(2005-06-16 13:01:26) Some ramblings...

The one thing that most cybervisionaries appear to miss in their prognostications is the implications of inbuilt obsolescence. There's no point in building smart houses with central computers unless you have a facility to rip out the hardware in 2 years time when it becomes obsolete. Ditto cyberware. The nice thing about Deralict Station was that it dealt with this. If cyberware makes us more like computers - what happens when you're the cyber-equivalent of a Pentium II? Another thing about cyber is that the kind of surgery required is very invasive. The human body just isn't built to be as tough as our imaginations would like it to be whether it be as the wetware substrate for fantastic superhuman cybernetics or to go gadding around the universe in lycra body stockings with neery a care for such irrelevancies as gravity, inertia, radiation and the unimaginable vastness of Space*. Human biology is a messy thing and until we get total control of our biochemistry and more importantly the biochemistry of our major pathogens thus tipping the pathogen/immune arms race in our favour - cyberware is more likely to be external, easy to replace and upgrade and minimally invasive. The datajack of the future will be a kind of wireless relay probably implanted somewhere subdermally (less chance of infection, see?) - where it can interface between the central nervous system and computers, but can be easily accessed and replaced (preferably by a simple operation requiring local anesthetic no more complicated than getting a mole removed). P. * In fairness, Ian M. Banks does try to deal with the implications of life and war at relativistic speeds this head on in *The Algebraist* as does Joe Haldeman in the excellent *Forever War*.

1.5.6 Urban Wasteland (2005-06-17 00:46)

Hot and humid in Dublin tonight. I've had the window fully open all evening, and I swear it's still hotter out there than it is in here. There's no air conditioning in work, so the weather makes working (ie. staying awake) hellish. And this is just the start of the summer.

Weather like this makes me want to write some urban wasteland stories. I tend to shy away from contemporary fiction, because I know I have a tendency to be preachy, and I've always hated sermonising. It's easier to hide that kind of thing in a skewed setting. Urban wasteland is a bit of a misnomer though. The exemplar I'm thinking of is Warren Ellis's "Transmetropolitan," which constantly made the point that the city it was set in was filled to bursting with human life, exploding off in every direction. Glorious and squalid and everything in between.

Just a desire at the moment. Maybe I'll have an idea while I'm sleeping.

laerfan (2005-06-17 12:48:00)

Yeah it's disgusting out in Dublin lately. Can't walk two feet without feeling sweaty, it's horrible. I agree with you about contemporary stuff, but sometimes it's great to bitch and moan about things that way. The novel I'm writing at the moment is a bit like that. It's a departure for me too, but it's been fun so far. I recommend you try it! Even if it's a "Micro-story" it'd be a worthwhile venture

lostperdita (2005-06-19 10:47:26)

it's not much better in Wales but, fortunately for me, walking two feet puts me straight into the sea.

1.5.7 Seeking Swelter (2005-06-19 13:38)

Back home for a few days and everything's more beautiful than ever, the sun beaming down out of a cloud-speckled blue sky. I'm not enjoying it yet. Partly because I had about 4 hours of sleep last night, but mostly because of the heat. The air tastes like it's been baked, and even here by the sea there's no breeze to speak of. I think I'm getting to be less and less of a warm-weather person as I get older.

The advantage of home, though, is reading time. I have two days or so, plus train trips and I intend to try and get "The Fabric of the Cosmos" mostly done. It's nice to have a book stretch my brain as much as this one does, even though it means I have to read it more slowly. In the meantime, I've been wandering around the house. Outside, that is. We've had a nest of swifts under the gable of the roof for a few years now, but there are now two nests there together, with a third under construction. I think we're being colonized. Give them a few years and they'll launch an assault on the garage for lebensraum. In the meantime, though, it's nice to have them flying around.

"Swelter" is one of my favourite words, by the way. I'm thinking of drawing up a list.

1.5.8 Home Thoughts (2005-06-20 21:58)

One of the problems with writing a blog from home is that there are just too many topics that come to mind. Things like the house just built down the road (which looks like a slug and has an extension built over the beach), maritime stories (like [1]Ballyhornan's version of Whiskey Galore), the tiny town of Dunsford (a pub on one side of the road, a church on the other and about six houses) and a friend of mine who opened his own pharmacy in the town of Strangford (and who I saw for the first time in years today).

Maybe I'm getting old, but I'm learning to appreciate things that I wouldn't have had any time for as a kid, or even relatively recently. After a meal in Strangford, I took a walk down to the slipway where the Stangford ferry leaves for Portaferry. It's no more than half a mile across the mouth of the lough, but you'd have to go perhaps 50 miles around to reach Portaferry in a car. It felt odd to stand there, looking across at rolling hills and a town perched on their edge. This is one of the longest-settled areas of Ireland and people have lived near the lough for 8,000 years and more. How much has changed since then? How did they navigate the swift-flowing waters of the lough's mouth? It's an odd kind of thought, but in the country it's easier to imagine their lives. The landscape remains unobscured, dotted with signs of an older life.

1. <http://www.library.georgetown.edu/dept/speccoll/guvict.htm>

1.5.9 Tough Week (2005-06-27 18:06)

Last week was a poor one for writing, all in all. No blogs entries after returning to Dublin, no overtime at work and two failed and one stalled attempt at writing a short story. Trying to get started on a story, I found that my first idea lacked a middle (I knew how it started and how it ended but not how to connect the two) and the second lacked an ending (knew the situation but not how to resolve it). Accordingly, both have been added to the pile of pieces that I'll return to if I figure out how to fix them. The third, titled The Prophet of Memory, is based around a very simple idea, which suggests that it might be worth sticking with. It'll be longer than the last two pieces I've posted here, but hopefully not by too much.

I'm just about to head off to a U2 concert in Croke Park now. I'm not a natural concert goer,

and one of the three concerts I've previously been to was U2's Popmart concert in Belfast. I had a great time there, possibly because I was standing within ten yards of the stage. This time, as befits the older man that I am, I'll be sitting sedately, maybe offering polite applause between songs. Then home for tea before bed...

1.5.10 U2 at Croke (2005-06-28 21:52)

It's been a while since I've been to a concert, and this one seems to have kicked me back into a working mood, so here's a report.

Monday night was my first time at Dublin's Croke Park in around 11 years, and my first time at a concert since a Gorillaz gig in Dublin a few years back. The stadium itself is an odd shape, rearing up on three sides and open on the fourth, calling to mind a hybrid of the Colosseum in Rome and a Greek amphitheatre. When you stick a stage in the open end, it's clear how it might have been designed for concerts.

We arrived early enough, setting off from home at around 6.30 and joining the tributaries and streams of fans flowing towards Croke Park. Progress towards the stadium was straightforward and swift, partially because the security checks erred on the side of cursory. I ate a toxic hotdog and headed for the stadium. Almost immediately there was some drama as I found a ticket lying on the street. Fortunately, as I considered whether to hand it to one of the security people, a young woman came running up breathless and retrieved her possession. Which at least saved me the moral dilemma of whether to flog the ticket for some money to buy souvenirs, I suppose.

After a brief hunt for ice cream in the stadium, we found our seats, pretty much dead centre of the lowest tier. A perfect position for watching a match, and not too bad for observing the massive stage and accompanying screen. Well, I say massive, but compared to Popmart's huge screen, massive arch and giant lemon/glitterball, it was positively subdued.

The stadium was only around a third full, if that, at this stage, and it was left to Ash to warm the crowd up, as they had in Belfast on my previous U2 outing. I have a lot of time for Ash, as we hail from the same part of the world, having both gone to school in the same town. I can't say I knew them, as they were a year below me in a different school, but I certainly saw them around town, and a friend of mine used to play with them. I can't imagine being a warm up act is an easy job, but they threw themselves into it, getting the crowd bouncing to songs like "Girl From Mars" and "Kung Fu" and winding up with "Burn Baby Burn," which is my favourite song of theirs. Job done, they retired, leaving us to wait for the main event.

There was to be a significant wait. The day was beautiful, with clear and blue skies, which was great for sun-worshipping but not so good for a show that relies on big-screen pyrotechnics. Perhaps unwisely, I consoled myself during the wait with another toxic hotdog, as all the while, people continued to filter in, taking their seats and pressing to the front of the standing area. At around 9, an announcer emerged onto the stage, telling us that the show was about to begin, having been slightly delayed by the brightness of the evening. The crowd, seeking to amuse itself for a few final moments, engaged in a round of Mexican waves, which are pretty impressive in a stadium of 80,000+ people.

From then on, every movement on the stage was greeted by excited whistles, and when the band finally emerged, the place erupted. Whereas for Popmart, they had paraded through the crowd, Bono dressed in a boxer's robe, here they simply strode onto the stage. The impact was not lessened. Right from the start it was clear that Bono had Croke Park in the palm

of his hand. There may be better singers out there, and his wearing-his-heart-on-his-sleeve attitude might occasionally become cloying, but there can't be too many better showmen out there. U2 have been doing this for years, and they have a well-tuned grasp of what an audience wants.

They kicked off with "Vertigo" from their newest album, appropriately enough, then segued into several big numbers to get the crowd going, including "Gloria" and "Elevation." There was an odd moment when a young girl joined Bono on-stage (the first of several visitors): U2's frontman donned her spangly cowboy hat momentarily, but then found that its drawstrings got tangled in his own wires. As she disentangled him, he was forced to start "Beautiful Day" with his head being pulled to one side...

I don't have a set list of the songs, but it was clear that the band was striking a fine balance between crowd favourites and their newer stuff, which fitted in perfectly. The first salvo had gotten the crowd onto their feet (few seats were actually used through the concert) and into the mood, but it was with "City of Blinding Lights," my favourite song from the new album, that the concert really got going. As the sky dimmed, the huge screen behind the band flared and flickered into life, providing an animated backdrop to the rest of the show. Each song had its own style and presentation, from the newest release to such old pieces as "Stories for Boys."

Inevitably, Bono used the stage as a pulpit, drawing the crowd's attention to human rights violations in Burma and the Make Poverty History campaign. Whatever your opinion of his efforts in these areas, they managed to contribute to the show: an appeal to text a number in support of the Make Poverty History campaign led to the audience raising up their mobile phones, the backlit screens standing in for the more traditional (and less-impressive) salute of cigarette lighters ususally seen at these events. The only dodgy note came when three people were invited up onto the stage with a home-made Make Poverty History banner. As Bono began the next song, a camera stayed fixed on them but no spotlight did, meaning that the gesture was wasted because no one in the stands could see the banner properly. Nonetheless, the emotional "Walk On" and the rapturously received "Sunday Bloody Sunday" took our minds off it.

By the time that the show drew to its close, at around 11, the sky was dark and no one was yet tired, especially those who were exploiting the more open spaces on the Croke Park pitch to dance in a manner that I'm pretty sure has never been in fashion. So it was a shame that it all had to end. Except, it didn't, at least not just then. Encores are obviously stage-managed and prepared, but this one offered the crowd "Zoo Station" and "The Fly" from Achtung Baby, offering some bite at the end of a long evening. And as the band headed off, the words "The End" appeared on the big screen.

Except it still wasn't the end. As more than a few in the crowd were heading for the exits, the band emerged one last time. Amid copious thanks to friends, family and others, and especially to the crowd, they played a few more songs, then, as "40" drew to a close, they made their individual exits. First Bono, then Adam, then the Edge, leaving Larry drumming alone on stage. A final flurry and he too was gone, leaving us to make our way from Croke Park to home.

It's a curious thing, but the audience played its own part in making the gig what it was. For the most part, they seemed to know the songs just as well as the band, and for songs like "Elevation" and "Sunday Bloody Sunday" they often took over, playing the part of a fifth band member. And with "40," they kept singing long after the band had left the stage.

The best gig I've ever been to? Well, it's not a crowded field, but yeah, it was. And it probably still will be until and unless I go to another of their gigs.

aeredhal (2005-06-28 22:03:16)

Since I've been stuck out there once or twice I thought I'd say 2 things about Croke Park. You probably have heard this stuff before, but maybe you haven't. The "open" end of Croke Park is known as Hill 16, as in 1916 (the Easter Rising). Traditionally Hill 16 was created when, after the rising, the rubble from Dublin City Centre was piled there and covered in earth, creating a mound that spectators have stood on since to watch matches. The very nationalist leanings of the GAA have kept that area from being overdeveloped, lest we forget. The 2nd thing, capacity. Croke Park is listed as having a capacity of 81000, including Hill 16. With Hill 16 covered by the stage I wouldn't be sure how much you should knock off, but then you can add in the seating on the pitch itself (added for the concert) the gig was sold out so I would imagine you were in the company of 84000 or thereabouts

cerandor (2005-07-02 08:25:33)

Thanks for that. I don't know why my brain refused to remind me that the open end was Hill 16. As for the capacity, I imagine you're spot on.

1.5.11 Changing the World (2005-06-30 21:58)

My French class this evening was disturbed for half an hour as the "Make Poverty History" marchers traipsed past on their way from Parnell Square to Merrion Square. Obviously, because of the class, I wasn't out there with them, but even if that hadn't been the case, I probably still wouldn't have gotten involved. I have a lot of sympathy for their aims (even if I do consider them a tad simplistic) but it's the methods that I have issues with. This is probably one of the more arrogant posts I've made on this blog (at least until next week), so I'd better explain myself.

Gandhi and Martin Luther King proved the power of harnessing public discontent in opposition to injustice. Yet it seems to me that no one today thinks as long-term as those two pioneers did. The goal of any elected politician is to get reelected, so if you can get your message to the masses of voters, politicians will pay attention. Note that I'm drawing a distinction between marchers and voters. These days, those who march are those who disdain the capitalist democratic system and aren't inclined to vote. So, their best hope of achieving their hoped-for change is to convert those who watch from the sidelines to their belief. Partially out of apathy, partially because of the soporific effect of the media, that doesn't happen much any more. The last great popular movement in the west was Live Aid and the response to the famines in Africa. That achievement was buried by all the mediocre copycats, and the forthcoming Live 8 is likely to be just a pale shadow of its predecessor.

Undoubtedly there are some in the movements who have the drive and vision to achieve their goals. Thus far, they've been drowned out by those who are there out of genuine but ill-informed outrage, a desire to contribute without risk or a wish to meet girls. There are two routes to the change the marchers want. The first is to overthrow the current system, which is risky, generally bloody (Ukraine was a notable exception) and ought not to be necessary in a democratic system. The other is to participate in the system. By which I mean not just voting, but also standing for election. Those who complain about the politicians who represent them should be willing to aim in the long term to replace them, steer the marchers to the ballot box (and then let them make their own minds up) and study the system to understand how it works in detail before demanding changes or taking it over. Democracy is not as glamorous as protest, but carping from the sidelines contributes nothing. Both options above require

a successful appeal to the public, and kicking in the windows of McDonalds does nothing to help that. Vested interests and the media are a problem, but hardly an insurmountable one in the current age of more open communication.

I've often wondered whether I could hack it in politics. Now, as 30 looms, I'm wondering where I ought to start.

Next week, Science vs. Religion and why science kicks religion's ass...

aeredhal (2005-07-01 10:18:05)

Ahem, while I respect your opinion in all things I believe you missed that the main body of this march, and the organisational core of many of the previous marches, are/were made up of supporters of political parties. One of the more common things to be approached about on these marches is whether or not you vote, and if not why not. From the point of view of someone who does march, I would have to say it seems that the people within those movements are the ones most likely to vote, at least more so than the large amount of hecklers who seem to turn up and say things like "the 60's are gone man". And yeah politics, a career path even I've considered.... Oh and I wouldn't hold the Ukraine up as an example of democracy, while we're all pretty sure the first round of elections was rigged, the second round, the victory for "the west" was done on the back of intense media pressure and more insidiously, pressure from gangs of Ushenko(sp) supporters hanging about outside polling stations. No doubt he would have won anyway (why else did the communists find it necessary to rig against him the first place) but you can hardly hold up those circumstances to scrutiny. And on a last point, the anti-war march in Dublin shortly before the invasion of Iraq was largely ignored politically, the gathering in the Ukraine forced another ballot. Numerically there were more people marching in Dublin than there were in that square, and while I don't know the difference in population sizes, I know Ireland is around the 5 million mark (including the north, a lot of marchers came from there) and the Ukraine has approximately the same population as France.

(2005-07-01 13:46:57)

Em...unless there half the population of Dublin turned out for the Anti-War march then - no, numerically there wasn't. 500,000 people turned out in the Maidan Nezalezhnosti in Kiev (and there were protests elsewhere in the country); 90,000 people marched on Feb 15 2003 in Dublin. Proportionally, more people marched in Dublin than in Ukraine. The population of Ukraine is just shy of 48 million (so about 1 % of the total populace protested in Kiev) [France is 63 million or so btw]. Ireland as an island has a population of 5.7 million, so 1 % is 57,000 or so people. Numbers have nothing to do with the different outcomes though. In Ireland, the march was ignored because the war didn't affect Ireland or the Irish people directly (and it was in the interest of the Irish government not to piss off the government of the country that pumps a sizable chunk of foreign investment into the Irish economy). The Ukrainians were protesting about the running of their own country - something that directly affected their lives - so you can understand that they might have been a bit more fervent. I agree broadly with Ciaran though - except in cases where the state is in crisis (or where a government might lose an election over the issue), protests marches are generally ineffective. Elections are the point of leverage in democracies. What annoyed me the most was watching Sinn Fein jumping on the bandwagon. Or perhaps they stole that £26 million to provide aid to the impoverished nations of Africa (and not the kind of aid they were supplying in Colombia either)?

cerandor (2005-07-02 08:24:08)

Fair enough, it was a bit of a rant, and some of my points were probably poorly made, but I'd still argue that marching has become something of a placebo for the populace. Those on the march believe that they're achieving something, and those who agree but don't march believe that something is being done. The rest, meanwhile, see it all on the news and go "Oh, another march." As a means of demonstration, there's nothing wrong with a peaceful march, but overuse dulls the impact. This applies to the Ukraine too. Western meddling or not (and such pressure is not always malignant),

the people suddenly realised, after years of being dominated by the Communist regime, that they had a voice and decided to use it. To (probably mis)quote Alan Moore's V for Vendetta: "The volume of a noise is relative to the length of the silence that preceded it. It has been a long time since our masters have heard the people's voice. They have forgotten how loud it can be."

(2005-07-04 17:45:24) Marches, in general, annoy me

I completely agree with Ciaran on this one. It has been my experience of marches and marches that they do nothing good at all, other than allow angry people to vent. There are so many these days that I barely even notice them. The anti-war demonstrators are particularly annoying. I have seen them verbally abuse people who question their politics on Grafton Street, and suffer the same extremist tendencies they attribute to "Powers That Be". I find the vitriol poured at Bush to be particularly offense. I do not have much time for him, but he is viewed as an anti-Christ by many.

(2005-07-05 09:45:48) Re: Marches, in general, annoy me

In fairness though, Bush and his neocon coterie deserve everything that's thrown at them. Their disasterous record speaks for itself (Climate change; Iraq; Afghanistan; tampering with the conduct of science; faith based AIDs initiatives among others). The only bright ray of hope in the thing is that the American people are beginning to wake up to the enormity of the mistake they made in re-electing him. You can fool some of the people all of the time....etc

1.6 July

1.6.1 Reading Update (2005-07-03 22:05)

Just finished a new book (I know, I'm weak), Dan Simmons' "Olympos." I'd read the first book in this series of two, "Ilium" and thoroughly enjoyed it, so I was looking forward to "Olympos." Now that I've finished, I'd have to admit I enjoyed it, albeit with qualifications. Simmons is a writer of big ideas: His acclaimed "Hyperion" cycle of four novels featured time, destiny, AIs and poetry (lots of poetry). It started well, in a manner that aped Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," but as it moved from the personal-scale to the galactic-scale, I felt it got a lot messier. The last two books in the series, where Simmons sought to pull together some long-laid strands, never really convinced.

The same criticisms can be laid at the feet of "Ilium" and "Olympos." Best described as a sci-fi collision of Homer's "Iliad," Shakespeare's "The Tempest" and, oddly, Brian Greene's "The Fabric of the Cosmos," which I'd just finished ploughing through. Or, if not that, something similar. Given the almost over-the-top referencing of a hell of a lot of sources I'm pretty familiar with, I came to this book much better prepared than most. Those with no knowledge of the Iliad or Shakespeare (Proust also gets a look in) may struggle. What's certain is that come the end of the second book, pretty much everyone might find the ride a bit bumpy. The effort of pulling together his separate story strands causes Simmons to expose some gaping gulfs in the science and narrative sequence. Where modern science runs out of answers, so does he, and the ending is far from completely satisfying.

But, all that said, I really enjoyed it anyhow. And most readers are probably a lot more forgiving than I am.

1.6.2 Religion vs. Science (2005-07-04 17:32)

Hopefully, this will be more palatable than my previous rant. It has the advantage of being more carefully structured (my rant about protesting was a mess, now that I come to review

it).

Recently, I've twice gotten involved in arguments over religion, which - unlike most other things - is a topic I don't tend to give much ground on. Specifically, the arguments tended to revolve around two topics: religion vs. science and the division between church and state and the desirability thereof. (Just for the record, I didn't start either argument...)

During the second argument, I was accused of being arrogant; an accusation that knocked me back a bit. I probably didn't respond well to that, but it did have the virtue of getting me thinking. Religion has been a major presence throughout my life, and I arrived at the position of being a staunch sceptic after a lot of thought and no little discomfort. Many people I know and care about are religious, so the imputation of arrogance was a bit off-putting. I decided I needed to review what I thought on the topic, and I'm putting the results up here. Don't feel you need to read it: it might get a bit sanctimonious.

I grew up in a fairly religious environment. In Northern Ireland, your religion is an important part of your identity, though this has more to do with where you come from than what you believe. This lack of choice probably had something to do with prompting me to question religion. I can't recall a particular point when I stopped taking what I was told at face value, but by the age of 12, I had decided I preferred figuring things out for myself.

My most immediate problem with religion is with organized religion, not with those who are religious. My own upbringing undoubtedly had a strong effect on me, contributing to my morality. However, my level of scepticism rises abruptly when religion departs from the words of its founder (I consider Jesus to have been an unusually perceptive and intelligent man). That's not the case with organized religion, in which the officials of the religion and the founder's successors have all added their points of view over the years. (For the rest of this, when I'm talking about religion, assume I mean Christianity unless I state otherwise. I'm not well versed enough in other religions to make specific criticisms.)

Religion derives its authority from presenting a universal truth, which is generally declared to be unknowable by mortal men. Catholicism, in particular, has always seemed to me to belittle humanity, declaring that the only way to heaven is through submission to Christ/God. Even when I was in primary school, the idea that anyone who didn't accept Christ was denied salvation, no matter how virtuous their life or whether they had an opportunity to become Christians, seemed unfair and at odds with the image of a God of unlimited mercy. (This theological point has been batted back and forth over the years, and while you won't find many arguing in its favour now, the current and former Popes are on its side.)

Yet this unquestionable authority of religion rests on shaky foundations. The New Testament of Christians is the creation of a committee, which aimed to excise undesirable elements of scripture (such as the apocryphal gospels) in order to unify a faith that had been riven by schism and heresy in the first few centuries of its existence. Even today, both Islam and Christianity are splintered by those who claim that they alone are the keepers of the one true faith. That they are the chosen, special people who will be rewarded for their faith.

This combination of authority and exclusivity is a pernicious one. For one group to be right, all others have to be wrong. Ecumenical efforts stall on the simplest points, because there is little or no room for compromise. How can one compromise on an article of faith? At the very origin of most religions are to be found figures who were admirable and inspired, yet immediately following them came the establishment of religious structures that were devoted as much to their own survival than the faith on which they were built. Religion does not

suffer threats well,

I'm not denying the good that that has been done in the name of religion over the centuries. Inspired by their faith, countless people have gone out of their way to emulate their founder and follow his dictates. However, no religion - and not even religion itself - has a monopoly on inspiring good works. Religion bases its moral contribution to society on a threat: behave or go to hell. It's the cruel stepfather with a bible in one hand and a cudgel in the other. A better argument, from my point of view, is a social one: we all exist in the same society, and it's rational to engage in acts of charity and mercy because, on a broad scale, they improve society for us all. Newton's law of action and reaction applies on the broad social canvas.

There doesn't have to be a conflict between science and religion. During the early years of Islam, the Middle East was a treasure house of knowledge and art, gathered up by a young and vibrant faith. Similarly, the Catholic church in Ireland, far removed from the authorities, stored up learning and knowledge and acted as a wellspring for new learning as Europe emerged from the dark ages. Yet the relationship between the two is always fragile. Following setbacks, Islam retreated into a more hardline faith and lost its lead over the west. Moreover, the Catholic authorities only approved certain texts: those deemed heretical were destroyed where they were found.

Why? Because science is based on the need to ask questions, and religion is based on the need to accept unquestioningly. The only way for the two to coexist is if neither is dominant, and neither field accepts that situation easily. For myself, I prefer science. As I was reminded during the second argument, science is riddled with holes, but as the practice of science is no more than a few centuries old, and most of its work over that period has been to define the parameters of the questions it addresses, this shouldn't be surprising. Science, unlike religion, is a work in progress, and always will be. (There's no religious equivalent of the phrase "scientific progress.")

Although science is incomplete, the fact that it accepts and absorbs change makes it preferable in my eyes to religion. I can be as stubborn as anyone in holding onto an opinion, but if it's disproved, I'll change my stance. Altering an article of faith is an entirely different proposition. The AIDs crisis in Africa is just the latest example of a religious principle standing in support of the deaths of millions and against solid scientific observation.

We as humans have the ability to understand the universe we live in, to employ our intellects to comprehend the laws of physics and nature that underlie our everyday existence. This quest for knowledge is science's greatest contribution to our history on this planet. There may come a time when we hit a barrier beyond which our knowledge cannot penetrate, but as yet there's no sign of such an obstacle. Yet religion insists on it. The mind of god is unknowable, after all. I know that people find comfort in religion as an answer to the most troubling questions: Why are we here? Is there a purpose to life? What comes before life and after death? Religion offers answers but not explanations. I can't blame anyone for accepting that, but I can't help but feel that it's a cop out.

Given all of this, it should be pretty clear where I stand on the role of religion in government. Yet there's more to it than that. Religion does not admit of a cause more important than itself, so in government, it will never be satisfied to be merely another voice around the table. I've been told that the founding fathers of the U.S. never intended for there to be a separation of church and state, but rather merely that no single religion should dominate others within government. Yet how can any religion compromise with another, accepting that other as an valid equal? To argue that they should is a fine and rational viewpoint, but

rationality does not form the basis of any religion.

Religion has political power because it has the power to inspire people: those people who put their faith in it to answer the troubling questions in their lives. A political leader can draw on his religious faith to garner support for his actions, and many unscrupulous leaders have done so, often to devastating effect. Religion is divisive unless all people in a country are of the same faith, and that has never been true that I've been aware of.

I'm going to avoid using the obvious stick to beat religion with: the various crimes against humanity committed in its name. As with good deeds, I'd credit them more to the people responsible than the faith that inspires. To (hopefully) bring this to a close, I'd like to talk briefly about someone who embodies the church/state problem for me: the Rev. Ian Paisley of Northern Ireland.

When I was a child, Paisley was the first politician I was aware of. I'll admit that I found him admirable when I was around 5 years old. Compared to the fairly charmless characters that made up Northern Ireland politics at the time, he was a colourful figure. Plus, his evident strong belief and charisma were and are admirable traits. It was only as I gained a better knowledge of Paisley and Northern Ireland that I realised that being seduced by charisma wasn't a good thing.

Paisley is a demagogue and a rabble-rouser. That may seem unfair, but his own history bears it out. He holds no strict loyalty other than to his faith (and he's the head of a church that he founded). Accordingly, he's been part of the problem in finding a solution to peace in Northern Ireland because he will not compromise and he will not feel bound to any agreement that he has not signed. His famous "Ulster Says No" campaign (geographic and other inaccuracies aside) was a textbook example of negative popular politicking. A minority figure with a fanatic following, he took to the streets in order to cripple any initiative that might compromise the union between Northern Ireland and Britain.

That Paisley has ascended to become the head of the most popular political party in Northern Ireland is partly a result of the failure of the peace process there to advance, but also because of his efforts to create an environment that supports him. In a land where compromise is necessary to achieve peace, yet that same compromise is presented as a threat to people on both sides, political leaders who refuse to compromise are seen as admirable, whereas those who do compromise are seen as bartering away the rights of their constituents. Paisley now finds himself alone on the battlefield of Northern Ireland politics with Gerry Adams, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern reduced to less than referees. I can see some hope of compromise from Adams, who is cynical and manipulative enough to get around the hardliners behind him, but none from Paisley, the man of faith.

I have my biases, of course. Some of them are probably clear from the above. Perhaps I've been too heavily influenced by where I've come from and how I was brought up. However, I believe that I've made a choice in what I believe. To profess to a religious faith that I don't have would be a lie and I won't do that.

"To science and the human heart, there is no limit.
There is no failure here sweetheart, just when you quit."
-U2, "Miracle Drug"

By the way, the [1]Gender Genie considers this rant thoroughly male. So I get to feel a little more secure for a while. Thanks to [LJ User: laerfan] and [LJ User: amanita _d] for pointing out Gender Genie.

(2005-07-05 13:18:32)

The thing that gets me is that, despite the holes, despite the fact that it's a work in progress, science works! It has at its heart a really simple and pragmatic system: Look at something, think of a possible explanation why it might be that way, try to disprove that theory, adjust your first idea based on the results. It's a refinement of basic exploratory behaviour. Science has uncovered basic and verifiable truths about the world around us and improved the lives of billions of people immeasurably. Yet still, people persist in clinging to clearly crazy beliefs and use them to justify all manner of irrational behaviour. And when you point this out, you're called arrogant. I refuse to accept that. Why is it arrogant to point out what is the truth (as far as we can tell) - that there is no credible proof of the existence of a higher power (at least not as conceived by many, if not all, major religions), and that basing systems of belief, behaviour and governance on such myths is irrational? If you said you believed in the Sumerian, Greek or Roman gods and sought to legislate that daily sacrifices be made to Ishtar, Zeus or Mars, the general public would regard you as being at best eccentric, at worst mad. Why is belief in the Holy Trinity, Jehovah, Allah, Buddha or Shiva any different? It's all myth and unless there's some pretty substantial evidence produced to the contrary, I feel completely justified in saying that. If that's arrogance, then, yes, I'm arrogant. But not as arrogant as those who say with utter certainty they know the ultimate truth without ever having to prove or justify their belief.

1.6.3 Cancer Myths (2005-07-06 18:59)

The G2 section in yesterday's Guardian featured a [1]story on the myths that cancer patients have to deal with. For the most part, the article, written by a cancer patient, concerned itself with the widespread, yet utterly unsupported, belief that positive thinking can affect whether a person develops or recovers from cancer. The writer made the point that this belief forces cancer patients to be positive and somehow improve their life while they suffer through a potentially lethal disease and an unpleasant course of treatments. If they don't, they run the risk of feeling guilty of somehow conspiring in their sickness.

Ten years ago, I was a few months into a course of chemotherapy for Hodgkin's Disease, a cancer of the lymphatic system. I had about five months of chemo left, at the end of which I received an all-clear that is still in force. I don't refer to it much (I hope), because I tend to feel guilty for drawing attention to it, but the article struck a nerve for me. Even now, a decade later, I have a lingering feeling that I ought to have done more with myself during the eight months I spent with my life effectively on hold.

This isn't to say I did nothing. I got myself a newspaper job over the summer, made a few trips to Dublin (where my first year in college had been cut short) and watched my hair fall out (less traumatic when you've never really cared for your hairstyles). Moreover, I was as positive about being ill as a teenager as gloomy as I was could be: I never really dwelled on the possibility of not recovering from the cancer. However, the eight months spent at home weren't life changing. When they were done, I resumed my life more or less as it had been (albeit with a better haircut). Thinking about it logically, I suppose I got through it all pretty well. So why should I feel that cancer should have been a revelatory experience, rather than just a disease I suffered and recovered from?

1.6.4 A Hole in my Mind (2005-07-06 18:59)

Yesterday, I had an idea for a blog entry. I'm pretty sure I've had it before and that it's an interesting topic. But somehow, in between remembering the idea and opening the file where I keep notes for blog entries, it slipped out of my head.

It still hasn't come back, and now I'm left with the knowledge that I had an idea but not the knowledge of what that idea was. This kind of frustration is one of the reasons why I generally carry around a paper and pen. Bad enough to lose a potential blog entry. Worse to lose a potential short story or more. Still, things are hopeful: Either I'll remember what the idea was or forget that I ever had it in the first place...

1.6.5 War of the Worlds (2005-07-07 21:56)

I saw Steven Spielberg's "War of the Worlds" last night. Unsurprisingly, given that Spielberg's name is as close as you get to a mark of quality in Hollywood, it was very enjoyable. As an action movie, it doesn't talk down to the audience or engage in lengthy expository dialogue. Buffeted by the action on screen, the audience is kept deliberately at the same level as the masses on the screen. There are some fantastic visual moments and some surprisingly bleak depictions of humanity's reaction to catastrophe. Most intriguingly, it almost entirely eschews the gung-ho, can-do spirit of Hollywood-ized humanity, as seen in "Independence Day."

However, the scene that's still with me now is the very last one, for a particular reason. Obviously, if you haven't seen the film, you'd better not read this.

In the last scene, Tom Cruise's father character, who has stumbled and survived through the invasion, at last completes his quest to reunite his daughter with her mother, now with another man. The mother rushes out, the daughter runs to her, and as this modern, fractured family is reunited, Cruise is left standing alone on the devastated street. As a final scene in a film, it's almost a straight lift from John Ford's "The Searchers," where John Wayne's bitter, racist cowboy redeems himself by returning his niece to her family, only to be left standing in the wilderness when the family returns to the safety and security of their domesticity.

However, where Ford leaves Wayne alone, a relic of a dying west, Spielberg offers a lifeline to Cruise, whose character has redeemed himself over the course of his trek from New York to Boston. This is relatively understandable. Wayne's character was a hard, vindictive man, driven by his hatred of the Indians to almost kill the girl he eventually rescued. The flaws of Cruise's character mostly revolve around his fecklessness, immaturity and lack of responsibility towards his kids. As he has faced up to those over the course of the movie (most disturbingly during an encounter with Tim Robbins' psychotic survivalist), it would seem a little unfair for him to come out of his odyssey with nothing. Yet it still struck me as a little odd, somewhat unbalancing the ending of the movie with something approaching a cop-out. Perhaps it's my cynical side coming to the fore, but I would have found an ending that saw Cruise's character, having accomplished his task and gained maturity at the cost of psychological trauma, left alone as the family gathered around his little girl.

laerfan (2005-07-08 10:46:35)

Well I think you might be going a bit too far into it, I must say that I enjoyed the movie too. The tripods were stunning and it's definitely the best thing Spielberg has done in a long time

(2005-07-08 13:50:14)

I have to say the ending didn't bother me as much as, say the cop out at the end of AI did. It was short and not overly sentimental. I wasn't aware of the parallel with The Searchers, but knowing about it now, I think it's not inappropriate. I'm also not sure that the end would have been improved by leaving the Cruise character out in the cold. He seemed to deserve a little inclusion. After all he killed a man with his bare hands to protect his daughter. Come on, cut the guy a little slack. :) The bits that stuck with me were the chilling images that Spielberg deployed to such effect. The blazing train that screams past the stream of shellshocked refugees; the clothes of the dead falling like huge obscene snowflakes onto bare trees, their branches silhouetted by the flickering light of a burning town (this brought to mind, not accidentally I'm sure, the scene in Schindler's List where ash from the crematoria starts to fall like snow); the view of Cruise and family from the inside of a car sinking into the depths of the Hudson river, its occupants beating frantically at the windows; the gunshots as the man who steals Cruise's car is himself shot, Jack Ruby/Lee Harvey Oswald style (again, I'm sure the allusion is not accidental); and then there's the confrontation between Cruise and the survivalist - brilliantly dealt with behind a closed door, while Dakota Fanning sings Hush-a-Bye Mountain. The two men stand and the door closes and you know only one is going to come out of there alive. This reminded me of one of the most hard hitting parts of Saving Private Ryan - where a German kills one of the Americans with a bayonet after a visceral, tooth and nail fight, the German leaning his weight on the blade, as the American's strength fails him and the knife goes in. All in all WotW, like Spielberg's best films has a chilling and dark vein running through the heart of it. This time though, rather than ruining the brew with too much sugar at the end, I think he sweetened it just enough.

1.6.6 Inevitable Consequences (2005-07-11 07:59)

It's a beautiful day already here. Three of the bulbs in my Galileo thermometer (a gift from a friend in a far-off country) have dropped, which hardly ever happens. It looks like it's going to be even nicer than yesterday, and yesterday was fabulous. However, work's going to stop me from enjoying today fully, and I didn't get out of the house much yesterday. Why? Well, much as it shames me to admit it, I was hungover.

I don't get hangovers much. I'm not a major league drinker, and when I get drunk, I can normally handle it. However, on Saturday night I made two major errors. First, I didn't eat properly before going out, and second, I mixed my drinks. Not just lager and spirits, which is only slightly insane, but lager, spirits and cider. Admittedly, the spirits only came to one shot of tequila (with salt and lemon: it was that kind of night), but I think it was the cider that did for me. I don't drink cider anymore, not since first year in college, but when the barman gave me a pint instead of my usual lager, I didn't bother asking him to change it. Big mistake.

It wasn't a really bad hangover, as these things go. The headache and nausea weren't as bad as the last time, which was over 7 months ago, but what killed me for the day was throwing up. Which is not something I've done in a very long time, and which I'm sure was the fault of the cider. So I spent Sunday indoors, mostly suffering the usual sense of moral failure I get after having been drunk and swearing not to do it again. (Not drink cider, that is...)

amanita_d (2005-07-11 11:28:17)

Hi, I've added you to my friends list - hope you don't mind!

cerandor (2005-07-11 17:24:49)

No problem at all. I'll even reciprocate.

laerfan (2005-07-11 12:12:23)

It's blistering out alright. Bloody horrible to walk in, you're not missing much, trust me

(2005-07-12 13:35:16)

Ireland is a funny country. For 50 weeks of the year, we slouch about under leaden skies from which significant percentages of the planet's liquid water intermittently fall upon our clinically depressed skulls while we raise bitching about how nasty the weather is to an artform. Then we get 2 weeks of fine weather - blue skies, light sea breezes and temperatures in the mid to high 20's and everyone is going: "Bloody weather! It's too warm. I'm dying here." Jesus, people - make up your mind! :) 26 degrees C is not scorching (try 42 C in 95 % humidity and then compare and contrast). Sweating is not evil (just shower a couple of times a day - and remember it's the one time that a cold shower is actually pleasurable). Duvets (or in fact bedclothes of any kind) are not required for sleep. Chill out and enjoy (for a tragically brief time) what this country would be like if we had a proper climate.

cerandor (2005-07-12 22:15:28)

Actually, I have no real problem with the weather as is. Only with being stuck in a non-air-conditioned office during it. The relative lack of humidity recently has made the sun and warmth much more bearable. For example, I spent an exceptionally pleasant hour between work and French sitting near Trinity's Pavilion Bar, reading "Fast Food Nation."

1.6.7 Two Ways to Write (2005-07-12 23:13)

Just watched a truly appalling movie called "Deathstalker." I'm actually embarrassed to admit to having watched it. But anyway...

A thought that's been running through my head for the last few days is that there are two ways that I know of to write. This may only be true for me: I make no claims to its universality, so if you disagree, say so.

The first is to take an idea or a moment of inspiration and run with it. I've been doing that for most of today. A few ideas that had been stewing in the back of my head for a while clicked together and I've been working and expanding on them, solving problems that I caused for myself and laying the groundwork for future stories. This kind of writing is by far the most fun type, but the problem is that it's reliant on having that moment of inspiration in the first place, and they don't come along too often. Moreover, when the inspiration dries up, so does the urge to write. I generally feel lucky if I get a full short story out of any one burst.

Which is where method two comes in. Method two involves sitting down in front of a keyboard (or notepad, whichever you prefer) for a set period with no distractions and not getting up until the period has been spent writing. It can be a slog, but there's a certain satisfaction to it, and it gets easier with time. My own method is to shut myself in my bedroom with my laptop with a CD playing (no lyrics) and write until the CD finishes. Unfortunately, being a lazy bastard, I haven't sat down and done this for a while.

Which is a shame, as the two methods complement one another. If you can force yourself to write regularly on a single piece, all sorts of other ideas will pop up and have to be dealt with individually. Which kind of answers the question of which is the more important: without perspiration, no inspiration.

laerfan (2005-07-12 22:25:32)

I'll be sure not to watch that film then. I like your idea of working through a full CD. I listen to music when I write, (most of the time) and the reason for that is that when I started writing my first novel, fucking years ago now, I was in a pretty full house, never any peace and quiet and I HAD to drown out all other sound. I HAD to write with music, with lyrics, and somehow I got used to it. I know that must sound mad. I can't read with music on, but I can write with it on! Weird huh? I have now since had some space cleared up in my house and I find myself alone a lot more, so it's not a problem anymore, but sometimes I'll still write with Placebo or Weezer chugging away in the background. That said, I try to listen to non-lyrics music. I find that music like Sigur Ros helps my brain to stay focussed and I'll listen to whatever classical stuff I can find. I find that your first method is the best, but hardly ever happens. Sometimes forcing stuff actually works amazingly well though. Most of my novel "Rage Eternal" was me making myself write it and it turned out fantastic. You should definately get back into the swing of things. More micro-stories would be nice. The last two were brilliant

lostperdita (2005-07-13 07:40:57)

any number of writers (and I think neil gaiman among them) have commented that it's not a matter of knowing <i>how</i> to write but figuring out how to write what you're working on <i>now</i>.

cerandor (2005-07-13 22:30:47)

I suppose I'd agree with that, though as long as I actually make myself sit down and write, I've never had too much trouble (probably partially because I don't do so often). Any distracting ideas, I push into impulse writing, to be dealt with once I've finished the current object of my effort.

1.6.8 Desolation Jones 2 (2005-07-14 23:49)

Issue one of this series impressed me. Issue 2, out yesterday, took that further. Warren Ellis can be something of a curmudgeon, both in how he presents himself and how his writing appears. As a result, when he drops the mask, there's genuine power behind his more affecting and sympathetic characters. One of the best early issues of Transmetropolitan focused on "revivals," people from our century cryogenically frozen and restored one or two centuries from now, into a mad world they couldn't adapt to. It showed a human side of the cynical, bitter main character and was all the more powerful for it.

In the second issue of Desolation Jones, Ellis introduces one of the most affecting characters I've come across in a while, the loneliest woman in L.A. That, and the story introduced in issue one deepens and spreads out. Plus, the art by J.H. Williams III remains beautiful. I'm recommending it. Even if you don't buy comics, visit your local shop and read it. This one is worth it.

(2005-07-20 15:49:35) Good idea!

I think you are from henceforth forbidden to bring those comics home. You must keep them all in Dublin until the series is complete, so I can read them all together. I presume this comic girl is sexy, right?

1.6.9 New Strategy (2005-07-19 23:03)

New strategy: I'm going to keep a note of how much I write, outside of work at least. Last night, 2,200 words of "Windshadow and Crumbledust," today 1,800. Which brings me nicely to the end of chapter 6. Which should have been chapter five, except that chapter four went

on so long I had to cut it in half. So much for not obsessing about planning everything before I write it. The general idea now is to keep writing until I'm done and then wield an axe (or an overly large red pen) on the result. Don't know how long this burst will last, but exposing myself to public ridicule (and having the record of my achievements or otherwise hanging on my wall) should serve to give me a kick up the ass...

(2005-07-20 15:52:00) Good Technique

I find the axe-wielding technique to be much better. It's the writing equivalent of the software development approach of "write a quick version to throw away" I like it. Of course, if we could get the Axeman to wield the axe, that would be all the better, especially if El Crappo is in the general vicinity.

laerfan (2005-07-21 12:01:48)

Good luck with the technique. I take it that this is a novel you're writing. Is it your first full novel or have you done some before?

cerandor (2005-07-21 22:33:50)

Yeah, "Windshadow & Crumbledust" (hereinafter referred to as "W &C" is a novel. First one I've made a serious attempt on one in about 12 years. My one previous attempt sits in my room. I don't look at it much except as an inducement to do better. :)

1.6.10 Music to my Ears (2005-07-22 19:36)

Well, my first week back at the writing grindstone seems to have been a success. I've averaged just over 2,000 words a day, Monday to Friday, comfortably beating my target of 10,000 words a week. Anything I write over the weekend can be considered a bonus. Not sure about the quality of all of it, but that's what editing is for.

I've also managed to put my set of Beethoven symphony CDs to good use. Tuesday to Thursday I employed the first four of them (only number 5, with symphony no. 9, has yet to be used). As they all clock in between an hour and 70 mins, they're perfect for the task. Today's CD, with symphonies no. 5 and 6, seems to have worked best. Or maybe I've just reached a particularly interesting segment of W &C. We'll see what happens when I finish chapter 7.

I'm not going to comment on the fact that just after I bought my Beethoven CDs, the BBC released the entire set of symphonies free for download. No, I'm not. I'm not going to mention my legendarily bad sense of timing either... :)

laerfan (2005-07-22 19:25:06)

Congratulations on the progress. It looks like the novel is going to be huge if every chapter is around 10,000 words. Or is that just this one? Or are they all more!? How long is your novel so far and how long do you expect it to be at the end?

cerandor (2005-07-23 23:21:03)

Yeah, like I said, I tend to overwrite. First time I wrote a novel, every chapter was a uniform length (give or take). Monday and Tuesday were winding up chapter 6. Wed-Fri was Chapter 7. So, given that I have at least one more evening of writing to finish Chapter 7, assume 8,000-10,000 words each. I had 20 chapters planned, maybe 21 now. Which will probably change by the end. A *lot* of stuff happens in chapter 7. Two major characters introduced, one other continues an appearance that started at the end of chapter 6. Way too much dialogue, which I'll have to hack down, but I'm enjoying it nonetheless.

laerfan (2005-07-24 12:32:06)

Wow that sounds like a huge novel. A friend of mine did a 270,000 novel (it was the first of a series of four) and it was gigantic to read. Sounds like your novel will be about the same nearly. My novels tend to stay within the 85,000 - 110,000 words bracket. I find that if something is too long it'll just drag on a bit, you know? But maybe you've a lot to say in yours! So what's the novel about? I'm interested now.

cerandor (2005-07-25 20:57:53)

Yeah, it worries me that I'm overwriting. I've deliberately avoided attempting part-works, like trilogies, etc. W & C was intended to be a relatively simple work that would stand on its own. Obviously, something went wrong somewhere! Of course, as I said, I intend to chop it down a lot in editing. There'll be a lot that's repetitive or redundant. Don't know if I'll give it to anyone else to read before the hacking begins. For reference, my first novel clocked in at 132,218 words. It was the first of a trilogy, but I never did any more than the first few chapters of the second. I just mine it for ideas now. I ought to mention how unspeakably impressed I am that you've written more than one of the things... As for what it's about and whether I have anything to say, well... Boiling down the story into one sentence (a painful procedure) provides: Three children find themselves in another world, where danger threatens. Which doesn't convey anything really. Given that I read it as a child, I suppose Narnia is the touchstone, although I'm going for a less familiar and comfortable tone (and less Catholic imagery). On a side note, I read somewhere recently that there is only one plot: "Things are not as they seem." Thankfully, W & C fulfills that nicely.

laerfan (2005-07-25 20:29:00)

<lj user="blue_sun_story"> You should check out my new community. The idea is to encourage people to write more by offering awards to the three best stories each month. You should enter some of your micro-stories, you might win an award and if not you'll definitely get it read by more people

cerandor (2005-07-25 20:59:14)

Thanks. I'll certainly check it out.

1.6.11 Monday Evening Review (2005-07-25 21:41)

Smell of the Day: The sweet tang of rotting fruit. The Moore Street Market is an odd little place. None of the pretensions of the Temple Bar Market on a Saturday, just a place to get fruit and veg (plus fish and other sundries) cheap. I walk past there every day yet hardly ever buy anything. It's always tomorrow.

Experience of the Day: Coping with a new mobile. I succumbed to my techno lust yesterday, availing of a €100 trade in to get a new Nokia 6680. Very much more flash than my old phone, with two (count 'em) cameras and various 3G fripperies that I'll probably never use. Inevitably, it's been an uncomfortable transition, even though I'm going from Nokia to Nokia. Partly this is just getting used to an upgraded system, but some interface niceties have been left by the wayside too: I used to be able to set my phone to automatically return to its general profile at 4.30, when I finished work, from the quieter office profile. The new phone doesn't seem to have that function. Sometimes technology advances so fast it leaves itself behind.

Word Count for the Day: 2,246. I'd expected to finish chapter 7 of W & C today. Instead, I think I have another day to go. Once again, what should have been a short stroll for the characters featured numerous digressions. 8,319 words for this chapter so far.

laerfan (2005-07-25 22:23:34)

Hi. Glad you're writing so much. Well done! Thanks for entering into the community too. "Derelict Station" is a great start. I read it again and it's really very good.

1.6.12 Making History (2005-07-27 20:27)

I've been making history for the last week and a bit. Not real history, of course. Just history in general.

One of the reasons that I enjoy reading and writing fantasy is the element of creation involved. Fantasy worlds always seem more real if they have a coherent history that lies outside or around the story. A story, after all, is something that happens somewhere. It's generally nice to feel that a story isn't the only important thing in the world it's set in. This may be the reason why I still hold to The Lord of the Rings as my favourite fantasy work. Created worlds don't come more detailed, coherent and consistent.

Luckily, I enjoy writing histories, whether they be myths and legends or accounts of wars and kingdoms or even smaller tales. Adding detail to the embroidery of a world is something I find very satisfying. (Stop looking at me like that. I know it's not normal...) I have my own world, of course. I have several, in fact, but most of the detail goes into one, a setting for a range of stories, planned or otherwise. But I do the same in roleplaying too. My characters have histories filled with extraneous details, and I occasionally pester my GMs with little extra things I've thought up. Sometimes they even use them.

Writing Update: Walking home from work, I found myself composing the evening's writing in my head, a good sign that I'm getting back into the habit. 2,477 words this evening, my best one-day total so far in this burst. Plus, I'm on chapter 8, which is hopefully where the action kicks in. Of course, most of what I wrote this evening was a long conversation...

laerfan (2005-07-27 22:12:11)

That's going to be a monster of a novel! I went to mad lengths doing the world for my book "The Spiral Rebirth" including a map, a list of geographical features, town plans, details and loads of new species and creatures (not all will be used even in the series) and I know a guy who's writing a fantasy series and he's gone so far as to have a file on his computer for keeping track of the FLORA and PLANTS in the world. It's mad. So you're probably not too mad yet

cerandor (2005-07-27 22:44:29)

Judging my sanity (or lack thereof) before meeting me may not be wise... Also, the history that I'm writing isn't actually for W & C, it's for my primary world. The Sapphire Land, the setting for W & C is intentionally sparse on detail (it literally doesn't have much history to talk of). However, there are some connections between the two.

1.6.13 The Dregs of the Night (2005-07-30 00:18)

It's just after midnight, and I'm sitting at home, bidding on items on eBay for a friend without a credit card. I'm also quite stuffed, having been well fed by a friend of mine whose cooking skills far outstrip my own. (This isn't much of a compliment, as I can't do much more than fry, grill or toast, but this guy can actually sling some mean ingredients). I'm not in the best of form, but I'm going to avoid complaining much. It's been a trying week.

I'm happy with the amount of writing I'm doing: this week I managed to hit exactly 11,000 words, which is, oddly enough, giving 110 percent. I'm not sure that I've got back into the feel of W & C, but I'm getting there. Next up is the first action sequence of the book. After this week's endless conversations, it'll be a nice change of pace. I also need to work on my descriptive passages. For some reason, my vocabulary doesn't seem to be all there. More work needed.

I'm glad this is a long weekend. Plenty to occupy my mind. I have a few ideas for short stories for Blue Sun Story and I might turn to them in my free moments.

1.7 August

1.7.1 Lessons Learned (2005-08-02 00:26)

Something that I've known for a while but haven't really faced up to: if I want to be serious about writing, I have to be serious about it. More specifically, I have to put writing ahead of everything that isn't life and death.

Today was a bank holiday. I don't like them much, at least partially because they mess up my relatively well-ordered week. I should have done my hour of writing early in the day, but instead I fell victim to the dreaded "I'll do it later" and now it's after midnight. No writing done, and I have nobody to blame but myself.

So, this is where my weekly total kicks in. I have to do my 10k by Sunday night. Either I write a little more than usual each day, or I write an extra day. I'll let you know how that goes.

1.7.2 Apologies of Sorts (2005-08-02 19:11)

It's come to my attention that this blog has turned into a sort of report on my writing, with not many other topics covered, which really wasn't my intention. So I'll cut back a bit. Keep it down to a weekly update, which is probably as much information as any of you actually need. As for today though, I managed to get 2,258 words in, which is good, but not enough to make up for yesterday's lapse. Either I'll work on Saturday or I'll do double on Friday, when I'm off.

More interesting topics soon, including a series of top fives. Why? Because I say so, that's why. :)

1.7.3 Weekly Report (2005-08-05 23:40)

You know, if there's something in the world that I wouldn't do ever again, if I had the money or the means, it's take a bus trip lasting more than 30 minutes. City buses I can handle, because they're basic services. You don't expect much. Coaches, on the other hand... People are stuck on them for a while. They get bored, drink, eat and do what they like. A new coach, after a month or two, takes on the standard coach smell. That smell that says someone once vomited somewhere nearby and that smell is never going to really go away.

Did I mention I hate travelling by bus?

Anyhow, apart from that, the week has rounded off well enough. Prior to heading north

on Thursday evening, I had done about 4,600 words over two days. I managed 874 on the bus before nausea kicked in and didn't have time to do any more when I got home. However, two sessions today, a free day, gained me 2,300 and 2,500. Which, by my calculation, takes me comfortably over 10,000 for the week. So now I can enjoy the weekend.

1.7.4 Waiting for Stellar Revelation (2005-08-07 20:34)

It's been a good weekend, improved somewhat by the thought that I won't have to go to work tomorrow, so I'm not rushing back to Dublin yet. The weather's been great, and while I haven't made the most of it, I did spend 30-60 mins in the garden last night, watching the stars, trying to spot satellites and shooting stars. It was that clear, despite a few clouds passing overhead. Tonight looks set to be even better. There isn't a cloud in the sky at the moment, and there's only a little haze. I miss seeing the stars when I'm in Dublin. It's good to take the chance to see them here.

To tie this thought back to my writing, my main fantasy world is one where there are no stars to be seen in the night sky. Just thought I'd add that in...

1.7.5 New Thoughts (2005-08-09 22:22)

It's always nice when something you read (or, less often, watch or hear) provides a new thought, something you hadn't considered before. I had a moment like that today, reading Jared Diamond's "Guns, Germs and Steel," a history and exploration of humanity's development around the globe. This is the passage that provided it:

"...the disappearance of the big animals of Australia/New Guinea had . . . heavy consequences for subsequent human history. Those extinctions eliminated all the large wild animals that might otherwise have been candidates for domestication, and left native Australians and New Guineans with not a single native domestic animal."

Not a big thought, but a new one nonetheless, which is something to be thankful for.

Today's word count: 2,747

(2005-08-10 11:55:50)

"Those extinctions eliminated all the large wild animals that might otherwise have been candidates for domestication, and left native Australians and New Guineans with not a single native domestic animal." The word, I believe, is "doh!" Cf: the guy who cut down the last tree on Easter Island (featured in Diamond's follow up to GG &S - "Collapse").

1.7.6 Collaborative Works (2005-08-11 22:43)

I've been thinking about collaborative working today. Comes from having to edit some articles on grid computing and reading about Wikipedia in the Guardian. This is more of a ramble than a rant, but it may go on for a while, so I'll keep it under a cut.

The concept of wikipedia has fascinated me since I first heard about it, and I'm both pleased and surprised to find out that it's worked so well. Not too surprised though, for despite my generally cynical demeanour, I have a relatively positive attitude towards the abilities of and outlook for the human race.

The idea of people coming together shouldn't be limited just to information resources though. (Check out Warren Ellis's wonderful "Global Frequency" for a wikipedia-style intelligence agency, for example.) There are plenty of directions this style of working could be applied, but given my own preferences, it shouldn't be surprising that collaborative storytelling is the one that springs to mind first.

I first had this idea years ago, when the Web was just getting into the public eye. I'd written one novel, which I was coming to realise wasn't much good, but I was still adding to the world it was set in and wondered about the idea of setting it up on a Web site and offering it as an open-source setting, as such, for people to set their own stories in, to develop as they saw fit.

A pretty utopian idea, of course, and given that some friends of mine have been participants in an actual version of this—Wizards of the Coast's farming out of the original D & D world, Greyhawk, to player groups—and have experienced the problems involved, I know that it certainly wouldn't have worked as I first envisioned it.

However, I think the idea has some merit. Currently, there's something of this kind going on in massively multiplayer online games. To a greater or lesser degree, players have a role in the story of a shared world, though the particular game they play determines how much effect they can have on it. This varies from City of Heroes, which I play, where the players merely experience prewritten adventures and stories, through EVE Online, where player groups vie and clash with each other to shape the future of the game universe, to Second Life, where the players actually build the world that they and the other players experience.

There are two big hurdles that such creative collaboration faces. The first is involvement: there has to be a community of people willing to contribute to the endeavour in order to create something large, rich and diverse enough that people are going to want to take part in it and even add their own part to the story. However, as Wikipedia and Second Life have shown, there are people out there who are willing to get involved and be builders as well as players. If the tools are there, they'll be used.

The second problem is more fundamental. Every effort of this kind has to deal with how much control to give to the participants and how much to retain centrally. Wizards of the Coast's Living Greyhawk certainly seems to suffer from being very constrained by the company's guidelines, and City of Heroes' allure fades quite rapidly when the players' lack of ability to effect any real change in the game world becomes apparent. Equally, despite the diversity and depth of Second Life, what I know of it suggests that the people involved are creating more of an experience than a story, and it's story I'm interested in.

If I was ever to follow through on my idea to release my world to the world (and I'd like to) I'd have to find some way to strike a balance between my desire to maintain its integrity and the need to give anyone generous enough to offer their creativity the space they needed to tell the stories that they wanted to tell. For creativity is inherently personal. The stories that I write are the ones that I'd want to read, and it's going to be the same for any other writer.

Someone will do it eventually. Probably someone already has, though I haven't had my attention drawn to anything of the kind. I'll keep my eyes open though.

In other news, I managed to hit 10,000 words after only four days writing this week. I'll probably still write some more tomorrow. I'm now on Chapter 10, "Among the Grey People," which marks a bit of a change in the story, and I'm definitely getting faster. However, my original plan for W & C is shot to hell. Chapter 10 should have been Chapter 11, but the orig-

inal Chapter 10 got merged with Chapter 9 when I realised that my original Chapter 10 was nothing more than a chase scene. However, given that I've realised that my planned ending drags on too long, I'm now definitely over halfway, which is something to celebrate, I suppose.

(2005-08-12 09:02:51)

Just be careful before you release your baby into the world - once it's out it's hard to get back (or even keep control of). People may take it in directions you may not agree with and there's little enough you can do about that. So before you open it up, be sure that you're happy to let it go where ever people take it or have a mechanism to exert ultimate editorial control. There's also the small issue of IP rights. Once you open it up to shared development, you're effectively saying bye-bye to exclusive IP rights over your world, which may have a complicating effect on selling works related to the world (you'd have to prove that the material you're selling didn't include anything contributed from other people). If there's any shadow of a doubt, unless you share out the goodies, you're opening yourself up to accusations of plagiarism, IP theft and a whole world of legal hurt. Not that I'm a lawyer, mind, but that's my understanding of IP.

1.7.7 Confessions of a Fan (2005-08-14 23:11)

It has come to my attention that I may not have been entirely honest in keeping this journal. In an effort to preserve my reputation in front of my (presumably small) readership, I may have concealed just how much of a geek I am. I know propose to end any illusions on that point. Those of you who don't want to know of the depths that I'm capable of sinking to should probably not read any further...

Still here? Damn. Ok, on with the show.

First off, a little history: I've been reading comics since I can remember. I recall reading U.K. reprints of Marvel's "Secret Wars" series, among others, but most of my weekly reads were black and white British series, specifically "Spike," "Champ" and "Victor." (Because I started with Spike, which was folded into Champ, which was folded in turn into the long-running Victor.)

However, there was one comic series I particularly coveted. As it was the 80s, and I was a fairly standard-issue boy, my favourite toys were Transformers, not that I ever had too many of them. Accordingly, I wanted to buy the comic series that Marvel UK published, based on the toys. However, my Dad bought the comics, and he had read Victor in his youth, so I read Victor too. Eventually though, through an increase in pocket money, I managed to start buying Transformers UK itself.

I'll avoid going into too much painful detail, except to note that compared to the bland U.S. Transformers stories, the U.K.-created tales were set in the future and took great joy in killing off notable characters and inflicting carnage on many others (you can see why this appealed to me). Among the innovations of the U.K. comic was an entirely new character, a robotic bounty hunter by the name of Death's Head. Created by writer Simon Furman and artist Geoff Senior, Death's Head was a skull-faced businessman with an odd speech pattern and a general lack of moral qualms about his chosen profession.

I warmed to the character straight off, and when he was shipped from Transformers and into his own title, I followed. That title died off, but he made a few cameos in U.S. Marvel comics and had his own graphic novel, "The Body in Question," all of which I picked up. Then he vanished from the scene, yet another of my underdog favourites.

However, that wasn't the end. A few years later, Marvel UK decided to release its own line of comics to try to take advantage of the comics boom then ongoing. At the forefront of this effort was to be Death's Head, revamped by writer Dan Abnett and artist Liam Sharp as a wisecracking cyborg bounty hunter with even fewer morals and a marked physical resemblance to the Predator, Terminator and Aliens (why copy one if you can copy all three?).

The new series was a big success, perhaps too much so. Marvel UK horribly overexposed the character, Dan Abnett didn't seem to know where to take it and the Marvel UK line as a whole was expanding far too fast, with too many titles being put in the hands of substandard creators. There was a momentary revival as Liam Sharp gave the character new life in the "Death's Head Gold" miniseries, but just then Marvel UK imploded, taking Death's Head with it.

And thus it remained, except for the odd mention of the character in one comic or another, to this day.

Is there a point to all this rambling? Glad you asked. Last year, Marvel asked their readers to vote for a character to undergo a revamp in their "Amazing Fantasy" series. The winning character (out of a choice of four) was the Scorpion, who's since enjoyed a lot of coverage across the Marvel line. Now Marvel are doing it again. And one of the characters up for revamping is Death's Head.

So... If you'd like to do me a favour, head over to the [1]Marvel home page and add a vote for Death's Head. He's winning anyway, but every little helps. Be nice to an old man and his delusions, huh?

As regards my writing, so much for good intentions. I didn't actually get any writing done on Friday, or yesterday or today. But I reached my weekly target, so I don't feel too bad, and there may be benefits. The next section of the book features the introduction of the main antagonist, and ideas for that conversation have been running through my head all weekend. If I can get through the coming week and hit my quota (not easy - it's going to be a busy week), I might take a break next week and write 10k on some other stories. It might help refresh me on W & C.

1. <http://www.marvel.com/>

1.7.8 Absence makes the hair grow blonder.... (2005-08-16 23:10)

...or the heart grow fonder. Something like that.

This, as I may have mentioned before, is shaping up to be something of a mad week. Many meetings, many old friends, even a wedding or two. It all kicked off yesterday with the return of one of my best friends from a long stint doing good deeds around the world. Of course, she kicked off our reunion by roundly berating me for some of my recent actions (yes, I probably deserved it, no, I'm not going into details) but after that, it was nice to slip back into old habits.

This mad week didn't start too well writing-wise. No work yesterday, as I only got home around 11.00pm. However, I managed 2,774 words this evening, which (my wall chart tells me) is my best one-session amount by a solid 27 words. So, I'm on course for a 4-day week, which would be an achievement, given all that still lies ahead. I like a challenge...

1.7.9 Update (2005-08-21 19:25)

Well, I made it to the end of a pretty crazy week. It's been full of its good points, most especially in seeing two friends for the first time in a long time, and going on a trip into the Wicklow Mountains with one of them on a beautifully sunny day. Oh, and yesterday evening's quite, quite mad "battle of the sexes" boardgame, which I'm pleased to report that the guys won.

Also, despite a stuttering finish, I managed to hit my 10,000-word quota for the week, although only by means of a final effort on Sunday morning. But still, I'm relatively happy with myself. Over the last five weeks, I've put 52,139 words to electronic paper, and that's just W &C, which is now most of the way through chapter 11, wherein our main protagonist reacts to the events of chapter 9 by taking matters into her own hands. It's going well, but I think I'll take a break this week, and try the more difficult task of putting together 10,000 words in other pieces. Mostly, a rewrite of "Courier Duty" for [LJ User: blue_sun_story] and hopefully a completion of the long-abandoned "Middlement." Should be interesting.

laerfan (2005-08-22 10:25:20)
Good luck with that!

1.7.10 New Week (2005-08-22 23:13)

Well, a new week has begun, rising from the ashes of last week's craziness. Pretty standard day of work. Learned that I didn't get a promotion, but as it had been a long shot in any case, I wasn't too bothered about that. A nice lunch with friends and a relaxing evening punctuated by conversations and writing helped too.

Feels odd to be writing something other than W &C today. I reread "Courier Duty" today and was surprised by how clunky it felt for something I'd written only a few years ago. Not sure the rewrite is working perfectly though. I'll probably end up blending the two versions. 1,616 words is a little below my average and I'll have to work to hit my target this week, but a change is so far looking as good as a rest.

1.7.11 The Power of Marketing (2005-08-24 00:43)

Marketing professionals get a lot of grief. Mostly, they ask for it. After all, they belong to a profession that involves manipulating peoples' perceptions in order to part them from their hard-earned cash. But I'm firmly of the belief that there's no skill that can't be put to good use. To wit:

Anyone remember the femidom? Some years ago, it emerged from a laboratory, offering sexual freedom to women who would never have to force their partners to wear a condom again. It was an immediate, massive flop, largely because it looked like a colostomy bag, with which it also shared its innate sex appeal.

However, as this [1]story from the Guardian makes clear, the femidom has enjoyed better success in less privileged parts of the world. Why? Because of marketing. Rather than being marketed as a contraceptive, it's been promoted as a sex toy, thus encouraging insecure men to accept their partners' use of it. This is, in all ways, a good thing. A triumph of marketing, as it were.

Persuading the Catholic Church to accept it is a whole different story though...

1. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,,1554324,00.html>

1.7.12 New Images in my Brain (2005-08-24 23:52)

No writing tonight or last night, which is annoying. Good reasons both times, but it's frustrating. Trying to start writing when you get home after 11.30 is difficult, doubly so when your brain's not proving you with anything new and exciting. Getting to 10k this week is looking tricky, but I haven't given up yet.

Tonight's excuse was a sneak preview of "Serenity" at my local cinema. I won't say anything beyond the fact that it comfortably exceeded my high expectations. Anyone who saw and enjoyed the cancelled "Firefly" TV show should love it. Anyone who didn't, well . . . I can't be sure, as I'm a fan, but I think they'll love it too. As a bonus, I got to briefly meet the extremely cute Jewel Staite and the less cute but no less pleasant Sean Maher, who came along to answer questions and sign things for the fans. I have a photo somewhere...

But it's not a very good one. (Bloody cameraphone.) If I can fix it up I'll post it here.

1.7.13 Smells Like New Beginnings (2005-08-28 20:37)

Well, I haven't quite made it to 10k for the week yet, but as there's three and a half hours left and I've only 60 words to go, I think I'll make it. It's my own fault: after a slow start on Monday, I neglected writing for the rest of the week and was forced to do 3,500 words yesterday and 5,000 today to make the quota. It's been fun working on "Courier Duty" (not utterly happy with it yet, but I'll keep working on it) and "Dead Man's Troubles" (another novel, trying to keep it shorter and snappier, two chapters in now), but I'm ready to get back to "W &C" again.

Things seem to have generally halted otherwise. I'm more or less out of reading material at the moment, which hasn't been the case for a while, and I've little interest in the games available to me. Not sure what I'm going to do to occupy my free moments. I guess I'll find out when I get some.

1.7.14 Critchet (2005-08-29 21:07)

I share with my Dad the habit of occasionally mispronouncing words for humorous effect (as with "cricket," above). Or rather, I've inherited his habit. I had meant to write something about cricket and the fact that I'm now finding it mildly interesting for the first time in my life, but frankly, it's not that interesting. Not half as interesting as musing about all the hand-me-down habits I've picked up from my parents anyhow.

My support of West Brom is the most obvious place to start, but my love for the Goon Show, a 1950s-60s BBC Radio comedy is quirkier. I even quote it regularly, though my friends probably just take my various odd utterances as signs of my encroaching insanity. I also enjoy golf, like he does, and have a love of trivia and quizzes. My Mum's contribution is more subtle, but I think I share a certain scepticism and stubbornness with her. My bad points, I'm fairly sure, are all my own.

Writing-wise, my first evening back at W &C has gone well. Two doses, adding up to 2,463

words, and I'm now on Chapter 12, "Allies Against the Blight." Not far off two-thirds through, by my reckoning, which is a nice thought.

1.7.15 The Fiction Shelf (2005-08-30 23:23)

I found this on my USB key earlier on today. Appropriately enough, I'd forgotten about it. Hope you enjoy it.

The Fiction Shelf

A historian friend of mine has a theory that she calls "the fiction shelf." According to her, numerous works of fiction were once nothing of the sort. She believes that they were accurate and honest records of historical events, at least until everyone was persuaded them to consider them fictional. Of course, it all sounds a little ridiculous, but she's quite happy to go on about it when pressed. Sometimes I think she's pulling my leg, sometimes I'm not so sure.

She's vague on the details, of course. She claims that she can't identify which books were "relegated" (her word) to fiction, because (after all) those responsible did such a good job. And what exactly was this good job that they did? Well, she claims that it mostly involved, and still involves, removing any direct evidence supporting the reality of a work destined for fiction. All very unlikely and difficult today of course, but once upon a time, it wasn't so hard. (She claims it all began with the burning of the Great Library of Alexandria, but of course, she has no proof.)

When I accuse her of being a conspiracy theorist, she argues back that conspiracy theories are the modern version of the fiction shelf. Remove enough evidence supporting an event (or event fabricate some) and no one credible will come within a mile of it. She tells me that it doesn't take much work. People believe all sorts of things that are false, leaving no room for the actual truth. When I look at the newspapers and the TV, I begin to worry that she might be right.

But I try to avoid thinking like that for the most part. Even she tends to regard the theory as an intellectual game. It's not comfortable to think that the building blocks of our history are mostly fake, swapped for the real ones. Sometimes we talk about the real library, where all the true facts are stored. What would it be like to browse those shelves?

1.8 September

1.8.1 Weekly Report (2005-09-05 00:11)

Well, I made my quota again, hitting 10k words for the seventh week running, though it took a little effort on Sunday morning, which also brought me to the end of Chapter 12 of W & C. Mostly my own fault for not prioritising writing. I get the feeling that things are going to be harder for a while, so I'm going to have to get my head down. If I do, I can see myself reaching the end of the book some time in October. Not sure what I'll do then, but taking a break would certainly be the wrong thing.

1.8.2 Earnestly, honestly... (2005-09-06 00:26)

Went to a play this evening, a relatively rare endeavour. In this case, it was Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest" in the Abbey Theatre, performed by an all-male cast. Not

all of it went off perfectly, but in the main it was enjoyable enough, and the quality of Wilde's writing shone through some perhaps misguided attempts to provide a context for the play.

Writing wise, I made a good start to the week, with 2,395 words of chapter 13 of W &C, "The Last Castle." Some of it went far better than I expected, giving me hope that I'm not just on a hiding to nothing. Of course, my general frame of mind persuades me that this just means I'm going to have to rewrite the earlier parts of the book even more thoroughly, but it's nice to meet your expectations, however briefly.

1.8.3 Crazy Week (2005-09-10 11:33)

It's been a crazy week. I meant several times to offer up entries to the journal, but each time, I didn't quite make it.

First off, I wondered why everyone complains about Mondays. Tuesdays are worse. Tuesdays you don't even have the residual weekend high that you have on Mondays. This Tuesday was particularly bad: worked extra hours at work, headed out to Ashbourne on the bus afterwards, heard that a friend is getting married next year, returned to town, got the DART to Sutton, met my dad, returned to town, headed home and still had time for an hour of writing.

Wednesday was almost as bad. I was going to write about how Northern Ireland beating England at football is one of the few things that'll unite my mad little country, then I read an article in the Guardian the next day about how the various factional newspapers reported the story differently. Bloody depressing.

Thursday and Friday were just grim weatherwise. Not getting any writing done, after a good start to the week, compounded the error. Thankfully, an extra-strength burst this morning took me past 10k for the week, over 83k since I started up again and finished chapter 13. So all's well that ends well (almost).

1.8.4 Intelligent Mousetraps (2005-09-12 21:09)

Intelligent design is something of a hot topic at the moment. The proposal that evolution alone cannot explain the nature of life on earth and that some form of designer must have been involved has stirred up all sorts of emotional arguments between those in favour and those opposed. I naturally tend towards the latter camp, but I try to keep an open mind. However, I mostly end up reading rebuttals of intelligent design, so it was nice to read an [1]interview in today's Guardian with Michael Behe, one of the foremost proponents of intelligent design. As interviews go, it was entirely impartial, as it should be, and offered Behe the chance to put forward his idea in his own words.

I have to say that I didn't come away too impressed. The arguments that have been marshalled against intelligent design can be found in various places, so I'll just focus on one particular element that struck me from the interview: the mousetrap analogy. According to Behe, something like a mousetrap can be identified as having been designed by its "irreducible complexity." In other words, take out a part and it doesn't work. Similarly, any biological mechanism that cannot work without any one element (the eye for example) is irreducibly complex and therefore evidence of intelligent design.

It's a nice idea, but it ignores the fact that evolution doesn't work like that. Treating a mousetrap as an evolved device and reversing its evolutionary course wouldn't result in the disappearance of specific elements, making the mousetrap nonfunctional. Rather, it the precursors

to those elements would be similar but less effective: a weaker spring, perhaps, or a less-solid base. For the most part, evolution works in terms of numbers and gradual progress. Many small changes occur through mutation, the vast majority are discarded, some offer a benefit and are therefore retained. Occasionally, mutation brings major changes, but those are even more unlikely to be successful. Evolution doesn't just add elements, either: sometimes it drops them. Dodos lost the ability to fly, after all.

The main problem with intelligent design is not its philosophical basis: that we're all the products of someone else's design. It's that the arguments its proponents put forward are not based on the strength of their proposals. Rather, they're aimed at the gaps in evolutionary theory and the fossil record. This is a peculiarly anti-scientific approach from a group that desperately wants the scientific community to take them seriously. Science is all about identifying and defining gaps in knowledge and then determining exactly what might fit them. In contrast, intelligent design amounts to papering over the cracks.

1. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,,1567967,00.html>

(2005-09-13 09:45:57)

The Guardian had a great rebuttal of ID by Richard Dawkins recently that's worth checking out. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/life/feature/story/0,13026,1559743,00.html> Also - don't forget the Flying Spaghetti Monster... <http://www.venganza.org/> Finally, the best comment I've seen on this was a reply to an article on the BBC website: "So who designed the designer?"

(2005-09-13 09:51:16)

Just read the interview. Wow - is he wrong on so many levels. And modest too. Galileo had empirical evidence for what he proposed. Behe hasn't.

1.8.5 Games that blew me away... (2005-09-12 21:14)

As I've mentioned before, I don't play games as much as I once did. I'm still waiting for one that will have the same effect on me as others did back in the day. Perhaps there's not enough of a kid in me now to get that buzz. Anyway, here's some of those that I remember best, in a roughly chronological order.

1. Football Manager (BBC B)

The first game to ever grab me, I remember playing this at home on a BBC Micro and an old tape player. Hours and days were lost watching stick figures knock a four-pixel ball around and rearranging my team to guarantee that 7-0 victory. Utterly simple, completely addictive.

2. Sonic the Hedgehog (Sega Megadrive)

Mario may have had the better games, but for a few shining years, a spiky blue hedgehog had his measure. Sonic brought something completely new to the platform genre: speed. The experience of whizzing your character through level after level was exhilarating, and although Sonic 2 improved the formula, it was the first game that made the impact.

3. Civilisation (Mac)

I probably lost more time to this game than to any other. There's something about creating your own world and leading your people to glory in this game that inspires the dreaded "just one more turn" syndrome. It could be frustrating, but it always dragged you back.

4. Myst (Mac)

Some people would argue that it isn't a game, being more of a slideshow with puzzles. But it's

a direct descendant of text-based adventures, and it was something completely different in terms of the alien world it presented through eerie sounds and stunningly detailed graphics. Moreover, it was incredibly well designed and offered a great deal of satisfaction to reward the effort of working your way through its logical puzzles.

5. Panzer Dragoon Saga (Sega Saturn)

Atmosphere drips from this little-played gem, one of the last games released for a dying system. Set in a very alien world, created from a fusion of Japanese and French sensibilities, it's half action game and half roleplaying epic. Very affecting and difficult to describe to those who haven't experienced it.

6. Baldur's Gate I & II (Mac)

In terms of story, Baldur's Gate got it right. It employed not only the Dungeons & Dragons rules but also the roleplaying concept of a character becoming more and more powerful and thereby more and more influential over his or her world. The player is cast as the central character in an epic tale, beginning as a forsaken, yet destiny-starred youngster and eventually coming to . . . well, that would be telling. Even better, the supporting cast is excellently drawn and features both villains and allies with stories and personalities of their own. I'm seriously considering playing it again...

7. Shenmue I & II (Sega Dreamcast)

Mechanically, this game has numerous flaws, not the least that it's so slow-moving. But that's part of the joy of it. Presenting a Japanese village and environs (Shenmue) and a sampling of Hong Kong and Kowloon (Shenmue II) in amazing detail, it's a game that ought to be played slowly. Take time off from the main plotline and just wander around and explore this '80's recreation and pray to go the rumoured final part of the story gets made one day.

8. Soul Calibur (Sega Dreamcast)

I've never been a great fan of fighting games. The mania for Street Fighter II passed me by, and even Virtua Fighter II required a degree of serious application that may have been beyond me. Soul Calibur, on the other hand, is a joy to play, even for those who don't know what they're doing. Fluid and beautiful, it teaches the hopeless and hapless and encourages them to competency by doling out a multitude of extras as their performances improve. Simply fun to play.

Those are mine. What are yours?

(2005-09-13 09:21:50)

Eight games that ate my life - Part 1 1: Elite: The one, the original. Who could have thought that flying a wire frame polygon at other geometric shapes could be so addictive? But it was. Starting off as a Harmless free trader - the thrill of building your ship from nothing was the hook. There still is nothing to match the joy getting an ECM (no more panicked high g turns trying to blow that pirate missile out of the sky before it gets you), a docking computer (not only no more nerve shredding docking, but the Blue Danube in glorious midi sound) and best of all - military lasers to blow the bad guys into component atoms when they're still only a white dot on your view screen. Not to mention the buzz of flogging some cut price computers from an industrial world noted for its fuzzy hairdryer fauna on some dirtball agricultural planet for a small fortune. I still count it as a lifetime failure that I never got to Elite, despite blowing everything out the sky that crossed my path in 6 galaxies. Oft imitated but never equalled for sheer playability. 2: Airbourne Ranger - one of Micropose's classic stable of C64 games, this little beauty had you as a little pixilated US Ranger, crawling through equally pixilated battlefields nailing the bad guys by bayonet and Car4. Possibly one of the common ancestors of the sneaky, stealth military game. 3: Red Storm Rising - another Micropose classic, this time giving you command of a Los Angeles class nuclear attack sub. The graphics never got more sophisticated than

a very blocky cut animation of a ship being hit by torpedo/missile, but by god was it compelling to play. The strategic view was a map of Europe across which the Red tide remorselessly flowed or ebbed depending on the success or otherwise of your missions. If watching Denmark or West Germany being swallowed by the onrushing Red Army isn't motivation to succeed, I don't know what is. The main interface was a sonar screen where you tracked sonar contacts, stalking your prey until you got close enough to get a good targetting solution, launching your Mk 42s at the right moment, guiding them by wire away from your sub (cos the bad guys always snap fire torps back down the heading that your torps appear from) and closer to the target and then when it's too late for them to evade, hit the active guidance and watch all hell break loose as the enemy realise what's appeared right on top of them. Panic as a helicopter active sonar pings you. Dive deep as you can under the thermocline layer and hope their hunter killer torps don't find you. And the manual - like all Microprose manuals of the era - was essentially a textbook of Cold War naval warfare - ship designations, weapons, tactics - all a military geek (or a 12 year old boy) could need. It says something about the quality of the game that (like Elite) I dearly wish I could find a version of this to run on a PC today. 4: Soul Calibur: Like Ciaran, I'm not a fan of beat 'em up twitch games. Never really did anything for me. However, while pulling kung fu moves never hooked me, there's something very satisfying about beating the snot out of someone with a zweihander taller than your polygon-rendered self (guess which character was my favourite). It could also have something to do with wiping the floor with a certain friend of mine (who shall remain nameless to hide his shame) the first time we played this in an arcade in New York nearly 10 years ago...

(2005-09-13 09:22:58) Eight games that ate my life - Part 2

5: Masters of Orion 2: Microprose's last hurrah and the first game that I experienced time slip-page with. You know how it happens. You sit down at 10 in the evening, fully intent on playing a just few turns before bed, only to look up what seems like 10 minutes later to find that the sun's coming up and your legs have atrophied into vestigial boney appendages. Part of the fun of this little space conquest classic was playing it on a LAN in the university computer labs through the wee small hours when the security guards were having a snooze, then wandering out for breakfast, just as the place started to fill up with early arriving students and getting breakfast in the Kylemore overlooking Stephen's Green, before snoozing through a day of lectures. Ah - happy times. And yes the Darlocks are pricks. 6: Medieval Total War: Hello, I'm P. and I'm a Total War-aholic. While I largely missed out on the brilliant (but now sadly dated) Shogun, I have lost days of my life taking "just one more turn" and crushing Medieval Europe beneath my heavily armoured/sandaled heel. Combining the best of a turn based strategy and real time tactics, this is an all time classic of a game. There is nothing quite like the thrill of arraying your forces on a battle field, luring your opponent into a rash charge and then running your kataphraktoi or Armenian heavy cav. into the rear of his formations sending them scurrying from the field in utter rout. Or faced with an endless Mongol horde, setting up a defensive line on a mountainside and remorselessly unleashing arrowstorm after arrow storm into the massed ranks, luring his cavalry into forested killing zones and breaking wave after wave of attack, until your small bloodied force stands behind ramparts of enemy dead. I'm sure Rome TW is just as addictive, but luckily for me, I don't have the computing power (or the spare 6 months of my life) to run it just now. 7: Homeworld: MTW in space. Not. A compelling game for anyone who ever heard that line from Bladerunner about attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion and wondered just what C-beams would look like glittering in the dark. And of course, anyone who loved Battlestar Galactica. Not only does it have a great interface and a great idea - real time space combat in 3 dimensions - but it is just beautiful to watch. I've found myself entranced in the middle of a fierce fire fight at the beauty of the destruction I've wrought - a sky full of stars and every star an exploding ship. Combine that with a similarly epic story, some of the most atmospheric music in computer games (running the Total Wars and Halo to a close second and third) and the most emotional, epic, heart rending, jaw dropping and sublime moment in any computer game I've played (if you've played it you know what I'm talking about; if you haven't, then you should). 8: Halo (1 and 2): The most stylish, best plotted and purdiest darn First person shooter going. Half-Life has its groupies and I'm sure they'll give a shopping list of HL's strong points - but I ask them this, in HL have you ever

stuck a grenade onto an enemy grunt, heard his squeal of terror and then watched him run back into his mates, furiously trying to shake the thing off seconds before it explodes, cooking off all his mates grenades in a chain reaction of utter destruction while you cackle like a fiend in evil satisfaction? Or swatted enemy Banshees out of the air with a disdainful deflection shot from a Scorpion tank? No? Didn't think so. Great music, innovative visual design, fine gameplay options, and an absolutely epic storyline. But I never did learn how to jump properly. P.

cerandor (2005-09-14 19:50:43) Re: Eight games that ate my life - Part 2

I realised after I posted the list that I hadn't included any first-person shooters. While they haven't been a major feature of my gaming life, I have enjoyed several of them. However, although Halo and Deus Ex would occupy two of the top three positions among FPSs for me, the one I regret not putting on the list is an older vintage. Marathon II (Mac): I remember buying Marathon II during a holiday to the U.S. and having to wait until I got home before I played it. In an era when Doom II was wowing everyone with pseudo-3D and a bare-bones plot, Marathon II had genuine 3D and a truly involving story of mad AIs, alien religions and a "returning the favour" one-man invasion. Look here to see where Halo was born, but remember that Halo lacks Marathon II's greatest feature: dual-wielding shotguns. These are my boomsticks, baby!

1.8.6 Weekend Report (2005-09-17 14:24)

Well, it was another Saturday morning completion, but I don't feel too bad about that. Thursday and Friday evenings were very busy, and while I could have done a little writing then, I'd already almost finished by Wednesday evening, so this morning's work was very relaxed. Plus, I completed chapter 14 and began chapter 15, "The Mountains at the End of the World." With only a few chapters left, I genuinely feel, for the first time, that I'm on the final run in. It's a nice, if unusual, feeling.

The final score was 11k words for the week, bringing me to just over 94k in the last nine weeks. Which satisfies me. Now that winter is at last showing signs of approaching, I may have even more time to write, hopefully adding a little to this blog.

Oh, and I've posted a couple of pieces to [LJ User: blue_sun_story]. Go and check them out, if you haven't already, and let me know what you think.

laerfan (2005-09-17 18:36:17)

Congratulations on all the work and I will be reading your two new pieces on blue sun very soon. I've had so much to do that I haven't been really able to come on and read everything. You got an award for Lisou, didn't you? Yourself and yume_kokoro seem to be running away with a lot of the awards. Did you read the winner, "Fruits"? And if so, what did you think of it?

cerandor (2005-09-18 14:29:30)

I've been a bit lax in checking out some of the stories on blue sun. I'll have to be more proactive in commenting. I wouldn't say I'm running away with anything though. Still shooting for one of those gold awards...

(2005-09-19 13:05:42)

Good stories! Just been across to the Blue Sun. Can't decide which I prefer - Lisou or Marguerite. They're apples and oranges, I suppose, but I think Marguerite wins it by a nose (or a microhypo). :)

1.8.7 T=25 (2005-09-18 15:52)

I've been in a strange mood this weekend, for a variety of reasons. Lots of people coming and going, which tends to shake up the senses. Getting writing done over the work week is admirable, but it seems to have left me at a loose end now, with little drive to distract myself. I'm content enough to sit in my room, high up in a house of the dead, and decompress, but with no reading material and few games worth playing, my brain is just ticking over.

I'll pull myself out of it though. It'll just take a little effort.

(2005-09-19 14:52:22)

T=30! T=30! T=30!

cerandor (2005-09-19 20:03:43)

I applaud your mathematical acumen. :)

1.8.8 Apologies and Non-sequiturs (2005-09-18 22:56)

Well, that was a little slice of misery, wasn't it? Rest assured, I'm feeling better now. A day of decompression will do that for you. It may not be nice to avoid people, but it can be necessary and beneficial.

Watching a few really bad movies has raised a thought in my head: is it possible to write a story completely composed of non-sequiturs? To create an apparent whole out of completely disparate pieces? Is it possible to create something that stands as a single piece without weaving some kind of connection between its elements? It's just an idea, and I'll probably drop it, but it's a nice little thing to turn over in my head for a while.

(2005-09-19 14:53:23)

I hate to burst your bubble here, Ciary, but isn't that what Monty Python is all about?

cerandor (2005-09-19 20:02:44)

Well, yes, but the point is to do it in textual narrative format. Monty Python just took the standard British sketch show format and (copying Spike Milligan) knocked down the walls between the individual segments. Plus, I'm not just talking about running jokes. I'm thinking about some kind of patchwork effect. Actually, I'm not sure what I'm aiming for. But, as I said, it's nice to think about it.

(2005-09-20 08:29:26)

Sort of like Short Cuts or Magnolia - except without the coming together or crosstalk between the narrative threads? Or in fact with out narrative threads at all - just a series of unrelated events with no causal flow? Sort of like a camera flicking at random from person to person in a street, following them around for a minute or two and then flicking on to someone else? Like a jumble of microscope sections of people's lives?

cerandor (2005-09-20 19:16:23)

Effectively. I'm trying to think of a way to link them together without using something as unsubtle as a unifying "theme." Just arrange things so that when you finish reading the disparate bits, you get a feeling of some kind of unity. All very nebulous and vague at the moment and likely to remain so.

(2005-09-21 09:15:46)

By unifying theme - do you mean the narrative gimmick to present the different stories - like that novel "253" (<http://www.ryman-novel.com/info/why.htm>), where you get a page on the lives of each of the 253 passengers on a London Underground train ?

1.8.9 T-4=26 (2005-09-19 20:59)

It's been getting colder these last few days. Just crossing that border from summer's lingering warmth to the first autumn chills. Time to consider wearing a jumper over that T-shirt. Time to think about the fact that the students will be showing up soon and Trinity will be crawling with the bastards. Time to look forward to birthday season in my family. Time to think about the end of the year and all that brings...

Or maybe not. Time enough for all of that later.

1.8.10 T-3=27 (2005-09-20 19:58)

Writing, as I've forced myself to remember, is hard work. Like all hard work, it has its satisfactions too. Not all of them come from the hard work part of the equation either.

For example, as I was walking home from work this afternoon, I realised how W & C is going to finish. More specifically, the final scene popped up into my head as a stray idea blossomed into something more fully grown. I already knew the structure of the ending, but to have a final scene to sit in my head waiting to be written is something different. This week is going well, writing-wise. I should finish chapter 15 tomorrow (and pass the 100k word mark at the same time). Almost at the big climax now and getting plenty of satisfaction from writing out stuff that I've held in my head for a long, long time.

(2005-09-21 09:10:58)

Excellent - do you want us to, as Warren Ellis so eloquently put it, "Send pictures and music and fluid-stained declarations of [our] wrong love for [your] resonating, fluorescent headbones while [you] slave, slave over a hot writing machine for [our] entertainment, edification and masturbation-fodder"? Just asking. :)

cerandor (2005-09-21 16:17:44)

All donations will be grudgingly accepted. What I do with them thereafter is none of your business. :)

laerfan (2005-09-21 11:21:29)

Cool! Glad you're getting towards the end. It's so worth it when the thing is finished, isn't it?

cerandor (2005-09-21 16:18:40)

Tell you when I get there...

1.8.11 T-2=28 (2005-09-21 20:30)

One of those days. Lots of things to deal with and organise. Good things happening too, but mostly I've been clearing up hanging issues. Hopefully finalising a lot of them. Many things coming to an end, hopefully I'll get around to starting a few things too.

Writing-wise, also one of those days. Came to the end of an hour of writing and I was too

close to finishing a chapter to just stop yet far enough away that it took an extra half an hour to do. Ended up doing 3,600 words and brought chapter 15 to a close. Also, since I'd only been 100 words short of 100k (since beginning this burst of productivity) at the start of the day, I can safely say I seriously smashed that barrier. Which deserves a little celebration: Yay me!

Next up, chapter 16, "A Long-Delayed Death," which should contain the climax of the book (though not the end - two chapters of winding down planned thereafter). Kind of looking forward to it.

1.8.12 T-1=29 (2005-09-22 20:36)

Coming to the end of a stressful week, but all the bad stuff is mostly behind me now. Haven't written anything yet tonight. Not sure yet whether I will. I'm only 700 words shy of my quota for the week, so making that won't be a problem, but getting my head clear before I start again could be a good idea.

1.8.13 T=30 (2005-09-23 18:54)

Well, as some of you already knew, and the rest of you may have guessed, the big countdown on this week's blog entries was all about the fact that today is actually my 30th birthday. The fact that I've had other things on my mind all week has probably contributed to the fact that I haven't had any adverse reaction to this major change (no bodily parts withering or dropping off, for example) but that may yet come.

I've lived a third of my life (more or less) in Dublin now, and I assume I'll be sticking around a while longer. That's not the case for everyone. Over the last week or so, I've had to say goodbye to a couple of friends who've returned to the U.S. and Australia. As the people in question were among my very small collection of close female friends, it was that bit more of a wrench to see them go.

It's an odd time. There are weddings and babies happening among my contemporaries, some a little younger, some a little older. I'm enjoying the change and enjoying my life as it is, but there's an element of onlooker-status to it all.

Meh. Maybe I have been affected a little bit after all...

lostperdita (2005-09-24 04:05:26)

hey, i ve got nine lives, baby. i just keep coming back. and it ll be before you know it. glad to hear you had an enjoyable birthday celebration. i raised both a long-awaited margherita and yuengling lager in your honor. and tomorrow-pirates. woot!

1.8.14 A commentary (2005-09-24 04:15)

I've just had a most enjoyable evening that mostly revolved around excellent food and a few strenuous efforts to avoid letting my friends pay for everything. The most memorable moment of the evening? The point when Female Friend 1 decided to take a rest on Female Friend 2's bosom. The quote that follows is taken direct and unabridged.

FF1: "Hey, these are really comfy!"

And so, a well-kept male secret falls to the gentler sex. It wasn't my fault, honest...

1.8.15 Revelation (2005-09-24 19:33)

Revelations are good things. I'm listening to Arvo Part's "Te Deum" at the moment. I've heard some of his stuff before, notably "Tabula Rasa," but this is something else. Perhaps I'm still a little spaced after last night, but this is one of the best pieces I've ever heard. (And I was listening to Mozart just before.)

As a little birthday present for myself, I bought a few CDs and DVDs today. This was one. I'm very glad I did.

1.8.16 Bill Bailey (2005-09-25 23:54)

Just been to see Bill Bailey at the Olympia Theatre in Dublin. First comedy show I can recall actually seeing live and well worth the effort. Bailey's not really a 'joke' comedian: he tells three jokes during the evening, all clearly signposted and of the "three men walk into a bar variety." However, he's a consummate professional and extremely skilled, both at humour and at playing a variety of instruments (including a theremin). Although his efforts at social commentary sometimes come off as a little clumsy, they're invariably saved by a variety of surreal asides and digressions. The most amusing of which involved the difference between Siberian and Ukrainian hunting spiders. I'll tell you about it some day.

In other news, I've just noticed that I spent my first two days as a 30-year-old wearing a Transformers T-shirt. I don't know about you, but that's not the sort of behaviour that I expect from a responsible adult.

Writing-wise, I started chapter 16 and finished for the week this morning. Just over 11k words for the week, making a 10-week total of just over 105k. I think this week is going to be difficult though. We'll see how it goes.

laerfan (2005-09-26 08:04:29)

I couldn't get tickets for Bill! You lucky sod!

theanonamerican (2005-09-28 14:34:49) Are You Knocking the Transformers?

Oh aren't you great, Mr. Look-at-me-in-my-Decepticon-t-shirt? Some of us don't have one. And want one. And you are going through some kind of midlife crisis about it? Kids today don't know they are bloody born.

1.8.17 The Addict (2005-09-27 19:29)

I've been trying a few MMORPGs recently and getting a feel for how they work. Unlike most standard computer games, MMORPGs are supposed to be shared experiences, either with existing friends who come together online or players who gather together as a result of meeting in the game. They're also supposed to be devilishly addictive, with more than a few stories of relationships, and even lives, lost as a result of slavish playing. So, am I in danger? Well, there are a few signs.

Years ago, while still in college, I spent a while playing an online game called Valhalla. A

MUD (multi-user dungeon), it was a text-based adventure game with the added bonus of having other players running around. The sense of community was pretty impressive, but when the people running the game decided that they would have to start charging for it, I bailed. I was a poor student, after all, and could not afford credit cards.

Earlier this year, no longer a poor student and now a proud possessor of a credit card, I decided to test out this online gaming thing again. The impetus for this was Guild Wars, a game which was unusual in the industry in that it didn't charge a monthly fee. All you had to do was buy the game and get online. As such, it seemed a safe way to begin. It turned out to be a professional, polished and quite beautiful game, with a number of interesting mechanics and game design choices that helped make it something quite unusual. However, where it fell down, for me, was the fact that when you left the cities and towns that served as hubs for the game, you were alone in the world, along with whomever was in your group. General interaction was limited to the cities. After a few months of playing, my friends and I were a little jaded. Besides, there was something bigger and shinier on the horizon.

That something was City of Heroes. Unlike the fantasy-based Guild Wars and most MMORPGs, City of Heroes offered players the chance to be superheroes. After going through a wonderfully flexible character creation system, players were free to run around a modern city full to the brim with superheroes of all shapes and sizes. Literally. As with Guild Wars, the city was almost entirely full of hostile enemies, but the sense of community was much improved. However, despite a number of clever touches, the fact was that there wasn't much to do in the game beyond beating up bad guys. Moreover, although the game was polished enough, the graphics tended to be flat and lacking character. After a couple of months, I drifted away.

It was about a month ago that PC Gamer magazine offered a 14-day trial of World of Warcraft on its cover disc. WoW is the big dog among western MMORPGs, with millions of players, and is based on the best-selling Warcraft series of strategy games. The first thing that struck me when playing was how beautiful it looked. Although employing a more cartoon-like style than either Guild Wars or City of Heroes, WoW had a consistent sense of style that came through in the alternately bright or gloomy palettes employed. The character creation system seemed limited after the joys of City of Heroes, but the game itself ran well, with a satisfyingly physical feel to the combat. Moreover, the NPCs encountered and the storyline underlying the game all contributed to an impressive sense of atmosphere.

This atmosphere is best expressed by the game's travel system. Rather than a quick and easy system, players can move from zone to zone through the use of a variety of flying creatures. Although relatively lengthy, such flights show off the artistry involved in the game's creation to great effect. Of course, players can simply walk to the destinations in question, but the game world on offer is vast, and major journeys on foot can be genuine expeditions. All the same, the game gently prods players to expand their horizons out from the simple starter zones, giving them quests that take them over the hill and far away.

The game isn't perfect, of course, as it can take a bit of effort to get it running in a hostile online environment, but the wealth of resources and assistance available online go a long way to ensuring that players never feel alone.

So, am I addicted? Well, not yet. Although I enjoy WoW, days can quite happily pass by for me between sessions. All the same, earlier on today, I caught myself thinking about the game. Not about an epic combat, though one of those occurred last night. No, I was thinking about blacksmithing. Every character in WoW can have two professional skills, in addition to such general skills as cooking, first aid and fishing. These skills go a long way towards varying

the experiences on offer in the game. In addition to completing quests, characters can now be hunters, trappers, miners or craftsmen, filling their own little niche and swapping professions if they get bored. I've been told that Star Wars Galaxies, an older MMORPG, offered an even more deep and complex system of professions and skills, but any time I saw that game being played, it seemed as though the complexity worked against it, especially in presenting such an adventure-based setting as Star Wars. WoW makes it easy to get started in a profession and harder to become truly skilled.

One of my characters took mining and blacksmithing as skills, and this morning, I found myself strategising exactly how I might locate the resources I needed to improve my skill to the next level. Which is only slightly worrying. The best games infiltrate your mind like this. They have to, if you're going to persevere with them, doubly so for MMORPGs. Will I keep playing WoW. For a while at least. I'll try not to let it take over from anything more important though.

Writing wise, I'm two days and 4,500 words into a tough week. Chapter 16, as the structure currently holds, is the big climax, and I'm having trouble tying everything together and mentioning everything that needs mentioning. It'll probably be as heavily edited as anything in the book when I come to that stage, but it's better to do it as well as possible first time out.

rustynails9 (2005-09-28 11:57:42) The First One's Always Free...

Seriously, step away from the electronic crack now! The only person I know to escape so far has A.D.D so he was bound to get out.

theononamerican (2005-09-28 14:42:27) Don't Listen to Her, She's a Girl!

You really don't want to do that. Don't listen to the Flaming Redhead, she's a girl, and hence, is crazy. Stop, move back towards the shiny screen and pretty colours, sit down at the keyboard, and persevere. The level is very close. Just another little while.

rustynails9 (2005-09-28 15:15:03) Re: Don't Listen to Her, She's a Girl!

He's right don't listen to me I am only a girl; I really don't know what I'm talking about. Much better that you should become hooked on the electronic crack and have any semblance of a life away from the computer flushed down the toilet. Never mind what it'll do to your writing. Much better that you listen to the guy who can add talking about WoW with her flatmate while on a <i>"date"</i> to the list of things he shouldn't have done this week.

theononamerican (2005-09-28 15:27:32) Words in my Mouth

I feel so aggrieved. I didn't mean "Don't Listen to Her, She's a Girl" in a "Girls don't know what they are talking about way," I meant it in a "Girls Don't Get It" way. Cos yis don't. Anyway, as for the WoW chat, you were making tea and I was trying to be friendly cos we'd made loads of noise on Friday, and we talked about the West Wing as well. Besides, I thought it was called a "kashplunk" the other night cos who knows what you lot count as date? Girls go on half-dates. Apparently. Us guys (especially the unwitting male half-date participants) go "You do?" I like my word better, if only because kashplunking sounds dodgy on about five different levels.

theononamerican (2005-09-28 15:28:34) Re: Words in my Mouth

And when I say "dodgy", I don't mean "like the car" either.

rustynails9 (2005-09-28 18:45:03) Re: Words in my Mouth

<i>"Girls Don't Get It"</i> So you keep saying...I don't buy it. I don't think we disturbed <lj user="traveller_syll"> too much on Friday he didn't even hear everyone leaving. As for how we're referring to Monday night, that's a whole other conversation that I'm sure <lj user="cerandor"> doesn't want clogging up his post about MMORPGs. So lets have it else where. I'll just say the

<i>"half-date"</i> was all <lj user="laine316"> and was more to do with us mocking her over the <i>"third date rule"</i> than anything else. And WoW is still Electronic Crack!* *<small>Just to bring us back on topic</small>

theononamerican (2005-09-28 19:03:33) Ah Crap

Did you do that deliberately? I have it pictured: YHN: Oh man, please don't read this, please don't read this. [CUT TO: Dominick Street] The Chameleon: Come quickly, Author, Mick is getting bitch-slapped on the web by the Flaming Redhead. [The Chameleon immediately runs back out of the room, and the Author leaps to his feet, closely followed by the Dark Assassin] The Author: Assassin, bring the popcorn.

rustynails9 (2005-09-28 19:48:14) Re: Ah Crap

Did I do what deliberately? *bats eyelashes* You <i>"crazy stalker guy"</i> me around LJ, my LJ, my friends LJ's, your friends LJ's, trying to lay the smackdown on my candy a \$ \$ and you expect me to sit back and take it? Why on earth would I when you've given me Grade A could-he-f & \$k-this-up-more ammo to work with, only a fool would let that go :-) But lets just remember who brought it to the pubic forum.

cerandor (2005-09-28 19:51:34) Re: Ah Crap

"Pubic" forum? What kind of blog do you think this is? Go on, hush up the both of you. I'm trying to get some writing done. Sheesh. Kids these days... :)

rustynails9 (2005-09-28 20:01:28) Re: Ah Crap

Well to be fair I meant the public forum of Live Journal as opposed to your LJ in particular. *I* was only trying to make a comment relevant to your post. I tried to tell him you were a busy person with better things to be doing. So sorry for the interruption we'll now return you to your regular viewing :-)

(2005-09-28 20:04:47) Re: Ah Crap

You're not *actually* interrupting. I haven't started the writing yet. Besides which, it has been amusing to see Mick getting his ass handed to him. Not particularly original, but amusing nonetheless.

rustynails9 (2005-09-28 20:10:43) Re: Ah Crap

I'm glad I could be of service :-)

theononamerican (2005-09-29 08:27:37) Re: Ah Crap

There's pictures of the Flaming Redhead in Turkey on the Internet!!! If I'm going down, I'm taking everybody with me.

rustynails9 (2005-09-29 09:24:07) Re: Ah Crap

First off, that was the weakest, least thoughtful, least intelligent attempt yet! Secondly, are you <i>trying</i> to make it the longest list ever? Thirdly, keep this up and you're never going to make it to the <i>"third date"</i>

theononamerican (2005-09-29 10:44:37) Re: Ah Crap

She reraises me all in! I think the rest of this hand should DEFINITELY be taken away from here now.

(2005-09-29 11:23:35) Re: Ah Crap

Just in case I was ambiguous... I intend to call the reraise.

rustynails9 (2005-09-29 11:58:24) Re: Ah Crap

As the song says "...know when to <i>fold</i> em, know when to walk away, know when to <i>run</i>." You used all your poker luck last Saturday.

theanonamerican (2005-09-29 14:13:32) Re: Ah Crap

I used some of it on Saturday, but not all of it! I did get well jammy on that one big hand with you Ciaran though. I had Q-7, you had K-9 and I flopped the matching Queen. That was very spawny.

(2005-10-03 09:41:02) Re: Ah Crap

Well, now I've seen everything. 20-somethings using someone else's blog to regress to primary school playground boy-girl behaviour. He pulls her hair. She kicks him in the shins. The back of the bike sheds is that way, guys. The Chameleon (overdosed on popcorn and pig-tail pulling) ;D

1.8.18 Breaking the Back (2005-09-28 23:14)

Some Samuel Barber saw me through the evening as I broke the back of chapter 16 with 3,118 words, bringing me almost to the end of it. His "Adagio for Strings" is deservedly well known, but what I've heard of the rest of his stuff is also worth listening to, if quite different in tone. (Apart from the very similar "Agnus Dei.")

Heading back home tomorrow for a long weekend, hopefully finishing chapter 16 and making a start on 17 before the week is out. I'll have plenty to read while I'm there anyhow. Picked up the new Terry Pratchett paperback and tomorrow is new comic and magazine day. Looking forward to the rest.

theanonamerican (2005-09-29 10:46:23) Barber

He was amazing, I have to say. I absolutely LOVE Agnus Dei, it is better than Adagio for Strings. I think the choral harmonies make it much sadder. Fantastic stuff. "Not even beacons." I'm definitely gonna have to listen to some of that stuff.

1.8.19 New Beginnings (2005-09-30 22:59)

Chapter 16 finished, Chapter 17 begun. No total for the week yet, as my numbers are back down in Dublin. I'm happy enough though. It's difficult to get a rhythm going here at home, all the more so because I'm at a stage in the story where the tone of the writing ought to change, if not drastically, then at least noticeably. We'll see if I pull it off. Other than that, a relaxing day, almost wholly taken up with reading and writing. I tried to watch "Troy" again too, but the sense of disappointment was too great. At least it persuaded me to try some writing before bed.

1.9 October

1.9.1 Plague Ridden (2005-10-02 22:11)

I have a relatively good metabolism, all things considered. Colds and coughs are as bad as it usually gets for me. However, this doesn't stop me from complaining. I've had a cough for a

while, and when I went home for the weekend, it was slowly dying away. However, over the weekend, my declining cough met an ascending cold and the two of them decided to have a party in my respiratory organs.

It's not a pleasant position to be in, to have no orifices that you can reliably breath through. Going to sleep becomes next to impossible. Sodden hankies pile up beside you. You begin to doubt whether there is a god. (Not one of the more major problems, I'll admit.) In the end, sadly, you just have to live with it. Or, rather, live through it. Saturday was not fun, but I think I'm through the worst of it.

Looks like we've passed into the second of the year's two seasons: T-shirt and jumper.

laerfan (2005-10-04 12:14:43)

Well, I'm sure there's something that'll cheer you up on Blue Sun...

1.9.2 Redemption (2005-10-05 00:18)

We live in a world suffused with mediocrity. I don't like to rant (too much) so I'll confine this one to cinema. Last weekend, I ended up watching three mediocre films. The first was "Troy", which took an archetypal epic and stripped it of all the soaring, elemental characters that have helped it endure throughout the centuries. The second was "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen," which took a wonderfully crafted and fun book by Alan Moore and divested the characters within of anything remotely two- or three-dimensional, resulting in a mess of hyperbole and slapstick. The third movie was so mediocre that I've forgotten what it was.

The Matrix movies are the recent high water mark of mediocrity. The first film was a breath of fresh air that suggested that Hollywood action movies could be improved if a little thought were put into them. The next two indicated that no, what we needed was more SFX. Their tortured attempts at profundity merely showed off the emperor's lack of clothes and indicated that the first time round, viewer interpretation had been much more important than authorial intent.

In brighter news, I've almost caught up with my writing after a poor Monday. This is a break week, so I'm not writing W & C, even though I'm very close to the end. I'm writing Dead Man's Troubles instead, which is fun, as I make up half of it as I go along. Also, I was treated very well at this month's [LJ User: blue_sun_story] awards, which pleased me no end.

(2005-10-05 09:35:01)

Well, I did say how much I enjoyed "Marguerite" - it's a fine little story. As for mediocre movies - Serenity at least offers a light in the wilderness. I remember how I had a very satisfying explanation for everything after the second Matrix movie (which at that time was borne aloft by the potential of what the third film would bring - as opposed to being the biggest unfulfilled promise in recent cinema). I also remember the increasing incomprehension, disappointment and eventually anger as the the third movie unfolded and ruined everything. Emperor's new clothes indeed.

1.9.3 Round Up (2005-10-07 19:11)

For those of you coming late to the party (and because a few people have asked) here's some links to the stories that I've posted online to date.

[1]Derelict Station

[2]The Axeman

[3]Lisou

[4]Marguerite

[5]Nonsense

Oh, and just to add to the fun, here's a little scrap of a story that never grew up.

Robert has a problem. There's a Frenchman living in his head. He says his name's Michel.

It's bad enough to have a foreigner living in your head, but Robert speaks little French, and Michel speaks just as little English. Things might be better if they were willing to teach one another, but the plain fact is that Robert and Michel just don't like one another. Robert thinks Michel is a snob, forever complaining about English food and English entertainment, and Michel thinks that Robert is a boor, living a life devoid of culture and deliberately antagonising his guest. Their relationship has taken on the trappings of an undeclared war. Michel demands that Robert read Balzac and Proust in the original French: Robert refuses. Robert demands to know what Michel is doing in his head in the first place: Michel keeps his counsel.

If this goes on for much longer, Robert is somewhat concerned that he might just go mad.

1. http://www.livejournal.com/community/blue_sun_story/1372.html#cutid1
2. <http://www.livejournal.com/users/cerandor/13471.html#cutid1>
3. http://www.livejournal.com/community/blue_sun_story/15059.html#cutid1
4. http://www.livejournal.com/community/blue_sun_story/19106.html#cutid1
5. http://www.livejournal.com/community/blue_sun_story/19391.html#cutid1

rustynails9 (2005-10-13 15:59:32)

Well I've finally found the time to read them all and I have to say I really enjoyed them. I think my favourite is <i>Derelict Station</i> followed closely by <i>Marguerite</i> which I found surprising as they both have a Sci-Fi feel to them and I'm not normally a sci-fi fan. But all the writing is beautiful and compelling in my humble opinion and I really look forward to reading more. Even the little story that never grew up grabbed me.

cerandor (2005-10-13 20:45:10)

Thanks for that. It's been a tough month so far and I'm not going to be clear of it for a few weeks yet, so my writing seems to be restricted to the novel I'm working on. If I can knock out anything else that I think is good enough, and of potential interest to anyone else, I'll post it up.

rustynails9 (2005-10-14 09:32:10)

I look forward to it :-)

1.9.4 The Irishmen who went up a mountain... (2005-10-10 00:19)

...or, rather, a few hills. It's been a busy weekend. Lots of going out and going up. even got my writing done too. The biggest portion of it though was a hill walking trip around the Wicklow

Mountains near Glendalough. Given that I'd been out the previous night, getting up at 7.30 in order to meet up for the trip wasn't appealing, but it had to be done.

After some false starts, we headed south on the N11. To offer deniability to the innocent/guilty, I'm going to be using nicknames here. My companions were the chameleon and the lawyer, who was doing the driving. Due to my own mistakes, and Irish road signage, we ended up going much further south on the main road than intended and enjoyed a detour through the country before getting to Glendalough itself. (In my defence, if we'd taken the route I suggested in the first place, this wouldn't have been a problem.)

Once at Glendalough, it was on with the hiking boots and up the hills. We headed west along the Spink ridge at first. This was probably the worst part of the walk for me, as my dodgy state of personal fitness was severely tested. Thankfully, after we got above the trees, there were some great views down the valley and no rain to bother us.

The rain did show up later, but by then we'd left the Spink behind and were traversing another ridge, curving around to make a run at the mountain peak that was our goal. However, our well-paved path was now faced with plenty of soft, peaty earth, not at all easy to get across. Not bringing a spare pair of trousers with me was looking like a serious error.

We hit the peak and descended out of the wind (some short rain had eased off by now) and enjoyed some Mars Bars, tea and hot chocolate. Then it was all about finding a way downhill. Which turned out to be tougher than expected. We even dived into some tree plantations for a while, during which the chameleon went exploring and came back, walking within ten feet of us on his way out without seeing us.

Thankfully, after wandering round the trees for a while, a ranger track opened up and the car park we'd left behind a few hours earlier was just a stroll downhill. It took us three and a half hours in the end, and if my legs are stiff right now, at least I managed to survive the whole thing.

As for writing, I finished up this morning with 2,723 words, bringing me to just over 10k for the week. This was my week off, so it's back to W &C tomorrow, hoping to finish it over the next two weeks. Not sure what comes after that though.

lostperdita (2005-10-11 00:37:33)

i've only walked along the lakes. i think i have a new item to add to my next dublin to-do list, assuming i get my hiking boots back from wales by then.

cerandor (2005-10-13 20:52:55)

It got pretty boggy up there, but other than some steep climbing at the start, it wasn't too bad. I was too tired to write a full report on it. Some of the views were amazing, though. Sadly I only got my camera back two days after the trip, so all I had was my so-so phone cam. If we can arrange it, we might try for Slieve Donard in the Mourne's next time. It's a shorter climb, but it's steeper and taller.

1.9.5 Notes in the Margins (2005-10-13 00:04)

Lots I want to write about, but there's no time. I'm barely managing to get my writing done at the moment. However, I have just finished chapter 17. Just one more to go. At this rate, I should be done early next week, which feels weird. After all, once I've finished W &C,

I've promised that I'm going to get started on something else straight after. Which might be overdoing it, but I don't want to get off this roll right now, and five hours a week devoted to writing isn't exactly strenuous. Here's hoping that there are no roadblocks between now and the end of the year.

1.9.6 Persian Fire (2005-10-14 21:12)

I recently finished reading "Persian Fire," the latest book by Tom Holland, author of "Rubicon," which I've mentioned here before. "Persian Fire," like the earlier book, takes an era of history and presents it in an easily digestible manner, focusing as much on the nature of the era as on the events it describes. As its name suggests, Holland's new book focuses on Persia, from the period of Cyrus the Great, who founded the Persian Empire, and the Battle of Plataea, which ended Persian efforts to conquer Greece.

It's a fine book, but it left me a little unsatisfied. The tale of such battles as Thermopylae and Salamis is well told, but as much space is given to the well-known Athenian and Spartan civilisations as to the less-well-understood Persians. In particular, I'd like to know what happened to Persia in the century or so between Plataea and Alexander the Great's conquest of their realm. That said, the book does contain some sublime moments, such as Leonidas's decision, when marching off to Thermopylae, to replace his traditional guard of young Spartan men with veterans who had already fathered sons, and the Athenian Themistocles' trickery of the Persians at Salamis.

Writing Report: Almost done for the week. One more session should do it, then another one or two and the book is done. It's proving very difficult to end things though.

(2005-10-17 11:05:19)

"Gates of Fire" by Steven Pressfield fictionalises this very effectively. The Spartans always got the best quotes (largely thanks to good press from Herodotus, I think), like, for example, when Xerxes sends a herald to tell the Spartans to surrender their weapons - Leonidas' response was "Come take them". When told that the arrows of the Persians were so many that they blotted out the sun, one of the Spartans, Dienekes, replied: "Good - then we will fight in the shade". Even their epitaph was epic: "Stranger, go tell the Spartans that here we are buried, obedient to their laws."

1.9.7 Done (2005-10-16 11:58)

I reached my total for the week yesterday morning, after another session where I found it difficult to force myself to sit down and write. However, I knew that I was close to the end. Maybe only 2,000 words away. So I started to write this morning, not long after I woke up. 2,992 words later, I was finished. Finished finished. "Windshadow & Crumbledust" is done, at least in first draft form.

Not sure how I feel about that yet. Need to get it printed out in order to start editing it, but that might be put off for a while; give me some space from it. In the meantime, I need a break, but not immediately. I'm on just shy of 140k words after 13 weeks of writing. If I can do a little more than 10k next week, I'll be 10k ahead of my overall target rate. Which will give me the justification I need to take a week off. Things are really busy at the moment, and I could really do with those extra five hours a week...

theanonamerican (2005-10-16 14:53:49) Wahay!!!

Woohoo! Well done, my friend. Now that you are at a loss for stuff to do, can I recommend doing a PhD? Seriously, they are a lot of fun, and won't take up much of your time...

(2005-10-17 18:56:57) Re: Wahay!!!

At a loss for things to do? I never said I was finished writing: just that I'd finished *this* book...

laerfan (2005-10-17 12:25:59)

Congrats on finishing the novel. If you ever need a proofer look no further.

cerandor (2005-10-17 18:58:13)

A surprising number of people have offered to proofread the book for me. I'm certainly going to be taking some of them up on it, but only once I have it in a shape fit to be shown to people.

(2005-10-19 12:58:59) Congratulations!

Wow, well done man! Reading how the word count has crept (raced?) up and hearing about chapters being finished was a story in itself; can't wait for the next one :)

(2005-10-19 12:59:39) Re: Congratulations!

oops, forgot to sign, that was from Michael O'B

cerandor (2005-10-19 16:26:50) Re: Congratulations!

Oddly enough, I knew it was you before I got the confirmation. Evidently your speech patterns come through when you write...

1.9.8 Another Book (2005-10-16 22:32)

Old habits die hardest. Back in my younger days (said the greybeard), I used to be something of a fast reader. I finished "The Lord of the Rings" in three days once. These days, though, I rarely have the time or the desire to indulge in a book to such a degree. However, when a good one comes along... I bought George R.R. Martin's "A Feast for Crows" yesterday morning, one of only a few copies that hadn't already sold out. I'd been waiting for it for quite a while, as I'd loved the earlier books in the "Song of Ice and Fire" cycle. This one was a brick of a hardback, weighing in just shy of 700 pages of story, plus appendices. I finished it half an hour ago.

It's well worth the read, and no, I'm not going to give away any spoilers. Here, Martin's tale veers into some genuine Shakespearean tragedy, as various characters are laid low by their flaws and genuinely awful things happen to both the deserving and the undeserving. The big disappointment is due to the fact that it's only a small part of a much larger tale, and so many loose ends are left untied. Thankfully, the next book is due out in less than a year, so I won't have to wait quite as long for a continuance.

rustynails9 (2005-10-17 09:04:34)

Want, want, want! Curse me and my desire to share the joy of <i>A Song of Ice and Fire</i> I'm still rereading the first one cos I only got it back recently :-)

amanita_d (2005-10-17 09:42:53)

Got to get those books - I've a feeling I should reread the first ones as well though, since the last one I read was over 3 years ago if I remember correctly. Just remembered about them last week, actually, and went looking for the proper list online (which I found and promptly lost again... doh.)

rustynails9 (2005-10-17 10:40:43)

I'd recommend reading them again. It's been about three years since I read them for the second or third time and as I go through this time I'm keep thinking "Man I forgot all about that!"

theononamerican (2005-10-17 16:09:41) A Generous Offer

I bought it today, and I hereby offer my services to tell you whatever you want to know about what happens while you are playing catchup.

rustynails9 (2005-10-17 16:13:33) Re: A Generous Offer

And I hereby promise to hurt you BADLY if you do!

(2005-10-18 13:08:19) Re: A Generous Offer

Is that supposed to be some sort of deterrent? Cos, I gotta tell ya, it's having the opposite effect.

rustynails9 (2005-10-18 13:33:23) Re: A Generous Offer

Whoa!!! Down boy! Nobody wants to hear that!!! All I'm saying is you take your life in your hands if you spoil <i>anything</i> from A Feast for Crows

(2005-10-17 11:11:38)

Damn your (no doubt tired) eyes! I have a feeling I know at least two characters that bad things are likely to happen to, neither of whom I want bad things to happen to (but one's being living a charmed existence (of sorts) from so long now, the other shoes got to fall). But that's one of the refreshing things about "Ice and Fire" - Westeros is as gritty, real and nasty as the real world and Martin isn't afraid to kill off beloved characters.

1.9.9 Associations (2005-10-20 22:31)

It's odd, the coincidences that appear in our lives. Some of them may not be coincidences at all, of course. I had a topic in mind for this blog, one that referenced my dad. It seems like complete coincidence that today happens to be his birthday.

A few times in recent days, I've passed by people smoking pipes in the street. There aren't that many pipe smokers around these days, so the particular aroma of pipe tobacco isn't a common smell. I've spent a lot of my life (especially the past ten years) around smokers, and I have to say that the scent of pipe tobacco is one I easily prefer to cigars. Cigarettes come a very distant last.

The reason is that I associate the smell of pipe tobacco with my dad. He doesn't smoke a pipe any more, but when I was a kid and he was still managing local football and gaelic teams, he did. That's the image that I built up of him: a font of knowledge, quietly observing things before commenting and occasionally with a pipe in his mouth. It's a bit old-fashioned, maybe, but that's how I like to think of him. I can't honestly say that there's anyone I look up to more, and I feel more than a little lucky that I'm able to say that.

Writings: For those of you keeping track, yes, I'm still writing. Hopping between projects and ideas at the moment before I settle on something. Just shy of 7k for the week so far, so comfortably on course. I also now have a hard copy print of W & C, so editing can begin presently. I may offer a chapter-by-chapter word count breakdown some time soon.

theanonamerican (2005-10-21 23:56:24) Yep

I can totally picture your father with a pipe, actually. He has that air about him, doesn't he?

1.9.10 A Week Off (2005-10-23 22:14)

Finally got my writing done for the week, sneaking over the 150,000 word total. As I've done this in 14 weeks, I have, by my admittedly slapdash rules, just earned myself a week off. I may end up doing some writing anyway, but I'm not planning to. It's been hard trying to write stuff without any planning. I need some structure before I start up again next week, and if I do any work this week, it'll be structural stuff most likely.

To celebrate, I took the Zombie Survival Test. I feel it's important to know these things.

```
Official Survivor
Congratulations! You scored 62%!
Whether through ferocity or quickness, you made it out. You made the
right choice most of the time, but you probably screwed up somewhere.
Nobody's perfect, at least you're alive.
[5349989821747660792-3.jpg]
```

My test tracked 1 variable How you compared to other people your age and gender:

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[1]free online dating [2]free online dating
You scored higher than 8% on survivalpoints
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Link: [3]The Zombie Scenario Survivor Test written by [4]ci8db4uok on [5]OkCupid Free Online Dating, home of the [6]32-Type Dating Test

1. <http://www.okcupid.com/>
2. <http://www.okcupid.com/>
3. <http://www.okcupid.com/tests/take?testid=5349989821747660792>
4. <http://www.okcupid.com/profile?tuid=773812361575599080>
5. <http://www.okcupid.com/>
6. <http://www.okcupid.com/oktest3>

(2005-10-24 09:05:55) Send more cops...

Woo! I got 70 % and higher than 30 % of folk. Bring on the zombie death!

1.9.11 Return of the Lazyman (2005-10-30 17:04)

Yeah, it's been a week since my last entry. I've had a lazier time than I expected. Which is not to say that I haven't been doing anything; just that writing has dropped on my list of priorities. Of course, come tomorrow, that has to change. Back to the grindstone it is. Problematically, a week of occasional consideration has failed to unveil the project I ought to be working on. I guess I'll figure it out by tomorrow though.

Right now, I've made it home and am sitting comfortably on the couch in the company of my granny, mum, dad and baby brother. (Baby brother is 16, of course, but I already have another little brother.) It's half time in the match between West Brom and Newcastle, and there seems to be a good chance of West Brom getting something out of this. It's all about to start up again. I'll be back later with a report.

1.9.12 Deflation (2005-10-30 17:55)

No sooner had the half started than Michael Owen snapped in a cross, putting West Brom a goal down. After that, WBA had the better of the second half, only to get hit by two more goals, both just like the first, by Owen and Alan Shearer. Not the most fun of afternoons...

1.9.13 Amassing Grace (2005-10-31 21:28)

One of the problems with heading home is trying to calculate whether or not this is going to require me to go to mass. There are times, alas, when it cannot be avoided. Nonetheless, there are sometimes compensations. This evening, one of the readings came from the last book of the bible, which I was pleased to note was not called by the cop-out name of the "Book of Revelations" but rather by the more descriptive "Book of the Apocalypse." As a kid, I always preferred listening to readings from this particular book. As opposed to the obvious homilies and tedious allegories, the Book of the Apocalypse offers a solid chunk of imaginative prose and lurid tales. I suppose it was an early instance of my preference for imaginative rather than descriptive fiction.

In any case, by the time that I'd spent the first eighteen years of my life attending mass at least once a week, I'd heard pretty much every slice of the Old and New Testaments that the Catholic Church was prepared to offer me. Several times over in pretty much every case. Sort of "God's Greatest Hits," if you will. To hear the album tracks and the B-sides, you've got to delve into the book itself. It's fascinating, the stuff you'll find in there. It's also fascinating, the amount of supposedly religious Christians who've never read it...

This evening? I've just finished reading "The System of the World," the last part of Neal Stephenson's exhaustive epic, "The Baroque Cycle." I deem it good. Time get a little writing done.

laerfan (2005-11-04 15:36:13)

I've read Quicksilver, but only the first book in it. It is exhaustive...

1.10 November

1.10.1 Compliant (2005-11-03 21:54)

It's been a tricky week. All weeks are tricky, to one degree or another, of course, but this one particularly so. Taking a week off writing and then coming back and expecting to pick up once again without knowing what I was going to write was not, in retrospect, the wisest move I could have made. I'm at least a day behind schedule, but at least I've done something. No complaints.

I don't like complaining, as a rule. This may surprise those who know me and have had to suffer my whinging on one topic or another, but it shouldn't. When I do complain, I feel guilty for doing so. I'm very aware that on a large scale and a small scale, I have very little to complain about. I've been very lucky in life, and so I've had few outlets for really serious moaning. As a consequence, when I get the chance to complain, I tend to take it. I then feel guilty about doing so, which makes me depressed, which makes me complain all the more. Such is my life. (See what I mean?)

Anyway, be off with you. I bought the new "Desolation Jones" today and I want to read it again.

1.10.2 End of Week Report (2005-11-06 21:11)

Well, the week started out badly, with no writing on Monday and nowhere near enough over the next three days, but I managed to get back into the habit on Thursday and ended up with a total for the week of 10,985. Which will do for starters. That included an array of projects, among which were two longer pieces that had been languishing incomplete for a while, so it was nice to clear them out of the way. I think I may be starting another book tomorrow, but I'll wait before commenting on that. It may not turn out as I hope.

I also bought Civilization IV yesterday, which may have been a mistake. I love the series, and this looks like it could be the best yet, but I don't have the time I once did to devote myself to a game like that, and it's never going to be as satisfying just playing it casually. I also really ought to start editing W & C soon. It's been three weeks since I finished it, and I was planning on starting to read it over this weekend, but it's now too late on a Sunday to get started. Some time this week then.

1.10.3 Monday Blues (2005-11-07 23:43)

Not sure why, but I'm not feeling mentally with it today. Odd, because I've been pretty productive for the last few days. Maybe it's because there have been lots of other things sapping at my time. Distractions can grate, even when other things are being accomplished.

Only 1,803 words tonight. Below average, but on the bright side, I didn't start until quite late, and I have just started something new. Not sure about it yet, but it feels right. It's an old project that might have come round at last. "W & C" might have been the right warm-up for it. No details yet, but I can give the name: "Malq"

1.10.4 Adversity, adversely... (2005-11-08 23:53)

I've been thinking about adversity recently, and how I deal with it. I'm not overly prone to panic - I think of myself as pretty stoical, albeit in a muttering, grumbling kind of way. How-

ever, I don't face too many crises, as a rule. I'm a little too organised, a little too anal for that. Things just rumble onwards, and I deal with problems as they come up. I'm not sure whether that's better or worse than being able to face disaster with steely nerve and unblinking eye. I'm not sure how I'd cope if I ever did find myself in such a situation.

I posted a new [1]short story on [LJ User: blue _sun _story] a day or two ago. Feel free to take a look.

1. http://www.livejournal.com/community/blue_sun_story/28989.html#cutid1

rustynails9 (2005-11-09 10:59:48)

You big tease! That story pulls you in, grabs hold of your brain and leaves you wondering, imagining and wanting more. I'm going to be thinking about it all day now! Good Stuff :-)

1.10.5 Pub quizzes will be the death of me... (2005-11-10 21:25)

Ok, so I'm a quiz-lover. When I'm invited to a pub quiz, I need a pretty good reason not to go. My question-answering abilities may not be what they once were, but I'm still a pretty useful person to have in a four man team. Unfortunately, quizzes happen to be one of the few things that will reliably get me worked up. My judgement tends to get a little impaired under those circumstances, and pubs are known for serving a substance known as "beer."

To cut a long story short, I got quite drunk last night. It was only four pints of Erdinger, but I hadn't eaten since lunch. Luckily, it only really hit me when I got home (I assume finally standing up and taking a walk in the fresh air didn't help). Apparently I was in quite a state by the time that I finally crawled into bed. Not that I really remember it too clearly. I'd love to say I'll know better next time, but pub quizzes happen quite regularly, don't they?

rustynails9 (2005-11-11 12:33:43)

Excellent you're poker skillz should be lacking tonight so :-D

theanonamerican (2005-11-11 12:45:52)

Hopefully, but he does have this annoying habit of doing well, if only because it annoys the rest of us.

cerandor (2005-11-11 17:58:01)

Quite so. And I reserve the right to gloat should things go my way. (Mostly because I'm sure that the two of you will do just that yourselves.)

rustynails9 (2005-11-16 14:49:04)

I'm hurt I didn't gloat, well not Friday night anyway :-)

1.10.6 Poker Too (2005-11-12 01:46)

It was, as they say at home, a sharp night. You could feel the knives. I had a poker date out in [1]Mick's place, with Mick, [LJ User: rustynails9] and one of Mick's former students, whose nickname, courtesy of Mick, I will not employ herein. Mick's apartment is a fairly salubrious one, and over the course of the evening, we enjoyed pizza, drinks and two games of poker. First game, I was sadly first one out. I had two pair, queens and kings, but lost going all-in against four queens. Not fun. After that, Mick's former student got over her lack of experience

quite quickly and took Mick to the wire. Sadly, the learner did not, on this occasion become the master.

Second time out, things went better for me. Some big hands helped me build up a stack of chips, while the student gained her revenge on Mick by putting him out. I then did the same to her, so it was down to me and [LJ User: rustynails9]. Things went my way at first, but two big hands decimated my chips and eventually I went out going all-in in search of a flush that wasn't to be. Still, I wasn't too displeased with the way I played.

Writing wise, I'm a few hundred words short of being done for the week. Finished the first chapter of "Malq" (chapters are geographically segregated, so the titles wouldn't mean anything to anyone but me) and will do a bit of chapter two tomorrow. I like leaving things off half-way through. Makes it easier to get back into them later. I'll write a bit more about the process of writing this new book and how it differs from the old next week.

1. <http://mickcooney.blogspot.com/>

1.10.7 Poker Three (2005-11-13 21:46)

So I ended up playing poker again last night. Two games, won one and should have won the second but reverted to old impatient ways. Finished the weekend up €15, which I'll accept. As a result of two late nights and one early morning, I didn't wake until 11.30 today, which was most satisfying. Spent my winnings on dinner at Wagamama and then helped a friend move to her new flat. Sitting at home now wondering if it's too late to do some purposeful reading.

You know what? No it's not.

(Oh, and for the ongoing record, I ended with 11,183 words for the week, 172,361 for the running total. This takes me into chapter 2 of Malq.)

1.10.8 Recovered (2005-11-16 23:14)

For a variety of reasons, I got no writing done on Monday. Which is not to say that I got nothing done, just that by the time I got home, writing was a distant and rapidly retreating prospect. Happily, yesterday and today, I managed to do three days work in two, and am back on course. I hadn't intended to do o much (weekends being the period for making up lost time) but I ended up writing my way through chapters two and three of Malq quite happily.

Perhaps I was inspired. I was out at a radio interview with Neil Gaiman yesterday, which was attended by a crowd of around 200 people. He was as I remembered him (I did a phone interview with him about 8 years ago) unfailingly polite and charming. Definite proof that nice guys don't have to finish last. I picked up a copy of his Anansi Boys for him to sign and I'll be reading it over the next while.

The last three days have been pretty mad for one reason or another, but it all seems to have come together and a lot has been achieved. I'm looking forward to some roleplaying at the weekend (my first in what seems like ages) and the run in to Christmas is at last looking doable.

lostperdita (2005-11-16 23:44:19)

yay! i wondered if anyone would attend the interview. lord knows, if i was around i d be poking and prodding people to go. sadly i have missed him entirely. stupid middle-of-nowhere.

aeredhal (2005-11-17 02:11:32)
Whats the game this weekend?

1.10.9 Weekend Report (2005-11-18 22:56)

Got finished my writing on a Friday for the first time since the end of September, which is a pleasant change. 10,467 words for the week, 182,828 for the running total. Still on chapter four of Malq, but this will be a little longer than the previous ones, so that's okay.

Anyway, I'm off to the pub. See you next week.

1.10.10 Anansi Boys (2005-11-20 23:33)

Just finished reading Neil Gaiman's "Anansi Boys." My advice to you: go read it (you can borrow my copy if you like). I'm going to resist claiming that it's better than "American Gods" which it's a sort-of-sequel to, but it probably is. I just like the broader canvas of "Gods" mythology more. Gaiman (I met him last week, but we're not on first name terms) has written surprisingly few novels, but each one seems to have been better than the last. I may now have to go seek out "Smoke and Mirrors," his short story collection.

1.10.11 What we leave out (2005-11-22 22:23)

What you don't write is as important as what you do. In any ongoing narrative, you have to make decisions as to which events you show and which you just refer to. The bigger your story, the more unseen elements you'll have. This has been a problem of mine. All the way through writing W & C, I found myself writing unnecessary scenes: people walking from point A to point B, people discussing something in detail that would be better referred to in passing, etc. (This is the sort of stuff I'll be cutting out when I get around to editing the damn thing.)

With Malq, I appear to have this problem under control, at least a little. I'm still overwriting, but things are moving ahead much quicker. I finished chapter 4 this evening. Lest anyone think I'm rushing ahead though, that just brings me to the bottom of page four of my 32-page synopsis. For the first half of the book.

Hopefully things will speed up once I've gotten past the introductory matter. There's a big scene coming in chapter six (actually, the big scene is chapter six) that should clear the board a little. I still wonder why I do this to myself though...

theanonamerican (2005-11-23 15:13:53) Get a Bloody Move On!

Less with the explaining and more with the printing! Some of us are waiting for manuscripts you know!

1.10.12 The Intermind (2005-11-24 00:36)

(I always like words without vowels. They seem like cheating somehow.)

Occasionally, I allow myself to be optimistic. I take a look at the world and find reasons for hope. I persuade myself that we're not all going down the crapper very quickly. (My standard point of view is that the smartest of us might just survive the coming armageddon and

build a world without neocons and fundamentalists.) Case in point, and it's a strange one: the launch of Microsoft's Xbox 360 console.

Now, I'm not going to buy one. I barely have time to play the few games I have on my PC as it is. But I've been following the run up to the launch on various blogs and gaming news sites. In the process, I noticed an odd thing happening. When people heard that Microsoft was going to offer two versions of the console, one with a bundle of accessories and a "Core" system without hard drive or wireless controllers, opinion firmly came down that this was a bad idea. The "Core" system wasn't worth it. I heard this repeated in many places, for months before yesterday's U.S. launch.

So what happens? Microsoft launches the 360 and it sells out. Well, sells out halfway anyhow. Y'see, Microsoft put equal amounts of "Core" and bundled systems out there, and the bundled systems vanished in a snap, as anyone reading the Web knew they would. The "Core" systems were the unwanted stepchildren. Despite the fact that Microsoft may have planned this (it gets the best of both worlds: being able to claim a sell out while having systems still on shelves), I like the fact that the collective intelligence of the Web knew what it wanted and made its decision accordingly.

[1]Penny Arcade, as is so often the case, puts it best.

1. <http://www.penny-arcade.com/comic>

1.10.13 Feet of Clay (2005-11-25 00:19)

How flawed does a hero have to be before he's not a hero anymore?

I've never made a secret of the fact that I find flawed characters more interesting than flawless paragons. I've even mentioned it here once or twice. But it's not a recent thing, and it's not even confined to literature. Two of my biggest sporting heroes are Alex Higgins and George Best, who's currently on media death watch and unlikely to survive the next 24 hours. Both men were Northern Irish, amazingly talented and unable to deal with the fame and temptations that those talents provided them with.

I'm too young to remember Best at his best. He first retired three years before I was born, when he was only 26, and I remember his various comebacks over the following years only vaguely. That he was one of the most talented footballers ever is as close to being beyond question as possible. That he drank it all away, having to auction off his awards and medals in recent years, is a tragedy, if one of his own making. Now his story seems set to end in the way that's seemed inevitable for years.

But you know what? He's still a hero. The light that shines brightest shines shortest, after all. As snow falls on Dublin for the first time this winter, I wish his family and friends all the best and I hope they're reassured a little by the fact that he brought a little something extraordinary into people's lives.

(2005-11-25 09:22:18)

Very true. Though there is something deeply ghoulish about the media camping out outside the hospital waiting for him to die so they can unleash the long-prepared documentaries, obituaries and cautionary tales. Not that George Best doesn't deserve some attention, but surely there's a lot of other important things those lenses could be pointed at. A lot more people are going to die today other than George Best and most of them without their friends, family and the trappings of 21st century medicine around them. That's not to diminish the personal tragedy of George Best though - he lived

his life the way he wanted to and it destroyed him. My favourite George Best story is the one where a hotel porter knocks on the door of his room and George answers. Behind him there's two gorgeous blondes sprawled on a bed covered in 20 pound notes. The porter takes in the scene and says: "Where did it all go wrong, George? Where did it all go wrong?"

cerandor (2005-11-25 17:56:31)

Yeah, the media vulturism was largely what prompted this entry of mine. All the same, I'm not sure that he could honestly be said to have lived his life the way he wanted to. The Guardian's feature article on him today does a very good job of illustrating the difference between the man and the image: <http://football.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,9753,1650475,00.html>

1.10.14 I have my camera back! (2005-11-25 20:07)

Those five words may not seem to mark a great triumph, but then, I've been through a lot waiting for this day.

I bought my camera a year and a half ago. At first all was good and I was very pleased with my purchase. However, eight months into our relationship, the camera began misbehaving: wiping pictures and corrupting memory cards. I sent her off, under warranty, for . . . re-education. She came back swiftly, but sadly soon lapsed into her bad habits and I had to dispatch her again. This time, when she returned, she was better behaved, but once again lapsed during a weekend of debauchery in Paris. Once more, I sent her off to St. Veronica's Hospital for Fallen Cameras. When she returned, she was a new camera: literally. The good little camera nuns had stripped out her insides and replaced them with shiny new gubbins.

One problem: in replacing said gubbins, they'd knackered the only bit they hadn't replaced: the lens. So, it was off to the hospital for one last trip. Today, she arrived back again, with a brand new lens in tow. So maybe she's not the same inside any more. Maybe she just looks the same on the outside. She does what I tell her to do, and isn't that what's really important?

Ahem.

Writing Report: Finished on a Friday again, reaching the end of chapter five of Malq and 12,001 words for the week. Running total now stands at 194,829. It's been a good week, overall.

1.10.15 Rome (2005-11-28 00:12)

I have a particular [1]friend who complains every time I mention Rome. He believes that I mention it far too much. Mostly he complains because I've been there and he hasn't. So this one's purely for the purposes of annoying him, then.

I've always had an interest in Roman history and culture. The Romans weren't nice people, for the most part, and they were inveterate pilferers of other people's achievements. But they were efficient and ambitious and, for a time, very successful. And it's pretty obvious that what we think of as Europe wouldn't have been anything like it is today without their influence.

In any case, a few things I ran into today dragged up memory of my only visit to Rome. Not of wandering through the Forum, or of climbing to the top of St Peter's, but rather of something more prosaic: sitting by the side of a swimming pool, surrounded on every side by

that ancient city, reading Gibbons' "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire."

It's very probable that I'll never read a book in so apt a place again.

1. <http://mickcooney.blogspot.com/>

1.10.16 A chapter a day... (2005-11-28 23:54)

A new experience: I wrote a full chapter of Malq today. Admittedly, it was a very short chapter (2,319 words) but it's important nonetheless. Chapter six is where the story changes. Everything previously was intended to set up the main character. In chapter six, his life changes utterly as he makes what may (or may not) be the worst decision ever.

Why am I telling you this? Because I've had the thought of posting this brief chapter to this journal. In and of itself, it doesn't give away much of the story, but because it's important, I'd like to get it right. So, it may show up here in a while. Be warned.

theanonamerican (2005-11-30 13:34:09) Yes

I think you should viciously follow the urge to post stuff. You know if you don't it's gonna be bad. Bottling up that kind of stuff eventually cause trouble! GO CIARY, GO CIARY, GO CIARY...

rustynails9 (2005-11-30 15:12:28) Re: Yes

Stop trying to freak him out for your own gains that's mean!

cerandor (2005-11-30 17:24:23) Re: Yes

Don't worry, he's long since passed the point of diminishing returns.

rustynails9 (2005-12-01 12:06:49) Re: Yes

Well that's fair enough. But can I still nag and harass him for my own amusement if not for your defense?

(2005-12-01 13:19:56) Re: Yes

Oh god, here we go again! You two - get a room! P.

rustynails9 (2005-12-01 16:28:58) Re: Yes

Us two get a room...pot, kettle there me thinks. And what are you talking about "here we go again"? Last I looked I was talking to <lj user="cerandor">

1.11 December

1.11.1 Deathly Distractions (2005-12-01 00:39)

Right now I'm at 4,500 words for the week so far, when I should be at 6,000. It's looking like I'm going to be writing over the weekend, though that isn't honestly a major chore. It's just that it's nice to get things done on a Friday and have the weekend clear.

My week so far has been bound up in small changes. Training in someone new at work (thankfully, they're very proficient) and dealing with the ramifications of my recent promotion (some welcome variety in my job, but I've been doing the same thing for so long that any changes are disturbing). I feel a bit run down, because I've been handling a lot of other things

too, and because my week is a long way from being over.

In my next post, some thoughts on World of Warcraft and why I'll probably be dropping it soon.

1.11.2 Explanations and Correlations (2005-12-05 00:21)

I don't normally like to go to the movies on my own. It's an activity best done with someone you can talk to about the film afterwards (or make acidic comments to during, if it turns out to be really bad). But there's something to be said for the therapeutic value of sitting in a cinema on your own for a few hours and being entertained at no expense of brain function. After one of the most stressful weeks I can remember, it really helped.

The film in question was Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, the fourth film in the series. Like the books, the films have risen to a high point in the third and fourth installments. I'd still rank the third as the best film, but the fourth probably does an even better job of compressing the subject matter. Hopefully the next two films won't take the downward trajectory that the fifth and sixth books did.

Anyway, I promised to talk about World of Warcraft, but this may take a while and be of little interest to most, so only look if you want to.

I've found that the amount of time I spend playing WoW has tailed off to almost nothing. This doesn't mean that I think it's a bad game: on the contrary, I have a lot of admiration for the way it's put together and the skillful design work intended to keep players of all levels happy. Moreover, I love the experience of wandering around and exploring a new world.

No, the fact that I'm barely playing it at the moment comes down to three reasons, more or less interconnected. The first, and least important, is that I'm just not that sociable. I'm happy enough to group together with other players and chat, but for the most part, I like playing on my own. And the experience of playing on your own can be a bit of a grind, especially if you want to see all that the game has to offer. In fact, there are plenty of places you simply can't go unless you're in a group.

Secondly is the matter of time. I'm not going to argue that I have no time to play. Most of my evenings are free, in fact. But when you consider the fact that I devote at least an hour each weeknight to writing, then the amount of time spent playing games suddenly starts to seriously cut into what's left. Moreover, I was out in the pub last night for a drink and I was struck how rare it is for that to happen these days: just to go out to the pub for a drink and a chat. A choice between the two options is really no choice at all.

Lastly, and connected to the point about time, is the existence of other games. Right now on my desk I have three games: Civilization IV, the best in that series so far; Rome: Total War, which I've recently rediscovered; and The Movies, which I'm starting to get into after a difficult initial period. Each of these is worth my time, and if I want to wander off and do something else, I just save my game and do so. With an online game, especially if you're playing in a group, it's not so easy just to drop things. And when you're paying on a monthly basis, you're aware that every day you don't play is a little more money wasted.

I haven't stopped my payments yet. I might have a change of heart. But I don't think so. There are other games coming out soon that'll be attracting my attention. The Elder Scrolls: Oblivion looks particularly tempting, and there have been whispers about Baldur's Gate III. So by Christmas I may longer be a resident of Azeroth. I may miss it, but not too much.

Writing Report: Due to the demands on my time this week, I ended up writing every day. I only broke 2,000 words on the Monday. The rest of the week was a struggle to meet my quota. I made it in the end though: 10,699 words for the week, giving me 205,528 words in total. I'm on chapter nine now of Malq and I hope the difficulties I've been having this week can't be traced back to the book itself. Even if they can, in another week I'll have been writing for five weeks: the next week will be a break week, when I can write something else. A change, after all, can be even better than a rest.

1.11.3 An Entrance! (2005-12-06 22:45)

I got to do something today that I've been looking forward to for a while. Specifically, I introduced a particular character in Malq, right at the end of chapter nine. You may have no idea who this character is, but you know his name: it's the name I use for this blog and in a few other places. It's not a speaking part yet (that comes a lot later) but it was fun to do all the same. When he does enter fully into the story though, he's apt to run roughshod over it. Still, that's what's he's supposed to do.

Writing-wise, I'm ahead of schedule after two days. Tomorrow I have a day off to go to Belfast. Which means I'll have to get up an hour earlier than usual to catch the train. I may have misunderstood the meaning of this "day off" concept.

Anyway, in the spirit of spreading the joy, here's links to two long-running web comics that I enjoy. [1]Something Positive has a pleasantly twisted sense of humour and has been running regularly for years. [2]Queen of Wands is now defunct, but the archives are well worth reading through. Not quite as snarky, but it has some great moments.

1. <http://www.somethingpositive.net/>
2. <http://www.queenofwands.net/>

rustynails9 (2005-12-07 10:04:37)

<i>"Tomorrow I have a day off to go to Belfast. Which means I ll have to get up an hour earlier than usual to catch the train. I may have misunderstood the meaning of this "day off" concept."</i> So why didn t go the night before?

cerandor (2005-12-07 17:34:22)

Because, depressingly enough, it s more convenient to wake up at the arse end of nothing in the morning and catch the 7.30am train to Belfast. It gets me in at a nice and convenient time for my appointment up there, and a day-return ticket on the train is much cheaper than a normal return ticket. Besides which, despite my complaining, I ve never been too bothered by getting up early. (Staying awake later in the day can be a hassle though.)

rustynails9 (2005-12-08 10:55:54)

So really what you re saying is you re just moaning for the sake of it and perhaps to garner some sympathy :-)

1.11.4 Chainsaw of Natural Selection (2005-12-07 19:25)

Okay, so this is a bit of a hangover from yesterday's entry, but still: go look at this Queen of Wands [1]back issue.

I would really like a Chainsaw of Natural Selection.

1. <http://www.queenofwands.net/d/20050929.html>

1.11.5 Late Notice (2005-12-09 01:15)

Over the last day or two, I've been getting e-mail notifications of comments posted to this journal as much as a week and more ago. It's a little odd, but so far I don't think anything has shown up that I didn't notice first time around. If there was, then rest assured, I wasn't ignoring your comment: it just slipped by without me seeing it.

Anyone else had this problem?

theanonamerican (2005-12-09 09:47:04) Yes

In fact, I'm getting notification now for stuff that was posted almost two weeks ago, or more. I have heard that the notification systems was being quirky so this is obviously a symptom of that. Like the line goes in Airplane, "I picked a great week to switch blog service providers!"

rustynails9 (2005-12-09 09:48:06)

I think just about everyone had this problem. It's all explained on <lj user="lj _maintenance">. It has to do with changing servers and spam and stuff.

1.11.6 Blog on the Edge of Midnight (2005-12-11 23:59)

By my reckoning, there are five minutes left before the old week is jettisoned and a new one is cranked into place. It's not been too bad, and I have a feeling that I'm getting on top of things now. Which makes a pleasant change. More on this soon. There's information I've been holding back.

Writing Report: I had a Saturday morning finish again, racking up 10,356 words for the week and a running total of 215,884. That's five weeks of Malq, bringing me to the middle of chapter 11 and a good place to leave the story for a short while. I know what comes next, but I've been getting a little tired, so a break is a good idea. The only problem being that I don't know what I'm writing this week. I guess I'll make it up as I go along.

One minute now. Good night everyone.

laerfan (2005-12-12 10:50:39)

I have a proposition for you. How would you like to help me run the Blue Sun community? You've won an award every month nearly so I think you more than qualify and it'd be nice to share the responsibility of the awards, might put a spin on things. I understand if you don't want to, but the offer is there. I'll be asking yume_kokoro too because an odd number is always best for decisions. Let me know what you think and get back to me either on my journal or here or on Blue Sun. That email notification is messing up with me too! Hope you say yes, it'll be cool

cerandor (2005-12-13 12:52:12)

After thinking about it, I'd be glad to help out. My short story writing has dwindled in the last couple of months, so I can probably make more of a contribution this way. What exactly does the job entail?

laerfan (2005-12-14 12:13:49)

There's not a lot to it really. When it comes to the end of the month and it's time to decide on the winners of the awards, I'd like you to tell me your top 3, I'll pick mine and we'll cross-reference the results together and get a final top 3. I think that makes it more fair for everyone, having more than one person deciding on the awards. Also, probably more importantly, the community is kinda slowing down a bit, I was hoping you could help me scream about it all over LJ. That's it. You can also change anything at all about the community, colours, headings, stuff like that, but I don't know how to give you moderator status so you'll just have to tell me everything you want changed! I can't think of much else, except maybe if you have any ideas yourself. The community is now in your hands too

laerfan (2005-12-14 12:14:40)

Of course, you can't vote for yourself from now on!

laerfan (2005-12-14 13:17:50)

Actually, I found out how to make you a maintainer and you are one now. Enjoy

1.11.7 Self-Serving Legislative Changes (2005-12-12 13:47)

I've been accused of being pedantic more than once in my life, and with regard to the proper use of the English language, I'll admit there's more than a bit of justification to that. Having had a job as an editor for seven years has probably only made things worse. Still, I don't think there's too much wrong with raising an eyebrow at the following sentence, culled from the front page of today's "Metro", a free Dublin newspaper:

The story concerns an initiative to lower the legal age of consent for women to match that for men.

"Mr McDowell described that as a 'a very strange situation', and vowed to discuss changing the age at which girls can legally have intercourse with the gardai and the Director of Public Prosecutions."

laerfan (2005-12-12 14:42:11)

Wow that's hilarious. Did you get the note on the post before this yet?

(2005-12-12 15:58:38)

Yeah, I read the offer. I'm flattered, and I'm considering it. Sorry I can't give you a more definite answer yet.

laerfan (2005-12-13 13:37:13)

Take your time

amanita_d (2005-12-13 14:00:31)

Brilliant!

theanonamerican (2005-12-15 13:07:55) Wahay!

Presumably both are pushing for no limits at all? The big pervs.

1.11.8 A Change can be Arresting (2005-12-13 12:55)

In the end, I opted for Dead Man's Troubles as my reliable filler-week fare. It worked out surprisingly well. Whereas Malq is a pretty sombre and depressing one-man tale, DMT is a double act, with a lot more action and wit. The change is pretty refreshing, and hopefully it'll clear my head for going back to Malq next week.

I also re-read what I've written of DMT. Some of it's pleasingly good and some of it even made me chuckle a bit. I may post a section or two up here to see what people think.

1.11.9 Time to Speak (2005-12-16 23:00)

Those of you who've been reading this a while have probably noticed my general whinging about being busy and otherwise laden down with work. For once, there's something to these complaints. Preparations for Christmas and a promotion that's dropped some new responsibilities on my desk have eaten up some time, but the main cause has been something that I've been avoiding discussing here until now.

Earlier this week, I signed the final papers and received the keys to a new apartment. More bluntly: I'm a homeowner now. The amount of work that goes into sorting something like this out is stunning. Even though the whole process went about as smoothly as I could have hoped, I've been a stressed out wreck for the last few months, though I've done my best to catch a break when I can.

I'm not quite done yet. There's cleaning and deliveries to be made in the coming week. I hope to move in shortly after Christmas. After which, I'll have the stress of making monthly mortgage payments, but if I can reduce my worries down to that, I'll be doing well.

Anyway, it's an explanation of sorts as to why I've been as preoccupied as I have been. Hopefully, things will change in the New Year.

theanonamerican (2005-12-17 23:46:44) Really?

I hadn't actually realised that you had never mentioned that here. I got all excited waiting for a big revelation. Deflation.

cerandor (2005-12-18 23:07:14) Re: Really?

Well, I'm sorry I'm such a disappointment to you. Always nice to know you pay so little attention to me... (sniff)

rustynails9 (2006-01-03 16:49:16) Re: Really?

Poor <lj user="cerandor"> I knew you hadn't mentioned it if that makes you feel any better. Hope you're more settled into it now.

1.11.10 The End of a Week (2005-12-18 23:04)

It's been a hard kind of weekend. Not exactly bad, but everything that came turned out to be difficult. Lots of things on my mind, as my last entry probably made clear. There were plenty of good points, such as a couple of parties last night and one of the best poker games I've ever enjoyed this evening (made all the better because I won). Didn't really help that I had a cold all Sunday, gained from spending most of the day cleaning a cold and empty flat.

Anyhow, I meant to post this last night, but never got around to it. It's a section from Dead Man's Troubles, chapter three: "The Last Time this Happened." It made me laugh when I read it back. It's not really edited, but I hope you enjoy it too.

Haolden tried his best to relax, but no matter how he tried, it proved impossible. It wasn't the inn. The Roasted Swan was as fine a hostelry as a traveller could hope for, and besides, he had grown up in his own family's inn and was more than accustomed to the comings and goings of strangers. It wasn't even that he was in a city. Keldrarn may have been the largest city in Haerlyr, but it was no great settlement. There were few enough great settlements in those days, just a century and a half after the Day of Ashes. The great cities of the west still endured, of course, but even they were greatly reduced, many quarters lying all but empty.

No, if there was one thing that made him uncomfortable, it was the company he was keeping. He supposed he ought to be used to it by now. He had, after all, been travelling with the Fellowship of the Eternal Flute for more than a year, and had travelled the length and breadth of Haerlyr with them during that time. He had seen any number of wonders that he had thought existed only in stories, and he had faced death half a dozen times and had just as many scars to remember those instances by.

The problem was that under the facade of the experienced traveller, whom his sister and brothers might not have recognised, he was painfully aware that he was still Haolden, as he always had been, a boy of no great physical courage and more wit than was good for him. Thus, while his companions were resting or preparing themselves in the rooms upstairs, he had decided to repair to the common room and seek out the answer to his concerns in the bottom of an ale mug. He was on his third, and the first two had proven to be great disappointments.

"Ho there!" came a loud voice from uncomfortably close. A heavy blow struck Haolden squarely in the back and half of his remaining mug of ale went flying across the bar. "I know you by your look. I'm sure of it. You're a Greatheart, aren't you?"

Haolden winced, partly at the fact that he had indeed been recognised and partly because what had struck him had been a mailed gauntlet that was sure to leave bruises. "Greatheart is my grandfather's name," he answered, wiping flecks of foam from his chin and turning to face his assailant. "I use it from time to time."

The newcomer turned out to be a warrior by his look, clad in mail and bearing a heavy sword upon his hip. Noble, was Haolden's first thought upon seeing him, for his mail was richly decorated, for all that it showed the signs of having been often repaired. Moreover, there was a cleanliness to his complexion that spoke of a man more used to fresh water than most. For all that he was tall and broad, looming over Haolden in a manner that would have been most unfriendly if it were not for the broad grin on his face, the visage under an unruly mop of blonde hair was incongruously boyish, dotted with freckles and decorated with a pair of sparkling blue eyes.

"Your grandfather, you say? Well, that must be it, then. Though I had not thought him so old as to have a grandson of your age." There had been little sign of any particular thought passing over the warrior's face. Evidently whatever occurred in his mind was put to word or action as swiftly as possible.

Haolden knew well that his grandfather was a youthful man, for all that Haolden had two older brothers, but he was surprised to see a noble of Haerlyr, for so his accent betokened him, talking about him in an inn in the capital, more than two hundred miles distant from his farm. "Your pardon sir," he said, gathering his wits about him as best he could. "I don't think we've been introduced. My name is Haolden."

"I'm Roel," the warrior replied. "It's a pleasure to meet you." He extended his hand and Haolden took it, wincing at the strength of his grip and the way the mail pinched his flesh.

"How is it you know my grandfather?" Haolden asked as Roel took a stool beside him and called for two ales.

Roel gave him a steady look and Haolden was forced to reappraise his initial impression of the man. "Most of those who are in our line of work in Haerlyr know your grandfather. But perhaps I ought not to say more than I have. You are here for the Council, aren't you?"

Haolden nodded. The Council of War Companies, lately called by the King of Haerlyr, was due to be convened the next day, and the Fellowship of the Eternal Flute, though one of the most junior companies, had been invited to attend. However, Haolden was far more interested in what Roel seemed to know about his grandfather. "How exactly is it that you know my grandfather? I only know him as a farmer."

"Well, now," Roel began before starting to hum and haw, evidently uncomfortable. Unfortunately for Haolden, he was saved from answering any more questions, for that was the moment that Berenn chose to come down into the common room.

Although the Fellowship had no particular leader, Berenn was generally acknowledged to be its spokesperson, largely because he was the most respectable looking of them. A warrior of uncommon stature, he was as broad as Roel and at least a hand's span taller, allowing him to dominate any room. His gear of war was much plainer, but at that moment, he was not garbed in mail, wearing instead a fine scarlet shirt. With his short hair carefully groomed and his beard neatly trimmed, he made an impressive sight, even if Haolden knew that he only had two shirts to his name.

As with most of those in the inn, Roel turned to observe as Berenn descended. Haolden, his mind only slightly clouded with drink, watched fascinated as Berenn saw first him and then the figure of Roel sitting beside him. The two warriors locked eyes and watched one another as Berenn made his way over to where Haolden sat. The singer was sure that their egos collided at least several seconds before Berenn came to a halt.

"Haolden," Berenn said with a forced smile. "Who's your friend?"

"Berenn Longblade of the Fellowship of the Eternal Flute," Haolden said, raising his voice slightly in his self-appointed role of herald to his company, "this is Roel..."

"Roel Quinsear," Roel continued, "of the Company of the Griffon." He extended his hand to Berenn, who took it and held it for a moment in a purely mechanical shake, not realising the fact that he was disadvantaged by Roel's gauntlets.

"Well met, sir," Berenn said. "Are you here for the council also?"

"I am," said Roel, leaning back on his stool. "I and my fellows. I was, in fact, meant

to secure lodgings for us here, but if your company has already claimed the best rooms, then I should perhaps look elsewhere."

Berenn grinned and Haolden winced at the thought of what the warrior might say. It wasn't that Berenn was witless, just that he needed a good run up before the idea of tact would occur to him. "I'm sure you could find room left over here. It is late in the evening, and I'd hate to think of you wandering the streets looking for a place."

"That's very kind of you Berenn," Roel replied, a dangerous edge to his smile. "But there are those in my company who would accept nothing less than the best rooms available, and it wouldn't do for us to have you turned out of your lodgings merely because of our seniority."

Berenn nodded his head slowly and Haolden could see that he was working up to a retort. "Well, it's up to you of course, but if it's not too late when you are settled, return here and we'll sit and drink together. Undoubtedly we would have much to learn from those who have spent so many years in the service of the king, doing . . . what was it that the Company of the Griffon did again, Haolden?"

Haolden winced at the flat unsubtlety of the jibe and the fact that he was being drawn into this points-scoring match. "They rescued the Duke of Sedryas when the Duchy was overrun. They have done more besides, but that is their most notable feat, of course." It was a poor attempt at peacemaking and he knew it was doomed to failure.

"Ah, of course, I remember that tale now," Berenn agreed. "I heard it when the king guested us after his coronation."

Clearly he felt he'd scored a point. More surprisingly, given the fact that Roel was grinding his teeth, was that the richly adorned warrior agreed. "If I may be excused then, gentlemen, I may well see you later this eve. For the moment though, I must see to my companions."

As he walked off, he could clearly be heard to mutter "Striplings!" under his breath.

"Braggart," Berenn commented when Roel was safely gone. "Do you think he'll be back, Haolden?"

"Oh, I don't doubt it Berenn," answered Haolden, smiling. "You may have caught him by surprise, but I don't think he's the kind to give up easily. He'll be back - in force most probably."

"Good," said Berenn, grinning. His grin widened all the more when two ales were deposited on the bar in front of him. "And he left without drinking his ale!"

"Or paying for it," Haolden reminded him.

Scowling, Berenn dug into his pouch and handed over some coppers.

Apologies to Des and Paul, who are responsible for the exchange that inspired the above passage.

Writing Report: Finished on Sunday morning, with 10,578 words of DMT in total and 226,462 for the running total. Back to Malq next week. Going to be difficult to reach my total this week. Looks like another weekend finish.

1.11.11 The Lewisian Jihad (2005-12-20 00:04)

Allegories are tricking things. Bereft of their original sources, they can be turned to any particular cause. For example, the thought's been running through my head today that "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" is actually a pretty good metaphor for the Muslims of the Middle East.

Now, wait, hear me out. I'm not entirely crazy.

The people of a land rich in history and folk tales are suffering under the rule of an invading force from the cold lands of the north, with a tendency to imprison and torture captives. They learn that it's not good enough to just accept this occupying force: they have to take up arms against them and drive them from the land to reclaim their birthright.

Ok, so it doesn't hold up under close analysis, but then neither does the book itself.

Writing: Back to Malq today and 2,337 words done. Which includes a love scene - the first one I've written in a very long time. But that's okay. Tomorrow I get to write a fight scene, a death scene and basically make life hideously awful for the protagonist after having taunted him with the promise of peace and happiness.

No, authors aren't meant to be nice, well-balanced people. Why do you ask?

lostperdita (2005-12-20 17:29:22)

you know, i spent the last few years thinking that i didn't read enough cs lewis as a kid and that i should further investigate the series and his academic writings, but after seeing the film (which i did enjoy) i realised the reason i never read much cs lewis is because, even as a kid, i didn't particularly like his storytelling. i'm still curious about his academic writing, though.

cerandor (2005-12-21 01:54:39)

Narnia, the Hobbit and Le Guin's Earthsea series were my big influences in terms of fiction when I was a kid. Of the three, Narnia has aged most poorly. The links that you can make as an adult somewhat spoil the straightforward enjoyment of the story that you can have as a child. As for his academic writing, he's generally well regarded, though he very much writes from an imperialist British Christian point of view. I remember one of my tutors taking an essay of his on Chaucer to pieces. So while you might learn something from him, agreeing with him might be less likely.

1.11.12 Self-Promotion (2005-12-20 15:51)

I don't, as you've probably noticed, generally post the results of polls to this journal. It seems a little self-promotional to me. Plus, I'm generally a cynic with regard to, well, everything. Still, this one seemed more straightforward and less spurious than most.

You are the Hanged Man

Self-sacrifice, Sacrifice, Devotion, Bound.

With the Hanged man there is often a sense of fatalism, waiting for something to happen. Or a fear of loss from a situation, rather than gain.

The Hanged Man is perhaps the most fascinating card in the deck. It reflects the story of Odin who offered himself as a sacrifice in order to gain knowledge. Hanging from the world tree, wounded by a spear, given no bread or mead, he hung for nine days. On the last day, he saw on the ground runes that had fallen from the tree, understood their meaning, and, coming down, scooped them up for his own. All knowledge is to be found in these runes.

The Hanged Man, in similar fashion, is a card about suspension, not life or death. It signifies selflessness, sacrifice and prophecy. You make yourself vulnerable and in doing so, gain illumination. You see the world differently, with almost mystical insights.

What Tarot Card are You?

[1]Take the Test to Find Out.

1. <http://warlocksrealm.homeip.net/tarot>

theanonamerican (2005-12-20 17:13:46) SNAP!!!

I got the same answer. That's kinda disturbing...

(2005-12-21 09:15:38) Re: SNAP!!!

Ha - I got the Devil. From now on, please address me as Lucifer. The Light Bearer

(2005-12-21 09:22:55) Re: SNAP!!!

Or alternatively...Goatboy: You are The Devil Materiality. Material Force. Material temptation; sometimes obsession The Devil is often a great card for business success; hard work and ambition. Perhaps the most misunderstood of all the major arcana, the Devil is not really "Satan" at all, but Pan the half-goat nature god and/or Dionysius. These are gods of pleasure and abandon, of wild behavior and unbridled desires. This is a card about ambitions; it is also synonymous with temptation and addiction. On the flip side, however, the card can be a warning to someone who is too restrained, someone who never allows themselves to get passionate or messy or wild - or ambitious. This, too, is a form of enslavement. As a person, the Devil can stand for a man of money or erotic power, aggressive, controlling, or just persuasive. This is not to say a bad man, but certainly a powerful man who is hard to resist. The important thing is to remember that any chain is freely worn. In most cases, you are enslaved only because you allow it. Huh-huh-huh...Goatboy wants to please you... P.

rustynails9 (2006-01-03 16:59:37) LAME!!!

I wanted to do the test but it's been removed from the domain due to popularity :-(

1.11.13 Christmas Fleeting (2005-12-25 20:56)

Christmas tends to get shorter every year. By which I mean that it arrives more quickly and departs more rapidly. The whole concept of Christmas spirit is often lacking if you don't have

children. When your TV is cluttered with advertisements for January sales that begin on Boxing Day, the chances of you being given a chance to sit back and relax become vanishingly small.

Which is not to say that it's not nice to come home and rest for a while. The annual Christmas Mass having been endured, there's much to recommend a family Christmas, not least of which is reconnecting with relatives you haven't seen in months - perhaps even a year. Still, it's family, not friends, which is why I'll be returning to Dublin before long. When your life is bifurcated like mine, it takes a bit of effort to keep the two sides running smoothly.

Writing Report: A very tricky week, but it worked in the end: 10,337 words for the week, taking me into chapter 13 of *Malq*. Don't have a running total, as I currently lack my wallchart. That'll return next week. Until then, best wishes to you all, and enjoy your holidays and the New Year.

1.11.14 Moving Out (2005-12-28 00:37)

Tonight is probably my last night in my current abode. Tomorrow I start (and hopefully finish) the process of moving my stuff from one house to another. It's going to be hard work, but the end result will hopefully be worth it.

I've been living in my current house for just over a year. It's an old house and has its share of quirks, but I'll miss it when I'm gone. Most of all, I expect I'll miss the company. People I know have been living here for years, and I'm just the latest person to occupy my current room. My replacement has already been lined up. Right now I'm looking around at my room and calculating all the carrying I'll need to do. I'll let you know how it goes.

Writing Report: Meant to get something done tonight, but an unsuccessful game of poker got in the way. Still, I wrote just under 3k on Monday, so I have a little extra slack to be cut.

1.11.15 Last Post... (2005-12-28 21:56)

...from this location anyhow. I've spent my last night in my current house. Today, everything got moved and most of my new apartment was cleaned and organised. Which is odd, since this was planned to happen tomorrow. The casualty in all of this is my writing. Nothing done for a second day. Ah well.

Anyway, I'm feeling a little odd. So excuse me if I ramble some.

Apparently, moving house is one of the most traumatic experiences you can go through. However, at this stage, I've done it so much that the trauma has abraded down into inconvenience.

The thought that's been running through my head all day has been how many places I've lived in Dublin now. I've been here 11 years in total. Over that period I've lived in 12 different places. (Admittedly, three of them were rooms in Trinity College, but they still count.) The longest I've spent in any one of those has been two years. So moving house has been a regular occurrence.

The place I've been staying in for the last year, I've been familiar with for a long time. People I know have been living here for eight years now. I've been to a lot of parties here, just dropped by many more. It's an old house, but the people here are great. I've just eaten a home-cooked

meal to celebrate (!) my going away. As much as I tend to tout my solitary nature, I'll miss the company here.

Odds are I'll be something of a hermit for the next month at least. I'm getting broadband in a week and a half from now, so until then, entries here might be a little thin on the ground. I'll try to make up for it somehow though.

I'll be broke too, but that's not such a bad thing. The apartment has come together well, and buying all the little knick-knacks that'll make it complete can wait awhile. I feel good about the whole thing, and that's something that hasn't been true for a while.

It's a good night. I feel pretty mellow right now. West Brom just won their match, rather surprisingly, and that cheered me up. My parents spent most of the day helping me on the apartment, which they've done more on than I could ever have expected them to. Not sure how I'll ever repay them, but I know it'll take a long time.

Anyhow, I'll sit here in my old house, not quite a stranger yet, for a while. Then I'll walk or ride my way home.

My home.

Odd.

theanonamerican (2005-12-29 11:35:46) Broadband

Well, there is a funky 3Mb connection not very far away from your new residence, so should you feel the urge to post an entry, it shouldn't prove to be too much hassle for you.

gads

Gad's LJBook v0.8,
 $\text{\LaTeX}2_{\epsilon}$ & GNU/Linux.
<http://www.ljbook.com>

Edited: August 8, 2011